

12 International government and the modern state

Our country is the world – our countrymen are all mankind.

(William Lloyd Garrison, Prospectus of
The Liberator, 15 December 1837)

The United Nations and the birth of world government

The interdependence and common purpose of humankind has been a recurrent political theme since at least the end of the eighteenth century, but two world wars and the growing globalisation of the world economy led to increased political pressure in the course of the twentieth century for effective governmental institutions that transcended national boundaries and interests. As has already been explained in Chapter 9, the first steps in this process met with very limited success, both in terms of promoting political stability, and in terms of opening up the world economy and reducing national protectionism. The League of Nations was unable to prevent the outbreak of the Second World War, the most destructive conflict ever seen in terms of loss of life, and a myriad of bilateral national agreements were strangling world trade.

The UN has been the bold and ambitious response to the challenge of a structure for world government, though still far from perfect and with major failures to set alongside its undoubted successes. The UN Charter was originally signed by 51 countries in 1945 and since then membership has grown steadily and, in 2004, stands at 185, representing all the formally recognised states in the world.

Since its inception, the UN has developed into a huge and somewhat unwieldy body, encompassing a wide range of very different international organisations under its umbrella (Figure 12.1). There are six

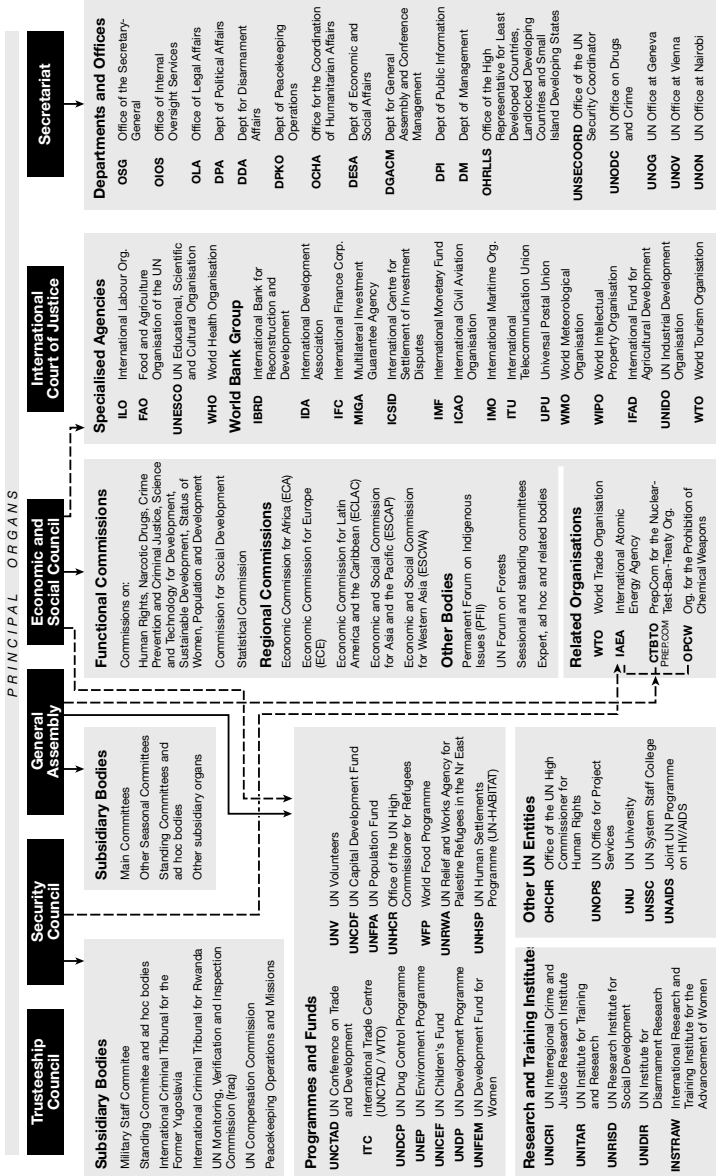


Figure 12.1 The UN system

Note: solid lines from a Principal Organ indicate a direct reporting relationship; dashed lines a non-subsidiary relationship.

major divisions: the Trusteeship Council, the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the International Court of Justice, and the Secretariat.

