e-ISSN **3041-2498**

Public Management and Policy

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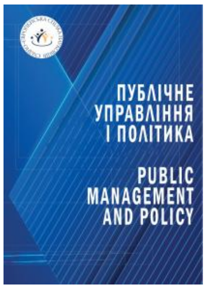

Comparative Analysis of the Effectiveness of Regional International Organizations: Cases of the European and African Unions

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ARTICLE INFO

Research Article

DOI: **10.70651/3041-2498/2025.4.08**

ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of regional international organizations with the example of the European Union and the African Union. The overall goal of the study is to deepen the scientific understanding of regional integration processes and provide practical recommendations for reforming international organizations that can be applied not only to the African Union but also to other regional associations. Based on the defined criteria – clarity and achievability of goals, institutional capacity and resources, decision-making mechanisms, economic integration, and development of social standards and human rights – a comparative study of the effectiveness of both associations is carried out. It is proven that the European Union is an example of successful regional integration due to the existence of strategic framework documents with quantitative benchmarks, a developed system of supranational institutions, a strong financial base, and effective decision-making procedures. At the same time, the African Union faces systemic challenges that limit its effectiveness: unclear goals, dependence on external financing, fragmented institutional structure, and lack of effective sanctions mechanisms. Based on the analysis, the author offers specific recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the African Union, including reform of strategic planning, strengthening financial autonomy, improving decision-making processes, and modernizing human rights mechanisms. The novelty of the study lies in the combination of comparative analysis, empirical basis and innovative recommendations, which makes it a significant contribution to the science of international relations and regional integration. The results of the study can be used to deepen the scientific understanding of regional integration processes and develop practical strategies for reforming international organizations.

KEYWORDS

international organizations, efficiency, European Union, African Union, regional integration.

e-ISSN 3041-2498

Публічне управління і політика

https://www.eu-scientists.com/index.php/pmap

Порівняльний аналіз ефективності регіональних міжнародних організацій: кейси Європейського та Африканського Союзів

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СТАТТЯ

Дослідницька

DOI: 10.70651/3041-2498/2025.4.08

АНОТАЦІЯ

Стаття присвячена комплексному аналізу ефективності функціонування регіональних міжнародних організацій на прикладі Європейського Союзу та Африканського Союзу. Загальна мета дослідження спрямована на поглиблення наукового розуміння процесів регіональної інтеграції та надання практичних рекомендацій для реформування міжнародних організацій, що можуть бути застосовані не лише до Африканського Союзу, але й до інших регіональних об'єднань. На основі визначених критеріїв – чіткість і досяжність цілей, інституційна спроможність і ресурси, механізми ухвалення рішень, економічна інтеграція та розвиток соціальних стандартів і прав людини – здійснено порівняльне дослідження результативності обох об'єднань. Доведено, що Європейський союз є прикладом успішної регіональної інтеграції завдяки наявності стратегічних рамкових документів із кількісними орієнтирами, розвинутій системі наднаціональних інституцій, потужній фінансовій базі та ефективним процедурам ухвалення рішень. Водночас Африканський Союз стикається із системними викликами, що обмежують його результативність: нечіткі цілі, залежність від зовнішнього фінансування, фрагментованість інституційної структури та відсутність дієвих санкційних механізмів. На основі проведеного аналізу запропоновані конкретні рекомендації щодо підвищення ефективності діяльності Африканського Союзу, включаючи реформу стратегічного планування, посилення фінансової автономії, удосконалення процесів ухвалення рішень і модернізацію механізмів захисту прав людини. Новизна дослідження полягає у поєднанні порівняльного аналізу, емпіричної бази та інноваційних рекомендацій, що робить його значним внеском у науку про міжнародні відносини та регіональну інтеграцію. Результати дослідження можуть бути використані для поглиблення наукового розуміння процесів регіональної інтеграції та розробки практичних стратегій реформування міжнародних організацій.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

міжнародні організації, ефективність, Європейський Союз, Африканський Союз, регіональна інтеграція.

