

The European Union and Regional Integration: A Critical Analysis of Peacebuilding and Support for the United Nations System

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Abstract

This paper offers a critical analysis of the European Union as a model of regional integration and examines its contribution to peace and to the effectiveness of the United Nations system. Set against the background of the failure of the League of Nations, the study argues that the post-1945 international order has endured largely because it is supported by strong regional institutions. Using the EU as the primary case study, the paper contends that by institutionalizing peace within Europe through economic interdependence, binding law, and supranational governance, the EU has created a zone of stability that reduces the burden on global governance structures. Furthermore, the paper analyzes how the EU functions as a support pillar for the United Nations under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. Through financial contributions, peacekeeping partnerships, and coordinated diplomacy, the EU has reinforced multilateralism and provided capacity for conflict management and development. A comparative perspective is also drawn with other regional bodies such as ECOWAS to demonstrate a broader pattern of regional-global cooperation. The paper concludes that the longevity of the United Nations, compared to the League of Nations, can be partly explained by this two-level architecture of global and regional governance. While the EU's support for the UN is substantial, it is also inconsistent, as internal EU divisions sometimes undermine collective action. Ultimately, the study shows that effective regional integration is a critical condition for sustaining peace and strengthening the United Nations system.

Keywords: European Union, Regional Integration, United Nations, League of Nations, Peacebuilding, ECOWAS, Global Governance

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Introduction

The collapse of the League of Nations in 1946 is widely cited as a failure of early collective security. Created after World War I, the League lacked three things critical to enforcement: binding mechanisms to compel states, near-universal membership, and strong regional foundations to manage disputes locally (Jackson, 2005). Without these, it could not prevent aggression by major powers. Its successor, the United Nations established in 1945, has lasted over eight decades. One key reason for this durability is the growth of regional integration after 1945. Regional bodies were designed to address conflicts closer to their source and to support global governance, reducing the load on central institutions (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000). The European Union is the most advanced example of this model. Built on economic interdependence and pooled sovereignty, the EU transformed relations between former enemies in Europe and institutionalized peace (Moravcsik, 1998). The process began with coal and steel integration under the 1951 Treaty of Paris, and expanded through a single market and common legal order. By raising the cost of conflict and binding states in law, the EU made war between members “materially impossible” and created more than 70 years of stability on the continent (Haas, 1958). Beyond Europe, the EU has become a central partner to the United Nations. Chapter VIII of the UN Charter encourages regional arrangements to manage peace and security in their own regions (United Nations, 1945). In line with this, the EU and its member states are the largest collective contributor to UN development and humanitarian funding.

The EU has also deployed civilian and military missions under UN mandates in the Balkans, Africa, and the Middle East (Gebhard, 2017). This reflects a clear division of labor: regional actors handle regional problems, freeing the UN to focus on global crises and strengthening

multilateralism. This paper uses the EU as a case study to explain why the post-1945 order has outlasted the League era. Its core argument is that the EU's internal success in maintaining peace, combined with its external support for the UN, demonstrates the value of a two-level system of governance — global and regional — for sustaining peace (Söderbaum, F. (2007). Similar logic appears in other regions, such as ECOWAS in West Africa, though with different levels of institutionalisation. The analysis also acknowledges limits. Internal divisions within the EU have at times weakened its ability to speak and act with one voice in support of the UN (Hill, 1993). Decision-making by 27 states is slow, and foreign policy differences can reduce coherence. The central question is: how has the European Union contributed to peace and to the effectiveness of the United Nations system, and what lessons does this hold for regional integration? The answer is that effective regional integration is not a rival to global governance. It is a necessary complement. By pooling sovereignty, creating binding law, and acting collectively, the EU solves collective action problems at the regional level. This reduces pressure on the UN, makes multilateral cooperation more workable, and helps explain why the current international system has proven more durable than its predecessor.