The *Trusteeship Council* was incorporated into the original UN Charter to oversee the progress of territories administered in trust by its member states towards full independence (Johnston *et al.*, 1988). It consists of the five permanent members of the Security Council – China, France, the Russian Federation (formerly the Soviet Union), the UK, and the USA – and it effectively completed its work in November 1994, when the last trust territory, the island state of Palau in the western Pacific Ocean, became independent and joined the UN in its own right.

The *Security Council* has eleven members, six appointed by the General Assembly and the other five the permanent members that form the Trusteeship Council. The main task of the Security Council is to maintain peace and security at an international level. It has a number of sanctions at its disposal, ranging from financial penalties, to trade embargos, and, as a last resort, military force. Any action must have the assent of seven of the eleven members, including that of the five permanent members. If military intervention is determined upon, then the Council can ask any of the members of the UN to contribute armed forces and other logistical support. The Security Council has a number subsidiary bodies, including all peacekeeping missions, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and the Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission to search for evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The International Atomic Energy Authority, a subsidiary of the Economic and Social Council, also has to report both to the Security Council and the General Assembly.

The *General Assembly* includes all the member states of the UN and is charged with discussing and deciding on issues of international peace and security. It can also make any recommendations it sees fit to promote international peace, as well as economic and social cooperation, and the promotion of human rights. It meets regularly and a two-thirds majority is required for any vote to be passed. The General Assembly has ten programmes and funds under its direct control, all of which have a seminal impact on the formulation and implementation of global policy. UNCTAD, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, has taken a leading role in deregulating world trade and promoting greater economic opportunities for all member states. The UN Drug Control Programme is at the centre of the worldwide struggle to control drug-related crime.

UNEP, the UN Environment Programme, is deeply involved in raising awareness of the threats associated with global environmental pollution and climate change. UNICEF, the UN Children's Fund, leads the way in exposing and combating the suffering and exploitation of children across the globe. The UN Development Programme oversees and coordinates development initiatives. The UN Population Fund monitors and advises on the demographic issues arising from the inexorable growth of the world's population. UNHCR, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, actually started work before the UN Charter was signed and ever since has attempted to inject some order and humanity into the intractable problems facing displaced people. The World Food Programme provides essential support for the UNHCR, and other programmes, by ensuring that essential foodstuffs reach those who are starving and most in need. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, as its name suggests, is a special agency that works to relieve the unique problems facing the Palestinian people in that region. UN-Habitat, the UN Human Settlements Programme, struggles with the huge challenge of providing adequate housing in urban and rural areas for a world population that is constantly on the move, both between countries and within them.

These are just the major programmes. There are a number of others, as well as research and training institutes and, all together, they represent a huge investment on the part of the world community to reduce human hardship of all kinds. Naturally, some programmes are more successful than others and none are successful all the time, but, taken as a whole, they represent a massive support mechanism for helping individual states to cope with problems that threaten to overwhelm their individual national resources.

The main task of the *Economic and Social Council* is to seek to improve the economic and social well-being of those living in the member states. Its brief covers health, education, economic, social and cultural issues, and the promotion of the position of women in the world. It supports a wide range of functional and regional commissions, as well as more than twenty specialised agencies, covering all aspects of the world economy (the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund), as well as education, science, and cultural development (UNESCO), and many other areas.

The *International Court of Justice* is the main judicial body of the UN and all members have to agree to abide by its decisions. The court consists of fifteen members and no country may have more than two

members at any one time. Its existence is an important step forward in ensuring that international decisions are actually implemented. But it still suffers from serious weaknesses. The court is almost entirely dependent on national governments to enforce its rulings, and many states have been reluctant to refer matters to the court, because they fear it may not find in their favour.

The *Secretariat* is headed by the Secretary-General, who is appointed by the General Assembly, and is the body that runs the whole complex and widespread organisation that is the UN in the twenty-first century. While the UN does not have the power to force individual member states to follow its recommendations, it does exert a considerable moral authority, which makes rejecting them a serious political step. Furthermore, in the space of little more than half a century, the world has moved from a position where it had failed disastrously with the League of Nations to create a viable world political order, to one where the absence of the UN and its many agencies would be inconceivable, despite its undoubted shortcomings.