1. Introduction

The article is devoted to a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of regional international organizations using the example of the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU). Based on the specified criteria – clarity and attainability of goals, institutional capacity and resources, decision-making mechanisms, economic integration, and development of social standards and human rights – a comparative study of the effectiveness of both associations is carried out. It is proven that the EU is an example of successful regional integration due to the presence of strategic framework documents with quantitative benchmarks, a developed system of supranational institutions, a strong financial base, and effective decision-making procedures. At the same time, the African Union faces systemic challenges that limit its effectiveness: unclear goals, dependence on external financing, fragmentation of the institutional structure, and the absence of effective sanction mechanisms. Based on the analysis, specific recommendations are proposed to improve the effectiveness of the AU, including strategic planning reform, strengthening financial autonomy, improving decision-making processes, and modernizing human rights protection mechanisms. The results of the study can be used to deepen scientific understanding of regional integration processes and develop practical strategies for reforming international organizations.

2. Literature Review

The research used a variety of sources to provide a comprehensive approach to the analysis of the effectiveness of international organizations. The basis for assessing the European Union's activities was the European Commission's strategic documents, such as the Europe 2020 program [1] and the European Green Deal initiative [3], which contain quantifiable goals and success criteria. These documents not only defined the main priorities of the Union for the medium and long term but also became the basis for shaping the policy of economic development, energy transformation, and social integration. Particular attention was paid to the analysis of the assessments of the implementation of Europe 2020 in the CEPS study [2], as well as Eurostat statistical data, which allow objective tracking of the implementation of the tasks set.

The official analytical materials of the European Commission on the functioning of the Single Market [12] and the Customs Union were the source of detailed information on economic integration and the EU market. Statistical reviews, in particular the "9th Cohesion Report" [14], have provided important data on the impact of cohesion policy on the economic development of the regions of the European Union.

Regarding the institutional structure of the EU and decision-making processes, information on qualified majority in the Council of the EU [11] and reviews of the functioning of the European Commission [6] were used, which allowed for analysis of the internal mechanisms of policy formation and the role of supranational bodies in ensuring efficiency.

As for the analysis of the African Union, the main reference was the documents "Agenda 2063" [21] and its first Ten-Year Implementation Program [22], which contain strategic goals for the development of the continent. A review of official materials of the African Union on the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) [23]; [24], as well as statistical reports of Afreximbank and STATAFRIC [32]; [35] allowed to assess the real results of integration processes in Africa.

An important source of analysis of the financing problems and institutional capacity of the African Union has been studies devoted to assessing the AU's ability to finance its own peace and security operations [26]; [27]. Particular attention has been paid to the analysis of human rights protection mechanisms through a review of the functioning of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights [36], as well as the decisions of the African Court of Human Rights, in particular the cases of SERAC v. Nigeria [37] and Endorois v. Kenya [38].

Thus, the sources used cover both the regulatory framework and the results of empirical research and statistical analyses, which provided a solid basis for conducting an objective and systematic study of the effectiveness of the European and African Unions.

3. Problem Statement

In the modern multipolar world, regional international associations play a very important role in ensuring economic unity, political stability, and common security. Two associations that demonstrate fundamentally different effectiveness are the European Union and the African Union. The tasks of independent work are:

1. Conducting an assessment of the European Union as the most successful regional organization from the standpoint of efficiency criteria: from the degree of implementation of strategic goals to practical cases in the spheres of economy, security, and social development;
2. Conducting an analysis of the African Union as the organization with the least efficiency, identifying its main shortcomings, shortcomings of decision-making mechanisms, and factors that cause the AU to be less effective in resolving crises and stimulating integration processes;
3. Providing recommendations for increasing the efficiency of the African Union.

Criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of international organizations:

- clarity and attainability of goals;
- institutional capacity and resources;
- decision-making mechanisms;
- economic integration and development;
- social standards and human rights.

4. Methods and Materials

In the process of preparing the study, a set of methodological approaches was used, which made it possible to provide a comprehensive and structured analysis of the effectiveness of international organizations using the example of the European Union and the African Union. The methodology was based on comparative analysis, which made it possible to compare the activities of the two organizations according to a system of clearly defined criteria: clarity and attainability of goals, institutional capacity and resource base, decision-making mechanisms, the level of economic integration, as well as compliance with social standards and human rights. The comparative approach was necessary to identify differences in the structural features, effectiveness of policies, and institutional dynamics of the EU and the AU.

An important role in the study was played by institutional and functional analysis, which made it possible to identify how the structure of the governing bodies of both organizations is built, how their powers are delimited, and how this affects the effectiveness of decision-making and implementation. The analysis of the organizational mechanisms, procedures, financial instruments, and policies of the EU and the AU made it possible to find out why one organization achieves significant results, while the other faces chronic problems in implementing its own goals.

