

Arguments against the EU

People who are opposed to the European Union come from many different shades of opinion. They are described as Euro-sceptics, anti-Europeans or Euro-realists. They hold opinions that range from disagreements over certain areas of EU policy to the belief that the EU should be disbanded. Such attitudes are particularly popular in Britain, but also have followers in other countries. Although different people are concerned with different issues regarding the EU, these generally relate to the broad themes outlined below. These are opinions – you should decide if you agree with them or not.

The EU is too expensive and doesn't work

For wealthy countries, such as the UK, the cost of being a member of the EU is greater than the benefits they receive. The best estimates put the annual net cost to the UK of EU membership at approximately £65.6 billion. Much of this money pays for the outdated and wasteful Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), while a sizeable amount goes towards the Structural Funds, which transfer money to poorer areas of the EU.

The costs of EU membership could also be holding back faster developing countries, particularly the UK, which has a more global economy than many member states. For seven out of the last ten years, EU **GDP growth** has been lower than that of the USA, being almost half of that of the US in 2010. This is largely the effect of EU regulation making it less easy to do business. In 2006, the EU's Enterprise and Industry Commissioner, Gunter Verheugen, estimated the cost of EU regulation to be €600 billion per year. This is the equivalent of the EU losing the entire output of a medium-sized country like the Netherlands every year! The situation is more concerning when one considers how hard it is to reform the way the EU spends money. Several attempts to reform the CAP have failed to reduce its cost substantially, while the 2005 budget negotiations also failed to agree to a slimmed-down budget. This is because it is almost impossible to reach an agreement between 27 countries. At present, EU leaders are hoping to negotiate a reform for the next budget cycle, starting in 2013.

The EU is too powerful

The European Community was set up as an economic organisation. However, it has expanded its role to cover many areas where it would be better for member states to make decisions. This process has been accelerated since the Maastricht Treaty (1992), which expanded EU power into new areas. Its powers now extend into traditionally national policy areas with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Justice and Home Affairs Policy (JHA). Many EU policies affect ordinary Europeans in the form of EU regulations that attempt to impose a single standard across the EU, but which are never debated by national parliaments.

The EU is undemocratic

The European Union has a lot of power but is much less accountable to the people than national governments. Most EU decisions are made or shaped by the EU Commission which is led by unelected Commissioners and run by an appointed bureaucracy. The democratic element of the EU model – the European Parliament – has fewer powers than a national legislature and rarely influences EU decisions. Turnout at European Parliament elections is so low that it is difficult to proclaim its legitimacy. The other key decision-making body – the European Council – is very secretive, often meeting behind closed doors to thrash out deals. All of this demonstrates contempt for democracy and a reluctance to engage with voters.

The EU undermines the nation state

Many of the things that the EU does are based on the principle of *supranationalism*. In order for this to work, member states have to agree (normally through signing a treaty) to hand over sovereignty to the EU. Certain areas, such as defence, taxation or currency should not be handed over to a supranational body because to do so would undermine the nation state. Nevertheless, many have been. Sadly, the EU is not as effective at managing many policy areas as nation states have been. The conflicts within the *eurozone* provide an example of the difficulties caused by handing over sovereignty. The EU often ends up reaching a compromise that no-one finds satisfactory because it always has to try to please all of its members.

Quotations

'The problems are getting more complicated. For each European country it is more complicated than before to find convergence with any other.' Hubert Vedrine, French Foreign Minister 1997-2002

'Recent votes in the real world suggest the peoples of Europe have lost confidence in this project.' Nigel Farage, UK Independence Party Leader, 2005

Technical Terms

Gross Domestic Product: the value of goods produced within a country.

Supranationalism: a form of organisation through which decisions are made by international institutions, not by individual states.

Eurozone: the nickname commonly used to describe the 16 member states that use the Euro.

Links

- <http://www.ukip.org/page/ukip-history>
- <http://www.brugesgroup.com/index.live>