A Historical and Structural Analysis of the European Union

The European Union emerged from a deliberate, incremental post-World War II integration process. Its core purpose, articulated in the Schuman Declaration of 1950, was to make war between European states “not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible” (Schuman, 1950). This required pooling sovereignty in strategic sectors and creating institutions to bind former adversaries. The EU's evolution

can be traced through three crisis-driven phases of deeper integration. The first phase, 1951–1957, established economic foundations. The 1951 Treaty of Paris created the European Coal and Steel Community, placing coal and steel — essential for armaments — under a common High Authority, making Franco-German war practically impossible. Six years later, the Treaties of Rome established the European Economic Community and Euratom. The focus was economic: building a common market based on interdependence (Haas, 1958). Political union was postponed, but economic integration generated vested interests in cooperation. The second phase, 1986–1993, marked political deepening. The Single European Act of 1986 committed members to completing the single market by removing trade barriers. The decisive shift was the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, effective from 1993. Maastricht formally created the European Union and moved beyond economics. It instituted the three-pillar structure: the European Communities, Common Foreign and Security Policy, and Justice and Home Affairs. It introduced EU citizenship, launched Economic and Monetary Union, and scheduled the Euro. Maastricht transformed the EEC from a trade bloc into a political project with legal personality and foreign policy ambitions (Moravcsik, 1998). The third phase, 2007–present, has been defined by constitutionalization and crisis. The Treaty of Lisbon, signed in 2007 and effective from 2009, granted the EU full legal personality, strengthened the European Parliament as co-legislator, and created the President of the European Council and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs. Since Lisbon, the EU has faced successive shocks: the Eurozone crisis, Brexit, COVID-19, and Russia’s war in Ukraine. Each triggered new competence transfers, from fiscal surveillance to joint borrowing via NextGenerationEU to accelerated defense cooperation. Scholars term this “integration

through crisis” (Schimmelfennig, 2020; Fabbrini, 2022). This history produced a “*sui generis*” structure combining supranational and intergovernmental elements (Wallace, Pollack, & Young, 2020). Supranationally, the European Commission holds the monopoly of legislative initiative, manages the budget, and negotiates trade for all members. Commissioners act in the Union interest, not as national representatives (Nugent & Rhinard, 2022). The European Court of Justice ensures EU law primacy over national law, established in *Costa v ENEL* 1964 (Alter, 2001). The European Parliament, directly elected since 1979, shares legislative and budgetary power with the Council and oversees the Commission. Its authority expanded significantly post-Lisbon (Hix & Høyland, 2022). Intergovernmentally, the European Council sets political direction while the Council of the EU, composed of national ministers, adopts legislation with Parliament. The European Central Bank manages monetary policy for the 20 Eurozone states. The result is pooled sovereignty: member states exercise power jointly through binding rules and common institutions. EU regulations are directly applicable, with compliance enforced by the Commission and the Court (Zgaga et al., 2023). This architecture shapes external relations and the diplomatic practice of small members like Luxembourg. Since 2010, the EU has maintained its own diplomatic service, the European External Action Service. EEAS Delegations represent the Union globally, including the Delegation to Nigeria and ECOWAS in Abuja, which handles political dialogue, development, and trade for all 27 states (European External Action Service, 2023). For Luxembourg, with a population of ~660,000, maintaining 190 embassies is neither feasible nor necessary. Two EU mechanisms enable this. Article 32 TEU requires member states to coordinate foreign policy, with the High Representative speaking for the Union (Duke, 2019). Article 23 TFEU guarantees that any EU

citizen can seek consular protection from another member state's embassy. Luxembourg maintains roughly 30 missions worldwide and relies on the EU Delegation in Abuja and partner embassies such as Germany, France, and the Netherlands for Nigeria (Dumont & Kies, 2025). As Tonra (2021) notes, the EU functions as a “force multiplier” for small states. In sum, EU history demonstrates integration as a solution to collective action problems. By balancing supranational law with intergovernmental decision-making, it internalized peace in Europe and projected capacity outward. The absence of a Luxembourg embassy in Nigeria is not a diplomatic gap. It reflects integration working as designed: pooled representation, reliance on Chapter VIII of the UN Charter's vision of regional support for global governance, and the EU Delegation as the primary channel. Regional integration thus does not replace national diplomacy. It transforms it into a more efficient, collective form that strengthens both the EU and the multilateral system.