In addition, the method of critical document analysis was used in the work. It consisted in the study and interpretation of primary and secondary sources, in particular, strategic documents ("Europe 2020", "European Green Deal", "NextGenerationEU", "Agenda 2063", AfCFTA Protocols and others), official reports (in particular, reports of the European Commission, Eurostat, African Union), international agreements, court decisions and publications of think tanks. This made it possible to assess not only the declared goals, but also the real results of their implementation.

To better understand the dynamics of changes in the activities of organizations, the historical-genetic method was also used. It made it possible to trace the evolution of the European Union – from the European Coal and Steel Community to a modern political community – and the African Union – from the Organization of African Unity to a continental structure with ambitious integration programs. Thanks to this method, it was revealed how historical conditions shaped the modern institutional capacity of both organizations.

It is worth noting the use of quantitative analysis. The work widely involved statistical data on macroeconomic indicators (for example, GDP growth, employment rate, share of renewable energy sources, trade indicators within the AfCFTA), the degree of implementation of strategic plans and programs. Analysis of these data made it possible to objectively assess the extent to which the goals set correlate with the results achieved.

At the same time, an important component of the study was the prognostic approach, which was manifested in the formulation of recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the African Union.

Based on existing trends, an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the AU, and EU best practices, the paper proposed directions for reforms aimed at eliminating structural shortcomings and strengthening the African organization's ability to act as a full-fledged integration mechanism.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. The European Union as the Most Successful International Organization

For more than six decades, the European Union has been demonstrating how economic and political unification can transform countries: after the Second World War, it has grown into a powerful player with its currency, a borderless internal market, and supranational institutions. Thanks to clear goals and a clear division of powers, the EU has learned to react quickly to various crises. Its ability to implement uniform rules for all 27 member states, coordinate joint investment programs, and build joint projects makes it an example of an effective international organization. That is why I choose the European Union as the most successful model of regional integration and cooperation.

1. Clarity and Achievability of Goals

One of the first major initiatives was the Europe 2020 strategy, adopted in 2010 as an action plan for the end of the decade with five clear, quantifiable targets: to increase the employment rate to 75% (69% in 2010), to invest 3% of GDP in research and innovation, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20%, to ensure a 20% share of renewable energy sources and to reduce the rate of early school leaving to 10%. According to Eurostat statistics, progress can be traced up to 2019 – employment increased to 73.2%, investment in research and development (R&D) to 2.2% of GDP, emissions decreased by 24%, and the share of renewable energy sources exceeded 20% [1]; [2]. It is worth mentioning the introduction of the "European Green Deal", consisting of policy initiatives that set the EU on a green transition path with the ultimate goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. Importantly, interim targets were set, including a 50–55% reduction in emissions by 2030, 32% renewables, and increased energy efficiency [3]. The results of the strategy's implementation are quite optimistic: according to an assessment by Ember, the share of wind and solar in electricity generation increased significantly in 2020–2024, and member states jointly launched "Fit for 55", which extended the scope of the Emissions Trading System (ETS) to transport and buildings [4]. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic has further confirmed the EU's ability to quickly adapt strategies to new challenges. In 2020, the EU adopted the NextGenerationEU, a commission that was introduced as a temporary recovery plan (€390 billion in grants and €360 billion in loans through the Recovery and Resilience Facility). Each member state developed its own National Recovery and Resilience Plan with clear milestones. Spain, Italy, and France have reported significant GDP growth and unemployment reductions, demonstrating that clear targets combined with financial incentives are working. A key element of the EU's success is its monitoring and reporting system [5]. Eurostat maintains monthly and annual online tables where each indicator is compared with the baseline. Each year, the commission issues detailed reports – Country Reports – analyzing who is not meeting the targets and how, and providing guidance on adjustments.