Antarctica

No issue illustrates better the strengths and limitations of the UN than its role in brokering a globally acceptable and sustainable political future for Antarctica, the last great unsettled wilderness on earth with over 70 per cent of the world's freshwater locked up in its ice-sheets (Schram Stokke and Vidas, 1996). The continent was first discovered by the British mariner and explorer, James Cook, in 1774, but there was no permanent presence there until 1943, when the UK established a base to provide reconnaissance and meteorological information for the south Atlantic. The UK also made the first unilateral claim to sovereignty over the Antarctic landmass, the British Antarctic Territory, when it defined a wedge-shaped area in the north-west of the continent, stretching from the coast to the South Pole, as well as further out into the south Atlantic to include the South Sandwich Islands and South Georgia. By the early 1950s, six other states – Norway, Australia, France, New Zealand, Chile, and Argentina – had also lodged similar wedge-shaped claims, with those of Argentina, Chile, and the UK overlapping each other, so that over 80 per cent of the continent was technically spoken for, though none of the claims was recognised by other, non-claimant states in the world (Figure 12.2).

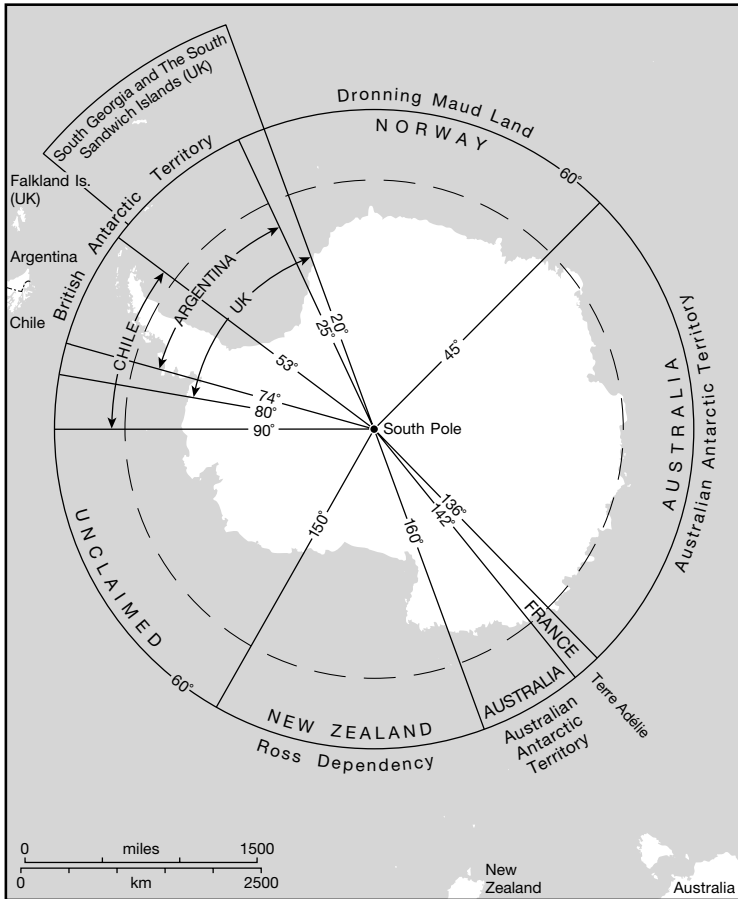


Figure 12.2 *National claims on the Antarctic territory*

Politically, it was clearly an unsustainable situation and, following on the success of the twelve-nation international scientific collaboration in to all aspects of the Antarctic environment during the International Geophysical Year in 1957–8, it was decided to draw up an Antarctic Treaty, monitored and administered by the UN. The treaty was published in 1959 and came into force in 1961 (Box 12.1). It covered the whole of the area south of 60° latitude south and its objectives were: to keep the continent permanently demilitarised and to establish it as a nuclear-free zone, thus ensuring that it is used only for peaceful purposes; to promote international scientific cooperation; and to put on one side all existing disputes over territorial sovereignty (Dodds, 1997).