The European Union: A Supranational Polity and Not a Traditional International Organization

. It cannot be classified as a traditional international organization such as the United Nations or African Union because it exercises powers that go far beyond intergovernmental cooperation. At the same time, it is not a federal state like the United States, because it lacks a monopoly of force and member states retain the right to withdraw, as demonstrated by the United Kingdom's exit in 2020. Scholars therefore describe the EU as a “sui generis” polity — a unique entity that combines elements of both an international organization and a state, but is reducible to neither (Wallace, Pollack, & Young, 2020). What makes the EU distinct is the degree to which sovereign authority

has been pooled, the binding nature of its law, and the institutional mechanisms through which it acts as a single actor globally. The core feature separating the EU from other regional bodies is supranationality: the transfer of specific areas of sovereign authority from national governments to common EU institutions, with the agreement that EU-level decisions are legally binding on all members. This is not voluntary coordination. It is law that directly affects citizens, companies, and governments. This supranational character is expressed through three central institutions. The European Commission holds the monopoly of legislative initiative and acts as guardian of the treaties. Commissioners are nominated by member states but must act in the interest of the Union as a whole, not their country of origin (Nugent & Rhinard, 2022). The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union serve as co-legislators. In most policy areas the Council decides by qualified majority voting, meaning a state can be outvoted and still be legally bound. Finally, the European Court of Justice ensures EU law has primacy over national law and is directly applicable in all member states. This principle was established in *Van Gend en Loos* 1963 and *Costa v ENEL* 1964, creating a legal order the League of Nations never possessed (Alter, 2001). Because of supranationality, the EU can regulate the single market of 448 million people, negotiate trade agreements on behalf of all 27 members, and enforce competition policy without unanimous approval. This pooling of sovereignty is the foundation for the EU's ability to maintain peace internally and project capacity externally in support of the United Nations. Internal disputes are settled by law rather than force, and external action is coordinated through common institutions rather than 27 separate foreign policies. The Union's size reinforces the necessity of this model. The EU began with six founding members in the Treaties of Rome 1957: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy,

Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Through five enlargement rounds it reached 28 members by 2013. Following Brexit in 2020, the EU now consists of 27 member states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden. Together they represent over 448 million people and the world's second largest economy (Hix & Høyland, 2022). A Union of 27 diverse economies and political systems could not function on intergovernmental bargaining alone. Without binding law and majority decision-making, coordination would be paralyzed by vetoes and divergent interests. Supranational rules make enlargement possible, and enlargement reinforces the need for supranational institutions. This is the central feedback loop of EU integration. Analytically, the EU is more than an international organization because its law is binding, its institutions can act against the will of individual states, and it possesses legal personality. It is less than a state because membership remains voluntary and defense is not fully centralized. This hybrid design made the EU successful as a peace project. By pooling sovereignty, it made war between members materially impossible. By speaking with one voice through the Commission and the European External Action Service, it acts as a major UN partner in trade, development, climate, and crisis management. The EU thus demonstrates that regional integration is not an alternative to global governance but a necessary complement. Its supranational architecture solves collective action problems at the regional level, reducing the burden on global institutions and strengthening the post-1945 international order. The Union's evolution from six to twenty-seven members confirms that only pooled

sovereignty can manage such scale and diversity while enabling coherent external action.

The Treaty Architecture That Made the EU Strong

The European Union was not created in a single constitutional moment. Its strength comes from a cumulative process of treaty-making in which each major crisis transferred more competence to the supranational level. Seven treaties form the Union's constitutional backbone. The process began with the Treaty of Paris 1951, which established the European Coal and Steel Community. By placing coal and steel under a common High Authority, the six founding states removed the material basis for war and created Europe's first supranational institution (Haas, 1958). The Treaties of Rome 1957 followed, creating the European Economic Community and Euratom. The EEC's goal was a customs union and common market designed to generate economic interdependence and raise the cost of conflict. The next leap was the Single European Act 1986. Signed by 12 members, it committed the Community to completing the single market by 1992 and introduced qualified majority voting to overcome national vetoes. The most transformative treaty was Maastricht 1992. In force from 1993, it formally created the European Union. Maastricht moved integration beyond economics by establishing EU citizenship, launching Economic and Monetary Union, and creating the Common Foreign and Security Policy. It turned the EEC from a trade bloc into a political project with foreign policy ambitions (Moravcsik, 1998). Before enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe, the Treaty of Amsterdam 1997 and Treaty of Nice 2001 reformed institutions and voting rules to make a larger Union workable. The capstone is the Treaty of Lisbon 2007, in force since 2009. Lisbon gave the EU full

