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## **UNIT 18 THE REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS : EU, ASEAN, APEC, SAARC, OIC AND OAU**

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### **18.0 OBJECTIVES**

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This Unit deals with six major regional organizations. Like the UN, these organizations are playing a decisive role not only in political or economic matters at regional level but also at the international level. As the world is becoming more interdependent, national barriers are getting weakened and nations of a particular region are forming their own associations. This process is still continuing. After going through this unit you should be able to :

- explain the origin, objectives or functions and structure of major regional organizations or groupings;
- gain an overview of their changing role in regional or international politics;
- examine some of their major accomplishments and shortcomings.

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### **18.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Unlike the global international organization, regional international organizations and institutions are created to perform specific or limited functions for a group of countries which are united by some geographical, cultural or historical factors. These States of a particular region may unite themselves in group or organizations for economic and political ties or for political ideology and similarity of social institutions. Experience of such regional organizations may be useful for governments and peoples to appreciate the benefits of international integration and international confederal arrangements. Such experience may

also teach them to develop the integrative political habits and skills for possible application on a larger scale and for a broader range of functions.

The Regional Organizations : EU, ASEAN, APEC, SAARC, OIC and OAU

Since the end of World War II many regional organizations have been established in the various regions of the world. This unit discusses the following ones.

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## 18.2 EUROPEAN UNION

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The European Union (EU) was previously known (till 1992) as the European Community (EC) or the European Economic Community (EEC). It is a closely-knit group of 15 European States. It was created to foster greater economic and political integration in Europe, to help them avoid another war among them, like World War II. These 15 members of EU, having a collective population of 370 million, share the common institutions and policies that have brought an unprecedented era of peace and prosperity to Western Europe. The EU is in many ways unique among the attempts towards fostering supranationalism among the people in its member countries. In fact, its unprecedented success story has served as a model for other similar experiments.

### 18.2.1 Origin, History and Objectives

Before and after the World War II many efforts were made to create unity among European States on institutional basis. However, the origin of EU can be traced directly to the year 1952, when six countries — Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and The Netherlands — decided to create the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) by pooling their coal and steel resources in a common market controlled by an independent supranational authority. A major landmark, however, came in 1958 when the Treaties of Rome (1957) entered into force. The Rome Treaties established the EEC and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), extending the common market for coal and steel to most other economic sectors in the member countries. The basic objective of these treaties was to establish gradually a European Common Market with the eventual free movement of goods, persons, services and capital among the EC countries.

In 1973, three other countries — UK, Ireland and Denmark — joined the EC. From Nine in 1973, its membership has risen to 15 by 1 January 1995. Others joining it were Greece (1981), Spain and Portugal (1986), Australia, Finland and Sweden (1995).

Many significant developments occurred between 1958 and 1992 which enabled the EC to be transformed into what it is now known as EU. In 1973 the Constitution of the European Monetary Co-operation was signed. From 1999 the European Monetary System starts to operate. The single European Act (1986) and the Maastricht Treaty on European Union (1992) were milestones in the history of EU. The former entered into force in July 1987 and the latter on 1 November 1993. The former envisaged the creation of a single market by 1 January 1993. The Maastricht Treaty sets into motion an ambitious programme: a common or single currency at the earliest by 1 January 1997 or the latest by 1 January 1999; a European Central Bank, a common foreign and security policy and internal security and the European citizenship. Its task is to mould the Member States into a single Community embracing every sector of the economy covering such key areas as the free movement of goods and workers, freedom of establishment and services, the free movement of capital and payments, competition policy, economic and monetary policy, environmental policy, research and technology and industrial policy.

The introducing of Union (European) citizenship can be considered as the most important feature of Maastricht Treaty. It gives Union citizens the right to live, study or spend their retirement in any Member-State. Originally the right to freedom was restricted to workers only, but now everyone can benefit from it. Union citizens have the right to vote and stand as candidate in municipal elections in the Member State where they reside. This has major

implications. Indeed some Member States had to amend their constitutions to make it possible. It should be noted that the Union citizenship stands alongside national citizenship so that people can still retain their national identity. However, it must be acknowledged that the Union citizenship is one of the innovations introduced by the Treaty showing how the EU is gradually evolving from an economic community into a political union.

