Chapter 15
The European Union and the African Union

Introduction

The European Union

The African Union

Conclusion

After reading this chapter you will have gained an understanding of the following:

• Structures and processes of the European Union
• Structures and processes of the the African Union
• How the EU and the AU are similar and different
Introductory box: Euroscepticism – we all hate Europe! Or do we?

The European Union (EU) has been in existence since 1992. Before that there was another, smaller, organisation called the European Economic Community (EEC), created in 1957. And prior to that there was the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which was founded in 1952. The overall point is that a European-wide organisation has been in existence since soon after the end of the Second World War. Now, over fifty years on, many Europeans are not convinced that a European-wide entity of this kind is a good thing.

Euroscepticism is a general term used to describe various forms of (1) criticism of the EU, and (2) opposition to continued European integration – that is, the gradual coming together, both economically and politically, of the member states of the EU. One of the main complaints of the Eurosceptics is that integration weakens the nation state and undermines national identity. Other Eurosceptic concerns include the charge that the EU is undemocratic, a top-down organisation that pays little attention or concern to the problems and aspirations of ordinary people, or that it is too bureaucratic: dominated by unelected, over-paid civil servants. A periodic European-wide public opinion survey, known as Eurobarometer, found that support for the EU was lowest in Hungary, Latvia, and Britain (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm).

Introduction

To what extent does a regional organisation manage to achieve their objectives? What more might they do to gain greater success? To what extent are member states prepared to allow regional organisations to act independently in international relations?

The main aim of this chapter is to examine what regional organisations do in international relations. There are numerous regional organisations of various types so to make our task manageable we shall look at two important regional organisations in some detail: the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU). We will compare and contrast their key institutions in order to draw conclusions about their differences and similarities. At the end of the chapter we shall be in a position to:

1. understand what roles these regional organisations play in international relations
2. see how successful they are in dealing with the peace and security issues with which they are concerned.

Many International Relations scholars would agree that, despite all the changes we’ve seen in the world in recent years, states are still the key actors in global politics. Many aspects of globalisation – including, extensive economic interactions, expanding communications links, major environmental interactions and overlaps – collectively encourage
individual governments to cooperate in order to try to achieve goals that, acting on their own, they may not believe they can achieve. The implication is that today no country is fully self-sufficient or capable of living in complete isolation from the rest of humanity. This state of affairs suggests that the very concept of national sovereignty (sometimes, called ‘independence’ or ‘autonomy’) is now much less certain than it once was. In some regions of the world, especially Europe, this realisation has led to highly structured attempts to promote cooperation across state boundaries, in the form of regional organisations. The most far-reaching of these efforts thus far has been the EU. In some regions, such as, Sub-Saharan Africa, the successes of European integration efforts over the last six decades have led to copy-cat attempts at regional integration. Examples include Africa, which we examine in this chapter in comparison with Europe, as well as parts of Asia, Latin America and elsewhere.

The key issue we examine in this chapter is: Thinking about regional integration in recent years, how has Africa done compared to Europe?

The European Union

Background and history

What makes the EU distinctive in today’s international relations? According to a British academic, Ben Rosamond, the EU is ‘by some distance – the most developed project of regional integration in the world’. This is largely because it has a ‘mature set of institutions’ (Rosamond 2002: 498). The current advanced stage of EU institutional development is the culmination of more than five decades of integrative efforts involving growing numbers of countries, increasing from six to twenty-seven over the last six decades, since integrative attempts began in 1952 with the inauguration of the European Coal and Steel Community (see Box 15.1). Over the last sixty years, the EU has pursued multiple – economic, cultural, security, and political – goals, leading now to an advanced state of regional integration. It has been marked by stages of institutional development, with several key milestones. The most prominent are: the Treaty of Rome (1957) and the Single European Act (SEA) in 1986. The SEA was signed by the then twelve members of the European Community (see Box 15.1). The SEA was particularly important because it established a single European market (defined as an area without frontiers with free movement of goods, services, people and capital). It was the first major revision of the Treaty of Rome, signed three decades earlier. In addition, the SEA allowed for increased involvement of the European Parliament in the decision-making process, as well as qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers for some policy areas. Finally, the Act included provisions covering collaboration in research and development and in environmental policy. The 1986 SEA was followed by the Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice treaties (1992, 1997, and 2000, respectively) which deepened Europe’s political integration. Major changes since 1945 in relation to the development of a European regional organisation are presented in Box 15.1.
Chapter 15 The European Union and the African Union

Box 15.1 European Union timeline since 1945

1945 The Second World War ends
1951 Treaty of Paris
1952 European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)
1957 Treaty of Rome
1957 European Economic Community (EEC)
1963 French president, Charles de Gaulle, vetoes British entry into the EEC
1965 European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM)
1967 ECSC, EEC and EURATOM merged
1973 Britain, Denmark and Ireland join Community
1979 First direct elections to European Parliament
1981 Greece joins
1985 Greenland leaves Community
1986 Single European Act
1986 Portugal and Spain join
1989 End of Cold War, marked by fall of the Berlin Wall
1992 Maastricht Treaty, leading to European Union
1993 Copenhagen criteria defined for EU membership, centring on both political and economic conditions
1995 Austria, Finland and Sweden join
1997 Amsterdam Treaty
2000 Nice Treaty
2002 Euro replaces local currencies in twelve member states
2004 Ten more countries join EU
2005 France, Ireland and the Netherlands reject European Constitution
2007 Bulgaria and Romania join
2007 Lisbon Treaty signed

The EU: undemocratic and needlessly bureaucratic, or an increasingly relevant institution in a multi-polar world?
Table 15.1 highlights differences in institutional development between the European Union and other examples of regional cooperation in the world, including Africa, Asia and the Americas. What Table 15.1 shows is that, while some non-EU countries have also been involved in sometimes lengthy integration efforts – for example, the European Free Trade Agreement, the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR in Spanish, Southern Common Market in English) and the African Union – none of these schemes has reached a level of institutional development which is anything close to comparable with the EU. This is a way of saying that one of the keys to understanding Europe’s advanced integrative position is to highlight how important are regional institutions with power and authority. In the EU context, this includes the European Commission and the Council of Ministers, which we shall examine below.

