

# PANORAMA OF THE EUROPEAN UNION



European Union

# WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN UNION?

## EUROPEANS UNITED IN DIVERSITY

The European Union (EU) is a family of democratic European countries, committed to working together for peace and prosperity. It is not a State intended to replace existing states, but it is more than any other international organisation. The EU is, in fact, unique. Its Member States have set up common institutions to which they delegate some of their sovereignty so that decisions on specific matters of joint interest can be made democratically at European level.

The historical roots of the European Union lie in the Second World War. The idea of European integration was conceived to prevent such killing and destruction from ever happening again. It was first proposed by the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman in a speech on 9 May 1950. This date, the 'birthday' of what is now the EU, is celebrated annually as Europe Day.

In the early years, much of the cooperation between EU countries was about trade and the economy, but now the EU also deals with many other subjects of direct importance for our everyday life.

Europe is a continent with many different traditions and languages, but also with shared values. The EU defends these values. It fosters cooperation among the peoples of Europe, promoting unity while preserving diversity and ensuring that decisions are taken as close as possible to the citizens.

In the increasingly interdependent world of the 21st century, it will be even more necessary for every European citizen to cooperate with people from other countries in a spirit of curiosity, tolerance and solidarity.

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## **EURO — A SINGLE CURRENCY FOR EUROPEANS**

The euro is the name of the single European currency that was put into circulation on 1 January 2002. The symbol of the euro is €.

The euro has replaced the old national currencies in 12 European Union countries: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain.

Having a single currency makes it easier to travel and to compare prices, and it provides a stable environment for European business, stimulating growth and competitiveness.

## **FREE TO MOVE**

You can travel, study and work wherever you want in the 15 European Union countries, if you are an EU citizen. The EU is working constantly to give its citizens greater freedom of movement as a fundamental right and to get rid of all discrimination based on nationality.

In most of the EU you can travel without carrying a passport and without being stopped for checks at the borders. With very few exceptions, you may buy anything you want anywhere you want and take it all back home with you.

The EU does not decide what you learn in school, but it does work to ensure that your educational and professional qualifications are properly recognised in other EU countries. The EU is working to provide access to learning opportunities for everyone, at home and abroad, through partnerships and exchange schemes and by removing bureaucratic obstacles. Over a million young people have taken advantage of EU programmes, such as 'Erasmus', to pursue their studies and personal development in another European country.



## KEEPING THE PEACE

War between EU countries is now unthinkable, thanks to the unity that has been built up between them over the last 50 years. Given this success, the EU is now increasingly involved in preserving peace and creating stability in neighbouring countries.

The European Union wants to prevent conflicts. The EU is the biggest donor of financial assistance to troubled places in the world. It is active in peacekeeping and peacemaking actions, and it runs many projects that help to make human rights and democracy succeed in practical terms.

To enable its Member States to speak and act in unison on the world stage, the EU is developing its common foreign and security policy and there are plans for more cooperation on defence questions.

## AN AREA OF FREEDOM, SECURITY AND JUSTICE

We all want safety and security in our lives. Some of the unrest that might threaten everyday life in our local neighbourhood has international roots, and European countries are making a joint effort to tackle these problems. They include international terrorism, drug trafficking and abuse, trafficking in human beings and the illegal exploitation of foreign women for prostitution. The EU countries are determined to fight these evils by adopting common rules and through cooperation between their police, customs and law courts.

The EU also plays a role in asylum and migration policy. It guarantees respect for the right to seek asylum. At the same time, the EU countries are coordinating their policies for refugees and trying to tackle the problem at source by combating poverty and preventing conflicts in the countries from which people might want to flee.

## FEWER FRONTIERS: MORE JOBS!

Safeguarding employment in Europe and creating new jobs is one of the European Union's key tasks. European industry will not be able to provide more jobs unless the economic conditions are right. And the right conditions are exactly what the Union is working to achieve.

By creating a frontier-free single market and a single currency, the euro, the EU has already given a significant boost to trade and employment in Europe. It has an agreed strategy for stimulating growth and generating more and better jobs. Tomorrow's jobs will be created through research, training and education, a spirit of entrepreneurship, adaptability to new working methods and equal opportunities for everybody.

A third of the entire EU budget is taken up by the Structural Funds which promote growth and jobs in less well-off regions, in order to ensure that wealth in Europe is more evenly distributed.

## AN INFORMATION SOCIETY FOR EVERYBODY

In a world of rapid technological change, the EU is increasingly active in helping European research to achieve scientific excellence. In a variety of sectors covering the whole spectrum of modern technology, the EU finances projects undertaken by research centres, universities and industry.

