

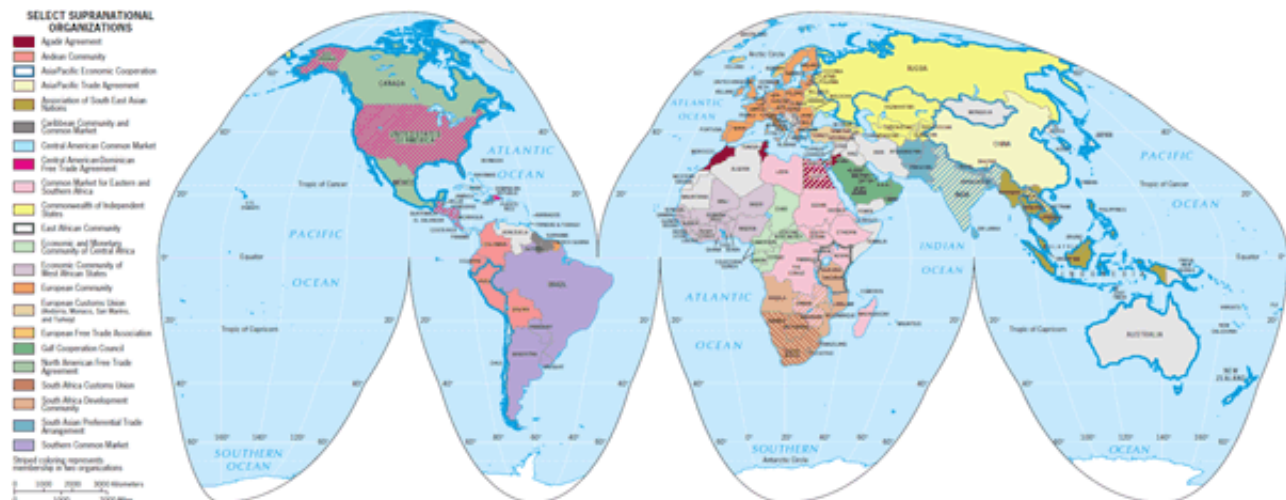
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## WHAT ARE SUPRANATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND WHAT ARE THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STATE?

Ours is a world of contradictions. Over the past couple of decades some French Canadians, Québécois, have demanded independence from Canada even as Canada joined the United States and Mexico in NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement). Flemings in northern Belgium called for autonomy or even independence despite the fact that Brussels, the capital of Belgium (and Flanders), serves as the de facto capital of the European Union. At every turn we are reminded of the interconnectedness of nations, states, and regions; yet, separatism and calls for autonomy are rampant. In the early decades of the twenty-first century, we appear to be caught between the forces of division and unification.

Despite conflicts arising from these contradictory forces, today hardly a country exists that is not involved in some supranational organization. A **supranational organization** is an entity composed of three or more states that forge an association and form an administrative structure for mutual benefit and in pursuit of shared goals. The twentieth century witnessed the establishment of numerous supranational associations in political, economic, cultural, and military spheres.

Today, states have formed over 60 major supranational organizations (such as NATO and NAFTA), many of which have subsidiaries that bring the total to more than 100 (Figure 8.22). The more states participate in such multilateral associations, the less likely they are to act alone in pursuit of a self-interest that might put them at odds with neighbors. And in most cases participation in a supranational entity is advantageous to the partners, and being left out can have serious negative implications.



