

Global Politics – Regionalism and the EU

Politics Edexcel and AQA – revision notes – based on Hodder Education revision guides

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Regionalism = refers to an alliance of states acting in a regional bloc.

Economic regionalism = focuses on the trading agreements and often accompanied by monetary policies. Member states can share economic aims, incentives and benefits without the need to share cultural features.

Political regionalism = refers to intergovernmental and sometimes supragovernmental cooperation. States are likely to need to share some common cultural and normative commitments as political regionalism operates at a deeper level of integration than the economic one.

Security regionalism = focuses on defence and military alliances between states in a particular region especially against a common threat. An attack on one country in a security regional bloc is considered to be an attack on all, thus, triggering a collective response by the entire bloc.

EU = considered to be the most comprehensive regional bloc because it involves various dimensions of regionalism; currently 27 member states (2026).

European integration = the level of regionalism in the EU and the extent to which the member states are interconnected and across which dimensions.

Sovereignty = regionalism involves a certain extent of erosion of sovereignty and therefore it poses a challenge to regionalism, in similar ways to its challenge to globalisation, with similar considerations of costs versus benefits.

Supranationalism = international cooperation that has overarching power beyond the state level; sovereignty is to a degree traded for the benefits embedded at the supranational level.

Intergovernmentalism = cooperation via IGOs such as trading agreements wherein states retain their sovereign power.

Federalism = the deepest form of regional integration whereby an overarching supragovernment authority exists and the other entities are subsidiary states. There is a controversy about the degree to which the EU is a federal political system or not.

Widening and deepening = refers to the degree of regional integration; widening refers to the expansion of membership whereas deepening refers to the depth of commitment of the state in the regional bloc.

Regionalism and globalisation

Some argue that these two processes are compatible = regionalism is a 'building block' whereas others argue they are contradictory = regionalism is a 'stumbling block'.

Building block = because regionalism is compartmentalising the international system, some argue it makes international politics more manageable and effective in a range of channels.

- **Politically**, states negotiate and cooperate at a regional level before they proceed to the higher more complex international level.
- **Economically**, agreements between states at a regional level, pave the way for cooperation between regions that are already cohesive compared with a large number of independent states, each with its own rules.
- **Security-wise**, states are more likely to foster regional security alliances as they can directly benefit individually from such cooperation, thus increasing their status as a regional actor in the international arena, combined with the increased power of individual states by virtue of their regional membership in a block.

Stumbling block = regionalism fosters unity and cooperation within the region thereby delineates its 'otherness' with relation to other regions and the international system as whole.

- **Politically**, states may focus on IGOs and international governance organisations that are pertinent to their own interest as a regional bloc.
- **Economically**, states trade primarily with fellow states in the regional bloc making it less 'needy' or interested in further cooperation in the global arena.
- **Security-wise**, especially because of the political and economic regionalism, the states have a greater interest to protect one another and maintain the stability and defence of each one of them separately, and the block as a whole.

Significance of regionalism

- Economic regionalism requires a minimal degree of regional governance when it involves trade agreements. However, where the economic regionalism touches issues such as customs and currency, there is a deeper level of regional governance and integration, and by definition, an increased erosion of sovereignty.

- Political and security regionalism usually involve a certain degree of weakened sovereignty. This issue is the most difficult challenge in managing integrated regional blocs = see the UK and the EU with Brexit.

Regional organisations, other than the EU

USMCA = United States of America, Mexico, Canada, formerly NAFTA

An economic regionalism of free trade agreement ratified in 2020, formerly the North Atlantic Free Trade agreement. It was changed after Trump first withdrew and then it was renegotiated.

The agreement is very similar to the original one but with some amendments around intellectual property, digital trade, environment policy and workers' rights.

AU = African Union

Established in 2002 aiming to provide African states with greater status in the global arena, with some backlash element against neo-colonial policies of the non-colonial era. All African states are member states.

Aimed primarily to promote economic growth and increased stability.

It involves a certain degree of intergovernmentalism, with its own peacekeeping force that has replaced UN peacekeeping forces in much of the region.

A key challenge is that it attempts at promoting some democratic liberal values while most of its member states are not democracies.

Arab League

Set up in 1945 principally as a security alliance combined with a number of political elements; 22 member states (2024), countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and others.

Some of its achievements is reforming education curriculums. However, it is rather fractured by significant differences between different states and heads of states, and fragmented across various indicators.

ASEAN = Association of South-East Asian Nations

Primarily an economic regional bloc aimed to cope with China and Japan; 10 member countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Aspire to develop in similar lines to the EU while promoting peace and security of the region.

Achieved success in establishing the South East Asian Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone Treaty signed in 1995 and the Asian Free Trade Agreement signed in 1992.

It was accused of not being active nor effective and suffer from conflict because some of its members are authoritarian political systems.

The European Union

- Since Brexit, it is composed of 27 member states.
- It was developed from the EEC and established by the Treaty of Rome in 1957.
- UK joined in 1973 under the Conservative PM Edward Heath.
- Two referendums in the UK: 1975 'Yes' to stay and 2016 to 'Leave'.
- The EU consists of various key bodies, developed significantly over time, and the Euro is used by 20 countries.