The immediate forerunner of the EU, the European Community (EC), was created over half a century ago, in 1957, under the terms of the Treaty of Rome. The agreement initially involved just six states (Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and West Germany). Over the next five decades, membership expanded greatly, increasing to twenty-seven countries, drawn from west, central and eastern Europe, creating a pan-European...
grouping. The process of EU enlargement reflects above all a shared understanding among member states that joining the EU is a sensible thing to do, as it is likely to increase their stability, prosperity and peace. These are, of course, goals that all governments would like to achieve; they are by no means a solely European objective.

Until recently, the EU was exclusively a Western European regional grouping of established democracies. However, in May 2004, it expanded both numerically and geographically, to welcome ten new members: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. In 2007, two further countries joined: Bulgaria and Romania. The new, enlarged EU symbolised the final end to Europe’s artificial division after the Second World War. During the Cold War (late 1940s–late 1980s), Europe was divided into ‘West’ and ‘East’. The West comprised liberal democracies with market economies, while the East was the shorthand term for the communist countries under the leadership and domination of the Soviet Union.

It is safe to assume that an important draw of the EU for non-members was expectation that membership of the Union would likely lead to increased economic growth and consequential prosperity, compared to countries which were not members. We have already noted that the EU attaches strict political and economic criteria for membership: members must be both democracies and market economies. The draw of the EU means that the Union is able to exert considerable pressure on would-be members, strongly encouraging them both to democratise politically and to liberalise economically. Overall, the EU exerts considerable influence on aspirant applicant countries. They collectively amount to a combined ‘carrot-and-stick approach’, featuring both political and economic conditionality (‘conditionality’ means that for something to happen, certain conditions have to be fulfilled). The chief incentive for putative members was a ‘clear timetable for quick accession to the EU’ and ‘generous aid, credit and direct investment flows from the member to the candidate countries’ (Yilmaz 2002: 73).

Some observers claim in addition that for Europe’s post-communist countries – such as the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Slovenia – a main objective of joining the Union extends beyond expected greater economic prosperity to include a further objective: a sense of post-communist ‘European-ness’ or ‘European-belonging’. This touches on a key issue of central importance to the EU and its future development, which also involves the issue of Turkey and its continuing application to join the Union. How do we understand the concept of Europe? Is Europe a territorial designation alone? Or does it also include the idea of Europe being a ‘social construct’, that is, an idea encompassing certain norms of behaviour, including democracy and well-developed human rights, and not just territory? This implies that Europeans collectively share certain norms and values which together comprise a fundamental

**Box 15.2 What is civil society?**

Civil society is defined by Bjorn Hettne as a range of ‘inclusive institutions that facilitate a societal dialogue over various social and cultural borders’, while ‘identities and loyalties are transferred from civil society to primary groups, competing with each other for territorial control, resources and security’ (Bjorn Hettne 2001: 40). A simpler way of expressing these ideas is to think of civil society as bringing together lots of groups of people with social and/or political goals which seek to gain their objectives by working collectively.
aspect of ‘European-ness’. A Swedish social scientist, Bjorn Hettne, highlights the following norms and values as characteristic of ‘European-ness’: ‘strong role for civil society, various institutionalized forms such as parliamentary decision making, and a democratic culture stressing above all individualism and human rights inherent in the individual human being’ (Hettne 2001: 38–9).

For the concerns of this chapter, the issue and application of ‘European-ness’ is important in two ways. First, it focuses attention on the question of how Europe’s former communist countries changed in order to fulfil the requirements of EU membership. Second, it also helps explain why the continuing attempts of Turkey to join the EU have been both protracted and problematic.

In his book, The Crescent and the Star: Turkey between Two Worlds, published in 2001, an American author, Stephen Kinzer, examines social and political tensions in Turkey over the last decade or so that collectively encouraged the country’s political leaders to seek Turkey’s membership of the EU. Kinzer examines the kind of state that modern Turkey’s founder, Kemal Atatürk, created in the context of the country’s historical background in Islam. According to Kinzer (2001), Turkey reached an important turning point on 17 August, 1999. On that day, more than 18,000 Turks were killed in a massive earthquake. The inadequacy of the state’s response to the earthquake – thousands of people were left without suitable shelter or services for months – led millions of Turks to question the country’s entire power structure. Popular concern was exacerbated when it became known that the authorities had allowed thousands of death trap buildings to be constructed, and then stood by impotently when there was no disaster plan to put into operation when many of them collapsed.