Box 12.1**Parties to the Antarctic Treaty*****Consultative parties*****Claimants**

Argentina*, Australia*, Chile*, France*,
New Zealand*, Norway*, UK*.

Non-claimants

Belgium*, Bulgaria, Brazil, People's
Republic of China, Ecuador, Finland,
Germany, India, Italy, Japan*, Netherlands,
Peru, Poland, Russia*, South Africa*, South
Korea, Spain, Sweden, USA*, Uruguay.

Non-consultative parties

Austria, Canada, Colombia, Cuba, Czech
Republic, Denmark, Greece, Guatemala,
Hungary, North Korea, Papua New Guinea,
Romania, Slovakia, Switzerland, Turkey,
Ukraine.

Note: * denotes an original signatory of the
Antarctic Treaty.

The UK was the first country to sign up to the treaty in 1961, but there are now forty-three signatories, divided into three distinct groups. First there are the seven territorial claimant countries, four of which are in the southern hemisphere and have a riparian interest in the south Atlantic, the other three being European countries with a long-standing commitment to polar research and exploration. Second, there are twenty non-claimant countries, mostly the major industrialised nations, identified as consultative parties, who must be involved in any changes to the status of the treaty. Third, there are sixteen non-consultative parties, states that wish to register an interest in the future of Antarctica, but recognise that they will never be in a position to exert a major influence on what is actually decided.

Within the framework of the treaty, five further measures have been adopted to protect the Antarctic environment and its flora and fauna, including that of the surrounding seas, and to regulate any future mineral exploration and development. In practice, the last of these measures, the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, which was agreed in 1991 and enacted in 1998, essentially superseded the others and combined them into a single document. In many ways, these subsequent additions are more important than the original treaty itself,

because they provide for regimes to control fishing and the taking of marine mammals in the seas around Antarctica, which at present are the only exploitable natural resources.

The treaty can remain in force indefinitely, though there was provision for a review after 30 years, but in 1991 none of the consultative parties wished to see it renegotiated. Clearly they believe it is working well and in their interests, but part of their lack of enthusiasm for any change is the growing clamour from countries that are not party to the treaty. Ever since 1982 the future of Antarctica has been raised regularly in the UN General Assembly with calls for the whole continent to be designated a 'Global Common' or 'Heritage of Humankind'. These calls have come from non-treaty countries in the developing world, which feel, with some justification, that the continent ought to be a global resource and that, if it is not, they have been frozen out of any long-term economic benefits arising from development in Antarctica. Not surprisingly, the countries that are already parties to the treaty have opposed any suggestion that their privileged position be threatened in this way and, thus far, have successfully resisted any change (Suter, 1991).

The role of the UN in the recent history of Antarctica has been somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, it has strongly supported the objectives of the treaty, in so far as they ban all military activity and nuclear testing, put strict limits on any exploitation, and support scientific research. On the other hand, it must also try to fight the corner of the very large number of small states that so far have been excluded from any say in the future of the continent.

Managing the global market

Despite the scale and huge scope of its activities, the UN is far from being a complete answer to the need for global institutions, especially when it comes to international finance. For more than two decades after the organisation was founded, the USA, or more precisely the US dollar, was the foundation on which trade in the non-Communist world relied, but, in the 1970s, this whole edifice began to disintegrate, partly as a result of economic weakness in the USA, and partly as a result of the growth in the sheer volume of trade in the world (Barry, 2001).

In the face of an economic crisis, fuelled further by the sudden sharp increase in the price of oil on the world market in 1973, the six major

capitalist countries in the trade-dependent maritime world (USA, Federal Republic of Germany, France, UK, Japan, and Italy) in 1975 formed themselves into an ad hoc group, known as the G6, to create a forum for regular meetings of their finance ministers to try to coordinate their macro-economic policies. At the insistence of the USA, Canada was invited to join in 1976 and, what was now the G7, began to exert a powerful influence on all aspects of economic policy. Indeed, broadly in the name of economic policy, the group's pronouncements ranged widely into other areas of policy-making as well. For instance, it roundly condemned the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, as well as playing a leading role in attempts to deregulate world trade within the general framework of the UN-sponsored General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

In the ensuing years the G7 has become an increasingly powerful voice and one that has been further strengthened since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. In 1991, the group invited the newly formed Russian Federation to join it as an observer, subsequently inviting it to become a full member in 1998 and thus changing the group into the G8. In 1999, in the face of growing criticism at its apparent exclusiveness and dominance, the G8 invited twelve other countries with emergent industrial economies to join with it in a subsidiary forum, the G20 (Box 12.2), to involve them more closely in discussions about the direction of global economic policy; this consultative forum has subsequently been enlarged to form the G33.

