

## Small State Diplomacy: Regional Diplomacy<sup>1</sup>

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One striking and perhaps unexpected feature of today's globalised environment is the increasing visibility and relevance of regional arrangements. It is evident that many of the factors that fuel globalisation are also at work at the regional level. These elements include an enhanced sense of inter-dependence among nations and peoples, the ease and intensity of the means of transport and communication, and the extent and complexity of economic interactions.

The factors that differentiate regional diplomacy from multilateral diplomacy arise from the conditions of proximity, manifested in shared strategic and economic concerns, very often accompanied by related historical and cultural backgrounds. In response, regional diplomacy takes on a dual direction. On the one hand, it is an inward directed process permitting consultation and cooperation among a group of neighbouring states on issues of shared concern. On the other hand, it is an outward directed process permitting a group of neighbouring states to adopt common positions and objectives in inter-actions at the global level.

### Regional Arrangements for Peace and Security

Regional diplomacy is essentially a post Second World War phenomenon. Its roots lie in the area of peace and security. The UN Charter (1945), which has a whole chapter (Chapter VIII) dealing with regional arrangements, refers to 'regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to peace and security as appropriate for regional action.'



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The UN Charter clearly subordinates regional arrangements to the global process, both in general terms – their activities must be ‘consistent with the purposes and principles of the UN’ – and in specific terms – ‘No enforcement action shall be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies without the authorisation of the Security Council.’ However, the Charter does not define the term *regional* in any way that links it to any defined geographical area.

The regional arrangements originally envisaged in the UN Charter were the defensive military alliances emerging at the end of the Second World War. Of these, the only effective remaining example is the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Such alliances were the product more of strategic than geographical circumstances, and were primarily the tools of major and powerful states operating in an environment of heightened antagonism and confrontation.

Small states have participated in such alliances, largely in virtue of their geo-strategic location. This has been the case with NATO and such defunct alliances as the Warsaw Pact, the South East Asia Treaty Organization and the Central Treaty Organization. In spite of the security umbrella they provided or may still provide for all their constituents, membership of small states in these alliances carried liabilities. For the more powerful members, participation increased the risk of hostilities under the defensive arrangements. For small states, it added a heavy burden of military preparedness.

Under very specific geo-strategic conditions, the membership of a small state in a military alliance may be desirable and necessary. The advantages of membership in a military alliance are clear for some small states in the NATO alliance (Setälä, 2005). For example, the three ex-Soviet Baltic states of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania exploit the security provided by NATO in their evolving relations with Russia.

## UN Regional Commissions

However, the pursuit of peace and security through regional arrangements involves a broader spectrum of social, economic, and political issues than may be encompassed through a military alliance. In recognition of this, very early in its history, the UN established a network of regional commissions intended to give policy advice and assistance to governments, initially mainly on economic, but, subsequently, on an expanding range of social and other subjects.

The UN formed these regional commissions as subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council and today they cover five regions. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) were both founded in 1947. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) was created for Latin America in 1948 and extended to the Caribbean in 1984. Later, the UN created the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (in 1958) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) (in 1973).

The regional commissions were originally intended as motors for regional states to collectively address the particular problems of their regions within the UN global

mandate in economic and social fields. As in the security field, a focus of the UN is to keep regional initiatives in the development field integrated within a global approach. Yet, due to the inability of the Economic and Social Council to assume the lead role in global economic and social management that was originally intended for it, each of the five regional commissions has developed a separate physiognomy and mandate closely attuned to specific regional concerns and priorities.

Accordingly, the role of individual regional commissions on issues directly related to small states has varied according to the particular circumstances of the different regions. Both ECLAC and ESCAP have separate units dealing respectively with the Caribbean (the Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, based in Trinidad and Tobago) and with the Pacific (the Pacific Operations Centre, based in Fiji). These units focus on questions related to small island states. In other regions, small states issues are dealt with in the framework of the broader regional development agenda.

