

The absence of coordination and consensus-building mechanisms within the Eastern European Group of the United Nations

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Abstract

This article explores the work of the Eastern European Group (EEG) of the United Nations (UN), which includes Latvia and other Baltic countries. The central hypothesis is that the EEG lacks essential regional group mechanisms, rendering its activities formal. It is analysed from both a legal perspective (procedural and institutional aspects) and a conceptual perspective (the functional goals of UN regional groups). The article provides a qualitative and conceptual analysis of the purposes and work of regional electoral groups within the UN and applies it to the EEG case. This research is relevant for Latvia and other EEG member countries as it offers a legal and political interpretation of how the EEG functions. Academically, the functionality of the EEG has not been explicitly addressed yet. From a practical political perspective, this study is relevant given Latvia's upcoming term as an elected UN Security Council member in 2026. This article argues that the EEG fulfils only one regional group's role (equitable geographic distribution) but lacks the mechanisms of the other two (coordination and consensus-building; and endorsement). The reasons for this are the aggressor's presence in the group, the historic aspects of EEG creation, as well as a politically highly fragmented membership.

Keywords

United Nations • Security Council • Eastern European Group • the Baltic States

INTRODUCTION

While the stipulation of equitable geographical distribution is determined by the United Nations (UN) Charter (United Nations Charter, Article 23), it does not specify how it should be achieved. Nevertheless, equitable geographical distribution plays a central role in the election of non-permanent members to the UN Security Council (UNSC). It has led to the creation of UN electoral groups that enable states to participate in often-competitive elections. To ensure fair and equitable representation of the membership in various UN bodies, five regional groups were established in the 1960s: African States, Asia-Pacific States, Eastern European States, Latin American and Caribbean States and Western European and Other States (WEOG) (U.N. Doc. A/RES/1991(XVIII)), although the names of the groups were slightly different at that time. Since the formation of these groups, numerous new nations have joined the UN, significantly affecting the size of the regional groups and resulting in disparities and increased competition for seats to be filled. Currently, the African Group and the Asia-Pacific Group are the largest, with 54 members each, while the Eastern European Group (EEG), which

includes Latvia and other Baltic countries, is the smallest, with 23 members (United Nations Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, 2025).

This article analyses the work of the EEG to outline this group's functionality and explore mechanisms for achieving its conceptual aims. The study adopts both (i) a legal perspective, covering procedural and institutional aspects of the UN regional electoral groups' formation and activities; and (ii) a conceptual perspective, which defines the practical aims and functional objectives of UN regional groups. The article's central hypothesis is that the EEG lacks essential regional group mechanisms, rendering its work formal and technical.

Methodologically, the study uses a qualitative and conceptual analysis of the purposes and work of regional electoral groups within the UN and applies the results to the EEG case. Therefore, the study provides a legal and political interpretation of how the EEG functions and fulfils its conceptual purposes, as well as explains the reasons for deficiencies.

Given the global importance of the UN and the status of the UNSC as the most influential institution in global peace

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and security, holding a very broad discreet power (Conforti, 2005: 172), this research is relevant for Latvia and other EEG members submitting their candidacies to the UNSC and other major UN bodies. The study enhances knowledge and encourages discussion in both academia and practical foreign policy. Academically, the functionality of the EEG has not yet been explicitly addressed. From a practical political standpoint, this research is especially relevant considering Latvia's upcoming term as an elected UNSC member in 2026. Since no comprehensive study has systematically examined the EEG's functionality, this research provides a new perspective and contributes to the academic debate on democratic representation at the UN.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Legal aspects of the work of UN regional groups

The UN regional groups consist of five geopolitical groups comprising UN Member States, initially established as informal mechanisms to ensure equitable distribution of positions within UN General Assembly (UNGA) committees (Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly, Rule 30). Over time, UN members have expanded their roles, and today, these regional groups serve a broader and more formalized function within the entire UN system. Many positions across UN entities, including the UNSC, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), UNGA committees and the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), are assigned based on geographic distribution principles. Major leadership roles, such as the Secretary-General and the President of the UNGA, refer to the principle of rotation among the regional groups. Furthermore, the regional groups participate in policy coordination and often adopt unified positions for negotiations. The UNSC has 15 members, with 10 elected members and five permanent members (P5 country). The principle of 'equitable geographical distribution' is specified in Article 23, Paragraph 1 of the UN Charter, which states that the UNGA must consider this principle when electing non-permanent UNSC members:

The Security Council shall consist of fifteen Members of the United Nations. The Republic of China, France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America shall be permanent members of the Security Council. The General Assembly shall elect ten other Members of the United Nations to be non-permanent members of the Security Council, due regard being specially paid, in the first instance to the contribution of Members of the United Nations to the maintenance of international

peace and security and to the other purposes of the Organization, and also to equitable geographical distribution (United Nations Charter).

The Preparatory Committee also referred to this phrase in its proposed Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly (see U.N. Doc. PC/EX/113/Rev.1) in 1945. The Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly have used the principle of 'equitable geographical distribution' since 1946 (see Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly). However, the UN Charter does not provide guidance on how to achieve it.

The lack of a clear definition has created a need to interpret the norms and develop additional procedural mechanisms through new normative frameworks. To ensure geographic balance in elections and the distribution of posts in the UNSC and other UN bodies, the UN has established a system of regional groups. Additionally, the terms 'regional groupings' and 'regional electoral groups' are commonly used. To address the issue of fair representation on the UNSC and the ECOSOC, in 1963, the UNGA adopted a resolution that not only expanded the membership of both bodies but also provided a more detailed outline for applying the principle of 'equitable geographical distribution' in electing members. This was done considering that the composition of the UNSC is 'inequitable and unbalanced', recognizing that the increase in UN membership requires 'a more adequate geographical representation' in both the ECOSOC and the group of non-permanent UNSC members:

[...] the ten non-permanent members of the Security Council shall be elected according to the following pattern:

- (a) Five from African and Asian States;
- (b) One from Eastern European States;
- (c) Two from Latin American States; and
- (d) Two from Western European and other States (U.N. Doc. A/RES/1991(XVIII), A).

[...] decides that, without prejudice to the present distribution of seats in the Economic and Social Council, the nine additional members shall be elected according to the following pattern:

- (a) Seven from African and Asian States;
- (b) One from Latin American States; and
- (c) One from Western European and other States (U.N. Doc. A/RES/1991(XVIII), B).

In 1971, the UNGA adopted a resolution that dealt with the enlargement of the ECOSOC and split the five seats allocated to African and Asian States into two distinct regional

allocations: three seats for the group of African states and two for the group of Asian states:

[...] decides that the members of the Economic and Social Council shall be elected according to the following pattern:

- (a) Fourteen members from African States;
- (b) Eleven members from Asian States;
- (c) Ten members from Latin American States;
- (d) Thirteen members from Western European and other States;
- (e) Six members from socialist States of Eastern Europe (U.N. Doc. A/RES/2847(XXVI), para. 4).

Additionally, one of these five seats is designated for an Arab country. It is unofficially known as the 'Arab swing seat', and it is filled on a rotating basis between the African and Asian groups, helping to ensure Arab representation on the UNSC. To ensure fair and equitable representation, five regional groups serve nowadays as the main framework for post distribution: African States, Asia–Pacific States, Eastern European States (EEG), Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) and Western European and other States (WEOG). Many new nations have joined the UN since their formation after decolonization and the collapse of the bipolar world order, leading to the renewal of independence of many countries that the Soviet Union formerly occupied, including Latvia. This decades-long process has significantly expanded these regional groups, making them very diverse in both size and internal dynamics. Currently, the African Group and the Asia–Pacific Group are the largest, with 54 members each; GRULAC has 33 members, WEOG has 28 members and the EEG, to which Latvia belongs, is the smallest, with only 23 members (United Nations Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, 2025). The regional groups include all UN Member States, except for Kiribati, along with the special cases of the United States of America (USA), Israel and Türkiye.

The primary purposes of the UN regional electoral groups

According to legal interpretation of UN legal acts, the UN regional groups serve several key purposes within the organization's structure and work. These groups are considered informal alliances of UN Member States based primarily on geographical and political considerations and 'principally act as electoral bodies, which take the preliminary decisions on the composition of nearly all important UN organs' (Winkelmann, 2010: 592). Based on legal analysis, they have three primary functional aims: equitable geographic distribution; coordination and consensus building; and nomination and endorsement of candidates. This scope of

functions also arises from the official interpretation of Rule 159 of the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly:

The latter groups are based entirely on the agreement of Member States and serve as a mechanism for consultation and coordination among them, particularly on matters relating to elections and candidatures, in the light of the requirement for equitable geographical balance or regional rotation and distribution in United Nations organs and bodies. The members of certain regional groups also use the groups for discussion and consultation on policy issues (Geographical groups and contributions by member states to the expenses of the organization, Articles 17 and 19 of the Charter of the United Nations, Rules 158 and 160 of the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly. Letter to the Senior Legal Adviser of the Universal Postal Union, 1996).

Firstly, looking narrowly, the initial primary purpose of UN regional groups is to serve as a functional and formal tool to uphold the principle of equitable geographic distribution enshrined in the UN Charter, as discussed before. Regional groups help ensure balanced representation of member states across various UN bodies, including the UNSC, the ECOSOC, the HRC and others. The primary significance of the UN regional electoral groups lies, therefore, in their work as 'electoral committees for appointments to seats, and to ensure the geographical distribution of the various offices' (Von Schorlemer, 1995: 75). In 1978, the UNGA adopted a resolution that amended the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly by clarifying the purpose of the regional groups and 'recognizing that the composition of the various organs of the United Nations should be so constituted as to ensure their representative character' (U.N. Doc. A/RES/33/138).

Secondly, coordination and consensus-building are essential functions of regional groups (see Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly: 129, 142–143). It is acknowledged that regional groups frequently meet to align positions, negotiate candidates for elections and build consensus on key issues among their members (U.N. Doc. A/58/47). The groups also coordinate substantive policies and establish common standings for negotiations and even bloc voting—they 'make preliminary decisions on the composition of nearly all important UN organs', notably through 'internal consultation and coordinate endorsements for Security Council seats' (De Lombaerde et al., 2023). UN regional groups are neither political alliances nor geopolitical frameworks; however, they 'fulfil some of the organizing and vote-aggregating functions played by political parties in national legislatures' (Peterson, 2008: 97) and can develop common regional interests to express concerns and influence agenda-setting.

Thirdly, the function of nominating and endorsing candidates for elected positions within the UN system is a vital role of regional electoral groups. It involves not only candidacies for various UN principal organs, councils and committees but also leadership roles such as the Secretary-General of the UN and the President of the UNGA. In performing this nomination and endorsement function, the regional groups operate based on the principle of unanimity, as a result of effective coordination and consensus-building. Specifically, candidates endorsed by their regional groups 'are as a rule elected by the General Assembly in the subsequent election' (Winkelmann, 2010: 595). Summing up all three purposes of UN regional groups, they function 'explicitly as consultative mechanisms for the selection and nomination of candidates to elective offices, thereby facilitating internal coordination to present joint candidacies' (Fomerand, 2009).

The functionality of the EEG

There are several key positions within UN bodies that EEG members can hold. First, the EEG has two seats on the UNSC: Russia's permanent seat and one non-permanent seat, which is filled every other year. Second, it manages six seats on the ECOSOC and the same number on the HRC. Third, during the rotation for electing the President of the UNGA, EEG members fill the seat in years ending with '2' and '7'. Fourth, an informal agreement exists to rotate the UN Secretary-General position among regional groups; however, the UNGA has never elected a UN Secretary-General from Eastern Europe. These are considered the most significant seats allocated based on the regional distribution principle. However, many more positions in the UN system are assigned according to the principle of 'equitable geographical representation'. The UNSC example best demonstrates the formal nature of the EEG because the mechanisms for coordination and consensus-building, as well as endorsement, not only do not exist but are also impossible. This is mainly due to the presence of the former (during the Cold War) and current (the war of aggression against Ukraine) aggressor—Russia—in the group and as a permanent member of the UNSC with veto power. Recently, before the UNGA vote on Latvia's candidacy for the UNSC seat, a Latvian diplomat highlighted Russia's strong opposition to these efforts:

Traditionally, this opposition, disinformation, and examples of slander are felt from Russia. [...] We are certainly not a convenient or advantageous partner for Russia in the UNSC—we oppose quite a lot, and it is entirely understandable that one of our main concerns given the current circumstances is Russia's aggression against Ukraine, as we believe that the outcome of this aggression will largely influence the future of the entire UN (*Latvija palikusi vienīgā*

kandidāte no Austrumeiropas valstu grupas uz vietu ANO Drošības padomē, 2025).

The UNSC elections after the Cold War have shown no group endorsement for the EEG seat to be filled (see Table 1). There is only one specific case that marks an EEG endorsement in 1991; nevertheless, it is regarded as the last representation of the bipolar world order, since at that time, the group's support

Table 1. UNSC elections for EEG seats: type, outcome and endorsement details (1991–2025)

Year	Country	Elected (yes/no)	Contested election (yes/no)	Group endorsement (yes/no)
1991	Hungary	Yes	Yes	Yes
1993	The Czech Republic	Yes	Yes	No
1993	Belarus	Yes	Yes	No
1995	Poland	Yes	Yes	No
1995	Albania	No	Yes	No
1997	Slovenia	Yes	Yes	No
1997	Macedonia	No	Yes	No
1999	Ukraine	Yes	Yes	No
1999	Slovakia	No	Yes	No
2001	Bulgaria	Yes	Yes	No
2001	Belarus	No	Yes	No
2003	Romania	Yes	No	No
2005	Slovakia	Yes	No	No
2007	Croatia	Yes	Yes	No
2007	Czech Republic	No	Yes	No
2009	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Yes	No	No
2011	Azerbaijan	Yes	Yes	No
2011	Slovenia	No	Yes	No
2011	Hungary	No	Yes	No
2013	Lithuania	Yes	No	No
2015	Ukraine	Yes	No	No
2017	Poland	Yes	No	No
2019	Estonia	Yes	Yes	No
2019	Romania	No	Yes	No
2021	Albania	Yes	No	No
2023	Belarus	No	Yes	No
2023	Slovenia	Yes	Yes	P5 endorsement
2025	Latvia	Yes	No	No

Source: Author's compilation, based on official records of the UNGA (United Nations Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, 2025; United Nations Digital Library, 2025). EEG, Eastern European Group; UN, United Nations; UNGA, UN General Assembly; UNSC, UN Security Council.

for Hungary was expressed by the representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (U.N. Doc. A/46/PV.32). Additionally, the 2023 election highlights a rare example of a UNSC permanent member's (P5 country's) endorsement (see Table 1), which usually acts as a strong geopolitical signal of support. In this case, it was the USA, 1 year before the actual election, expressing its backing for Slovenia's candidacy while competing against Belarus for the same EEG seat:

Secretary Blinken thanked Slovenia for its outspoken support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and emphasized the need for robust security assistance in response to Russia's brutal war. Secretary Blinken condemned the horrific atrocities committed by Russia's forces in its unprovoked and unjustified war against Ukraine and stressed the need to hold Moscow accountable. Secretary Blinken and Prime Minister Janša discussed Slovenia's candidacy to the UN Security Council for 2024–2025, and the Secretary repeated the United States' belief that Slovenia is a very well qualified candidate that, if elected, would be a credible voice in contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security (Secretary Blinken's Call with Slovenian Prime Minister Janša, 2022).

