

SIGNIFICANCE OF INTER-GOVERNMENTAL REGIONAL ORGANIZATION (A CASE STUDY OF ECOWAS IN WEST AFRICA)

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Abstract: *this article analyses the significance of inter-governmental regional organizations in the geopolitical system of the world after the end of the cold war era. The increasing status of inter-governmental regional organizations around the globe became apparent in this century because of the domineering nature of powerful states actors and due to the absence of singular hegemony state actor. In view of this, the enormous task of regional stability now hinges on regional organizations, that is why, assessing this global trend from ECOWAS perspective is central to the West African regional integration process, and African unification.*

Keywords: *Inter-governmental, organization, region, state, actor, ECOWAS, West Africa.*

ЗНАЧЕНИЕ МЕЖПРАВИТЕЛЬСТВЕННОЙ РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЙ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ЭКОВАС В ЗАПАДНОЙ АФРИКЕ

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Аннотация: *данная статья анализирует значение межправительственных региональных организаций в мировой геополитической системе после окончания эпохи «холодной войны». Возрастающий статус межправительственных региональных организаций во всем мире стал очевидным в этом столетии из-за авторитарного характера влиятельных государств-акторов, а также и из-за отсутствия гегемона как единственного государственного актора. В связи с этим, огромная задача региональной стабильности теперь зависит от региональных организаций. Поэтому оценка этой глобальной тенденции с точки зрения ЭКОВАС имеет центральное значение для процесса региональной интеграции в Западной Африке и объединения африканских стран.*

Ключевые слова: *Межправительственный, организация, регион, государство, актер, ЭКОВАС, Западная Африка.*

Introduction

Retrospectively, the period in history after the end of Second World War brought a new paradigm shift in world views in international relations diplomacy, and to question the negative approach of state and the tendency to engage in conflict. This palpable change in world system led to the formation of several inter-governmental organizations across the globe leading to the emergence of powerful state actors in regional groupings and super-institutions as non-state actors to participate in the integration process especially in Europe particularly in economy.

Furthermore, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 which signaled the end of the much-debated cold world era in precipice which breeds hostility for decades between North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact which was the defining feature of the Cold War. This moment in history intensified the need for regional integration and cooperation among countries all over the world to break the dominance of singular superpower hegemony. Thus, the end of the cold war was a watershed in the history of the world generally” [1]. Consequently, its impact, both positive and negative, on the African continent, has been monumental” [2]. This era also increased the quest for regional groupings in Africa.

In attempt to change the lopsided development in the world system to create the right platform for even development to enable the developing countries move away from the shadow of the West led to the formation of regional blocs by non-aligned developing states in disapproval to the East-West conflict spearheaded by former Soviet Union and United States. The development saw the emergence of regional organizations, such as: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS in 1975), The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN in

1967), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM in 1973), Southern African Development Community (SADC in 1980), Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC in 1981), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC in 1985). Nevertheless, most of these regional organizations are still overshadowed by the existence of European Union, which is viewed as misnomer. This whole arrangement is enshrined in “the fallacy that is inherent in the traditional European, and generally in the Western belief that countries outside of the core west somehow lack in subjectivity, personality and moral fiber, representing a normative void, to be filled by Western values, institutions and practices” [3, p. 3].

Formation of ECOWAS

The agitation for the creation of various regional integration groups in Africa dates to the immediate post-independence period of the 1960s. Accordingly, the pursuit of economic integration as a model of development was one of the earliest responses to the myriads of socio-economic and political problems that confronted post-independence Africa [4]. Even, the United Nations specialized agency (UNCTAD) emphasized and reiterated the need for West African regional integration “the global shift and focus to integrate economies is nowhere more urgent than in Africa, where the combined impact of relatively small economies, international terms of trade, and the legacy of colonialism, misrule, and conflict has meant that West Africa region has not yet attain its share of global market value despite its significant market size” [5].

In West Africa, initial steps for formation of an economic community were taken as early as 1964, leading to the signing of an agreement among the four countries of Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone in February 1965. Although, “this effort did not however yield meaningful results until April 1972, when General Gowon of Nigeria and General Eyadema of Togo re-launched the idea, drew up proposals and toured 12 countries, soliciting their plan from July to August 1973” [6]. A meeting was then called at Lomé from 10-15 December 1973, which studied a draft treaty. This was further examined at a meeting of experts and jurists in Accra in January 1974 and by a ministerial meeting in Monrovia in January 1975 led to the adoption of the treaty creating the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in May 28, 1975” [7].

The view of collective battle, and the phrase ‘divided we fall, but united we succeed’ played a role in West African integration process. Hence Akindele, A. (2003) contends that; “West Africans and their leaders, later saw the need to tackle their development problem harmoniously because weakened international structures affect foreign policies of individual country negatively” [8]. The formation of ECOWAS created a platform for countries in West African region to officially interact among themselves. Thus, integration is viewed as the creation and maintenance of intense and diversified pattern of interaction among previously autonomous units [9].