The emphasis is on putting research and innovation to work for precise socioeconomic objectives, such as job creation and improved quality of life. The EU's research priorities include among others life sciences, nano-technology, aeronautics and space, food quality, sustainable development and the knowledge-based society.

The EU also tries to create conditions that allow us to actually use new technology in our everyday life. It is due to EU decisions on the technical standards of 'GSM' that Europeans are now world leaders in the use and manufacture of mobile telephones.

# CARING ABOUT OUR ENVIRONMENT

Pollution has no respect for national frontiers. That is why the European Union has a special role to play in environmental protection. Many environmental problems in Europe could not be tackled without joint action by all EU countries.

The EU has adopted over 200 environmental protection directives that are applied in all Member States. Most of the directives are designed to prevent air and water pollution and encourage waste disposal. Other major issues include nature conservation and the supervision of dangerous industrial processes. The EU wants transport, industry, agriculture, fisheries, energy and tourism to be organised in such a way that they can be developed without destroying our natural resources - in short, sustainable development.

We already have cleaner air because of the EU decisions in the 1990s to put catalytic converters into all cars and to get rid of the lead added to petrol.

In 1993, the Union set up the European Environment Agency, based in Copenhagen. The Agency gathers information on the state of our environment, enabling protective measures and laws to be based on solid data.



# THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

The European Parliament (EP) is the democratic voice of the peoples of Europe. Directly elected every five years, the members of the European Parliament (MEPs) sit not in national blocs but in seven political groups. Each group reflects the political ideology of the national parties to which its members belong. Some MEPs are not attached to any political group. In the European election of June 1999, nearly 30 % of the MEPs elected were women.

Parliament's principal roles are as follows.

- To examine and adopt European legislation. Under the co-decision procedure, Parliament shares this power equally with the Council of Ministers.
- To approve the EU budget.
- To exercise democratic control over the other EU institutions, possibly by setting up committees of inquiry.
- To assent to important international agreements such as the accession of new EU Member States and trade or association agreements between the EU and other countries.

The EP has created the Sakharov Prize which is awarded annually to an individual or group that has defended the cause of human rights anywhere in the world.

As with national parliaments, the EP has parliamentary committees to deal with particular issues (foreign affairs, budget, environment and so on). Via one of these, the Committee on Petitions, European citizens can also submit petitions directly to the European Parliament. The Parliament elects the European Ombudsman, who investigates complaints from citizens about maladministration in the EU.

[www.europarl.eu.int](http://www.europarl.eu.int)



*Pat Cox  
is the President  
of the European Parliament.*



# THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: VOICE OF THE MEMBER STATES

The Council of the European Union – formerly known as the Council of Ministers – is the main legislative and decision-making body in the EU. It brings together the representatives of all the Member State governments, which you elect at national level. It is the forum in which the representatives of your governments can assert their interests and reach compromises. They meet regularly at the level of working groups, ambassadors, ministers or – when they decide the major policy guidelines – at the level of presidents and prime ministers, i.e. as the European Council.

The Council – together with the European Parliament – sets the rules for all the activities of the European Community (EC), which forms the first 'pillar' of the EU. It covers the single market and most of the EU's common policies, and guarantees freedom of movement for goods, persons, services and capital.

In addition, the Council is the main body responsible for the second and third 'pillars', i.e. intergovernmental cooperation on common foreign and security policy and on justice and home affairs. That means, for example, that your governments are working together within the EU to combat terrorism and drug trafficking. They are joining their forces to speak with one voice in external affairs, assisted by the High Representative for common foreign and security policy.

[ue.eu.int](http://ue.eu.int)



*Javier Solana  
gives EU diplomacy a face as High Representative  
for common foreign and security policy.*



# THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION: THE DRIVING FORCE FOR UNION

The European Commission does a lot of the day-to-day work in the European Union.

It drafts proposals for new European laws, which it presents to the European Parliament and the Council. The Commission makes sure that EU decisions are properly implemented and supervises the way EU funds are spent. It also keeps an eye out to see that everyone abides by the European treaties and European law.

The European Commission consists of 20 women and men (more in 2004), assisted by about 24 000 civil servants. The President is chosen by the governments of the EU Member States and must be approved by the European Parliament. The other members are nominated by the member governments in consultation with the incoming president and must also be accepted by Parliament. The Commission is appointed for a five-year term, but it can be dismissed by Parliament.

The Commission acts independently of the governments of the Member States. Many, but not all, of its staff work in Brussels, Belgium.

[europa.eu.int/comm](http://europa.eu.int/comm)



*Romano Prodi  
heads the EU executive as President  
of the European Commission.*

## **COURT OF JUSTICE: UPHOLDING THE LAW**

When common rules are decided in the EU, it is of course vital that they are also followed in practice – and that they are understood in the same way everywhere. This is what the Court of Justice of the European Communities ensures. It settles disputes over how the EU treaties and legislation are interpreted. If national courts are in doubt about how to apply EU rules they must ask the Court of Justice. Individual persons can also bring proceedings against EU institutions before the Court. It consists of one independent judge from each EU country and is located in Luxembourg.