2. Institutional Capacity and Resources

At the heart of integration is the European Commission, the executive body responsible for the legislative process, budget management, and enforcement of European law. At the beginning of 2023, the Commission had around 32,262 staff: a mix of permanent officials, temporary agents, contract staff, and national experts, providing both political and technical support to all 27 Commissioners and their Directorates-General [6]. In addition, a growing number of different executive agencies operate within the EU (European Medicines Agency (EMA), Eurostat, European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), etc.). Each such agency develops a narrowly focused expertise and has its budget and staff. Based on a multi-annual model, the European Union spends around 1.0–1.1% of its GDP per year. The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF 2021–2027) set a budget of €1.211 trillion, and the NextGenerationEU was added, making the EU the first supranational borrower on global markets [7]. Such financial autonomy allows not only to implement common policies (from the Green Deal to the digital transformation), but also to quickly mobilize resources in crises, as happened during the COVID19 pandemic. A key element of institutional capacity is the European External Action Service (EEAS), which brings together diplomatic representatives in more than 140 delegations around the world and coordinates the EU's foreign policy course [8]. An extremely important component is the European Semester system – an annual cycle of coordination of budgetary and reform plans. Member States submit "Programmes on Stability or Convergence" and "National Reform Programmes", and the

Commission puts forward CountrySpecific Recommendations [9]; [10]. In conclusion, the EU has a unique institutional capacity thanks to the combination of effective supranational bodies (Commission, European Parliament, Court of Justice), an extensive network of executive agencies and delegations, which allows it to cover almost all policy areas.

3. Decision-Making Mechanisms

In the European Union, decision-making is built on a combination of three main elements:

- The European Commission which has the right to propose new laws. Projects are developed by the Directorates-General, agreed by the College of Commissioners, and only then submitted to the Council and Parliament. Such centralization provides a single "entry point" for new policies;
- Then the ordinary legislative procedure works – the European Parliament and the Council of the EU discuss this project together. They exchange proposals and make amendments until they reach a common agreement.
- In most cases, the Council approves the final version not unanimously, but by the so-called qualified majority, when 55% of the countries (in practice 15 out of 27) vote "in favor", which makes up at least 65% of the population of the Union.

This allows decisions to be made even without the full consent of all 27 countries. A blocking minority requires at least four countries representing more than 35% of the population. If at least three countries refuse, but together do not constitute a blocking minority, the decision is also adopted. In cases where the Council does not vote on the proposal of the Commission or the High Representative, a "reinforced qualified majority" (72% of countries, 65% of the population) applies [11]. Therefore, the EU decision-making system, based on a qualified majority and a "trilogue" between the three institutions, allows for quick and legitimate resolution of complex issues of most policies, avoiding the veto that paralyzes other international organizations.

4. Economic Integration and Development

The EU is seen as a unique project of economic integration (primarily the EU originated based on economic integration within the framework of the ECSC between France and Germany in the 1950s), based on four "freedoms" – the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people. In 1993, the Single Market was created, which significantly reduced internal barriers. According to the European Commission, in the period 1992–2017 alone, the share of trade between member states increased by 9%, and the EU's gross domestic product (GDP) gained an additional 2–3% each year due to the effect of scale. The Customs Union operates simultaneously with the Single Market, which abolished internal customs duties and established a single external customs duty. The financial "cushion" of integration was the Monetary Union with the single currency, the euro, and the European Central Banking System. At the same time, to smooth out the differences in the development of regions, the Cohesion Policy has been introduced, which for the period 2021–2027 provides a budget of €392 billion to support lagging regions, create jobs, and strengthen the competitiveness of local enterprises [13]. According to the 9th Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion (2024), in recent years, EU investments have led to GDP growth in less developed regions by 1.5–2% and significantly reduced youth unemployment [14]. Another important step is the formation of the Capital Markets Union, which aimed to facilitate access to long-term financing for small and medium-sized enterprises, and the external dimension of integration is implemented through the Global Gateway and numerous trade agreements. The EU currently has agreements in place or provisionally applied with over 80 countries and regions, including the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) for 72 countries and free trade agreements with 54 partners. An example of such external deepening is the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with Ukraine [15]; [16].

5. Social Standards and Human Rights

The European Union is built on clearly formulated social standards and human rights guarantees, enshrined in the founding treaties and legal acts. Firstly, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights has the same legal value as the treaties and covers a wide range of rights: freedoms, equality, solidarity, civil liberties, and justice. It protects the rights to freedom of thought, religion, expression, and non-discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, belief, gender identity, disability, age, or sexual orientation [17]. In 2017, the EU agreed on the European Pillar of Social Rights, a declaration of 20 principles aimed at ensuring equal opportunities, fair working conditions, and social protection. This initiative is also complemented by the Social Scoreboard, which annually measures employment, poverty, and living standards in member states, allowing progress to be tracked and "hot spots" in social policy to be identified [18]. Directives are used to implement social policy. For example, the Work-life Balance