legal personality, abolished the three-pillar structure, strengthened the European Parliament as co-legislator, and created the President of the European Council and High Representative. It also established the European External Action Service, giving the EU its own diplomatic service (Hix & Høyland, 2022). Since Lisbon, the EU has been tested by the Eurozone crisis, Brexit, COVID-19, and Russia's war in Ukraine. Each crisis produced new agreements transferring more powers to the EU level. Scholars call this "integration through crisis," showing the treaty framework is a living architecture that adapts to shocks (Schimmelfennig, 2020; Fabbrini, 2022). Analytically, the EU is a supranational union of 27 member states. It is more than an international organization because its law is binding, its institutions can act against individual states, and it has legal personality. It is less than a state because it does not monopolize defense and membership is voluntary. This hybrid structure made the EU successful as a peace project and as a supporter of global governance. By pooling sovereignty, the EU made war between members materially impossible. By speaking with one voice through the Commission and EEAS, it acts as a major UN partner in trade, development, and crisis management. The sequence of treaties from Paris to Lisbon provided the legal tools for this role. That 27 states now participate shows both the appeal of the model and the necessity of supranational rules to manage diversity. Ultimately, the EU demonstrates that regional integration is not an alternative to global governance. It is a necessary complement. Its supranational design solves collective action problems regionally, reducing the burden on global institutions and strengthening the post-1945 order.

The European Union as a Model of Regional Integration, Peacebuilding, and Support for Global Governance

The European Union is the most advanced example of regional integration in the modern international system. Its development provides a direct answer to the central problem that caused the League of Nations to fail: the absence of strong regional foundations for peace and enforcement. From an economic community to a political union, the EU demonstrates how regional actors can internalize peace, create binding law, and project capacity outward to support global institutions such as the United Nations. The Union's origins lie in the aftermath of World War II. The Schuman Declaration of 1950 framed integration as a peace project, arguing that pooling coal and steel production would make war between France and Germany "not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible" (Schuman, 1950). The Treaty of Paris in 1951 created the European Coal and Steel Community, followed by the Treaties of Rome in 1957 establishing the European Economic Community and Euratom (Haas, 1958). This early phase was functional and economic. The logic was that interdependence in strategic sectors would raise the cost of conflict and create vested interests in cooperation. This directly addressed a key weakness of the League, which had no mechanism to bind the economies and security interests of its members.

The second phase began with the Single European Act of 1986 and culminated in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992. Maastricht transformed the European Community into the European Union and moved integration beyond trade. It created EU citizenship, launched Economic and Monetary Union, and most importantly established the Common Foreign and Security Policy (Moravcsik, 1998). For the first

time the EU claimed a collective role in international peace and security, marking its emergence as a regional actor capable of supporting the United Nations under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, which encourages regional arrangements to deal with peace and security (United Nations, 1945). The third phase, from the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 to the present, has been defined by crisis and adaptation. Lisbon gave the EU legal personality, strengthened the European Parliament, and created the European External Action Service as the Union's diplomatic arm (Hix & Høyland, 2022). Successive shocks — the Eurozone crisis, Brexit, COVID-19, and the war in Ukraine — have forced deeper integration in fiscal policy and defense (Schimmelfennig, 2020; Fabbrini, 2022). This pattern of “integration through crisis” has made the EU more capable of acting as a stabilizing power in its neighborhood and as a partner to the UN. The EU's internal structure explains how it performs these functions. It is a “*sui generis*” polity combining supranational and intergovernmental institutions (Wallace, Pollack, & Young, 2020). The Commission proposes legislation and represents the Union in trade.

