The African Union (AU) is a regional organization that aims to strengthen continental solidarity, territorial integrity and sovereignty, and development. The AU officially began in 2002, emerging out of what had been the Organization of African Unity (OAU). It has 53 member states, comprising all of Africa's continental and island independent states except Morocco and including the nonindependent Sahrawi Arab Republic (Western Sahara). The AU is particularly pertinent to political geographers as an example of the 21st-century phenomenon of growing significance for supranational and international organizations amid contemporary globalization.

In 1999, the OAU decided to relaunch itself, but it took three more years to officially become the AU. The AU can be distinguished from its predecessor mostly through its commitment to invoking African unity to further the development interests of member states. The AU forth-rightly prioritizes economic development through integration of economic policies and solidarity on global trade issues. Four of its eight “portfolios” are directly related to economic development (Economic Affairs, Rural Economy and Agriculture, Trade and Industry, and Infrastructure and Energy). Fostering the idea of a smaller group of member countries’ leaders for a New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has been chief among the AU's achievements, following the 2001 adoption of NEPAD as an AU program. The AU seeks to implement NEPAD's economic agenda for what is characterized as African solutions to African problems.

The AU has retained the strategic agenda of the OAU, with portfolios dedicated to Political Affairs and Peace & Security. The AU supports NEPAD's peer review mechanism, an institutionalized means for strengthening democracy and governance on the continent. Another key area of operation is peacekeeping—notably, in the AU's early years, in Sudan's Darfur region. In both peer review and peacekeeping, the AU strongly advocates for pan-Africanism, but with a practical orientation. In 2008, the introduction to its Web site contained the key pan-Africanist phrase “Africa Must Unite,” but with this caption: “An Efficient and Effective African Union for a New Africa.” The AU also operates in social and cultural spheres, but its role in these areas is muted in comparison with its political and economic priorities.

The AU has many supporters but also a wide array of critics. One common vein of criticism is that the AU remains captive to development policies imposed from the Global North. Critics from the Global North in turn often cite the failure of the AU to condemn violations of its own standards for human rights and social justice in non-democratic member states. Others have seen its peacekeeping operations in Darfur as inadequate. Although its record thus far is mixed, the AU can legitimately claim to have improved on the OAU's performance in both the political and the economic spheres.

See also

https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/african_union
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