Box 12.2

Membership of the G8 and G20

The members of the informal groups, G8 and G20, are the finance ministers and central bank governors of the following states:

G8

Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, UK, USA.

G20

Includes the G8 countries, together with Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, and the EU in its own right.

The cornerstone of world trade policy is the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and its precursors. After the Second World War, attempts to create an International Trade Organisation, led by the USA, failed and the GATT was created as a temporary measure in its place. Starting with 23 members in 1947, it grew rapidly and by the early 1990s had a membership in excess of 120. GATT operated through a series of rounds of multilateral negotiations, the aim of which was to reduce progressively tariffs and other barriers to free trade across the world. From its inception, it has been guided by two basic principles. The most-favoured nation principle insists that any trade concession agreed bilaterally between two countries must apply equally to all the other members of the GATT. The national treatment rule requires that all imported goods are traded in exactly the same way as domestically produced goods. A third principle was agreed in 1965, which allowed preferential access for goods produced in developing countries to markets in the developed, industrial world, though there were some important exceptions, associated especially with clothing and textiles, and there is some cynicism about how much improvement in access was actually achieved (Hoekman and Kostecki, 1995).

By 1994, eight rounds of negotiations had been completed within the framework of GATT and more than 90 per cent of world trade in raw materials and manufactured goods was covered by the agreements. The Uruguay Round, the last to be completed in 1994, was by far the most ambitious. It extended the scope of GATT to include, for the first time, agriculture, textiles, and clothing. It also concluded preliminary agreements on trade in services, intellectual property, and investment, thereby encompassing whole new areas of economic activity, which account for a growing proportion of the world economy.

The success of the Uruguay Round also provided an opportunity to bring an end to the provisional status of GATT and to replace it with a permanent body. The WTO came into existence in 1995 and since then has continued the work of trying to eliminate restrictions on trade of all kinds. GATT had been very successful at eliminating overt restrictive measures, like tariffs and import duties, but much less so in getting to grips with other forms of trade distortion, such as quotas on the amounts of goods that could be imported and legal requirements which prevented goods and services from having access to certain national markets. For instance, a refusal to recognise professional qualifications gained in another country can very effectively prevent doctors, lawyers, accountants, and many others from practicing outside their own national jurisdictions.

The WTO has begun to address the detail of these issues, as well as continuing to try to eliminate tariffs and other, more obvious, limits on free trade. In 2001, it initiated the Doha Round, an attempt to reduce still further the very severe obstacles that most of the major developed countries continue to place in the way of trade in agricultural products. Heavy agricultural subsidies in the developed world mean that they are able to produce foodstuffs at artificially low prices and, as a result, developing countries, whose main exports are such primary products, are unable to penetrate the lucrative markets in the developed world, especially in North America and Europe.

Progress in the Doha Round has been very slow and the failure of the WTO to act more quickly and effectively to address the widespread discrimination through the barriers to trade between the developed and the developing world has led to widespread criticism. Protests have been growing, and are becoming increasingly violent, in the face of the apparent lack of will in the organisation to truly create a more equitable environment for a trading system that supports the interests of all the countries in the world, and not just those that are already industrialised and affluent (Chossudovsky, 1997).

Regional responses

By no means all the responses to globalisation have been global in extent; regional initiatives have been equally important, in some cases transforming the geopolitical context of political decision-making. Regional alliances in support of furthering national economic interests and bolstering national defensive capabilities have, of course, long been a feature in the world's political landscape, but since the middle of the twentieth century some have begun to assume more concrete form, with their own institutions, and economic, political, and social infrastructure.