[curia.eu.int](http://curia.eu.int)

## **EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS: VALUE FOR YOUR MONEY**

The funds available to the EU must be used legally, economically and for the intended purpose. The Court of Auditors, an independent EU institution located in Luxembourg, is the body that checks how EU money is spent. In effect, these auditors help European taxpayers to get better value for the money that has been channelled into the EU.

[www.eca.eu.int](http://www.eca.eu.int)

## **THE EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK: STABLE MONEY FOR EUROPE**

The European Central Bank is in charge of the single currency, the euro. The Bank independently manages European monetary policy – deciding, for example, how high interest rates should be. The Bank's main objective is to ensure price stability, so that the European economy will not be damaged by inflation. But the monetary policy also supports other political objectives decided in the EU. The European Central Bank is based in Frankfurt, Germany. It is managed by a president and an executive board in close cooperation with the national central banks of the EU countries.

[www.ecb.int](http://www.ecb.int)

## **EUROPEAN INVESTMENT BANK: INVESTING IN THE LONG-TERM FUTURE**

The Bank lends money for investment projects of European interest, in particular projects that benefit less well-off regions. It finances, for example, rail links, motorways, airports, environmental schemes, and (via partner banks) investment by small businesses (SMEs) that helps create jobs and growth. Loans also support the Union's enlargement process and its development aid policy. The Bank is based in Luxembourg and raises its funds on the capital markets. As a non-profit organisation it is able to lend on favourable terms.

[www.eib.org](http://www.eib.org)

## **THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE: INVOLVING SOCIAL PARTNERS**

Ranging from employers to trade unions and from consumers to ecologists, the 222 members (more in 2004) of the Economic and Social Committee represent all of the most important interest groups in the EU. It is an advisory body and has to give its opinion on important aspects of new EU initiatives. This is part of the common European tradition of involving civil society in political life.

[www.esc.eu.int](http://www.esc.eu.int)

## **THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS: THE LOCAL PERSPECTIVE**

Many decisions taken in the EU have direct implications at the local and regional level. Through the Committee of the Regions, local and regional authorities are consulted before the EU takes decisions in fields such as education, health, employment or transport. The Committee's 222 members (more in 2004) are often leaders of regions or mayors of cities.

[www.cor.eu.int](http://www.cor.eu.int)

# ENLARGEMENT FOR A STRONGER AND MORE STABLE EUROPE

Until May 2004 there are 15 EU Member States with a total of 375 million citizens. Ten more countries, mainly from central and Eastern Europe, are expected to join the EU in 2004. Bulgaria and Romania are likely to join in 2007, bringing the EU's total population to nearly 500 million. Turkey is also a candidate country and could join later, when all the conditions for membership are met.

In order to become a member of the EU, a country must have a stable democracy that guarantees the rule of law, human rights and protection of minorities, and it must have a functioning market economy as well as a civil service capable of applying and managing EU laws.

The EU provides substantial financial assistance and advice to help the candidate countries prepare themselves for membership. This unprecedented cooperation has brought benefits to people in both present and future Member States. Trade has increased massively, and it has become easier to deal with the problems that effect us all, such as cross-border pollution and the fight against crime.

This is the European Union's most ambitious enlargement ever. Never before has the EU embraced so many new countries, grown so much in terms of area and population or encompassed so many different histories and cultures. This historic opportunity will unite the European continent, consolidating peace, stability and democracy, and enabling its peoples to share the benefits of progress and welfare generated by European integration.

# KEEPING THE EU DEMOCRATIC, FAIR AND EFFICIENT

The EU needs a streamlined and efficient decision-making system as it enlarges from 15 to 25 and eventually more members. But the arrangements must be fair to all member states, old and new, large and small.

Each EU country has a certain number of votes it can cast when the Council of Ministers takes decisions. The people of each country also elects a certain number of members of the European Parliament. These numbers roughly reflect the relative size of the country's population. They will change in 2004, after 10 new countries have joined and following the European Parliament elections.

The new numbers will be as follows (in alphabetical order according to the country's name in its own language). A decision by the Council often requires that countries representing about 72% of the votes are in favour.