In addition, powerful forces of globalisation have affected Turkey’s political culture over time, making it more secular and democratic. These two issues – the impact of globalisation and the decline in trust between state and society as a result of the 1999 earthquake – were present in the sustained, so far unresolved controversy, about Turkey’s bid to join the EU. Coincidentally, in the same year as the traumatic earthquake, the EU announced that Turkey was an official candidate for membership. A wave of ecstatic self-congratulation washed over the country, accompanied by solemn newspaper commentaries declaring it the most important event since the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923. The EU laid down strict conditions under which Turkey could become a member. The country’s rulers were dismayed by the conditions as they were very far reaching. To attain membership of the EU, the following reforms would be necessary:

1. Repeal limits on free speech
2. grant every citizen the right to cultural expression, including Turkey’s main minority people, the Kurds, whose aspirations had long been suppressed in pursuit of nation-building goals by successive Turkish governments
3. subject the military to emphatic and consistent civilian control
4. resolve social conflicts by conciliation
5. allow all citizens to practice their religion as they see fit.

Such was the overall magnitude of these putative changes that many among the ruling elite seriously questioned how desirable it would actually be to join the EU (Jenkins 2008: 174–9).

Thus, EU membership was the touted reward – if Turkey made profound progress towards an interlinked democratic and human rights regime which met the EU’s stringent standards. To the surprise of some observers, over the next few years there were clear signs of progress. In 2007, eight years after Turkey’s EU membership bid began, Turkey’s political system was judged by Freedom House (2008) to be ‘partly free’. The qualifying adjective (‘partly’) was awarded because the country was only slowly emerging from many decades of strong military involvement in politics. In other words, by 2007, Turkey’s democratic and human rights credentials were significantly improving, although there was still some way to go to achieve a good European standard.
The American nongovernmental organisation, Freedom House, reported in 2002 that ‘Turkey [had] registered forward progress as a result of the loosening of restrictions on Kurdish culture. Legislators made progress on an improved human rights framework, the product of Turkey’s effort to integrate into European structures. At the same time, political rights were enhanced as the country’s military showed restraint in the aftermath of a free and fair election that saw the sweeping victory of a moderate Islamist opposition party’ (emphasis added; Freedom House 2002: 12). In 2007, in addition, Turkey ‘received an upward trend arrow for holding free and fair parliamentary elections’ (Freedom House 2008). In a bid to encourage improved democracy and human rights, the EU has sought to apply both political and economic ‘conditionality’ on Turkey from the early 2000s. The EU sought to exert conditionality as a means to try to achieve particular reforms in Turkey: good governance, democratisation, better human rights, the rule of law, and economic liberalisation. (Conditionality is a concept used not only in international relations but also in international development and political economy. It refers to the use of conditions to encourage compliance by a country in relation to aid, a loan, debt or membership of an international organisation, such as the EU.)

There was, in addition, another important factor to note regarding EU–Turkey relations at this time. Following the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, it became clear that many EU governments believed that it was better to have ‘Muslim’ Turkey in the EU rather than, potentially, as a component of an ‘anti-Western’ grouping of Muslim countries. Partly as a consequence, in early 2003 the European commission recommended that foreign aid to Turkey should be doubled – from €0.5bn to €1.05bn – in 2004–6. This was a calculated attempt both to encourage the then newly elected Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP; in English, the Justice and Development Party) government to refrain from military intervention in Iraq as well as to encourage continuation with domestic political and human rights reforms that would hopefully bring the country ‘civilisationally’ closer to Europe (Osborn 2003). Subsequently, during 2007–13, the EU’s foreign aid programme to Turkey continued, with financial transfers scheduled to amount to nearly €800 million. While this was a significant fall, some 20 per cent, compared to 2004–6, it still represented a considerable sum at a time of European financial restraints, underlining the EU’s continued commitment to support continued democratisation and human rights reforms in Turkey (Ayvaz 2008).

**Important institutions**

For the EU to implement conditionality on Turkey or the post-communist new members, it is crucial that the organisation has a set of workable and robust institutions. In fact, the range of institutions that the EU has developed is extensive. All are concerned with governance of the organisation. The EU’s main institutions are:

- **European Council of Ministers.** The Council is the predominant governing body of the EU. The ministers – all of whom are cabinet ministers in their respective countries – are chosen by member states to represent them. A president coordinates the Council’s
work, a rotating position changing every six months. The Council is both an executive
and a legislative body, with the final word on most significant issues in the Union.

- **European Commission.** This is the executive body of the EU. It puts into effect decisions
  made both by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. It is made up
  of Commissioners, individually appointed by member states (although they do not
  represent their home countries, but are supposed to represent the EU only), and given
  areas of responsibility akin to those presided over by government ministers in domestic
  contexts. The Commission has a president, selected following a consensual decision by
  member states.

- **European Parliament.** This is the legislature of the EU. Its 626 members are chosen via
  the ballot box in each member state every five years. It is the only elected institution in
  the EU. The most recent elections were held in June 2009.

- **European Court of Justice.** The Court of Justice of the European Communities (often
  referred to simply as ‘the Court’) was set up in 1952 under the Treaty of Paris. Its job is
  to ensure that EU legislation (technically known as ‘Community law’) is interpreted and
  applied in the same way in each member state, so that it is always identical for all parties
  and in all circumstances. The Court has the power to settle legal disputes between member
  states, EU institutions, businesses and individuals. The Court is also important as it can
  legally settle disputes in the EU.

- **European Council.** This body comprises the heads of member governments. It meets a
  few times a year for discussions about various pressing issues.

- **European Central Bank.** This is a coordinating organisation. Its key function is to
  bring together the central banks of member states for policy-making in their areas of
  competence.

Politically, the EU is policed by the Commission, a body with supranational powers.
(‘Supranational’ means that an authority has jurisdiction over national decision-making
bodies.) The EU also has a Parliament and a Court to interpret EU laws. Over time, inter-
vention in each other’s internal affairs has become the norm for EU members. Prior to ten
new members joining in May 2004, and two more in January 2007, most of the then fifteen
members shared both a central bank and a single currency (the euro). Following the
increase from fifteen to twenty-seven members between 2004 and 2007, there was a transi-
tion period during which the new members worked towards integrating their national
banks and currencies within the EU.