In the forefront of such developments is the EU, a regional political initiative to which frequent reference has already been made, that has transformed relations between European states and, in a period of little more than half a century, has remade the political architecture of the whole continent (Blacksell and Williams, 1994; Williams, 1994). It began life as a core group of six, largely industrial states in mainland western Europe (Belgium, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands), which were trying to rebuild their economies in the wake of two disastrous world wars in the space of less

than forty years, first as the European Coal and Steel Community (1952), and then as the European Economic Community (EEC) (1956). The goal was to create a customs union, with free trade amongst themselves and a common external policy for trade with the rest of the world, as well as to develop common policies in specific areas, such as agriculture and transport.

Throughout the 1960s much was achieved, though progress was very erratic. Nonetheless, the EEC was secure enough to feel able to accede to the requests of other West European countries to be allowed to join. Denmark, Ireland, and the UK joined in 1973, but the expansion coincided with the time that the US-led period of sustained economic growth, that Western Europe had enjoyed since the early 1950s, was beginning to break down. What now had been renamed the European Community (EC), experienced a very difficult few years in the mid-1970s, both economically and politically, with even its long-term future being thrown into question.

The European Community managed to weather the storm and, once it re-emerged, it was well on the way to becoming a substantially different political entity. In 1979, the first direct elections to the European Parliament took place and marked the beginning of a long process of giving the EC a political voice and presence, independent of its member states. In 1981, Greece became a member, followed by Portugal and Spain in 1986, all three joining less for economic reasons than to underpin their newly elected, and fragile, democratic governments. The EC was manifestly becoming a political force in its own right and this trend was accelerated even further by developments after 1990.

First of all, the EC itself took a much stronger lead than hitherto in moving from trade liberalisation to the creation of a deeply embedded single market across all its member states. The Maastricht Treaty in 1994 not only reformed the EC as the integrated European Union (EU), it also committed it to becoming a single market with its own currency, the euro, as well as its own social and environmental agenda (Wise and Gibb, 1993). At the same time, it had to respond to dramatic political upheaval, sparked by the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1990 it effectively welcomed its first member from the former Communist bloc, when Germany was reunified and what had been East Germany became included in the union. It was immediately clear that this was likely to be the beginning of a new phase of enlargement in support of a new political agenda, and that the EU of twelve members was unlikely to be able to

rise to the economic challenges that this would bring with it. Other wealthy states in Western Europe were encouraged to join and, in 1995, Austria, Sweden, and Finland became members, thus easing the burden of integrating a group of much poorer former Communist states from Eastern Europe. There then followed a period of intense negotiation, which culminated in the EU accepting ten new members in 2004, eight former Communist states in Eastern Europe (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Slovenia), together with Cyprus and Malta, two small Mediterranean island countries.

The twenty-five members of the EU now form a very significant global political entity that has a population of 456 million, more than half as big again as that of the USA, with negotiations for further new members (Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey) already in train. Although it is not a new state in the conventional sense, it does have many of the trappings of statehood: a democratically elected parliament, its own currency, which has been adopted by the majority of its member states, and a constitution that is drafted and under discussion.

Whether the EU will be a model for other regions of the world remains to be seen, but there have certainly been putative attempts to follow its example. NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Area, ASEAN, the Association of South-East Asian Nations, and LAFTA, the Latin American Free Trade Association, all represent regional free trade agreements, but none has so far begun to assume the separate institutional substance of the EU.

Regional defence alliances have been commonplace throughout history, but they have usually been ephemeral and have not evolved to create any institutions, independent of the individual member states involved. NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, is an exception (Blacksell, 1981). Founded in 1949, the alliance comprised the USA and Canada and a steadily expanding group of Western European countries, committed to containing the threat of Communist expansionism during the Cold War. The key to the alliance was a commitment that an attack against any one of the signatories would be treated as an attack against them all, and would spark an appropriate military response. By 1982 there were fourteen West European countries in the alliance and NATO had developed a very substantial separate institutional presence, based around its headquarters in Brussels. It had also evolved a system of joint commands, so that NATO forces were integrated across national lines in a way that remains highly unusual.

