Regional Groups in the UN

I. General


Internet: Homepages on UN reform that also contain the reports and documents cited above: www.un.org/reform; www.reformtheun.org; www.globalpolicy.org.
have constantly changed during the Organization’s existence. Since 1995 at the latest, commentators have been considering how the groups could be adapted to the changes wrought by the close of the East-West conflict in the late 1980s.

II. Origins

The origins of today’s regional groups can be traced back to a gentlemen’s agreement concluded by the United States and the then Soviet Union in 1946, regarding the distribution of the six non-permanent seats on the Security Council between the 51 (46) founding members of the organization (→ History of the UN). The “main groups” recognized were Latin America (2 seats), Middle East (1), Eastern Europe (1), Western Europe (1) and the British Commonwealth (1). While the Soviet Union was of the opinion that decisions by the regional groups were to be endorsed by the → General Assembly, the United States viewed the division as a one-off without binding consequences. States such as India subsequently voiced their dissatisfaction with the division (Bailey 1988). Its basis was however not to be understood as representative, but rather as distributive (in the following years for example, Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia occupied the “Eastern Europe” seat).

III. Gradual Entrenching of the Group System

The regional group system has since become firmly established. In the course of enlarging the Security Council in 1963 from 11 to 15 members, a reallocation of the seats was undertaken and recorded in General Assembly decisions (UN Doc. A/RES/1990 (XVIII) and A/RES/1991A (XVIII) of 17 December 1963). This geographical distribution was later also applied to the Economic and Social Council (→ ECOSOC) (A/RES/2847 (XXVI) of 20 December 1971) and was ultimately stipulated for “principal organs” of the UN (A/RES/33/138 of 19 December 1978). From July 1978 the monthly regional group chairs have been published in the official UN journal. The five groups as redrawn in 1963 are still in existence today.

IV. Geographical Distribution

The five regional groups in existence since 1963 are the Group of African States (GAFS), the Group of Asian States (GASS), the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC), the Group of Eastern European States (EEC) and the Group of Western European and Other States (WEOG). The composition of the last group, which also includes the most important western states outside of Europe, shows the extent to which the distribution of 1963 was built on the East-West confrontation, which at that time divided the UN. The members of the individual groups are listed below:

GAFS (53): Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Comoros, Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Kinshasa, Côte d’Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, São Tomé and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, the Sudan, Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe;

GASS (53): Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nauru, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka,