

The European Union

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The European Union (EU) earlier known as European Economic Community (EEC) or European Community (EC) consists of 27 states of Europe. Its members have a combined area of 4,233,255.3 km² (1,634,469.0 sq mi) and an estimated total population of about 447 million. The EU has developed an internal single market through a standardised system of laws that apply in all member states in those matters, and only those matters, where members have agreed to act as one. EU policies aim to ensure the free movement of people, goods, services and capital within the internal market, enact legislation in justice and home affairs and maintain common policies on trade, agriculture, fisheries and regional development. A monetary union was established in 1999, coming into full force in 2002, and is composed of 19 EU member states which use the euro currency.

Members



The European Union is a coalition of 27 European countries. The members are: **Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.** The headquarter of the EU is located in Brussels, Belgium.

Brexit

The United Kingdom became the first member state ever to leave the EU. Following a 2016 referendum, the UK signified its intention to leave and negotiated a withdrawal agreement. The UK is in a transitional phase until at least 31 December 2020, during which it remains subject to EU law and part of the EU single market and customs union. On January 31, 2020, the United Kingdom formally left the European Union, and an 11-month implementation and transition period began. A referendum was held in June 2016, when 17.4 million people opted for Brexit. This gave the Leave side 52%, compared with 48% for Remain. The transition period is meant to give both sides some breathing space while a new free trade agreement is negotiated. This is needed because the UK will leave the single market and customs union at the end of the transition. A free trade agreement will allow goods to move around the EU without checks or extra charges. If a new one cannot be agreed in time, then the UK faces the prospect of having to trade with no deal in place. That would mean tariffs on UK goods travelling to the EU and other trade barriers. Aside from trade, many other aspects of the future UK-EU relationship will also need to be decided.

Origin

The EU represents one in a series of efforts to integrate Europe since 2nd World War. At the end of the war, several western European countries sought closer economic, social and political ties to achieve economic growth and military security and to promote a lasting reconciliation between France and Germany. To this end, in 1951 the leaders of six countries - Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and West Germany signed the **Treaty of Paris**, thereby, when it came into effect in 1952, founding the **European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)**. On March 25, 1957, the six ECSC members signed the two **Treaties of Rome** that established the - (i) **European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM)** and the (ii) **European Economic Community (EEC)**.

In 1965 members of the EEC signed the **Brussels Treaty**, which merged the commissions of the EEC and EURATOM and the high authority of the ECSC into a single commission. It also combined the councils of the three organizations into a common council of Ministers. The EEC, the EURATOM, and the ECSC - collectively referred to as the **European Communities** -later became the principal institutions of the EU. Established in 1974, the **European Council** meets at least twice a year to define the long term agenda for European political and economic integration. **The Maastricht Treaty** (formally known as the Treaty on European Union), which was signed on February 7, 1992, created the **European Union**. An amended version of the Maastricht Treaty officially took effect on November 1, 1993. The Maastricht Treaty has been amended by the treaties of Amsterdam (1997), Nice (2001) and Lisbon (2007). The Treaty of Maastricht established the European Union common market. The treaty was designed to enhance European political and economic integration by creating a single currency (the **Euro**), a unified foreign and security policy, and common citizenship rights and by advancing cooperation in the areas of immigration, asylum, and judicial affairs. In 2009, the Treaty of Lisbon increased the powers of the European Parliament. It gave the EU the legal authority to negotiate and sign international treaties. It increased EU powers, border control, immigration, judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters, and police cooperation.

Objectives:

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The European Union's main objective is to promote peace, follow the European values and improve the wellbeing of nations. The European Parliament and other institutions see to it that these objectives are achieved. The main objectives are:

1. **Internal market:** The objective is to ensure smooth and efficient trade within Europe. Competition between companies is free and fair.
2. **Stable and sustainable development:** The objective is to ensure Europe's sustainable and steady development. It means balanced economic growth and stable prices. The European Union seeks to create a competitive market economy which takes into account people's wellbeing and social needs. An important issue is environmental protection. Efforts are made to protect the environment and repair any damage made.
3. **Scientific and technological development:** The European Union supports the advancement of science and technology and invests in education. Another objective is to achieve a skilled workforce and a high standard of technological production.
4. **Prevention of social exclusion:** The European Union works hard to prevent social exclusion. It seeks to prevent people from drifting outside the labour market and society. Efforts are made to eliminate poverty. The Union works for equality. Minority rights are protected. Social security is improved. Men and women must be treated equally. Children's rights must be protected and children given a happy childhood. Old people must be looked after and respected.
5. **Solidarity:** Solidarity between countries and people is promoted in the field of the economy, social equality and regions. The member states must be loyal to one another. It means that states must take responsibility for and be understanding of one another.
6. **Respect for languages and cultures:** The European Union respects the languages and cultures of the individual countries. National cultures and the common European culture are cherished and developed.
7. **Common foreign and security policy:** The European Union seeks to promote peace not only in Europe but also elsewhere in the world. It seeks to ensure that peace is maintained in Europe and that people have security. With the common foreign policy, the European Union wants to make sure that the resources of the planet are used sensibly and that the environment is not destroyed. The European Union also wishes to respect other countries and nations. It works for free and fair trade and tries to eliminate poverty. Human rights are important all over the world. The European Union follows the Charter of the United Nations and underlines the importance of common international rules.

Values

The EU values are common to the EU countries in a society in which inclusion, tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination prevail. The main values are:

- (1) **Human dignity:** Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected, protected and constitutes the real basis of fundamental rights.
- (2) **Freedom:** Freedom of movement gives citizens the right to move and reside freely within the Union. Individual freedoms such as respect for private life, freedom of thought, religion, assembly, expression and information are protected by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- (3) **Democracy:** The functioning of the EU is founded on representative democracy. Being a European citizen also means enjoying political rights. Every adult EU citizen has the right to stand as a candidate and to vote in elections to the European Parliament. EU citizens have the right to stand as candidate and to vote in their country of residence, or in their country of origin.
- (4) **Equality:** Equality is about equal rights for all citizens before the law. The principle of equality between women and men underpins all European policies and is the basis for European integration. It applies in all areas. The principle of equal pay for equal work became part of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Although inequalities still exist, the EU has made significant progress.
- (5) **Rule of law:** The EU is based on the rule of law. Everything the EU does is founded on treaties, voluntarily and democratically agreed by its EU countries. Law and justice are upheld by an independent judiciary. The EU countries gave final jurisdiction to the European Court of Justice which judgements have to be respected by all.
- (6) **Human rights:** Human rights are protected by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. These cover the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, the right to the protection of your personal data, and or the right to get access to justice.

Institutions of the European Union

The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union are the three central institutions of the European Union. There are seven official EU institutions, which can be roughly grouped by their executive, legislative, judicial, and financial functions.

European Parliament

The European Parliament is the only directly elected EU body, with representatives apportioned by each member state's population. The 705 Members of the European Parliament are directly elected by EU citizens every five years on the basis of proportional representation. In the ordinary legislative procedure, the European Commission proposes legislation, which requires the joint approval of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union to pass. This process applies to nearly all areas, including the EU budget. The Parliament is the final body to approve or reject the proposed membership of the Commission, and can attempt motions of censure on the Commission by appeal to the Court of Justice.

European Council

The European Council, a grouping of the EU's top political leaders, consists of the president or prime minister of every member state. Its summits set the union's broad direction and settle urgent high-level questions. The European Council gives political direction to the EU. It convenes at least four times a year. The European Council uses its leadership role to sort out disputes between member states and the institutions, and to resolve political crises and disagreements over controversial issues and policies. It acts externally as a collective head of state and ratifies important documents (for example, international agreements and treaties).

European Commission

The European Commission acts both as the EU's executive arm, responsible for the day-to-day running of the EU, and also the legislative initiator, with the sole power to propose laws for debate. It proposes laws, manages the budget, implements decisions, issues regulations, and represents the EU around the world at summits, in negotiations, and in international organizations. The members of the commission are appointed by the European Council and approved by the European Parliament. It operates as a cabinet government, with 27 Commissioners for different areas of policy, one from each member state, though Commissioners are bound to represent the interests of the EU as a whole rather than their home state.

Council of European Union

The Council of the European Union (also known as the Council of Ministers) forms one half of the EU's legislature. This council consists of the government ministers from all EU members, organized by policy area. For instance, all EU members' foreign ministers meet together in one group, their agriculture ministers in another, and so on. In addition to its legislative functions, the Council also exercises executive functions in relations to the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Court of Justice of the European Union

The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) is the EU's highest judicial authority, interpreting EU law and settling disputes. The CJEU consists of the European Court of Justice, which clarifies EU law for national courts and rules on alleged member state violations, and the General Court, which hears a broad range of cases brought by individuals and organizations against EU institutions.