The collapse of the Soviet Union should, theoretically, have marked the end of the alliance, as the military threat it had been set up to contain had effectively disappeared, but predictions of its imminent demise proved premature. NATO had become so integral to the whole defence structure of Western Europe and the North Atlantic region that, rather than fading away, it has been transformed into a vehicle for integrating the former Communist states of eastern Europe into a unified defensive alliance. After the unification of Germany in 1990, it oversaw the withdrawal of Russian troops from what had been East Germany. Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic were admitted as members in 1998 and, in 2002, they were followed by Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. It is also highly likely that more former east European states will join in the future.

The inclusive, multinational approach adopted by NATO towards the former Communist states of eastern Europe has almost certainly been crucial in smoothing the way for their peaceful transition to democracy. It also stands in sharp contrast to the fate of some of the former Soviet republics in the Caucasus, where vicious civil wars have all but stopped democracy taking root.

Human rights

One aspect of the tortuous institutional response to a more internationalised world which must not be forgotten is the struggle for universal standards in human rights (Smith, 1994). The First French Republic, which emerged from the political anarchy of the French Revolution in 1791, and the US Bill of Rights, which was enunciated in the same year, both set standards for human rights and freedoms and in the twenty-first century all states incorporate into their constitutions or systems of governance laws regulating the relations between those in power and citizens. However, although some, such as the right to life, are almost universal, others, such as freedom of speech and the right to vote in a democratic society, are not. Indeed, it is sometimes argued that to attempt to impose a set of universal rights is actually not desirable, as it will stifle legitimate differences between societies.

Nevertheless, the growth in the number and importance of international institutions has led to an ever greater insistence on international standards for human rights. The first Geneva Convention which attempted to put

limits on the conduct of war and the treatment of prisoners was signed in 1864 and has been extended through a series of further conventions and protocols ever since. The UN adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948 and in 1966 adopted the *Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and the *Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, both of which are binding on its member states and provide an effective global framework for human rights. Earlier, the Council of Europe, created in 1949, was an attempt to generate common basic standards of behaviour across Europe and, although it only encompassed non-Communist countries during the Cold War, it has expanded rapidly since 1990 and now has forty-six members from across the whole of the continent, including the Russian Federation. The greatest achievement of the council has been the *European Convention on Human Rights*, which most of its members have accepted and incorporated into their constitutions. It sets a general standard for human rights, which can be tested in the council's legal forum, the European Court of Justice, effectively providing a supreme court for deciding human rights issues. The UN has also taken action to set up formal institutions to adjudicate on violations of human rights mainly through the International Court of Justice, but also by establishing International War Crimes Tribunals to deal with human rights and genocide in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia.

Key themes and further reading

The growing recognition of the essential interdependence of all humankind and the frequency and complexity of interaction at a world scale increasingly require institutions to underpin them. The opportunities and limitations are well illustrated by the way in which the UN has been organised to meet these challenges. The Antarctic Treaty is the most ambitious attempt to place an area of the globe of continental scale above national politics and competitiveness. The realisation of the ideal of a global marketplace has also led to institutionalisation through GATT and, subsequently, the WTO. Regional organisations for military cooperation have been commonplace for centuries, but they too have begun to assume stronger identities in the modern world through bodies such as NATO. Regional economic cooperation is also increasingly common, notably in the form of the burgeoning EU. The greater contact between peoples across the globe has brought with it demands for common minimum standards of behaviour and the recognition of human

rights. This applies as much to the way governments treat their own peoples, as it does to their behaviour towards each other.

The recent institutional development of the world trading system is considered at length by B. Hoekman and M. Kostecki (1995) in *The Political Economy of the World Trading System: from GATT to WTO*. For a study of the evolution of the EU from a purely economic arrangement to a much more sophisticated and complex transnational socio-economic organisation, *Single Market to Social Europe* by Mark Wise and Richard Gibb (1993) provides an excellent introduction. The political geography of Antarctica as a continent under international, rather than national, control is dealt with in depth by Klaus Dodds (1997) in *Geopolitics in Antarctica: views from the Southern Ocean rim*. Turning to human rights, this whole field, and much more, is surveyed from a geographical perspective by David Smith (1994) in *Geography and Social Justice*.