Nonetheless, it appears that, while struggling to maintain a central role in conducting regional analyses, in developing policy frameworks and norms, and in supporting regional integration efforts and activities, the regional commissions have lost a clear focus within the UN. They are sometimes only an additional layer within the UN Secretariat's structure contributing to overlap and duplication, making, at best, a partial contribution to regional integration. This loss of direction strengthens the conviction of many observers that the UN should concentrate on global cooperation, leaving the field of regional cooperation to other intergovernmental organisations established at the regional level.

A whole range of regional intergovernmental processes has developed over the last few decades outside the framework of the UN. One issue today is how these processes fit into multilateral processes regarding peacemaking and peacekeeping (Acharya, 2004), as well as into those regarding the promotion of trade and other forms of economic, social and cultural cooperation (Hudgins, 1996).

However, here we will not look at how regional processes fit into, complement, supplement, or compete with global multilateral processes. Rather, we will examine regional arrangements in America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. A certain amount of parallelism emerges in the different regional arrangements. In many cases, these arrangements operate at three often separate, but inter-linked levels: a continental level, a sub-regional level, and an inter-regional level.

## Regional Arrangements in America

The first regional process originated on the American continent. Two central political ingredients of this process are the economic and military dominance of the United States in the region, and the many historical, cultural, and development characteristics shared by the Latin American states.

The process began as a US initiative in the late nineteenth century to establish a regular international conference of American states intended to serve as a discussion forum for the nations of the American continent. Eventually, this led to the creation of the first permanent inter-American organisation, the Commercial Bureau of American

Republics, which became, in 1910, the Pan American Union and subsequently, in 1948, the present Organization of American States (OAS). An alternative mechanism for political consultation and coordination among continental Latin American countries, pointedly excluding the US and Canada, has developed in recent years under the Rio Group which in 2010 became the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

*The Organization of American States.* The OAS defines itself as the principal regional multilateral forum for strengthening democracy, promoting human rights, and confronting shared problems such as poverty, terrorism, illegal drugs, and corruption. The OAS has a well-developed institutional structure, with an Assembly, which meets annually at the ministerial level to lay down the general action and policy of the Organization, a Permanent Council that discharges the functions assigned to it by the Assembly, and a multilayered Secretariat, coordinating the organisation's efforts in different areas of activity. The broad policy mandates of the system are formulated at periodic summits known as Summits of the Americas.

As defined by its Charter, the essential purpose of the OAS is to strengthen the peace and security of the hemisphere. However, it should be noted that the most far-reaching security-related regional initiative on the American continent, the negotiation and conclusion of the 1967 Treaty for the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Treaty of Tlatelolco, was conducted outside the framework of the organisation.

The unique challenge faced by American small states has been one of the subjects of attention of the OAS process. This attention found its most extensive expression in the series of meetings leading to the *Kingstown Declaration on the Security of Small States*, adopted in 2003, although this adoption has not had extensive operational follow-up.

Small states in the region also benefit from the OAS role of facilitator, negotiator, and arbiter in bilateral disputes or conflicts. This role, over the years, has developed as one of the more unique and effective features of the OAS (e.g., in the long-running Belize and Guatemala territorial dispute; the 1969 El Salvador and Honduras conflict; and the maritime delimitation dispute between Nicaragua and Honduras) (Inter-American Dialogue, 2006).

Outside the strict framework of the politically-driven continental processes of the OAS and the Rio Group, a number of sub-regional initiatives are directed towards economic integration. Currently, four incomplete or incipient customs unions operate in Latin America and the Caribbean, the long-term objectives of which are to establish common markets or economic communities. These are the Central American Integration System (SICA) (O'Keefe, 2001), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Andean Community (AC), and the Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR).