The EU’s governing bodies feature a mix of two governmental models. The first is
intergovernmental, with national parties, legislatures, and governments functioning as key
supports of EU governing bodies. The second is supranational, with the EU governing
bodies such as the Commission, separate from and superior to, national political institu-
tions and organisations (Beetham and Lord 1998; Christiansen 2001; Hix 2003). It is some-
times observed that the first (intergovernmental) model has gained ground at the expense
of the second (supranational) in recent years. That is, national governments have managed
to retain their influence despite the developments of supranational institutions. However,
Box 15.4 The euro

The euro is the single currency currently (mid-2010) shared by sixteen of the European Union’s twenty-seven member states. The euro was introduced in 1999. Full economic and monetary union has been in effect since 1 January 2002, initially for twelve countries, with further members joining over time bring the number up to sixteen. Together they make up the euro area. Adoption and use of the euro was a major step in European integration.

Many observers believe that euro has been a success. Over 300 million EU citizens now use it as their currency and enjoy its benefits. This includes the obvious benefit of being able to travel across national borders among the sixteen states and continue to use the same currency as they do at home.

Adoption of the euro is a key focus of the wider goal of economic and monetary union (EMU). EMU was adopted in three stages:

1. coordinating economic policy
2. achieving economic convergence (that is, their economic cycles are broadly in step)
3. adoption of the euro.

The final stage for the sixteen member states was achieved in 2002. The other eleven members have not yet reached this stage of economic and monetary union, leading to fears of a two-tier EU involving, on the one hand, euro states, and on the other, non-euro states.

this does not really make a difference in terms of representation, because in the first model, relationships between ordinary people and the EU institutions are indirect; in the supranational model they are weak. Combining the two models is thus unlikely dramatically to increase EU institutional representation. However, the picture is by no means static. According to Etzioni-Halevy (2002: 205), 'European governing institutions are in constant flux, and suffer from excessive complexity, fuzziness, and ambiguity of procedures’, characterised by ‘euro-jargon’ and the use of numerous technical terms and over thirteen hundred acronyms! She suggests, plausibly, that this situation is ‘off-putting for citizens, and makes it difficult for them to understand what is really going on in these bodies, and what they need to do to link up with them’. We saw this expressed in the concept of Euroscepticism at the beginning of the chapter.

Both in theory and practice, the EU’s governing institutions have important functions, but how do they measure up as representative bodies? That is, how democratically accountable are they? It is often noted that the EU suffers from what is referred to as a ‘democratic deficit’. This refers to a real or perceived gap between the Union’s lofty aspirations and what many say is the mundane reality. This concern stems from the fact that while some of the Union’s governing institutions – including the Parliament and to some extent the Commission – have inbuilt provisions for regularised interactions with ordinary people, there are often said to be major problems in how these arrangements work in terms of their representativeness. This is not to suggest that things were designed like this, only to note that this is how they have turned out, ‘due to factors beyond the control of anyone in particular’ (Etzioni-Halevy 2002: 209). However, it is worth noting that the EU is often thought less problematic in this regard than several other important international governmental organisations, including the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty
Organisation and, as we shall see below, the African Union. In these organisations, no real provision exists for significant public interaction with power holders and senior policy makers (Hill and Smith 2005).

The issue of accountability was called into question in the context of the EU’s attempt to introduce a constitution, which began in 2004. Three years earlier, in 2001, EU heads of government met at Laeken, Belgium, declaring that Europe’s citizens were ‘calling for a clear, open, effective, democratically controlled Community approach’ (europa.eu.int/comm/laeken_council/index_en.htm). For this reason they established a convention to draw up proposals for a European constitution. Consequently, the EU heads of government sought to:

1. clarify where power resides, by defining powers of various EU institutions
2. identify the rights of citizens vis-à-vis the established powers
3. provide ‘an indication of purpose, a rallying cry for the citizen’ (Bogdanor 2003).

However, progress towards the proposed EU constitution has not been entirely smooth. Most EU member states had ratified their country’s acceptance of the constitution by late 2009, including Ireland which had rejected the constitution when it first voted on the issue. By the end of 2009, the Lisbon Treaty had been enacted. This implied the following: first, there would now be qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers, meaning that even if some countries rejected a measure it could still go through. Second, the European parliament had greater involvement in decision making, working more closely than before with the Council of Ministers. Third, creation of the post of President of the European Council (currently, mid-2010, a Belgian, Herman Van Rompuy) and that of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (currently, mid-2010, a Briton, Catherine Ashton) meant that the EU was able to present a more consistently united position on EU policies than it had in the past. Finally, the Lisbon Treaty made the Union’s human rights charter – the Charter of Fundamental Rights – legally binding, much to the chagrin of many Eurosceptics.

Conclusion

The EU is sometimes described as a ‘post-sovereign’ entity. This means that over time power has steadily moved away from individual member states to supranational EU institutions. As a result, the EU has established a new form of governance at an intermediate level – the regional – which is between the global and the state.

What makes the EU unique among existing regional organisations is that it has a mature set of institutions which make it the most developed project of regional integration in the world. The current advanced stage of EU development represents a complex process over five decades, since the early 1950s. This half century was a time when the Union developed a multifaceted agenda with economic, cultural, security and political goals, arrived at via a series of important treaties, in order for the EU to become a key player in today’s international relations.
Conflicts, particularly violent conflicts between and within states in other parts of Africa, and in the world in general, are also a danger to our peace and tranquility. Helping other peoples keep and maintain peace is also a way of defending our own peace.