Importance of ECOWAS in West African Region

The region defined as West Africa consists of sixteen nations sharing various colonial heritages including British, Portuguese, French and even American [10], while the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) today is one of the foremost inter-governmental organization in West African region comprises of fifteen countries out of the sixteen countries in the region, namely; Benin, Ghana, Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Nigeria, Niger, Sierra Leone, Togo, Senegal, Cape Verde, Burkina Faso, Liberia, and Gambia while Mauritania withdrew its membership in 2000. ECOWAS as an inter-governmental grouping is relevant and strategically position as a regional organization in the vanguard of West African regional integration process, so it served as an umbrella for West African countries since its formation in 1975 despite the different political ideology, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious affiliation among its member states. It is in this context that ECOWAS as an inter-governmental regional organization becomes significant to West African regional integration.

ECOWAS’ effort to accelerate West African regional integration process was further justified by 2015 UNECA report, the need for West African countries to integrate, according to UNECA statement “there are theoretical and practical reasons to pursue integration in West Africa as a legitimate and natural process” [11]. The report further pointed out that West Africa is a historically integrated region, composed of ethno-settlement areas that were disrupted by the political borders arbitrarily imposed during colonization. However, in the context of increased globalization, integration remains a powerful means for economic and social development, especially for low-income countries in a region like West Africa.

Since the formation of ECOWAS, the organization has undergone various changes to remain relevant and meet contemporary challenges as the symbol of modern West African integration process. Consequently, various efforts have been made towards building regionalism in West Africa, especially within the context of neoliberal economic paradigm in which removal of barriers to market access and other factors of production is the main concern” [12]. Despite some successes, the effectiveness of the sub-regional body has been hampered through both domestic and external factors. The operational structure of regional organization process in the contemporary world order encourages powerful state actors to act irrespective of the presence of non-state actors. Though, integration as

defined by Strezheva, M., as “a very broad term that can be applied to any case in respect of which we can say that something that is considered as integral, is something bigger, than the sum of its parts that it is made of” [13, p. 39].

The Role of ECOWAS in West African Integration Process

ECOWAS is one of the strong sub-regional economic groupings in Africa, others are: Common Market for Eastern and Southern African (COMESA), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), East African Community, Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Southern African Development Community (SADC) and many other not mentioned. The role of inter-governmental organization as agent of state actor in modern integration is very significant, ECOWAS is not an exemption in its link with West African integration process which is hinge on the concept of “Regional Integration” which implies the existence of people, things or events that are separate entities that can be brought together to form a stronger entity.

The disadvantageous position of West Africa sub-region in international trade largely responsible in the formation of ECOWAS, hence emphasis is still on economy liberalization, this factor was equally agreed to by Wallerstein, I. (1979), according to him, “to observe that commerce was as a major tool in the “peripheralization” of new territories and transfer of resources to “core areas”. Such a position cannot but partly informed the need for integration to benefit from the economies of large scale and the removal of trade barriers among ECOWAS” [14].

Irrespective of the shortcomings of ECOWAS, it is still considered as one of the vibrant, most formidable regional organizations in Africa. “In general, we must admit that, despite the persistence of many objective and subjective obstacles, ECOWAS is one of the most effective integration groupings in Africa” [15]. In his remarks, Lavergne sees, “regional or sub-regional integration as an imperative for African countries to achieve sustainable growth and development soon” [16, p.18]. The voting procedure in ECOWAS is one member, one vote to give the smaller countries in the organization sense of belonging, and to respect their sovereign right as a nation thereby eliminating the fear of domination by bigger nations in the organization. Thus, “an effort has been made to counterbalance this by placing ECOWAS member states on an equal footing in all things except in financial contributions to the Community which is another big achievement for Nigeria, bearing the burden when it comes to carrying out political assignment in the region” [17, p. 111].

In January 2007, the ECOWAS Secretariat was transformed into a Commission as part of a wider institutional reform of the Community but many academic scholars see the transformation of ECOWAS into a Commission as a mere African imitation of the European Union (EU) model. But, the enforcement of the ECOWAS revised treaty has witnessed many changes, including bilateral agreements and cooperation between ECOWAS and other regional organizations especially the European Union (EU). The various agreements and treaties entered, and regional laws enacts in different fields are to realize the aims and objectives of the founding fathers of ECOWAS.

Conclusion

Conclusively, the significance and importance of inter-governmental regional organization cannot be undermined in the present world order. In view of the unfolding events in the global polity which has prompted the strengthening of regional blocs through the activities of inter-governmental organizations by actors involved. The new development is the reason Gambari insists that, “despite the slow start of ECOWAS and its disappointing performance during the first wave of integration, commitment to regional integration has been strong since the beginning of the new regionalism in the 1990s. The specter of economic integration has kept the enthusiasm high among ECOWAS countries” [18, p. 56].

Since the adoption of ‘ECOWAS’ Revised Treaty’, Francophone and Anglophone countries have demonstrated a great willingness to work together. It should be taken under consideration that countries are always located in a geographical region, and they are forced to have relations with their neighbors which varies [19, p.494]. In fact, ECOWAS has even achieved more since the 1990s than would have been thought possible only two decades ago” [20, p.167]. By and large, from analytical point of view, the strategic role ECOWAS is playing in West African region makes it relevant and indispensable as a regional organization for now.

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