In the light of this article, the Slovenian case regarding the US endorsement highlights two key aspects. First, a struggle for power within the UNSC is evident, even within a regional group, and in important cases, a P5 country may choose to signal its position. Second, the work of the UNSC often reflects a fragmented, yet in this case, a divided geopolitical perspective within the EEG, which limits the group's performance to a formal and technical level. This case is quite famous as a Western democracy deciding to run against the supporter of an aggressor in the UNSC election. However, the details remain within diplomatic circles and are not officially documented. It was assumed that 'the candidacy, formally proposed by the foreign ministry, had been initiated by the USA, which had been looking for a candidate to counter Belarus [...] [and] the USA was looking for a country that was a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member but also had pragmatic relations with Russia, the main sponsor of the regime of Alexander Lukashenko' (Maček, 2024).

While Belarus is often viewed as a satellite state of Russia, both being EEG members, many other EEG countries prioritize foreign policies that aim to limit, counter, isolate and stop Russia's aggression against Ukraine (see, e.g., Reire, 2022). Consequently, the EEG secured a seat at the UNSC in 2023, fulfilling one of its goals of ensuring fair geographical representation. At the same time, this situation also reveals the lack of—or even the impossibility of—coordination,

consultation, or group endorsement mechanisms within the EEG. Moreover, there are numerous instances in UNSC elections whereby an EEG seat was filled through uncontested elections or the so-called 'clean slate' (see Table 1), demonstrating cases where an EEG member ran and won without opposition but without the group's endorsement.

The dynamics within the EEG in the context of the UNSC election are not a matter of recent years, but quite the opposite: the fragmentation and diversity of group members' foreign policy strategies and geopolitical stances, have been present since the disruption of the bipolar world order. It is highlighted by different or even contradicting positions towards NATO and the European Union (EU) membership (See Table 2). This context heavily affects the regional group's ability to endorse candidates in the UN.

Furthermore, the EEG in the UN today reflects remnants of the historic rivalry between the East and the West during the bipolar era that ended in 1991. The EEG, in its operation, captures a snapshot of the former world order and is among the reasons for calls to reconsider membership in all UN regional groups: 'A new classification would, not least, do justice to the altered circumstances, brought about by the end of the East–West confrontation, under which groups within the UN now work' (Winkelmann, 2010: 595).

During the Cold War, 'in the case of Eastern Europe, the voting of the caucusing bloc was largely led and dictated by the Soviet Union', and the USSR maintained an active policy of keeping the group as 'consisting of Soviet-friendly communist states only' (Daws, 2009). The core of the regional group was formed by the USSR, along with the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, which, despite being occupied by the USSR and not being sovereign countries, were admitted as founding members of the UN. Later, the bloc and the UN regional group were joined by the Warsaw Pact countries—Yugoslavia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania (see Member States, 2025). The EEG, as an ideological 'socialist bloc' under Cold War realities, was framed in the 1971 UNGA resolution, which refers to this regional group as 'socialist States of Eastern Europe' (U.N. Doc. A/RES/2847(XXVI), para. 4).

Having this geopolitically ideological historic framework as a basis, even after the fall of the Iron Curtain, 'the control over the post-Soviet countries [...] has always been under the radar of Russia. Every movement in this area has been perceived as a threat to Russia's national security and as a danger to losing ideological influence across its borders and finding itself face-to-face with the "enemy"' (Reire, 2016). This has resulted in many EEG members, especially those being part of NATO and/or the EU, distancing themselves politically from their regional group and 'increasingly aligning themselves with WEOG' (Winkelmann, 2010: 595).