**Figure 8.22** Select Supranational Organizations.

Data from: Crawford, Jo-Ann and Roberto V. Fiorentino "Changing Landscape of Regional Trade Agreements," World Trade Organization. [http://www.wto.org/english/res\\_e/booksp\\_e/discussion\\_papers8\\_e.pdf](http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/discussion_papers8_e.pdf)

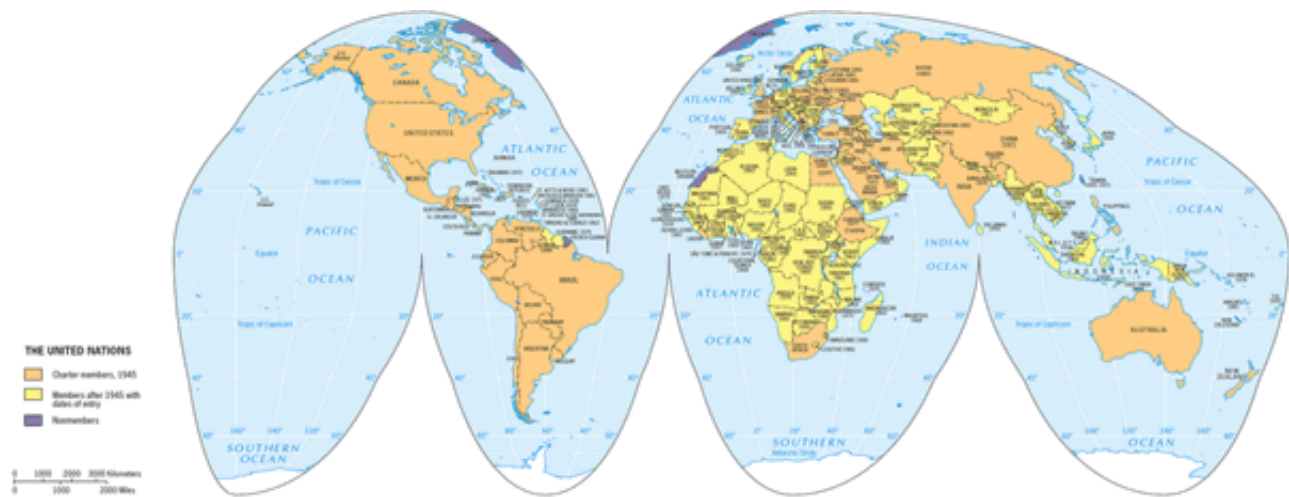
### From League of Nations to United Nations

The modern beginnings of the supranational movement can be traced to conferences following World War I. Woodrow Wilson, president of the United States, proposed an international organization that would include all the states of the world (fewer than 75 states existed at that point), leading to the creation of the League of Nations in 1919. Even though it was the idea of an American president, the United States was among the countries that did not join this organization because isolationists in the U.S. Senate opposed joining. In all, 63 states participated in the League, although the total membership at any single time never reached that number. Costa Rica and Brazil left the League even before 1930; Germany departed in 1933, shortly before the Soviet Union joined in 1934. The League later expelled the Soviet Union in 1939 for invading Finland. The League was born of a worldwide desire to prevent future aggression, but the failure of the United States to join

dealt the organization a severe blow. In the mid-1930s, the League had a major opportunity when Ethiopia's Haile Selassie made a dramatic appeal for help in the face of an invasion by Italy, a member state until 1937. The League failed to take action, and in the chaos of the beginning of World War II the organization collapsed.

Even though the League of Nations ceased functioning, it spawned other supranational organizations. Between World War I and World War II, states created the Permanent Court of International Justice to adjudicate legal issues between states, such as boundary disputes and fishing rights. The League of Nations also initiated international negotiations on maritime boundaries and related aspects of the law of the sea. The conferences organized by the League laid the groundwork for the final resolution of the size of territorial seas decades later.

After World War II, states formed a new organization to foster international security and cooperation: the United Nations (UN). Membership in the UN has grown significantly since its inception in 1947 (Fig. 8.23). A handful of states still do not belong to the United Nations, but with the most recent additions in 2006, it now has 192 member states. The United Nations organization includes numerous less visible but nonetheless significant subsidiaries, including the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), and WHO (World Health Organization). Not all United Nations members participate in every United Nations subsidiary, but many people around the world have benefited from their work.