European Central Bank

The European Central Bank (ECB) manages the euro for the nineteen countries that use the currency and implements the EU's monetary policy. It also helps regulate the EU banking system. In the midst of the European debt crisis, which rocked the continent beginning in 2009, ECB President Mario Draghi controversially committed the bank to acting as a lender of last resort to ailing eurozone economies. French politician Christine Lagarde, former head of the International Monetary Fund, took over from Draghi in 2019.

European Court of Auditors

The European Court of Auditors (ECA) audits the EU budget, checking that funds are properly spent and reporting any fraud to Parliament, the commission, and national governments.

Some other Institutions of the European Union:

- European External Action Service
- European Economic and Social Committee
- European Committee of the Regions
- European Investment Bank
- European Ombudsman
- European Data Protection Supervisor
- European Data Protection Board
- European School of Administration

Activities and Achievements of the European Union:

Single Market:

The single market is one of the European Union's greatest achievements. Restrictions between member countries on trade and free competition have gradually been eliminated, with the result that standards of living have increased. The single market is supported by a number of related policies put in place by the EU over the years. They help ensure that market liberalisation benefits as many businesses and consumers as possible.

Single Currency:

The euro is the single currency of the European Union. Nineteen of the 27 countries adopted it for non-cash transactions from 1999 and for all payments in 2002 when euro notes and coins were issued. The Eurozone consists of all countries that use the euro. All EU members pledge to convert to the euro, but only 19 have so far. They are Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain.

Common Agricultural Policy:

The Common Agricultural Policy is one of the oldest policies of the European Community, and was one of its core aims. The policy has the objectives of increasing agricultural production, providing certainty in food supplies, ensuring a high quality of life for farmers, stabilising markets, and ensuring reasonable prices for consumers.

The Schengen Area:

The Schengen Area guarantees free movement to those legally residing within its boundaries. Residents and visitors can cross borders without getting visas or showing their passports. In total, there are 26 members of the Schengen Area. They are Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Two EU countries, Ireland and the United Kingdom have declined the Schengen benefits. Four non-EU countries, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland have adopted the Schengen Agreement.

Biggest Market:

Along with labour market mobility, the free movement of goods, services and capital has made the EU one of the biggest single markets in the world. The GDP of the European

Union last year was \$16,5 trillion according to the IMF, representing 22.8% of the world's total.

Abolition of Death Penalty:

In 1983, the European Convention on Human Rights was updated with a new protocol to abolish the death penalty. To join the EU, a country first joins the broader Council of Europe, a human rights organisation. No country can join the Council of Europe unless it ends the death penalty first.

Charter of Basic Social Rights:

The aim of the EU's social policy is to correct the most glaring inequalities in European society. Financial aid is just one way in which the EU seeks to improve social conditions in Europe. In 1991, the Maastricht European Council adopted the Community Charter of Basic Social Rights, setting out the rights that all workers in the EU should enjoy: free movement; fair pay; improved working conditions; social protection; the right to form associations and to undertake collective bargaining; the right to vocational training; equal treatment of women and men; worker information, consultation and participation; health protection and safety at the workplace; protection for children, the elderly and the disabled.

Largest trade block:

The European Union is the largest trade block in the world. It is the world's biggest exporter of manufactured goods and services, and the biggest import market for over 100 countries. Free trade among its members was one of the EU's founding principles. This is possible thanks to the single market. Beyond its borders, the EU is also committed to liberalising world trade.

World's leading donor of humanitarian aid:

The EU is committed to helping victims of man-made and natural disasters worldwide and supports over 120 million people each year. Collectively, the EU and its constituent countries are the world's leading donor of humanitarian aid.

Conclusion:

Today the EU is dealing with many major issues (including the ongoing migration crisis and the Brexit). Although Brexit may prove to be more harmful to Britain than the European Union, there have still been rippling impacts on the EU in the post-Brexit world. Certain countries in the EU could face huge economic losses, including Ireland and Germany, who both could stand to lose over 10% and 5% of GDP, respectively. The EU has been also facing some controversial issues like weighted voting, Greek debt crisis, Croatia-Slovenia border dispute, Copyright controversy etc. In early 2020, the bloc struggled to craft a collective response to the outbreak of a new Corona virus disease, **COVID-19**.

Today, the EU is a powerful player on the world stage, but the complexity of its many institutions can often confuse. EU is a very successful regional organisation for

regional cooperation and development, other regional organisation can follow its success story as a role-model.