### 18.2.2 Institutions or Organs

The EU functions through seven organs. They are :

- 1) **The Council of the European Union** is the main decision - making institution. It is made up of Ministers from the 15 Member States. Different Ministers attend Council meetings depending on the agenda. It enacts Union Legislations (regulations, directives and decisions). Its decisions are binding throughout the EU territory and it directs inter-governmental cooperation. The Presidency of the Council rotates among the Member States every six months. Each Presidency concludes with a summit of the Council which brings together the Heads of State or Government.
- 2) **The European Parliament (EP)** is composed of 626 members, directly elected (since 1979) to five year terms. Members of the EP (MEPs) form political rather than national groups. The EP acts as the EU's public forum, debating issues of public importance and raises questioning for the Council and the Commission. It can amend or reject the EU budget.
- 3) **The European Commission** : A single Commission for all three Communities (the ECSC, the EEC and Euratom) was created when the Treaty merging the executives entered into force in July 1967. The number of commissioners was increased to 20 in January 1995. The Commission proposes policies and legislation, and ensures that the provisions of the treaties and the decisions of the institution are properly implemented.
- 4) **The Court of Justice** interprets EU law and its rulings are binding. The Court comprises 15 judges assisted by 9 Advocates-General. It is assisted by a *Court of First Instance*, which has jurisdiction to hear cases in limited areas. The other bodies of EU are the *Court of Auditors* (15 members), the *Economic and Social Committee* (222 members) and the *Committee of the Regions* (222 members). The second body represents employers, employees and many groups such as farmers and consumers, and the third one represents local and regional authorities.

### 18.2.3 Role and its Future in World Politics

During the last four decades the EU has emerged as the world's largest trading bloc and an economic giant. It has served as a magnet to attract new members (the applications of Hungary and Poland for EU membership are pending since April 1994) bringing its total population and GNP equivalent to those of the present and former Super Powers – the USA and the USSR. It is gradually moving towards greater European integration and federalism. It may become a *United States of Europe* in due course. It is a Super Power in the making and may fill the vacuum created by the disintegration of the USSR, the only other Super Power since 1945. Its constructive role may restore the balance of power in the present uni-polar world politics.

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## 18.3 ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH EAST ASIAN NATIONS

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The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was formed following the signing of the Bangkok Declaration on 8 August 1967 by five States – Indonesia, Malaysia, the

Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei joined it in January 1984 and Vietnam recently. Though ASEAN came into existence principally as a result of the Vietnam war and its perceived threat to the non-communist States of South-east Asia, by admitting Vietnam (a communist State) it has overcome its earlier anti-communist bias. Like EU, it is attracting many new members. Myanmar has been given observer status at a meeting of its foreign ministers on 20 July 1996. It is expected that Myanmar alongwith Laos and Cambodia will soon join ASEAN.

The Regional Organizations : EU, ASEAN, APEC, SAARC, OIC and OAU

### **18.3.1 Aims and Purposes**

Seven aims and purposes were included in the ASEAN declaration. These are :

- i) to accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of South East Asian Nations;
- ii) to promote peace and stability through binding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries of the region and adherence to the principles of the UN Charter;
- iii) to promote collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields;
- iv) to provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional, technical and administrative spheres;
- v) to collaborate more effectively for the greater utilization of their agriculture and industries, expansion of their trade including the study of the problem of international commodity trade, improvement of their transport and transport and communication facilities and raising living standards of their peoples;
- vi) to promote Southeast Asian studies; and
- vii) to maintain close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes and to explore all avenues for even closer cooperation among themselves.

### **18.3.2 Institutions or Structure**

ASEAN's highest authority is the summit of heads of government of its members States. The summits are held only when necessary, the first such summit was held in 1976 and the third and most recent in 1987. The ministerial conference is an annual meeting of foreign ministers held on a rotating basis in each country. The ministerial conferences are supplemented by bimonthly meetings of the standing committee which comprises the foreign minister of the host country and ambassadors from other six. The ASEAN secretariat was formed in 1976; the post of Secretary-General rotates among member States every three years.

Other permanent committees include : (i) trade and tourism; (ii) industry, minerals and energy; (iii) food, agriculture and forestry; (iv) transportation and communications; (v) finance and banking; (vi) science and technology; (vii) social development; (viii) culture and information; and (ix) budget.

### **18.3.3 Powers, Functions and Role**

ASEAN provides a unified front for the member countries vis-a-vis third countries primarily in the areas of trade, development aid and some areas of foreign policy.