	Number of votes in Council	Number of members of Parliament
Belgium	12	24
Cyprus	4	6
Czech Republic	12	24
Denmark	7	14
Germany	29	99
Greece	12	24
Spain	27	54
Estonia	4	6
France	29	78
Hungary	12	24
Ireland	7	13
Italy	29	78
Latvia	4	9

	Number of votes in Council	Number of members of Parliament
Lithuania	7	13
Luxembourg	4	6
Malta	3	5
Netherlands	13	27
Austria	10	18
Poland	27	54
Portugal	12	24
Slovakia	7	14
Slovenia	4	7
Finland	7	14
Sweden	10	19
United Kingdom	29	78
TOTAL	321	732

The European Union also needs a simpler treaty – a constitution clearly setting out the EU's aims and values, and saying who is responsible for doing what. To draft this document, a Convention was set up in 2002, bringing together representatives of all the member states and candidate countries as well as the EU institutions.

The Convention will lead to an intergovernmental conference, at which the leaders of the governments of the EU countries will sign the new Treaty.

For more information about the Convention, go to [european-convention.eu.int](http://european-convention.eu.int)

To join in an online discussion about the future of Europe, go to [europa.eu.int/futurum/forum](http://europa.eu.int/futurum/forum)

# OTHER INFORMATION ON THE EUROPEAN UNION



Information in all the official languages of the European Union is available on the Internet. You can access it through the Europa server: [europa.eu.int](http://europa.eu.int)



All over Europe there are hundreds of local EU information centres. You can find the address of the centre nearest you at this web site: [europa.eu.int/comm/relays/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/relays/index_en.htm)



**EUROPE DIRECT** is a service which answers your questions about the European Union. You can contact this service by freephone: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (or by payphone from outside the EU: 32-2 29-99696), or by electronic mail via [europa.eu.int/europedirect](mailto:europa.eu.int/europedirect)

You can also obtain information and booklets in English about the European Union from:

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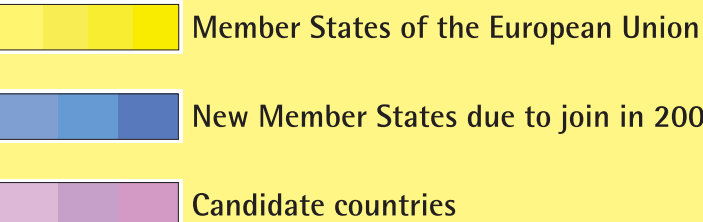
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*European Commission and Parliament representations and offices exist in all the countries of the European Union. The European Commission also has delegations in other parts of the world.*



# THE EUROPEAN UNION



## BASIC STATISTICS ON EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

European Union Member States				New EU Member States			
	Area 1 000 km <sup>2</sup>	Population million	Per capita Gross domestic product PPS (1)		Area 1 000 km <sup>2</sup>	Population million	Per capita Gross domestic product PPS (1)
België/Belgique	31	10,2	25 100	Česká Republika	79	10,2	14 600
Denmark	43	5,4	28 300	Eesti	45	1,4	10 900
Deutschland	357	82,4	24 800	Küpros-Kibris	9	0,8	18 500
Ελλάδα	132	10,6	16 500	Latvija	65	2,4	7 900
España	505	40,4	19 900	Lietuva	65	3,2	8 800
France	544	59,1	23 900	Magyarország	93	10,2	12 600
Irland/Eire	70	3,0	28 400	Malta	0,2	0,4	13 300
Italia	301	58,0	25 000	Polska	313	38,0	9 000
Luxembourg	3	0,4	45 000	Slovenija	20	2,0	17 000
Nederland	41	16,1	26 600	Slovensko	49	5,4	12 000
Österreich	84	8,1	26 700	The 10 new EU countries together	738	75,0	10 800
Portugal	92	10,3	17 300				
Suomi/Finland	337	5,2	24 600				
Sverige	411	8,9	24 900				
United Kingdom	244	60,1	24 200				
The 15 European Union countries together	3 101	379,6	23 800				
United States	9 372	270,1	33 500				
Japan	378	126,0	24 800				

Candidate countries			
	Area 1 000 km <sup>2</sup>	Population million	Per capita Gross domestic product PPS (1)
Bulgaria	111	7,9	7 700
Romania	238	22,4	6 200
Türkiye	775	69,2	6 200

Figures for 2002

(1) Gross domestic product is the total value of all goods and services produced within a country in a year – it is often used to express wealth, PPS, purchasing power standard, is a unit representing an identical volume of goods and services in each country, irrespective of price levels. The value of 1 PPS unit corresponds roughly to 1 euro. Figures are forecasts.

Source: European Commission services.

The European Union is currently made up of 15 countries committed to working together for peace and prosperity. They have transferred specific powers to the European level, so that democratic decisions on questions of truly European importance can be made at European level, while safeguarding the diversity of European cultures and ways of life. A number of other countries are on the way to become members. Learn more about the European Union on the Internet at [europa.eu.int](http://europa.eu.int)