(Harsch 2003: 16)

These words were spoken in 2003 by Mozambique’s president Joaquim Chissano, in the context of his government’s efforts to build peace, prosperity and development following the country’s long civil war (1977–92). However, while Mozambique experienced more than a decade of serious conflict, it was by no means unique in this regard among African countries. Many – including Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Somalia – have also recently experienced serious political violence and conflict. These examples highlight that in government policy making in Africa there is a key question to address: How can African governments build an environment where peace, stability and prosperity can be expected to develop?
Like Europe, Africa is a region which has long sought to build and develop viable regional institutions. Following the founding of the European Steel and Coal Community in 1952, Europe seriously began to build its regional institutions in 1957, marked by the signing of the Treaty of Rome. Africa began its own attempt to build a regional organisation – the Organisation of African unity (OAU) – six years later in 1963.

**Box 15.5 Organisation of African Unity/African Union timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>First Organisation of African Unity (OAU) summit meeting in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>OAU founded as formal organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Final OAU summit meeting in the Zambian capital, Lusaka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>OAU disbanded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>African Union replaces Organisation of African Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>The AU’s first military intervention in a member state (Burundi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>AU troops deployed in Sudan to help deal with Darfur issue when thousands of civilians were killed or injured by marauding ‘militias’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Sudan mission handed over to United Nations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike Europe, which has seen its own regional organisation go from strength to strength, Africa’s attempts at regional integration have been less successful. Because of its perceived lack of success, the OAU was eventually disbanded and replaced in 2002 by the African Union (AU), a regional intergovernmental organisation modelled directly on the European Union.

**Box 15.6 Creation of the Organisation of African Unity**

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was created at a time of decolonisation, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when European colonial powers, including Britain, France and Belgium, were withdrawing from Africa. In international relations, this period was a time of pronounced ideological polarisation. On the one hand, there was the liberal democratic and pro-market USA and on the other hand there was the communist Soviet Union, which saw these issues very differently. Reflecting this ideological division in international relations, African leaders disagreed about what kind of organisation the OAU should be. Some, including Kwame Nkrumah, prime minister of Ghana, wanted to create a regional wide states’ union, with a central government that would seek to unite all African countries under the authority of one leader. However, the plan was very problematic as very few African countries, most of which were only then emerging from colonial rule, would seriously countenance the idea of moving from colonial control by European countries to a new arrangement whereby one African leader – perhaps Nkrumah – would seek to dominate the OAU. As a result of such concerns, other African leaders, such as President Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d’Ivoire, strongly opposed Nkrumah’s idea. Eventually, Africa’s leaders reached a compromise on this issue which directly related to the ability of the OAU to achieve its goals: the OAU was divided among factions, leaving it with little power to act on its own.

While over the years, the OAU did appear to help build links between African countries, mainly through the periodic meetings which took place under OAU auspices, it also faced many problems of disunity that ultimately meant that it was unable to achieve its goals of peace, prosperity, security and stability for the African region.
**Problems and issues**

Reflecting its problematic origins, the OAU was troubled by disputes among member states throughout its existence. One of the earliest divisive issues was a civil war in Angola which started in 1975. The war was ostensibly fought on ideological grounds, between Soviet Union-supported communists grouped together in the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola-Partido de Trabalho (MPLA), on the one hand, and two competing pro-Western factions on the other, supported by the United States and other Western countries. These two other factions – the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola, or FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola, or UNITA) – were also supported by the region’s most powerful country, South Africa. The OAU held a vote in December 1975 to try to decide which of the groups to support. Half of the OAU members backed the MPLA, while the others backed either the FNLA or UNITA. During the later 1970s, the OAU was consistently divided on ideological grounds in a similar way to the situation over Angola. Conflicts afflicting Africa during this time included a civil war in Katanga Province, Zaire (now called the Democratic Republic of the Congo), Somalia’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1978, and attempts at independence from Morocco fighters in the Western Sahara. Later, during the 1980s and 1990s, the OAU’s ability to work collectively was further undermined by a serious and accelerating regional economic decline. Under these circumstances, African countries tended to be inward looking, seeking to resolve their problems by individual effort rather than looking to regional mechanisms and solutions.

**Successes and improvements**

The OAU did record some successes. For example, in 1964 it successfully mediated a border dispute between Algeria and Morocco, and in 1968–70 it was able to resolve problems, involving Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya.

The OAU was also actively involved in assisting efforts by African countries to end colonial rule. This was a policy which did not divide its members in the same way that questions of leadership of the organisation or ideological direction did. Soon after its founding in 1963, the OAU formed its African Liberation Committee (ALC). The main goal of the ALC was to channel financial support to movements trying to defeat Portuguese colonial rule in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. Unlike Britain or France, which by this time were happy to relinquish their colonial possessions in Africa, the Portuguese government made no such commitment, vowing to maintain its African colonies. Portugal’s resolve did not last long, however. In 1974, liberation movements in all three of its colonies were successful in overturning centuries of Portuguese domination.

On the other hand, during the 1970s and 1980s, the OAU engaged in several mediation efforts and even a couple of military missions (for example, in Chad and Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo). The OAU was able to act in this way due to the acceptance of the actions by the government of the country affected. The main drawback, however, was that the OAU Charter’s emphasis on ‘national sovereignty’ and a consequent prohibition
against OAU involvement in the internal affairs of other member states made such initiatives quite difficult. The non-interference clause, in particular, was often invoked as an excuse for inaction.