**Figure 8.23 Member States of the United Nations.**

This map shows charter members, members after 1945 (with dates of entry), and nonmembers of the United Nations. *Data from: the United Nations, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)*

We can find evidence of the United Nations' work in the “world” section of any major newspaper. UN peacekeeping troops have helped maintain stability in some of the most contentious regions of the world. The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees is called upon to aid refugees in crises in far-flung places. UN documents on human rights standards, such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Covenant on Economic and Social Rights, set a precedent and laid the groundwork for countless human rights groups working in the world today.

By participating in the United Nations, states commit to internationally approved standards of behavior. Many states still violate the standards embodied in the United Nations Charter, but such violations can lead to collective action, such as economic sanctions or Security Council-supported military action. The United Nations' actions in South Africa (Apartheid) and Iraq (the Gulf War) are examples of UN success, but the organization has its critics as well. Some argue that the composition of its Security Council reflects the world of 1950 more than the world of today. Others express concern about power being vested in an organization that is not directly responsible to voters and that provides little room for non-state interests. Still others criticize the fact that states like Iran, Cuba, and North Korea sit on the organization's Human Rights Council. For all its weaknesses, however, the United Nations represents the only truly international forum for addressing many significant problems confronting the globe.

## Regional Supranational Organizations

The League of Nations and the United Nations are global manifestations of a phenomenon that is expressed even more strongly at the regional level. States organize supranational organizations at the regional scale to position themselves more strongly economically, politically, and even militarily.

Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg undertook the first major modern experiment in regional economic cooperation. The three countries have much in common culturally and economically. Dutch farm products are sold on Belgian markets, and Belgian industrial goods go to the Netherlands and Luxembourg. During World War II, representatives of the three countries decided to create common tariffs and eliminate import licenses and quotas. In 1944, even before the end of the war, the governments of the three states met in London to sign an agreement of cooperation, creating the *Benelux* (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg) region.

Following World War II, U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall proposed that the United States finance a European recovery program. A committee representing 16 Western European states plus (then) West Germany presented the United States Congress with a joint program for economic rehabilitation, and Congress approved it. From 1948 to 1952, the United States gave Europe about \$12 billion under the Marshall Plan, the largest foreign aid program in history. This investment revived European national economies and spurred a movement toward cooperation among European states.

## The European Union

From the European states' involvement in the Marshall Plan came the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), and this body in turn gave rise to other cooperative organizations. Soon after Europe established the OEEC, France proposed the creation of a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) with the goal of lifting the restrictions and obstacles that impeded the flow of coal, iron ore, and steel among the mainland's six primary producers: France, West Germany, Italy, and the three Benelux countries. The six states entered the ECSC, and gradually, through negotiations and agreement, enlarged their sphere of cooperation to include reductions and even eliminations of certain tariffs and a freer flow of labor, capital, and commodities beyond steel. This led, in 1958, to the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC).

The success of the EEC induced other countries to apply for membership. Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom joined in 1973, Greece in 1981, and Spain and Portugal in 1986. The organization became known as the European Community (EC) because it began to address issues beyond economics. By the late 1980s, the EC had 12 members: the three giants (Germany, France, and the United Kingdom); the four southern countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece); and five smaller states (the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, and Ireland). These 12 members initiated a program of cooperation and unification that led to the formal establishment of a European Union (EU) in 1992. In the mid-1990s, Austria, Sweden, and Finland joined the EU, bringing the total number of members to 15 (Fig. 8.24).



**Figure 8.24 European Supranationalism.**

Members of the European Union and their dates of entry. *Data from: the European Union, [www.europa.eu.int](http://www.europa.eu.int) ©H. J. de Blij, P. O. Muller, and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.*

In the late 1990s, the EU began preparing for the establishment of a single currency—the euro (Fig. 8.25). First, all electronic financial transactions were denominated in euros, and on January 1, 2002, the EU introduced euro coins and notes. Not all EU member states are currently a part of the euro-zone, but the euro has emerged as a significant global currency.