Directive 2019/1158 introduced a minimum of 10 working days of paid parental leave, 5 days of career leave, and the right to flexible working hours for parents and carers, protecting them from unfair dismissal when exercising these rights [19]. The financial backbone of the EU's social policy is the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the main instrument for investing in people. For the period 2021–2027, the ESF+ has a budget of €142.7 billion for projects aimed at increasing employment, social inclusion, training, and skills [20]. In summary, the European Union is the most successful model of regional integration thanks to a clear combination of defined quantitative targets and a monitoring system that ensures transparency and accountability of all 27 Member States. Supranational institutions and a common euro budget allow for swift decision-making without endless vetoes, while a borderless internal market and cohesion policy support economic growth and reduce regional disparities. Finally, high social standards – from human rights protection to paid holidays – make life safer and fairer for people in the EU.

5.2. The African Union as the Least Successful International Organization

The African Union was established in 2002 based on the Organization of African Unity to deepen political and economic integration, as well as for the development of the continent. However, it has faced some structural and functional limitations. Although the organization has formally ambitious goals, the AU does not demonstrate noticeable results due to limited financial resources, weak executive power, and the recommendatory nature of its decisions, which makes it one of the least effective international organizations today.

1. Clarity and Attainability of Goals

The African Union has formalized its key goals in the strategic framework of Agenda 2063, announced as "a blueprint for the continent's development for the next 50 years", but in practice, they remain too broad and weightless, as clear quantitative indicators for intermediate stages and clear deadlines are almost absent. Although the Document states the overall objective of "charting Africa's development trajectory," the specification of roles, responsibilities, and time frames for member states is only partially implemented, creating a syndrome of "constant new ideas without tangible achievements" [21]. The lack of a single mechanism for monitoring and evaluating progress, even within the first Ten-Year Implementation Program, has led to parallel processes with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and duplication of reporting, rather than some clarity and coherence [22]. The list of 15 projects – from high-speed rail to a continental space agency – looks impressive on paper, but most initiatives have yet to move beyond the planning stage, demonstrating a lack of realism and the resource base to implement them. Even the priority African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), launched as a pilot in January 2021, is experiencing persistent delays in the final implementation of tariff schedules and optional free movement provisions, despite active signatures and ratifications by most countries, which de facto illustrates the discrepancy between ambition and real steps with the established deadlines [23]. The level of political will is also confirmed by the free movement protocol, signed by 32 states but ratified by only four, indicating a weak commitment to agreed continental goals [24].

2. Institutional Capacity and Resources

The African Union (AU) remains institutionally and resource-poor, which undermines its ability to carry out its mandate. The executive body is the AU Commission, which has approximately 1,500 staff and operates with a budget of $647.3 million for 2024, a meager sum to serve the 55 countries of the continent with a population of over a billion and numerous crisis zones [25]. Moreover, almost 98% of the program and 99% of peace and security expenditures are funded by international partners, not member states, which has resulted in the AU losing its strategic autonomy and being unable to independently determine the priorities and scope of operations without donor approval [26]. Despite the decision in 2016 to introduce a 0.2% import levy on imports from third countries with a projected revenue of $1.2 billion to establish a Peace and Security Fund, key provisions of this mechanism have not yet been implemented, and serious cash gaps have led to delays in the launch of important missions (such as AFISMA in Mali) and the disruption of financing of "hot" projects within the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) [26]; [27]. Due to the lack of its resources, the AU is forced to delegate the management of many operations to regional organizations and international missions, effectively acting as an "observer" instead of leading continental initiatives and ensuring their sustained support. Even more telling is the situation with the African Standing Force (ASF), which has never reached operational capacity due to insufficient funding and lack of coordination across regions. For example, the AMISOM mission in Somalia, with 22,000 troops, requires approximately $900 million annually, and the funds come exclusively from the EU, the UN, and individual donor countries, while the AU's contribution remains symbolic.