The European Court of Justice ensures EU law has primacy over national law, creating a binding legal order the League never possessed (Alter, 2001). The Parliament provides democratic legitimacy, while the European Council and Council of the EU allow member states to control high politics (Nugent & Rhinard, 2022). This architecture of pooled sovereignty has produced over 70 years without war between member states — the EU's most fundamental contribution to international peace. This internal peace has external consequences. By securing Europe, the EU has freed UN resources for other regions. More directly, the EU has become the UN's most important regional partner. The EU and its member states are the largest collective contributor to the UN budget, peacekeeping, and humanitarian aid. EU

civilian and military missions in the Balkans, Sahel, and Horn of Africa have often operated with a UN mandate. In climate and human rights forums, the EU negotiates as a bloc, giving weight to multilateral outcomes (Gebhard, 2017). This reflects the division of labor envisioned by the UN founders: regional bodies handle regional problems, strengthening the center. The EU structure also shapes the diplomacy of member states, especially small ones like Luxembourg. Because the EU speaks with one voice, there is less need for 27 parallel embassies in every capital. The EU Delegation to Nigeria and ECOWAS in Abuja serves as the primary channel for EU-Nigeria relations (European External Action Service, 2023). For Luxembourg, which maintains only about 30 missions worldwide, this system is essential (Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2024). Under Article 32 TEU, member states must coordinate foreign policy, and under Article 23 TFEU, EU citizens can receive consular protection from any member state embassy (Duke, 2019). Thus Luxembourg relies on the EU Delegation and partner embassies in Nigeria. As Tonra (2021) notes, for small EU states the Union is a “force multiplier.” The absence of a Luxembourg embassy in Abuja is not a failure. It shows that integration works: collective representation substitutes for redundant bilateral missions, allowing resources to be concentrated where they matter. In conclusion, the EU succeeded where the League failed because it built peace from the region upward. By institutionalizing cooperation, creating binding law, and speaking collectively, the EU has become a pillar supporting the United Nations system. The case of Luxembourg illustrates that regional integration does not eliminate diplomacy but transforms it into a more efficient, collective form. This two-level system of global and regional governance is a key reason why the United Nations has endured while the League of Nations collapsed.

The EU as a Support Structure for the United Nations: Financial, Operational, and Normative Contributions

The European Union is the most advanced example of regional integration in the modern international system. Its development provides a direct answer to the central problem that caused the League of Nations to fail: the absence of strong regional foundations for peace and enforcement. From an economic community to a political union, the EU demonstrates how regional actors can internalize peace, create binding law, and project capacity outward to support global institutions such as the United Nations. The Union's origins lie in the aftermath of World War II. The Schuman Declaration of 1950 framed integration as a peace project, arguing that pooling coal and steel production would make war between France and Germany "not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible" (Schuman, 1950). The Treaty of Paris in 1951 created the European Coal and Steel Community, followed by the Treaties of Rome in 1957 establishing the European Economic Community and Euratom (Haas, 1958). This early phase was functional and economic. The logic was that interdependence in strategic sectors would raise the cost of conflict and create vested interests in cooperation. This directly addressed a key weakness of the League, which had no mechanism to bind the economies and security interests of its members. The second phase began with the Single European Act of 1986 and culminated in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992. Maastricht transformed the European Community into the European Union and moved integration beyond trade. It created EU citizenship, launched Economic and Monetary Union, and most importantly established the Common Foreign and Security Policy (Moravcsik, 1998). For the first time the EU claimed a collective role in international peace and security, marking its