Key aims of the EU

- Economic and monetary union.
- A single market.
- Economic growth and stability.
- Environmental protection.
- Peace and security.
- Promotion of scientific, technological and academic progress.
- Economic, social and political integration.

The four freedoms related to the single market, already in the original Treaty of Rome in 1957:

1 – Freedom of movement of goods = free trade of goods between the states, thus, states do not charge tariff on imports.

2 – Freedom of movement of services = free trade in services within the market, not restricted to goods.

3 – Freedom of movement of capital = no restrictions on capital flow between the states, easy transfer of money.

4 – Freedom of movement of people = EU citizens can live and work anywhere in the EU countries.

Key institutions

- (1) European Council = (European Summit), intergovernmental decision-making body that provides strategic leadership and direction for foreign policy, treaties and conflict resolution.
Meets at least 4 times a year and member states have a veto.

- (2) **Council of Ministers** = intergovernmental body that is responsible for day-to-day and short-term decision-making.
- (3) **European Commission** = the main executive body that promotes EU interests as a regional bloc and proposing new laws. It is a supranational body and acts as the bureaucratic vehicle of the EU. There are commissioners from each state and a president that serves a 5-year term.
- (4) **European Parliament** = consists of MEPs from all states that are elected directly by each country for a 5-year term. It is also a supranational body, and MEPs are organised by a political party rather than nationality.
- (5) **European Court of Justice** = the judicial body of the EU, interpreting and amending EU laws and treaties. It is also a supranational organisation and consists of judges from each member states and 8 advocates that advise the courts. EU law is superior to national law and therefore it can override domestic laws of member states.
- (6) **European Central Bank** = responsible for economic governance of the euro, its purchasing power and price stability. Similar in its function to the Bank of England regarding the pound. It is also a supranational body that represents all Eurozone countries, which is not the same as all EU countries.

The EU went through a few stages of enlargement by which new member states joined in:

- 1951 = the inner 6 states: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxemburg and the Netherlands.
- 1970s = first enlargement: Denmark, Ireland and UK, including Gibraltar.
- 1980s = Mediterranean enlargement: Greece, Portugal, Spain.
- 1990s = Northern enlargement: Austria, Finland and Sweden.
- 2000s = post-Communist enlargement: Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia.
- The UK was the first to leave in 2020.
- There are other states awaiting to join.

Key treaties and organisations

- **Treaty of Rome 1957** = EEC established, commitment to customs/common market. Founding of key institutions such as the European Parliament.
- **Single European Act 1986** = single market deadline agreed for 1994, more powers for the European Parliament and agreeing the basis for a European foreign policy.
- **Maastricht Treaty 1993** = formal establishment of the EU transforming the body from an economic regional bloc to deeper levels of integration and establishing the foundations for the euro currency that was later introduced in 1999.

- **Treaty of Nice 2003** = adjustment to EU commissioners because of widening processes; states now have one seat each and deepening of defence policies.
- **Treaty of Lisbon 2009** = new powers to the EU Parliament, abandoning the idea of a codified constitution.

The euro

The official currency of the EU, used in 20 countries.

Monetary union was the second main stage of integration, and it involves political elements.

Main objective = to reduce fluctuation in exchange rates and foster monetary stability.

Established under the **Maastricht Treaty**.

Involves 3 stages of integration and only after reaching the third stage a country can declare the euro its official currency.

Various economic benefits alongside erosion in sovereignty and not all benefits apply equally to all states.

- There is a controversy as to what extent the EU is a supra versus intergovernmental entity: different institutions of the EU can be seen as one or the other, so it is reasonable to argue that the EU involves a combination of features.

How successful has the EU been in achieving its aims

- EU members have never been at war with one another.
- The EU was expanded to incorporate most former communist Eastern bloc states.
- **The Single Market** is a fundamental feature of Europe, and it is characterised by a significant degree of cooperation between the countries across various domains.
- On the other hand, there were some critically divisive issues emerging, such as during the Greek debt crisis in 2010, and Brexit. That reflects some resentment and rethinking of the arrangement with its costs and benefits.

Significance of the EU as a global actor

- **Political** = a key player in the global arena; also represented as a whole entity in several organisations such as the G20. However, key issues with contravening sovereignty and suffering from democratic deficit in its functions.
- **Economic** = a significant economic success. However, marred by a controversy during the global financial crisis that hit the EU rather negatively, especially some countries compared with others, and the measures that were taken to assist them.
- **Military** = key security benefits alongside its greatest weakness for lacking central military power; some argue against its over-reliance on NATO.

- **Structural** = significantly great to the point of some considering it to be seen as a superpower. However, it is sometimes struggling to juggle diverse and conflicting interests between its members.

Is the EU federal

Yes

- Can act supranationally and can override states' domestic laws.
- Characterised by deeper economic integration; the euro and monetary union.
- Promoted stability between states (France and Germany).
- Involves deeper political integration.

No

- Performs various functions but not incorporated into a federalist platform.
- States are not always happily surrendering their sovereignty.
- Many aspects remain intergovernmental rather than supragovernmental and the key institutions are intergovernmental such as the Council of Ministers.
- Sovereign states retain significant elements of their sovereignty.
- Lacking a clear and cohesive foreign policy as an overarching orientation to replace specific states' orientation.

Synoptic

Regionalism

- Conflict.
- Poverty.
- Human rights.
- Environment.