Other sub-regional initiatives are the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) initiative, which some would like to see given a wider continental dimension in the shape of a Free Trade Areas of the Americas (FTAA) but is now uncertain following the change in the US administration after the 2016 elections; the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, and the Association of

Caribbean States. A counterpoint to the FTAA idea is the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), based on a project for cooperation, solidarity, and economic sustainability first proposed by President Chavez of Venezuela in 2001.

While no institutional commitments link the OAS process and the sub-regional economic integration processes, the OAS provides a forum for the examination of the inter-locking elements of these parallel processes. The OAS Secretariat also cooperates with regional integration secretariats such as the CARICOM Secretariat, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States Secretariat, the ACS Secretariat, and the Central American Economic Integration Secretariat.

*The Caribbean Community.* The clustering of small states in the Caribbean and in Central America ensures that CARICOM concentrates on issues related to small states. Today, CARICOM constitutes the most developed and structured association of small states in the world. Emerging out of the collapse of the pre-independence West Indies Federation, first as the Caribbean Free Trade Area and, subsequently, as the Caribbean Community and Common Market, CARICOM presently generates a wide range of cooperation activities beyond the purely economic area.

Under the 2001 Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (Girvan, 2006) pursues freedom of movement of goods, services, capital, business enterprise, and skilled labour within an area bounded by a customs union. It includes several institutions responsible for formulating policy and promoting cooperation. Among others, a Caribbean Court of Justice, a Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, and an Assembly of Caribbean Community Parliamentarians operate within the auspices of CARICOM.

*The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States.* The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) is a nine-member grouping of small Eastern Caribbean states, founded in 1981 with the objective of promoting cooperation, unity and solidarity among its members. The OECS is administered by a Central Secretariat located in St. Lucia. It has achieved a significant level of economic integration among its members, including the sharing of a single currency, which is overseen by a common institution: the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank. It has a Supreme Court which predates that of CARICOM. There is telecommunications liberalisation among its members, joint diplomatic representation, and cooperation in various social and economic areas including a joint pharmaceutical service (CARICOM, no date).

*The Association of Caribbean States.* The Association of Caribbean States is a loose structure initiated in 1994 with the aim of promoting consultation, cooperation, and concerted action among the small countries of the Caribbean and Central America. The most visible operating structures are the periodic summits, four of which have taken place to date, annual Ministerial Council meetings, and a small secretariat. The association promotes technical cooperation projects in the greater Caribbean region relating to trade, transport, sustainable tourism, and natural disaster summits.

Outside the global processes of the UN and the World Trade Organization, the inter-regional processes that link countries on the American continent with countries in other regions involve the EU and the Commonwealth. The EU is developing a structured partnership with Latin America and Caribbean countries that takes the

shape of regular summits, meetings with the Rio Group, and specialised dialogues with MERCOSUR, the Andean Community, and the Central American Integration System (EEAS, 2017). Relations between the EU and the Caribbean take place, on the one hand, within the framework of the African, Caribbean and Pacific process and, on the other hand, within the framework of EU cooperation with small island developing nations. In addition, Caribbean countries form a significant group within the Commonwealth, thereby giving that association its interest in all issues relating to small states.

## Regional Arrangements in Europe

The regional process on the European continent is of more recent origin than that in America, but it has developed more complex and integrated structures. In Europe, the process started as a reaction to the tragic experience of the Second World War, with the Cold War situation forming one of its significant influences in the early years.

At the continental level, the European regional process has had four separate initiatives: the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the NATO alliance, the Council of Europe, and the European Union. The origins of NATO and the OSCE are rooted in the Cold War and their original vocations were in defence and security. The Council of Europe and the EU are broader processes of regional cooperation and integration.

*The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.* From the outset, the OSCE, initially a periodic conference (the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe) rather than a structured organisation, took a comprehensive approach to the politico-military dimension of security, linking this with the economic and human dimensions. Following the demise of the Cold War, the OSCE emerged as a full-fledged institution equipped to initiate or maintain a whole range of peacekeeping activities, such as arms control, border management, conflict prevention, policing, democratisation, election monitoring, and the protection of human rights.

