

1 What is an International system?

2 If there is no International system, the different countries act for their own sake without taking into account the other nations, without having anything in common.

3 This triggers only tensions and conflict among the nations.

4 An International system is a whole of countries that share common values, observe common rules and adopt common practices.

5 Europe in the International System: What has been the place of Europe in the international system from the Middle Ages to today?

6 During the Middle Ages, Christianity gave a unity to the European countries: it gave a feeling of community, especially in opposition to Muslims as shows in the eleventh century the first call for the crusades.

7 But during the sixteenth century, the dream of Christian unity disappeared with the Reformation. European countries were divided by the wars of religion.

8 The seventeenth century was a turning point in the European system. After the conflict of the Thirty Years' war, the Congress of Westphalia marked the birth of an interstate system based on the balance of power: states are considered as equal in law. The states seek to make this balance respected.

9 But during the second half of the seventeenth century, Louis the fourteenth led a policy of conquest which challenged this balance of power. To prevent this, numerous coalitions opposing France were organised. The Peace of Utrecht re-established the balance of power as the condition to secure peace in Europe.

10 During the eighteenth century, the international system changed of scale. France and Great Britain became rival at a world level with expanding colonies and commercial competition. They fought each other overseas during the Seven Years' War.

11 The Treaty of Paris resolved the disputes. It established diplomatic practices with shared references and values.

12 However the French Revolution challenged this International system.

The National Constituent Assembly made a "declaration of peace to the world" which respected the equality among nations and the principle of balance of power.

13 France established itself as a model and put an end to the balance of power to expand its borders and spread the ideal of liberty.

14 The Napoleonic "Great Empire" united half of Europe's inhabitants under the authority of a single country. But the other states became allied to resist.

15 The French defeat at Waterloo opened the way for the Congress of Vienna establishing a new balance of power to protect the continent's stability and prosperity during the 19th century. Its inability to evolve explained the first world war.

16 The system established by the League of Nations kept this Eurocentric representation at a world scale to establish a collective security. Its structure was dominated by Europe and it didn't challenge the colonial empires. Europe was still considered as the centre of the International system.

17 This Eurocentric representation ended with the Cold War. Europe was dominated by two foreign superpowers and was divided between the 2 blocks as shown with the partition of Germany and of Berlin.

18 The construction of the European community had begun in the 1950s. The end of the Cold war gave birth to the dream of a unified Europe sharing common values at the continental scale. The Maastricht Treaty gave the frame to build a common policy and make the EU a major economic, commercial, financial and monetary power.

19 However the EU fails to act as a whole on the diplomatic level: it was greatly divided during the US intervention in Iraq in 2003. It is difficult for the EU to be a power in the traditional sense of the term as long as it is not a state. It hasn't got the same hard power as the United States but it is truly influential in the International system.

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