The OAU also supported liberation movements against white minority rule in three southern African countries: Namibia, South Africa and Rhodesia (renamed Zimbabwe at independence in 1980). The white minority governments in each case managed to hang on longer than those in the Portuguese colonies, but not for that long: in 1994, South Africa threw out its white minority government, following Zimbabwe (1980) and Namibia (1990). The OAU received a boost when South Africa became a member in 1994; earlier, membership of the OAU had been denied to the country because of its white minority-led government. Following South Africa’s admittance to the OAU in 1994, the organisation sought – albeit unsuccessfully – to redouble its efforts in pursuit of regional peace, democracy and swifter economic development.

By the early 1990s, as more conflicts broke out across the region, such notions began to change and, as a result, the idea of national sovereignty underwent reinterpretation in two main ways. First, it became less categorical – by considering massive human rights violations and population displacements resulting from domestic conflicts as regional security threats. Second, the concept of ‘security’ was broadened to include not just state security but also human security, including the idea that people had a right to expect food, shelter, and other aspects of a decent life. The result of these developments was to shift the emphasis on regional security concerns and make it more likely that multinational interventions would be undertaken in order to try to arrest anarchy, restore order and protect innocent civilians.

**From the OAU to the AU: new initiatives for regional progress**

The development of the African Union (AU) from its predecessor organisation, the OAU, was widely regarded as an encouraging sign that Africa’s governments were at last serious in seeking to tackle endemic problems of political violence, poor governance and developmental disappointments which had dogged the region for so long (Makinda and Wafula Okumu 2006). One of the key goals of the AU was to focus on regional conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict resolution. Unlike the charter of the OAU, that of the AU allowed the organisation the authority to ‘intervene in cases of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity’ (www.africa-union.org/). The AU created a new institution in 2002 to pursue these goals: the fifteen-member Peace and Security Council, which South Africa’s then president, Thabo Mbeki, identified as ‘a collective security and early-warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient responses to conflicts and crisis situations in Africa’ (African Union 2002: 4).
The AU launched a flagship regional development strategy in 2002: the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), which included an ‘African Peer Review Mechanism’ to check on progress within individual countries. This was designed to promote good governance within African countries, seen as one of the best ways to prevent domestic political conflicts from leading to coups, insurgency or civil war (www.nepad.org/).

Case study: The AU and the International Criminal Court

The International Criminal Court (ICC) was founded in 2002. Many people hoped that those guilty of appalling crimes against humanity would now be brought to justice. But that was not all. In addition, there was also expectation that the behaviour of warlords and dictators – individuals with power who pay little or no regard to the well-being of ordinary people under their control – would henceforward see fit to change their behaviour and activities and seek to behave better in relation to the hundreds of millions whose lives they affect, increasing the security of many of the most vulnerable.

Less than a decade later, these hopes were badly undermined by the African Union’s decision in July 2009 to withdraw cooperation with the ICC. Why would the AU see fit to do this? African leaders, meeting at the AU summit in Libya, made the decision that if indicted by the ICC, no African figure would be extradited to face trial. In fact they would not even be arrested. The reason for this decision was that some African governments had complained that the ICC, despite its professed universal focus, was actually a ‘Western court’ whose key purpose was unjustly to prosecute Africans.

Omar al-Bashir, the Sudanese president – indicted by the ICC over alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity by his country’s armed forces in Darfur – was the first African to benefit from the AU’s decision. The AU’s resolution contained a demand that not only should no African government try and arrest Bashir if he happens to be in their country but also they should not allow the ICC to conduct investigations on their territory.

This decision was unexpected. While some African countries have rejected the remit of the ICC from the start, the July 2009 AU resolution also gained the agreement of those governments – a majority of African countries – who signed the Rome Treaty that established the ICC.

It appears that many African governments, formerly supportive of the ICC, had been persuaded by pressure from Sudan to change their position – pressure which only a month earlier they had resisted. A June 2009 meeting in Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia, had seen many such AU countries resisting pressure from Sudan and other staunch ICC opponents to change the AU position of willingness to work with the ICC.

On the other hand, some African critics of the July 2009 AU decision, including the governments of Botswana and Uganda, refused to drop their commitment to justice and human rights and maintained their support for the ICC. South Africa’s position was particularly important. This was partly because the country played a leading role in setting up the ICC and partly because it is one of only three states in Africa to have incorporated the ICC statute’s provisions into the law of the country. One outcome was that Sudan’s president declined to attend the inauguration of South Africa’s president, Jacob Zuma, in May 2009, fearing that he might be arrested if he set foot in South Africa.

It is worth noting that the ICC is a very new international organisation; it is important when necessary to critique it, for it may well be necessary for the growth of its maturity and capabilities. But this is not how the AU’s July 2009 statement should be interpreted: it is hard not to conclude that African leaders – not all but most – were more inclined to protect one of their own than to stand up for the principles that most had officially signed up to.

The first African Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, was in post when the ICC came into existence. He is and remains a strong supporter of the organisation, not sharing the view of some African power holders that the ICC is primarily concerned with protecting Western interests and undermining those of Africans. Annan noted that the AU’s July decision implied there is ‘little hope of preventing the worst crimes known to mankind, or reassuring those who live in fear of their recurrence, if African leaders stop supporting justice for the most heinous crimes just because one of their own stands accused’ (Annan 2009).