Small states have played a significant role in the OSCE, especially in its early years. Within the framework of the group known as the neutral and non-aligned states, some of the smaller members that were not part of the military alliances were often instrumental in keeping the process on an even keel. In particular, they were active during the periods when the fragile spirit of détente upon which the OSCE was built was passing through difficult moments (Mosser, 2001).

*The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.* While the NATO alliance has maintained and even enlarged (though new memberships) its original military structure and vocation well into the post Cold War period, it is currently seeking to define a new role for itself in an international environment more attuned to peacemaking and peacekeeping than to formal defensive postures. In this spirit it has been involved in operations both within Europe itself (in Bosnia and Herzegovina) and outside (in Afghanistan and Libya).

*The Council of Europe.* The Council of Europe was created in 1949 with a mandate to maintain and develop the ideals of individual freedom, the rule of law, and democratic

principles through greater unity. It has an elaborate institutional structure, with an extensive inter-governmental and strong inter-parliamentary dimension, and acts as a leading norm setter in the area of human rights. One of its most prominent and active organs is the European Court of Human Rights. Following the break up of the Soviet Union, the Council has played an important role in building and consolidating democratic stability in the newly independent Eastern European, Balkan and Eurasian states.

*The European Union.* In the 1950s, the EU took over from the Council of Europe the role of main forum for debate and action on the future of Europe. The Union has developed along a functionalist concept. A series of ever-expanding projects of functional cooperation in the economic and social fields forms the essential building blocks in a process of regional political, economic, and social integration (EU, no date).<sup>1</sup> From an original 6-member Economic Community engaged in building a customs union, the EU is today a union of 28 members in an advanced and complex form of regional integration.

The majority of EU member states are small, in either absolute or relative terms. At the same time, the Union counts among its membership two permanent members of the UN Security Council (UK and France), and some of the largest economies in the world. This diverse membership has been an important factor in ensuring some of the Union's distinctive features. In particular its institutional structure minimises, without completely eliminating, the preponderance of the more powerful members in the internal deliberations; its openness to the rest of the world, including the developing countries, and its commitment to effective multilateralism, human rights, and the rule of law preserves its uniqueness.

The comprehensive and forceful thrust of EU regional integration has either absorbed or marginalised the effects of separate sub-regional cooperative projects in Europe. The initiative towards a European free trade area, initially envisaged as an alternative to the EU, has been largely absorbed by the Union. Some elements of sub-regional cooperation involving small- and medium-sized European countries still exist among the Scandinavian countries (the Nordic Group), the three Benelux countries, and the Central European countries (the Central European Initiative), but the activities of these groups take place within the framework of the EU and NATO.

In the area of inter-regional cooperation, besides acting in global multilateral fora, the EU has also initiated its own cooperative projects within neighbouring regions through its European Neighbourhood Policy. Within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, one of the most structured inter-regional projects encompassing a number of small states is the EuroMed initiative, an experiment linking the EU with non-member states bordering the Mediterranean and including the long-term objective of a free trade area. In recent years, on the initiative of the French EU Presidency, the EuroMed process has evolved into a more functionally-oriented process called the Union of the Mediterranean (EEAS, 2016).

Further afield, EU projects of inter-regional cooperation include projects started in 1965 under the first Yaoundé Convention, and expanded through subsequent conventions (the Lomé Conventions and the Cotonou Agreement – now supplemented by a set of separate Economic Partnership Agreements or EPAs) (European

Commission, 2010). These conventions provide a framework for an extensive programme of cooperation, of particular interest to a large number of small developing countries in Africa (Commission of the European Communities, 2005), the Pacific (Commission of the European Communities, 2006), and the Caribbean (EEAS, 2017).