**Figure 8.25 Cortina, Italy.**

A market in northern Italy advertises the price of fruit in euros. © Alexander B. Murphy.

The integration of ten eastern European and Mediterranean island states into the European Union in 2004, and two more in 2007, is a significant development. Integration is a difficult process and often requires painful adjustments because of the diversity of the states involved. For example, agricultural practices and policies have always varied widely. Yet some general policy must govern agriculture throughout the European Union. Individual states have found these adjustments difficult at times, and the EU has had to devise policies to accommodate regional contrasts and delays in implementation. In addition, integration requires significant expenditures. Under the rules of the EU, the richer countries must subsidize (provide financial support to) the poorer ones; therefore, the entry of eastern European states adds to the financial burden on the wealthier western and northern European members. Recent financial crises in Greece and Ireland have put the union under unprecedented pressure, as wealthier countries such as Germany question why they should foot the bill for countries that have not (at least in German eyes) managed their finances responsibly.

The Union is a patchwork of states with many different ethnic traditions and histories of conflict and competition, and some in Europe express concern over losing traditional state powers. Economic success and growing well-being tend to submerge hesitancy and differences, but in the face of difficult economic or social times, divisive forces can, and have, reasserted themselves. Moreover, as the EU gets bigger, it becomes increasingly difficult for individual states (even powerful ones) to shape the direction of the union. And some citizens in smaller states such as Denmark and Sweden worry about getting lost in the mix.

Another difficult problem involves Turkey. Some western Europeans would like to see Turkey join the EU, thereby widening the organization's reach. The government of Turkey has long sought to join, but many Greeks are hesitant to support Turkish membership because of the long-standing dispute between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus and a number of islands off the Turkish coast. Other EU members have expressed concern over Turkey's human rights record, specifically its treatment of Kurds and its reluctance to recognize the extent of the mass killing of Armenians in World War I. Behind these claims lies an often-unspoken sense among many Europeans that Turkey is not "European" enough to warrant membership, perhaps rooted in a historical and cultural tendency to define Muslims as the "Other." The debate within the EU about

Turkey has alienated many Turkish people, causing them to question their support for EU membership.

## How Does Supranationalism Affect the State?

Supranationalism is a worldwide phenomenon. Other economic associations, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the Central American Common Market, the Andean Group, the Southern Cone Community Market (MERCOSUR), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Asia-Pacific Economic Council (APEC), and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), have drawn up treaties to reduce tariffs and import restrictions in order to ease the flow of commerce in their regions. Not all of these alliances are successful, but economic supranationalism is a sign of the times, a grand experiment still in progress.

Yet, when we turn back to the European Union, we see a supranational organization that is unlike any other. It is not a state, nor is it simply an organization of states. The European Union is remarkable in that it has taken on a life of its own—with a multifaceted government structure, three capital cities, and billions of euros flowing through its coffers. The European Union is extending into foreign relations, domestic policies, and military policies, with sovereignty over certain issues moving from the states to the European Union. One of the authors of this book has studied the degree to which Europeans in some regions are feeling a greater attachment to their region and to the European Union than to their own state (Fig. 8.26). Identifying with the European Union (over the state) is strong in the Benelux countries (the first members) and in regions where people have been disempowered by their state governments. With the European Union, we may be witnessing a transformation to a new political geographic construct that signifies a change in the political organization of space similar to the transformation to the modern state system that occurred in Europe in the seventeenth century.



**Figure 8.26 Brussels, Belgium.**

A woman with a European Union umbrella shops in the flower market in the Grande Place of Brussels. Note that the flag of the European Union has 12 stars, which recognizes the 12 European Community member states that committed to becoming the European Union in 1992. © Erin H. Fouberg.