Has the ICC enough authority to become an important component of international law?
NEPAD’s key reforms included a focus on several desirable reforms in African countries: improved civil order and democracy; better conflict prevention and reduction; better human rights; enhanced human resources, especially in health and education sectors; greater economic diversification and increased trade with the rest of the world; and more effective policies in relation to combating various killer diseases, notably HIV/AIDS and malaria.

This list of reforms suggests that demands on African states would be considerable, notably the political measures adopted by the AU, underlining that human development necessarily accompanies both promotion of democracy and good governance. The consequence was that all AU states had to agree to develop political systems with the following characteristics:

- uphold the rule of law;
- adhere to a governmental separation of powers, including an independent judiciary and an effective legislature;
- promote the equality of all citizens before the law, including equality of opportunity for all;
- safeguard individual liberties and collective freedoms, including the right to form and join political parties and trades unions;
- acknowledge the inalienable right of the individual to participate, by means of free, credible and democratic processes, in periodically electing leaders for a fixed term of office;
- uphold probity in public life;
- combat and eradicate corruption;
- ensure free expression including media freedom;
- facilitate the development of vibrant civil society organisations;
- strengthen electoral commissions, administration and management.

One very important feature of NEPAD was the voluntary Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), established in April 2003, designed to ‘ensure that the policies and practices of participating states conform to the (mutually) agreed . . . values, codes and standards contained in NEPAD’s Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance.’ The peer review process aims to spur African countries ‘to consider seriously the impact of domestic policies, not only on internal political stability and economic growth, but also on neighbouring countries.’ Any member of the AU can adopt APRM as a self-monitoring instrument. By early 2009, over thirty African governments had signed up to APRM. Operationally, APRM is directed and managed by a five to seven member Eminent Persons’ Panel, whose members are appointed by the heads of states and government of the participating countries. They serve for a period of up to four years, retiring on rotation. Members of the panel must be Africans who have expertise in the areas of political governance, macro-economic and public financial management and corporate governance. There must also be ‘broad regional balance, gender equity and cultural diversity’ in the APRM make up.

There is no doubt that the AU’s adoption not only of NEPAD but also the focus on conflict resolution, governance and reform are ambitious and potentially far-reaching developments that potentially usher in a new era for Africa’s development prospects.
Critics, however, suggest that there is one fundamental problem – that of implementation. What might be the key obstacles in this regard? First, there is the basic issue of sovereignty and the extent to which African states will cede it to the AU. Second, there is the question of whether or not there is sufficient political will within African states for the relevant reforms to be implemented. Third, it is unclear what roles will be played by existing elites and political leaders, many of whom, it is suggested, are primarily motivated by goals of personal power and prosperity and may have relatively little concern for popular democratic legitimacy. In other words, how might the AU encourage many African political leaders to change how they rule, to improve governance and, in many cases, adopt more even-handed development policies that would benefit the majority of their people, rather than the few? Finally, as the AU acknowledges, the often-embryonic nature of civil society within many African states often significantly undermines public participation and engagement in political life. What the AU would like to see in relation to African citizens – a fundamental shift from being often passive subjects of authoritarian or dictatorial rule to become politically active citizens seeking consistently to hold their governments to account – does not as yet show many signs of developing in the region.

In sum, the AU’s efforts have focused on attempts to try to deal with the region’s most serious problems: regional instability and conflict; poor governance; and disappointing development outcomes. So far, however, outcomes have been relatively disappointing.

The African Union: institutions

Following the example of the EU, the AU seeks to create a common African currency, foreign policy, defence structure and economic programme. The AU also wants to develop a pan-African parliament, an economic community, a central bank and a court of justice (Muthiri 2008). Overall, the AU’s institutions are designed to accelerate the political and socio-economic integration of the continent; to promote and defend African common positions on issues of interest to the continent and its peoples; to achieve peace and security in Africa; and to promote democratic institutions, good governance and human rights:

- **Assembly of the African Union.** This body makes the most important decisions of the AU. The Assembly is the highest decision-making organ of the AU. Comprising heads of state and government of the fifty-three member states, the Assembly meets twice a year.
- **African Union Commission.** The AU’s secretariat to the political structures is located in Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia. (A secretariat is an administrative unit responsible for maintaining records and other secretarial duties, especially for international organisations such as the AU.) In February 2009, AU leaders decide that the African Union Commission would be henceforth known as the African Union Authority.
- **Pan-African Parliament.** The AU’s representative body comprises 265 members elected by the national parliaments of the AU member countries.
- **Executive Council.** Other political institutions of the AU include this Council, which is constituted by member states’ foreign ministers. The Executive Council prepares decisions for the Assembly.
Permanent Representatives Committee. This body comprises the AU Member states’ ambassadors.

Economic, Social and Cultural Council. The Council is a civil society consultative body.

Conclusion

[In February 2009] the Heads of State and governments of the various nations in Africa met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to discuss issues affecting the Continent. For five years such meetings have been taking place and after each meeting nothing happens to the numerous problems facing the continent. There is very little to show for all the millions of dollars of tax payers’ money that has gone into such meetings. What has the AU achieved or got right in Africa since it replaced the toothless OAU (Organisation of Africa Unity)? How effective has the AU been in tackling the numerous problems facing the continent? Can the AU tell the people in the continent why it should be allowed to hold such meetings in the name of the people after five years of no results? Can the AU tell the people in Africa one single thing that it has got right since it changed its name from OAU to AU? What at all has the AU achieved in Africa that merits another waste of tax payers’ money?