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and humanitarian aid. EU civilian and military missions in the Balkans, Sahel, and Horn of Africa have often operated with a UN mandate. In climate and human rights forums, the EU negotiates as a bloc, giving weight to multilateral outcomes (Gebhard, 2017). This reflects the division of labor envisioned by the UN founders: regional bodies handle regional problems, strengthening the center. The EU structure also shapes the diplomacy of member states, especially small ones like Luxembourg. Because the EU speaks with one voice, there is less need for 27 parallel embassies in every capital. The EU Delegation to Nigeria and ECOWAS in Abuja serves as the primary channel for EU-Nigeria relations (European External Action Service, 2023). For Luxembourg, which maintains only about 30 missions worldwide, this system is essential (Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2024). Under Article 32 TEU, member states must coordinate foreign policy, and under Article 23 TFEU, EU citizens can receive consular protection from any member state embassy (Duke, 2019). Thus Luxembourg relies on the EU Delegation and partner embassies in Nigeria. As Tonra (2021) notes, for small EU states the Union is a “force multiplier.” The absence of a Luxembourg embassy in Abuja is not a failure. It shows that integration works: collective representation substitutes for redundant bilateral missions, allowing resources to be concentrated where they matter. In conclusion, the EU succeeded where the League failed because it built peace from the region upward. By institutionalizing cooperation, creating binding law, and speaking collectively, the EU has become a pillar supporting the United Nations system. The case of Luxembourg illustrates that regional integration does not eliminate diplomacy but transforms it into a more efficient, collective form. This two-level system of global and regional governance is a key reason why the United Nations has endured while the League of Nations collapsed

From League Paralysis to EU Tension: The Structural Logic of UN Support

The endurance of the United Nations since 1945, in contrast to the collapse of the League of Nations in 1946, is explained by a fundamental redesign of international architecture. The League failed because of three interlocking defects. First, it lacked enforcement capacity. Article 16 of the Covenant allowed sanctions, but provided no standing force, no automatic procedure, and no obligation for members to contribute troops. When Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, the League could issue resolutions but could not compel compliance, rendering violations cost-free (Claude, 1966). Second, it had no economic integration. Member states retained full control over trade and resources, so there was no material penalty for defection and no interdependence to raise the price of conflict. Third, it suffered from inconsistent great-power commitment. The United States never joined, the Soviet Union joined late and was expelled, and Germany and Japan withdrew in the 1930s. Without the major powers, the League lacked both legitimacy and material capacity, and collapsed when tested by revisionist states (Henig, 2010). The UN system corrected these flaws through a two-level architecture of global and regional governance. At the global level, the Security Council was given Chapter VII powers and the veto was used to keep the great powers inside the system. At the regional level, Chapter VIII encouraged “regional arrangements” to manage peace and security, creating space for organizations to absorb shocks before they reached the Council (United Nations, 1945). The European Union is the most developed example of this regional support structure, and also the clearest case of its structural tension. Financially, the EU and its 27 members provide approximately 43%

of the total UN budget and are the world's largest humanitarian donor. Operationally, it deploys civilian and military missions under UN mandates, from EUFOR Althea in Bosnia under UNSCR 1575 to training missions in Mali that support MINUSMA. Normatively, it coordinates 27 states to act as a bloc in climate, human rights, and development negotiations. This role aligns with Article 52 of the Charter and reflects the EU's origin as a peace project that internalized conflict in Europe. Yet this support is conditional on internal unity, which the EU's intergovernmental foreign policy cannot always guarantee. The Iraq War in 2003 exposed the fracture: France and Germany opposed the US-led invasion and called for a stronger UN role, while the UK, Spain, Italy, and Poland supported it. With no common position, EU states took opposing sides in Security Council debates, undermining the Union's credibility as a defender of multilateralism (Duke, 2019). A similar split occurred in Libya in 2011, when France and the UK pushed for intervention under UNSCR 1973 while Germany abstained, complicating the EU's role in the subsequent UN political process (Howorth, 2014). The structural constraint is clear: only France holds a permanent Security Council seat, and when national interests diverge, coordination under Article 34 of the Treaty on European Union breaks down. Thus, the EU can be simultaneously the UN's largest backer and a source of fragmentation within it. The lesson of the post-1945 system is that global legitimacy requires regional capacity. The League had legitimacy without capacity and failed. The EU provides capacity, but only to the extent that its members can achieve unity. The UN endures not by replacing regionalism, but by depending on it.