Other movements in addition to the European Union are posing major challenges to the state as we know it and raising questions as to whether the division of the world into territorial states is logical, effective, or even necessary. Among these challenges are the demand of nations within states for independence, economic globalization, increasing connectedness among people and cultures, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Nuclear weapons give even small states the ability to inflict massive damage on larger and distant adversaries. Combined

with missile technology, this may be the most serious danger the world faces, which is why the United Nations insisted on dismantling Iraq's nuclear capacity after the 1991 Gulf War and why concerns over Iran's nuclear program are so great. Some states publicize their nuclear weapons programs, whereas other nuclear states have never formally acknowledged that they possess nuclear weapons. Reports of nuclear proliferation have led to military actions in the last 30 years. In 1981, when reports of Iraq's nuclear program reached Israel, the Israelis attacked Iraq. As nuclear weapons have become smaller and "tactical" nuclear arms have been developed, the threat of nuclear weapons sales is of growing concern. It is now possible for a hostile state or group to purchase the power with which to threaten the world.

Although states provide the territorial foundation from which producers and consumers still operate and they continue to exert considerable regulatory powers, economic globalization makes it ever more difficult for states to control economic relations, which is an example of deterritorialization. States are responding to this situation in a variety of ways, with some giving up traditional regulatory powers and others seeking to insulate themselves from the international economy. Still others are working to build supranational economic blocs that they hope will help them cope with an increasingly globalized world. The impacts of many of these developments are as yet uncertain, but it is increasingly clear that states now compete with a variety of other forces in the international arena.

The state's traditional position is being further eroded by the globalization of social and cultural relations. Networks of interaction are being constructed in ways that do not correspond to the map of states. In 2011, when unrest broke out in Egypt, for example, activists used Facebook to garner support. Scholars and researchers in different countries work together in teams. Increased mobility has brought individuals from far-flung places into much closer contact than before. Paralleling all this change is the spread of popular culture in ways that make national borders virtually meaningless. Katy Perry is listened to from Iceland to Australia; fashions developed in northern Italy are hot items among Japanese tourists visiting South Korea; Thai restaurants are found in towns and cities across the United States; Russians hurry home to watch the next episode of soap operas made in Mexico; and movies produced in Hollywood are seen on screens from Mumbai to Santiago.

The rise of fundamentalist religious movements with geopolitical goals represents another global phenomenon with potentially significant implications for a future world order. In Chapter 6, we noted that fundamental religious movements sometimes become extremist by inciting violent acts in the name of their faith. Violence by extremists challenges the state—whether undertaken by individuals at the local scale or by widely diffused groups spread across major world realms. The state's mission to combat religious violence can produce support for the state government in the short term, but the state's inability to defeat extremist attacks may weaken the state in the long term. Terrorist attacks have been threatened or carried out by religious extremists from a variety of different faiths, but the wave of international terrorism that began in the 1980s in the name of Islam has dominated the international scene over the past two decades. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the downing of Flight 93 in Pennsylvania, and the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan that followed, moved terrorism to the geopolitical center stage. More recent terrorist attacks in Madrid, Moscow, and Mumbai have helped to keep it there.

All of the foregoing processes are creating economic, social, and cultural geographies that look less and less like the map of states (Fig. 8.3). The term **deterritorialization** is sometimes used to describe these processes because globalization, networked communities, and the like undermine the state's traditional territorial authority. But the state is far from disappearing, and nationalism continues to be a fundamental social force in the world today. Indeed, in many instances the state is moving to solidify control over its territory through a process known as **reterritorialization**. For example, in response to concerns over illegal immigration, some state borders are becoming more heavily fortified, and moving across those borders is becoming more difficult. However one views the balance between deterritorialization and reterritorialization, the state of the geopolitical order is clearly in flux. We appear to be headed toward a world in which the spatial distribution of power is more complex than the traditional map of states would suggest. Describing that spatial distribution will be a challenge for geographers for generations to come.



In 2004, the European Union welcomed ten additional states, and in 2007, it welcomed two more. Examine the European Union website (listed below in the Learn More Online section). Read about the European Union's expansion and what is going on in the European Union right now. Assess how complicated it is for the European Union to bring together these many divergent members into one supranational organization.

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