ASEAN's internal powers are executed in the areas of, and through, its standing and other committees. Its primary functions in these areas are the coordination of joint industrial and technical projects and the harmonization of policies, standards and regulations.

It played an important role in two areas : (1) With the aim of maintaining peace and stability in the area, it sponsored the UN Conference on Cambodia 1981. (2) In 1977 it established Preferential Trading Agreements (PTA), which resulted in the increase of intra-ASEAN trade from 15% in 1977 to 21% in 1983.

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## **18.4 THE ASIA-PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION COUNCIL**

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On 5 November 1989 Asia-Pacific Economic Corporation Council the APEC was established. ASEAN members participated in its founding. APEC includes the ASEAN countries and the USA, Japan, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Korea. At the July 1990 inaugural meeting of APEC it was agreed to open membership negotiations with China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. The European Community-APEC relations were on the agenda for the October 1991 meeting. ASEAN reactions to the foundation of APEC (a new regional economic organization) varied from Singapore which was very enthusiastic to Indonesia which called for greater concentration on intra-ASEAN rather than external economic relations.

### **Check Your Progress Exercise 1**

**Note :** i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the answers given at the end of the unit.

1) What are the bases or reasons for the creation of regional organizations?

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2) The main features of the Maastricht Treaty are ....

- (1) .....
- (2) .....
- (3) .....

3) The three main goals of ASEAN are ....

- (1) .....
- (2) .....
- (3) .....

## 18.5 SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION (SAARC)

The SAARC was formally inaugurated at the first summit meeting of the Heads of State or Government of the South Asian countries in December 1985 in Dhaka. Seven countries of South Asia – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – had begun discussions on regional co-operation after the initiative for such an organization had been taken by the late President of Bangladesh, Zia-ur-Rahman, in May 1980. King Birendra of Nepal is also reported to have been among those who conceived the idea.

### 18.5.1 Aims and Objectives

According to Article 1 of the SAARC Charter (adopted in December 1985) its main objectives are as follows :

- a) to promote the welfare of the people of South Asia and to improve their quality of life;
- b) to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region;
- c) to promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among countries of South Asia;
- d) to contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems;
- e) to promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields;
- f) to strengthen co-operation with other developing countries;
- g) to strengthen co-operation among themselves in international fora on matters of common interests; and
- h) to co-operate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes.

### 18.5.2 Structure and Functions

- i) **Meeting of Heads of State or Government** The SAARC Summit is the supreme policy making organ and meets ordinarily once a year. SAARC Summits have so far met in Dhaka (1985), Bangalore (1986), Kathmandu (1987), Islamabad (1988), Male (1990), Colombo (1991), Dhaka (1993) and New Delhi (1995). No summit meeting was held in 1989, 1992 and 1994.
- ii) **Council of Ministers** consists of the Foreign Ministers of the members States. It meets ordinarily twice a year and is concerned with the formulation of policies, review of programme of co-operation etc.
- iii) **Standing Committee**, comprising of Foreign Secretaries of the Member countries, is concerned with overall monitoring and co-operation, mobilisation of resources, identification of new areas of co-operation etc. It meets as often as deemed necessary but at least twice a year.
- iv) **Technical Committees** comprising representatives of member-States are responsible for implementation, co-ordination, and monitoring of the programmes in their respective areas of co-operation. They submit periodic reports to the Standing Committee.
- v) **Action Committees** may be set up by the standing committee. They consist of member-States concerned with implementation of projects involving more than two but not all member-States.

- vi) The Secretariat, established in 1987, consists of a Secretary-General and other staff monitoring the co-ordination and implementation of programmes as well as for servicing the meetings of the SAARC organs. It is based at Kathmandu.

### 18.5.3 Accomplishments and Prospects

Though SAARC has completed ten years, like the other regional organizations it has not been as successful as it should have been. Progress on the generally agreed items of the SAARC agenda has been not only very slow but also unsatisfactory. It has not been able to make any significant impact on the process of cooperation and coordination in implementing the aims and objectives of the SAARC. The reasons for this state of affairs are not far to seek. The region is marred by ethnic tensions such as the Tamil-Sinhala conflict, Assamese-Bangladeshi tensions and Hindu-Muslim conflicts. In all these ethnic tensions India, as the geographical centre of the region, becomes involved. Also, historically-rooted mutual mistrust, misperception and misunderstanding among its member-States prevails. The endemic conflict between India and Pakistan is well known. Indo-Sri Lankan tension over the Tamil question or the Nepalese complaints about India's interference in her domestic affairs are other factors for tension. Moreover, as the region's largest country, there is a lurking fear of Indian domination among other members. Although external security threats do not exist in South Asia today, the problem of cross-border movements of terrorists from Pakistan to India, first in Punjab and later in Kashmir, leading to continuous tension, skirmishes, military alert and low-level proxy-war, has aspects of security concern constraining genuine regional co-operation.