(Adusei 2009)

In July 2002, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was renamed and rebadged as the African Union (AU) during the OAU Summit in Durban, South Africa. The new treaty was used to formulate more exacting criteria for membership in the AU compared to the OAU. Article 30 of the treaty establishing the AU states explicitly: ‘Governments which shall come to power through unconstitutional means shall not be allowed to participate in the activities of the Union’. However, any transparent procedures for the exclusion or suspension of member states on the basis of this article were absent – as condemnation of unconstitutional governments belongs only to the guiding principles of the treaty. A (military) intervention in the domestic affairs of an AU member state is only possible in the following cases: crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide. So far, as we saw above in relation to the International Criminal Court, these have not been forthcoming.

Reflecting the AU’s focus on both political and human security, African mediators, troops and civil society activists – whether acting with the context of the UN or acting alone – now play an increasingly active and central role in trying to resolve the numerous conflicts that still unfortunately afflict many parts of Africa. At the annual summit meeting of the AU, held in Maputo, Mozambique in July, 2003, Africa’s heads of state jointly expressed their ‘determination’ through the AU ‘to address the scourge of conflicts in Africa in a collective, comprehensive and decisive manner’. This expression of intent by African leaders to shoulder more of the burden of peacekeeping in Africa was not only a reflection of a shared regional determination that the means to deal with conflicts should be found from within regional resources. It was also a sign that non-African countries and organisations, such as the UN, were now very reluctant to undertake large-scale peacekeeping operations or to become directly entangled in African conflicts. This is because when they have done
so, for example in Somalia, Sudan and Liberia, they have found it very difficult or impossible to make good progress. Currently, while several thousand European and US troops were engaged in peace missions in Africa – for example, there were hundreds of British troops stationed in Sierra Leone during the early 2000s, central to the successful efforts to end that country’s civil war in 2002 – most of these personnel are in place as a result of ad hoc, often bilateral, arrangements for very specific assignments, not as part of UN peacekeeping operations.

According to the former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, the AU should now ‘play a variety of important roles’ in African peacekeeping. According to Annan, such initiatives can not only ‘help ensure that regional peace efforts are closely integrated with the approach of a [UN] peace operation’, they can also identify personnel for such operations and develop long-term peace-building strategies to stabilise African countries emerging from conflicts (Annan 2009). Adding weight to the opinion expressed by Kofi Annan, the then South African President Thabo Mbeki told the July 2003 summit that ‘conflict resolution is a top priority for the [African] Union. As a consequence, conflicts that have been raging for many years are being tackled with increased determination and many African countries are committing their own resources to conflict prevention, management and resolution’ (http://www.africa-union.org/Official_documents/Speeches_&_Statements/HE_Thabo_Mbiki/Opening_speech_Maputo_10%20July.htm)

Conclusion

We noted at the beginning of this chapter that a key aim of virtually all existing regional organisations is to expand trade among member countries in the context of globalisation. We have seen that when there are appropriate formal institutions – as in the EU and, but not to the same extent, in the AU – then political, social and/or developmental objectives, even when officially of no or minimal importance can grow in significance in the context of trade talks. For example, the issue of EU enlargement was not only about the economic ramifications of regional augmentation, but also importantly concerned wider political, cultural and social issues subsumed under the heading of what constitutes ‘European-ness’.

A further point is that states engaged in regional cooperation attempts, in effect, want both to have their cake and to eat it: that is, they ‘attempt to gain the economic advantages of larger and more open markets without sacrificing their political sovereignty’ (Hague and Harrop 2001: 52). However, we have seen that the history of the EU, the most developed regional organisation, indicates that advanced regional cooperation can have multiple – economic, political, security, and cultural – outcomes.

We saw that the AU shares Europe’s aspirations but has so far failed to enjoy the kind of success that Europe has in relation to regional integration. Despite long-term calls for African unity, there has been in reality much less commitment to the ideals of regional
integration on the part of African governments. Until this situation changes, we should expect to see a failure of Africa’s regional efforts despite continuing rhetorical commitment to them on the part of the region’s governments.

### Resource section

#### Questions

1. Which is more successful: the EU or the AU? What criteria would you choose for making this judgement?
2. Explain why the EU grew in size in both 2004 and 2007.
3. Why is Turkey so keen to join the EU?
4. Can the AU fulfil its goal: ‘Africa must unite’?

#### Recommended reading


This book examines the development of collective security by regional organisations particularly after the Cold War. It analyses the various constitutional developments that have occurred within regional organisation, including the African Union. The book evaluates the impact of regional organisations’ evolving powers to authorise enforcement action and determine when situations within member states warrant their intervention. The book also analyses the regime of complementarity between the UN and regional organisations.


The aim of this book is to locate the European Union in the context of International Relations theory and to explore the ways in which the EU seeks to undertake its international relations. Various chapters deal with three key themes: the EU as a sub-system of international relations; the EU and the processes of international relations; and the EU as a regional and international power.


This book is a comprehensive examination of the work of the African Union. The book’s main special emphasis is on the AU’s capacity to meet the challenges of building and sustaining governance institutions and security mechanisms.


This volume brings together the analysis and research of 17 mainly African scholars, policymakers, practitioners and civil society representatives. It presents a positive but realistic picture of the African Union, while diagnosing several key challenges that face the organisation. While the AU has established an array of institutions to deal with Africa’s security and governance problems, the book makes it clear that there is still some way to go before we can conclude that institutional development is effective in terms of pursuing the organisation’s goals.
Useful websites

African Union
www.africa-union.org/

European Union
http://europa.eu/

International Criminal Court
http://www.icc-cpi.int/Menus/ICC