At present, however, the UK, based on its referendum of 23 June 2016, has decided to leave the Union (BREXIT) and has triggered Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty on 30 March 2017 (UK Government, 2016). It is surmised that this exit decision may have an impact not only on the structure of the Union and the single market but also on its relations in many different areas, one of which may be the implications for existing agreements with the UK's former colonies (Sanders, 2016).

## Regional Arrangements in Africa

In spite of some limited sub-regional cooperation efforts during colonial times, a consistent regional process in Africa developed only in the wake of decolonisation with the 1963 establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The OAU objectives were originally defined as the promotion of the unity and solidarity of African states; the defence of their sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence; and the eradication all forms of colonialism from Africa.

Over the years, the OAU sought to inject an economic dimension into its political mission. The Lagos Plan of Action, formulated in 1980, presented a unified blueprint for the continent's economic development. The Lagos Plan promoted collective self-reliance in food production, human capacity-building, and trade and investment priorities. In 1991, the objective of African economic and social integration received a concrete form in a treaty establishing the African Economic Community with the expressed goal of creating an African Common Market by the year 2025.

A main strategy behind the African Economic Community is to consolidate the various ongoing initiatives towards sub-regional economic integration. Of the fourteen extant initiatives, some are performing quite successfully (notably, the West African Economic and Monetary Union and the Southern African Development Community), while others are largely stagnant (notably the Arab Maghreb Union and the Economic Community of Great Lakes Countries).

Duplication of efforts and waste of scarce resources, due to a multiplicity of regional economic communities with overlapping memberships, remains a significant hindrance to the integration process in Africa. The goal of streamlining these various initiatives within the African Economic Community is complicated further by the twin problems of low levels of development and political instability. The need to link more effectively the political and economic dimensions of African regional integration received expression in 2002 through the transformation of the OAU into the African Union. At the same time, the goals of the African Economic Community were reinforced by the adoption in 2001 of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

To an extent greater than on other continents, the problems and concerns of small African states tend to merge with the severe economic problems of other states on the continent. Of the fifty least developed states identified globally by the UN, thirty-four are in Africa. Four of these are small island states.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development Action Plan for the Environment gives attention to the special vulnerabilities of small African island states, and has a specific sub-programme to ensure control of invasive alien species on African island states. However, in general, for African small states regional integration has meant integration with larger neighbours, as evidenced by such bodies as the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa and the Economic Community of West African States (Domeland and Sander, 2007).

## Regional Arrangements in Asia

On the Asian continent, regional cooperation, while extensive, is more fragmented than elsewhere largely because significant economic, cultural, and political disparities have not permitted the emergence of a cooperative process on a continental basis as has taken place in Europe, Africa, or America. The structured sub-regional cooperation processes that have emerged include the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Gulf Cooperation Council, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and the Pacific Islands Forum. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations has spawned a number of related programmes, notably the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Free Trade Area, and ASEAN+3.

The League of Arab States and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference are rather unique organisations whose binding elements lie in cultural rather than geographical dimensions. They share some of the features of more traditional regional organisations in the cultural, political, economic, and social initiatives they undertake. The League of Arab States, in particular, has an elaborate institutional structure and is involved in a number of programmes designed to promote the interests of its member states, most notably in the fields of education and of telecommunication.

The **Pacific Islands Forum**, formerly the South Pacific Forum until a name change in 2000, was founded in 1971 and consists of sixteen independent and self-governing states in the Pacific. Second to CARICOM, the Forum is the most extensive example of regional cooperation by small states, although, unlike CARICOM, the forum develops its cooperative activities under the guidance and support of two developed country sponsors, Australia and New Zealand (Hughes, 2005).

Established by a treaty between its members, the Forum is the region's premier political and economic policy organisation. Forum leaders meet annually to develop collective responses to regional issues. Its activities are managed by a governing body (the Forum Officials' Committee) and a Secretariat that also oversees the activities of a number of sectoral organisations dealing with medicine, fisheries, education, tourism, and the environment.

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