Despite these problems, SAARC has been gradually moving towards greater co-operation. The seventh Summit at Dhaka in April 1993 achieved a major breakthrough. It decided to set up the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) which is a concrete step in the direction of trade liberation in the region. The SAPTA became operational in January 1996. But till in September 1996 intra-regional trade under SAPTA had not taken off as it remains hampered by a paucity of infrastructure, lack of information and prevalence of high tariff walls among its members. The attempts to throw open the borders for inter-State trade have run into trouble with businessmen in Pakistan and Bangladesh raising fears that their industries would be swamped by competition.

Since the SAARC is still in its initial stages one cannot expect quick results. However, within the existing constraints it has made some progress in regional co-operation. Its Visa Exemption Endorsement Facility is worth mentioning. Under this facility, with a view to promote people-to-people contact, visa exemption has been provided to Supreme Court Judges, members of National Parliaments, heads of national academic institutions, their spouses and dependent children from 1 March 1992. This facility allows them visa-free travel within the SAARC region.

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## 18.6 ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC CONFERENCE

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The Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) was established in May 1971, following a summit meeting of Muslim Heads of State at Rabat (Morocco), in September 1969 and the Islamic Foreign Minister's Conference in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) in March 1970 and in Karachi (Pakistan) in December 1970.

At present OIC has 45 members: Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Benin, Brunei, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Comoros, Djibuti, Egypt, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

### 18.6.1 Aims and Objectives

The Regional Organizations : EU, ASEAN, APEC, SAARC, OIC and OAU

The aims of OIC, as set out in the Charter adopted in 1972 are :

- 1) To promote Islamic solidarity among member-States ;
- 2) To consolidate co-operation among member-states in the economic, social, cultural, scientific and other vital fields, and to arrange consultations among member States belonging to international organizations; —
- 3) To endeavour to eliminate racial segregation and discrimination and to eradicate colonialism in all its forms;
- 4) To take necessary measures to support international peace and security founded on justice;
- 5) To co-ordinate all efforts for the safeguard of the Holy Places and support of the struggle of the people of Palestine and help them to regain their rights and liberate their land;
- 6) To strengthen the struggle of all Muslim people with a view to safeguarding their dignity, independence and national rights; and
7. To create suitable atmosphere for the promotion of cooperation and understanding among member States and other countries.

### 18.6.2 Organs of OIC

Over the years, the OIC has been actively working towards greater cooperation among its members in the field of economic, cultural, humanitarian and political matters. In this regard, it has launched programmes and has set-up the Islamic Reinsurance Corporation with authorised capital of US\$ 200 million. The Organization supports education of Muslim communities throughout the world, and, through the Islamic Solidarity Fund, has helped to establish Islamic Universities in Niger, Uganda and Malaysia. In the political field, however, the organization is mainly concerned with the recognition of the rights of Palestinians and the PLO. The 1981 Summit Conference called for a *Jihad* (holy war — though not necessarily in a military sense) for the liberation of Jerusalem and the Israeli-occupied territories. Also, this was to include an Islamic economic boycott of Israel. In the last 15 years it demanded, among others, for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. In fact, the Conference had asked its members not to participate in the 1980 Olympics unless the Soviet troops had withdrawn from Afghanistan. Though it is not very successful in building cooperation and consensus in political field, it is nonetheless an important international community-group.

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## 18.7 ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

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The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) is one of the multipurpose regional organizations and is the largest in terms of membership. It was established in 1963. From its original membership of 30 it has grown to include 51 States. All members are from Africa, since the OAU Charter does permit non-African States to join. Only independent and sovereign States are admitted. After getting independence in 1990 Namibia was admitted as the 51st member.

### 18.7.1 Purposes and Principles

The purposes of the OAU are the following : (i) to promote unity and solidarity of the African States; (ii) to cooperate and coordinate efforts to achieve a better life for the people of



Africa; (iii) to defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the African States; (iv) to eradicate all forms of colonialism from Africa; and (v) to promote international cooperation with due regard to the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The basic principles of OUA include; (i) peaceful settlement of disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation, or arbitration; (2) unreserved condemnation of political assassinations and subversive activities; and (3) affirmation of a policy of nonalignment with regard to all blocs.