Table 2. UN EEG countries and NATO and EU membership

Country	NATO membership (yes/no)	EU membership (yes/no)	Special remarks
Albania	Yes	No	EU candidate country status since 2014, accession negotiations since 2022
Armenia	No	No	
Azerbaijan	No	No	
Belarus	No	No	Aligns with Russia in its war of aggression against Ukraine
Bosnia and Herzegovina	No	No	The partner country that has declared its aspiration for NATO membership; EU candidate country status since 2022
Bulgaria	Yes	Yes	
Croatia	Yes	Yes	
Czechia	Yes	Yes	
Estonia	Yes	Yes	
Georgia	No	No	The partner country that has declared its aspiration for NATO membership; EU candidate country status since 2023, but since 2025, the accession process has been <i>de facto</i> halted
Hungary	Yes	Yes	
Latvia	Yes	Yes	
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	
Moldova	No	No	EU candidate country status since 2022, accession negotiations since 2024
Montenegro	Yes	No	EU candidate country status since 2010, accession negotiations since 2012
North Macedonia	Yes	No	EU candidate country status since 2005, accession negotiations since 2022
Poland	Yes	Yes	
Romania	Yes	Yes	
Russia	No	No	P5 member waging the war of aggression against Ukraine; NATO recognizes Russia as the most significant and direct threat to the Allies' security; foreign policy strategy focused against NATO and the EU
Serbia	No	No	EU candidate country status since 2012, accession negotiations since 2014
Slovakia	Yes	Yes	
Slovenia	Yes	Yes	
Ukraine	No		The partner country that has declared its aspiration for membership; fights against Russia's war of aggression

Source: Enlargement and Article 10, 2025; EU Enlargement, 2025; *Strategic Concept*, NATO, 2022.

EEG, Eastern European Group; EU, European Union; NATO, North Atlantic Treaty Organization; UN, United Nations.

To sum up, regional electoral UN groups are designed to fulfil functions such as equitable regional distribution, internal consultations and endorsement: 'regional groups play an important role in negotiations related to elections to the various UN bodies. Each regional group usually proposes the candidates from its region for a particular election, in accordance with the number of seats allocated to the regional group' (Elections to UN Bodies, 2025). The analysis indicates that the significance of the EEG is very limited in its operational mode. It serves as a formal and technical framework for filling upcoming positions in UN bodies, but nothing more. It cannot achieve the following: provide group endorsement; facilitate information exchange with partners from the regional group; serve as a launching pad or support group for candidature within the UN system; or establish clear rotation patterns, group coordination and expert meetings. It functions merely as a geographic container, lacking broader and more meaningful capabilities: '[...] how meaningful is geography as the unit of cohesion in today's world? Not all countries in a region caucus on relevant issues; the political, economic and cultural-religious correlates can vary quite significantly from geographical neighbourliness; and habits of dialogue and cooperation may be rooted more in history than geography' (Thakur, 1999).

Geopolitically, the presence of Russia and the role of Belarus as Russia's satellite state influences the EEG's overall tone, as does the diverse geopolitical stance towards NATO and the EU among EEG members. The group is characterized by significant fragmentation, differing understandings of the world order and fundamentally different foreign policy strategies. The lack of geopolitical and geostrategic uniformity directly explains the group's dysfunction: 'Electoral group stability rests on caucus group homogeneity. Caucus groups in turn reflect geopolitical realities both in terms of the political climate and the effects of changes in international society on the composition and complexion of UN membership' (Daws, 2009: 12). Geopolitical and historical factors explain EEG's inability to perform basic functions beyond formal and technical mechanisms.

CONCLUSIONS

The UN regional groups were established to ensure fair and equal representation of members across different UN bodies, allowing all members who wish to participate in the UN's decision-making process to do so. These groups have three main goals: fair geographic distribution; coordination and building consensus; and nominating and endorsing candidates.

This article aimed to examine the functionality of the EEG, to which Latvia and other Baltic countries belong. The study

concludes that the EEG operates as a highly fragmented, uncoordinated and unstable regional group within the UN, marked by significant internal geopolitical tensions. It mainly functions through a formal and technical framework that manages the allocation of seats for EEG members in the UN system. Therefore, it only fulfils one of the three main functions of UN regional groups—the function of equitable regional distribution. Although legal sources collectively confirm that coordination and consensus-building, as well as nomination and endorsement functions, are fundamental to how elections, nominations and voting processes work at the UN, the EEG lacks mechanisms for both. The reasons for this are the presence of the aggressor in the group, the historical aspects of the EEG's creation and a highly fragmented membership in terms of foreign policy orientation. Consequently, the EEG lacks significant regional group mechanisms, making its work mostly formal and technical. This is why, with full rights, the EEG can be called a 'nonsense group' (Center for International Studies, 2024).

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