3. Decision-Making Mechanisms

The African Union formally entrusts the adoption of fundamentally important decisions to the highest body, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, which, according to the Statute, can vote only by consensus or, in its absence, by a two-thirds majority of the votes of the Member States, and the procedures for determining whether a question is procedural are decided by a simple majority [28]. However, in reality, practice shows that the search for consensus turns into endless bargaining, as a result of which decisions are taken for months and lose their relevance in crises. In addition, the powers of the summit are duplicated by decisions of the Executive Council and the Peace and Security Council, and various technical issues are considered by the Committee of Permanent Representatives – each body uses its procedures, which creates fragmentation and incoherence that paralyzes a rapid response even within the framework of the same policy [29]. This fragmented structure shows its unwillingness to act in a coordinated manner: for example, during a series of coups d'état in 2021–2023, the Peace and Security Council's decisions to immediately suspend Mali and Sudan from all AU bodies were adopted only a few weeks after the events [30]. Therefore, the lack of a single, universally binding decision-making process, insufficient delegation of authority, combined with diffused accountability, make the AU's decision-making mechanisms too slow, opaque, and ineffective in the face of urgent challenges.

4. Economic Integration and Development

The African Union has laid the foundation for economic integration through the strategic documents Agenda 2063 (see paragraph 1) and the creation of NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) as an executive development agency, but their institutional structure and financial base have proven too weak to implement ambitious plans. NEPAD is financed by the AU Commission, contributions from member states and donor grants, but due to the lack of a transparent mechanism for resource allocation and weak support, none of the numerous projects has reached the proper stage of implementation [31]. Particular attention was paid to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which was supposed to increase the share of intra-continental trade to 50% by 2023. However, in practice, trade between African countries fluctuates between 15–18%, and although in 2023, according to Afreximbank, its total volume increased by 3.2% to $192.2 billion, this dynamic remains insufficient to achieve the goals of the agreement [32]; [33]. Basic protocols on tariff liberalization and coverage of services have been implemented only in some states, which further complicates the creation of a full-fledged internal market; a large number of non-tariff barriers, a low level of logistics and digital infrastructure hamper trade even within countries with ratified tariff reduction schedules [34]; [35]. In addition, economic integration suffers from excessive fragmentation: the African Union recognizes eight regional economic communities, each of which has its trade regimes and safeguard mechanisms. As a result, membership overlaps and conflicting rules between such regional associations and the AfCFTA create legal uncertainty. The lack of a single authority to coordinate these communities and agree on priorities creates a "broken telephone" effect between the continental and regional levels, which leads to delays in making key economic decisions.

5. Social Standards and Human Rights

The African Union has formalized a mechanism for the protection of social standards and human rights through the African Charter on the Rights and Freedoms of Peoples (Banjul Charter), adopted on 1 June 1981, as well as through some protocols (the African Court on Human Rights (1998) and the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol, 2003) [36]. However, the actual level of implementation of these norms remains low, since the Charter and its annexes are consensual and do not provide for effective sanction mechanisms in the event of failure by participating States to implement the decisions adopted. In 1987, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) (generally a quasi-judicial body) was established, which can only recommend to member States to bring national legislation into line with the Geneva norms of the Charter, but has no power to enforce its conclusions. Monitoring procedures are mentioned and it is stated that ions should be regulated, but clear reporting deadlines for states and control mechanisms are not prescribed, and the budget and staff of the commission remain limited, which undermines its ability to even receive and process citizens' appeals. A typical case is the case of SERAC v. Nigeria, in which the Commission in 2001 found that Nigeria had violated some articles of the Charter (the right to health, environment, property and social development), but to this day neither promises nor reforms have been implemented, and the people's rights to a clean environment and material compensation have remained declarative [37]. Even worse is the case of Endorois v. Kenya: No radical progress has been made even 20 years after the Commission's decision, which ordered Kenya to return the community their traditional lands and pay compensation: of the seven recommendations, only the formal registration of the Endorois Welfare Council has been fully implemented, all others – access to the lake, economic benefits, real land restitution – remain on paper [38]. Another important instrument is the African Court of Human Rights, established by the 1998 protocol and launched in 2004 as an addition to the Commission. However, as of 2024, only 34 states have ratified this protocol. In addition, the processing of cases remains slow, the court's budget and staffing are too small to meet the demands of the population, and decisions are often ignored by national governments [39]. The Maputo Protocol, which was supposed to be a breakthrough in the field of women's rights (the right to decent marriage, combating violence, access to inheritance, etc.), is due to enter into force at the end of June 2023. ratified by 44 out of 55 member states, but with a large number of reservations: 15 countries signed but did not ratify, and even among those that ratified, many made amendments to key provisions (for example, on the age of marriage) [40].