At the inception of the OAU, Ghana led an attempt to establish a central political organization with power to formulate a common foreign policy, common planning for economic development, a common currency, and a common defence system. These suggestions, implying the surrender of national sovereignty, were unacceptable to most of the Heads of State and Government that approved the OAU Charter. The Ghanaian proposal for organic political union was rejected in favour of a loose organization with a limited functional approach to unity.

### 18.7.2 Organs or Institutions

The supreme organ of the OAU is the *Annual Assembly of the Heads of State and Government*. The agenda for the supreme organ is prepared by the Council of Ministers, which meets twice a year to supervise the general work of the organization and which is also called into emergency session to meet with any crises. The Council is charged with the responsibility of implementing the decisions of the supreme organ. A permanent *General Secretariat* carries on the continuous activities of the organization and provides necessary support for the periodic meetings of the policy making organs. The Secretariat is headed by an Administrative Secretary General, a title that underscores the limited initiative conferred upon the officer. Five functional specialized Commissions and a Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration complete the organizational structure of the OAU.

### 18.7.3 Role and Activities

The OAU does not have an impressive record of resolving regional political, economic or refugee problems. During the last 30 years it has witnessed, most often helplessly, many crises that have sometimes threatened its disintegration. Many African States have experienced civil wars and guerilla fighting. The UN-imposed sanctions against racist South African government or the earlier white-dominated regime in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), were often at the behest of the OAU organs pressures for effective UN action. But when it came to the actual implementation of UN resolution, the individual African States have often violated UN resolutions imposing trade embargo by continuing to have trade links with South Africa apartheid regime. However, the OAU has some accomplishments in political, economic and social matters. *First*, in 1965, in the area of economic and social cooperation, the OAU and the UN Economic Commission for Africa signed an agreement for mutual cooperation on a continuing basis to facilitate economic and social development in Africa. *Second*, in 1981, it adopted the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, which entered into force in 1986. OAU is the third regional organization (besides the Council of Europe and OAS) to have a regional human rights and mechanism to implement it.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note : i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the answers given at the end of the unit.

1) List the eight main purposes of the SAARC.

- 2) Why OAU is not a very successful organization?

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## 18.8 LET US SUM UP

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This Unit has begun with the discussion of the rationale of regional organization. It surveyed six kinds of major regional institutions, each of which have had different reasons for its creation. Thus we learnt that different reasons or factors, such as the homogeneity of interests, traditions, and values within small groups of neighbouring States, prompted their establishment. Moreover, it shows that political, economic and social integration is more easily attainable among a lesser number of States within a limited geographic area than on a global basis.

Also, this Unit has enabled us to examine some of the major accomplishments and shortcomings of these regional associations.

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## 18.9 KEY WORDS

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- Regional Integration :** The process whereby a group of nations or other political units shift loyalties from a national setting to a larger regional entity.
- Free Trade Areas :** An area where goods and products can move without tariff or custom duties.
- Common Market :** A customs union where labour and capital can move freely within the area characterised by product and factor integration.
- Apartheid :** The official policy of racial discrimination practised in South Africa till the white-minority government, which was in power for the last 50 years, was replaced by the first democratically elected non-racist government headed by Nelson Mandela in May 1994.

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## 18.10 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

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Bennett, A LeRoy, (1988) *International Organization — Principles and Issues*. 4th edn. (Eaglewood Cliffs, N.J.: Practice-Hall International).

Borchardt, Klaus-Dieter, (1995) *European Integration — The Origins and Growth of the European Union* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities).

Elazer, Daniel J. (ed.), (1994) *Federal Systems of the World — A Handbook of Federal, Confederal and Autonomy Arrangements*, 2nd edn. (London: Longman).

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## 18.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 18.1
2.
  - (a) It entered into force in November 1993
  - (b) It seeks to establish common an single currency in Europe
  - (c) A envisages European or Union Citizenship
3. See the first three aims in Section 18.3.1.
  - (a) to accelerate economic growth & development
  - (b) to promote peace and stability.
  - (c) to promote collaboration and assestance for mutual development of member states

### Check Your Progress 2

1. See Section 18.5.1 of this Unit.
2. See Section 18.7.3 of this Unit.