

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

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Summary

The definition of “international organization” is considered and the remarkable growth in the number of international organizations over the last 200 years is reviewed. This growth is traced from the Napoleonic period down through the nineteenth century, when international organizations began to appear in a range of human activities, including, for example, the management of transnational rivers. After World War I and the establishment of the League of Nations, the focus fell on peace and security. After World War II and the setting up of the UN, international organizations continued to focus on these issues but soon spawned a wide range of agencies. These included bodies geared to food and agriculture, and, since the 1970s and the United National Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, groups dealing with environmental issues. The evolution of international cooperation on environmental and other issues is traced through the Rio Conference on Environment and Development to the present day. Throughout this history of international organization, there has been continuing and unresolved tension between maintaining national sovereignty and national advantage on the one hand, and cooperating to achieve common goals on the other.

1. Introduction

In 1800 there were no international organizations. By 1909 there were only 37 international governmental organizations and 176 nongovernmental organizations, by 1977 there were 252 and 2502, respectively, and by the mid-1990s, 260 and 5732. Indeed, the Union of International Associations has calculated that this 5732 figure may be a gross underestimate and that if we use a broad definition, the figure might rise to more than 44 000. This begs the question of when is an international organization an International Organization. Some authorities have stressed that international *organization* is a process, while international *organizations* are a phase in that process, based on efforts at *organization* in which governments are involved.

In *organization*, the focus is on the manner in which actors in the international system interact and literally regularize, order, and manage their affairs together, while in *organizations* it is on the formal structured entities that they decide to institute. There is also the problem of distinguishing public governmental organizations from private nongovernmental organizations, with about 95% of organizations belonging to the latter category, although the former are actually more important because they comprise states. Another distinction is between those organizations that seek to be universal and open to all who meet certain criteria, and those that are avowedly regional. The UN is an example of the former. Its Charter states that “membership is open to all other peace-loving states which accept the obligations contained in this Charter and, in the judgment of the Organization, are able and willing to carry out these obligations.” The European Union, on the other hand, restricts its membership to European states (which must satisfy additional criteria relating to democracy, human rights, and functioning market economies).

For an international governmental organization (IGO) to exist, it is conventionally held that it must have:

- a basis of a formal instrument of agreement between governments
- include three or more states
- possess a permanent secretariat.

An international nongovernmental organization (INGO) according to the Union of International Associations must have:

- genuinely international aims, with the intention to cover at least three states
- voting rights from bodies or individuals from at least three states
- permanent headquarters, with a governing body and officer
- officers from different states over a period of time
- evidence that they lead an independent life
- evidence of activity
- be nonprofit-making toward its members
- funding should come from at least three members.

Some authorities have pointed out that it is also necessary to consider transgovernmental organizations. They relate to structure relationships among governmental actors that are not controlled by the central foreign policy organs of their governments. There are also BINGOs (Business International Nongovernmental

Organizations), alternatively called multinational enterprises or corporations: MNES or MNCS. These tend not to be seen as true international organizations, because among other reasons, the UN does not recognize them as such, and they are motivated to make profits for the participants. Different authors have come up with different criteria for defining international organizations, but the definition given in the glossary is a commonly accepted one. For the most part the differences in definition relate to such issues as the number of states required, the questions of permanence or continuity, of secretariats and executive bodies, and of whether they are required to have a will of their own independent from that of their individual members.

There are some debatable cases such as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (1975–1994) which was no more than a peripatetic conference that held periodic review meetings with no secretariat or organization existing between conferences. This situation lasted until the Congress of Paris in November 1990, when it was agreed to begin the gradual institutionalization of the process, a development that culminated in the 1994 agreement to transform the CSCE into the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

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Biographical Sketch

Trevor Salmon is professor in the Department of Politics and International Relations in the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. He joined the Department in 1996 after working previously in the University of St. Andrews and the University of Limerick. His research interests include European Union policymaking and European security, within the wider context of his interests in International relations. In addition to numerous papers on these topics, he has published *Unneutral Ireland* (1989), *Understanding the New European Community* with Sir William Nicoll, Second Edition (1993), and *International Security in the Modern World* with Roger Carey, eds. (1992).