Due to the lack of resources and a clear enforcement mechanism for the implementation of decisions, these institutions remain more symbolic to maintain the image of the AU than a real safeguard against rights violations. Without a radical increase in funding, a clearer reporting system, and, most importantly, the political will of member states, even the most convincing or progressive documents will remain a mere formality.

Recommendations

To increase the effectiveness of the African Union, it is advisable to carry out a comprehensive transformation of key strategic approaches. First of all, it is necessary to review the strategic planning process, ensuring the reform of the Agenda 2063 document by the principles of SMART planning, with the definition of clear, measurable indicators, the establishment of intermediate stages of implementation, and specific deadlines. It is also advisable to create a single mechanism for monitoring and assessing progress, integrated with the UN reporting system, which will avoid duplication of procedures and increase transparency in the implementation of strategic goals. A critical element of the reform should be to strengthen the organization's financial autonomy. In particular, the implementation of the government initiative to introduce a 0.2% import levy, launched in 2016, should be intensified, and the funds received should be directed not only to financing the Peace and Security Fund, but also to supporting the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and social initiatives. In parallel, it is necessary to introduce mandatory minimum contributions from member states to the general budget of the AU Commission, as well as to attract additional resources with the participation of the private sector under the coordination of the African Investment Bank. Given the low efficiency of decision-making, it is advisable to streamline the institutional mechanisms of the African Union. In particular, it is proposed to abandon the principle of consensus in resolving fewer sensitive issues (economic, infrastructure) in favor of the qualified majority procedure. It is also necessary to unify the rules of procedure of the Assembly, the Executive Council, and the Peace and Security Council to ensure greater coordination and consistency of decision-making processes.

In the field of economic integration, it is recommended to accelerate the implementation of the AfCFTA by simplifying the procedures for ratifying agreements, establishing mandatory time frames for the removal of customs and non-tariff barriers, as well as agreeing on uniform rules for determining the origin of goods within the eight regional economic communities. To coordinate integration processes, it is advisable to create a permanent coordination committee with the participation of representatives of all regional associations under the auspices of the African Union Commission.

The reform of the human rights protection system requires special attention. To increase its effectiveness, it is advisable to grant the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights powers that are mandatory for member states to implement, as well as to provide for sanction mechanisms for failure to implement adopted decisions. It is recommended to significantly increase the budget of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, expand the mechanisms for individual appeals by citizens to the court (currently this possibility is provided in only eight states) and introduce a system of permanent monitoring missions under the auspices of the UN to promptly respond to human rights violations.

An alternative approach to the development of the African Union could be the concept of "gradual integration", which involves the formation of vanguard groups of member states ("first-speed clubs") with deeper economic and political integration, clear obligations, and defined financial contributions. Other states could join such unions in stages after achieving established benchmarks (KPIs). The application of such an approach would accelerate the process of regional integration, ensure visible results and increase confidence in the African Union at the continental level.

6. Conclusions

The study conducted provided a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of two regional international organizations – the European Union and the African Union – based on some clearly formulated criteria: clarity of strategic goals, institutional capacity, decision-making processes, level of economic integration, and protection of social standards and human rights. The European Union has confirmed its role as the most successful model of regional integration. Its strategic planning is based on clearly measurable goals and effective monitoring mechanisms; supranational institutions ensure prompt decision-making, and a multi-level financial system allows for the implementation of large-scale development programs and response to global challenges. A high level of economic integration, the functioning of the single market, and the consistent implementation of social policy and human rights standards are key factors in the EU's success. In contrast, the African Union's activities demonstrate low effectiveness, which is due to some systemic problems: excessive generality of strategic goals without proper detailing, weak institutional and financial capacity, fragmentation of decision-making mechanisms, as well as limited effectiveness in the field of economic integration and human rights protection. Dependence on external financing and the absence of mandatory decision-making mechanisms significantly complicate the achievement of the set goals. The study formulated some recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the African Union, in particular, the need to revise strategic planning according to the SMART principles, strengthen financial autonomy, improve decision-making procedures, and reform the human rights protection system. It was also proposed to consider the "gradual integration" model as an alternative approach to gradually deepening regional cooperation. In general, the results of the study confirm the importance of a comprehensive approach to the assessment of international organizations, which takes into account both the formal aspects of the institutional architecture and the real practices of implementing goals and programs. The conclusions obtained have the potential for further use in scientific research and practical recommendations for reforming regional integration associations.

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