The Post-1945 Correction: A Two-Level System of Global and Regional Governance

The architects of the United Nations deliberately corrected the structural failures of the League of Nations by creating a two-level architecture of global and regional governance. The UN Charter retained the League's universalist ambition for legitimacy, but added two critical innovations. At the global level, the Security Council was endowed with Chapter VII powers to authorize enforcement action, while the veto for the five permanent members ensured great powers remained inside the system rather than operating outside it (United Nations, 1945). At the regional level, Chapter VIII explicitly recognized "regional arrangements or agencies" as mechanisms for peace and security. Article 52 affirms that nothing in the Charter precludes such arrangements, provided their activities are consistent with UN purposes (United Nations, 1945). This created institutional space for regional bodies to manage crises locally before escalation to the Security Council. The effect of this design is visible in Europe and West Africa, where the European Union and ECOWAS have functioned as regional shock absorbers that extend and reinforce the UN system. In Europe, the EU became the most advanced expression of this model. By pooling sovereignty through the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, the Treaties of Rome in 1957, and later the Single Market and the Euro, the EU made war between member states materially impossible (Haas, 1958; Moravcsik, 1998). The European Court of Justice and the Commission ensured disputes were adjudicated through law rather than force (Alter, 2001). Because European conflicts were internalized within this supranational framework, the UN has not intervened in an interstate war in Western Europe since 1945. Instead, the EU has acted as a partner to the UN

beyond Europe. EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina, deployed under UNSCR 1575 to support the Dayton Agreement, illustrates how the EU provides deployable capacity under UN mandate (Council of the European Union, 2004). In climate diplomacy, the EU negotiates as a single bloc in the UNFCCC and was central to the Paris Agreement in 2015 (European Union, 2015). The EU thus reduces the burden on the UN while amplifying its normative and operational reach. A functionally similar, though less institutionalized, pattern exists in West Africa through ECOWAS. Founded in 1975 and revised in 1993 to include security, ECOWAS established the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security in 1999. In Liberia between 1990 and 1997, ECOWAS deployed ECOMOG to halt the civil war when the UN could not respond quickly, before the UN assumed a role through UNOMIL in 1993 (Adebajo, 2002). In Sierra Leone from 1997 to 2000, ECOMOG intervened to restore the elected government following a coup, after which the UN deployed UNAMSIL under UNSCR 1270 (Adebajo, 2002). In The Gambia in 2017, ECOWAS issued an ultimatum and deployed troops to enforce a democratic election after President Yahya Jammeh refused to step down. Operating with a UN mandate, the intervention concluded without large-scale violence and facilitated the inauguration of President Adama Barrow (UN Security Council, 2017). In each case, ECOWAS managed the initial crisis using proximity and local knowledge, then coordinated with the UN. This division of labor spared the Security Council the need to deploy from zero and gave UN action greater local legitimacy. The durability of the UN compared to the League is therefore structural, not accidental. The League attempted to manage all security issues at the global level without a regional foundation, and it lacked enforcement, interdependence, and great-power commitment. The post-1945 system

distributes these functions. Regional organizations perform three roles the League lacked. First, they absorb regional shocks before they reach the Security Council. Second, they provide resources — troops, funding, and administrative capacity — that the UN does not independently possess. Third, they confer local legitimacy on intervention, because action originates with neighbors rather than distant powers (Diehl & Druckman, 2010). The EU represents the most developed version of this model, having created a 70-year “zone of peace” in Europe through supranational law and economic integration. ECOWAS represents a less legalized but strategically similar model in West Africa. Both demonstrate that the UN functions most effectively when supported by capable regions. The lesson of 1945 is clear. Global legitimacy without regional capacity, as in the League, leads to paralysis. Regional capacity without global legitimacy risks hegemony. The UN system endures because it combines both, embedding regional integration within a universal legal framework.

Conclusion

The comparison between the League of Nations and the current UN/EU/ECOWAS system reveals why one collapsed and the other has lasted. The League lacked enforcement, economic ties, and great power buy-in. The UN system corrected this by pairing universal legitimacy at the global level with operational capacity at the regional level. The EU and ECOWAS demonstrate that regional organizations can manage crises, pool resources, and provide the local ownership that UN interventions require. This two-level architecture is not perfect, but it is the central reason why the United Nations has outlived its predecessor and remains the central forum for international peace and security.

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