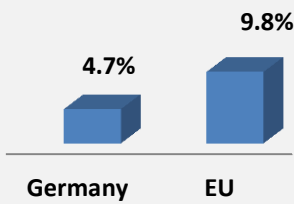


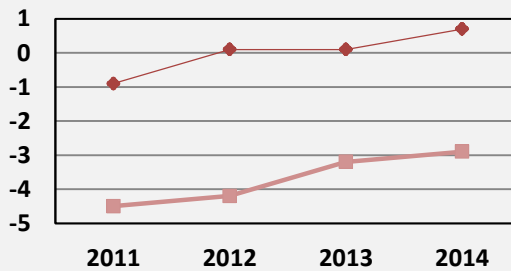
Recent history

Having experienced enormous political upheaval during the twentieth century, the modern German political system puts strong emphasis on stability and **consensus**. After World War II, Germany was divided into two nations: the Federal Republic of West Germany (West Germany) and the communist German Democratic Republic (East Germany). After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 these two states were reunified and the Federal Republic of Germany was created in 1990. After eighteen years of centre-right government under Chancellor Helmut Kohl, a Social Democratic Party (SPD)-Green coalition was elected in 1998 led by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. Having won re-election in 2002, Chancellor Schröder continued to govern until 2005 when the SPD lost seats at an early election. From 2005-09, Germany was governed by a Grand Coalition between politicians from Germany's two main parties, the SPD and Christian Democratic Union (CDU). The Grand Coalition faced pressure to reform Germany's social model due to high unemployment and an expensive welfare system.

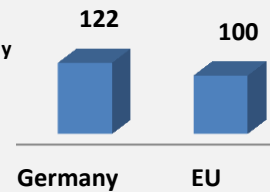
Unemployment rate (2015)



Public budget deficit/surplus



GDP per capita in PPS (2013)



Current government

Germany is a federal republic. The head of government is the Chancellor who presides over a cabinet made up of members of the governing coalition parties. The German parliament, based in Berlin, has two chambers – the *Bundestag* and the *Bundesrat*. The latter has less political power than the former as it only approves bills, while the *Bundestag* initiates, assesses and amends legislation. While the CDU, CSU and SPD have no majority in the *Bundesrat*, the parties hold 504 of the 631 seats in the *Bundestag*.

The Federal Republic is made up of sixteen Federal States (*Bundesländer*) each of which has its own state legislature (*Landesrecht*). Germany's Head of State is the President, who has largely ceremonial duties. The current President, Joachim Gauck, was elected in March 2012 with an overwhelming majority in the *Bundestag* after the former President, Christian Wulff, resigned over a corruption scandal the month before. The highest court in Germany, the *Bundesverfassungsgericht*, plays an important role in interpreting the German constitution, known as the Basic Law. The court is based in the south-west German town of Karlsruhe.

During the 2013 election, the CDU obtained its best result since 1990: the party won over 40% of the votes and almost half of the seats. Germany is currently led again by a Grand Coalition between the CDU, its sister party the Christian Social Union of Bavaria (CSU) and the SPD, this time under the leadership of Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU).

Germany: key facts



- ❖ **Capital** Berlin
- ❖ **Population** 81 million (2014)
- ❖ **% of total EU population** 16%
- ❖ **Official language** German
- ❖ **Year of EU accession** 1958 (founding member)
- ❖ **Currency** Euro since 1999
- ❖ **Schengen Area member** Yes, since 1995
- ❖ **Seats in European Parliament** 96

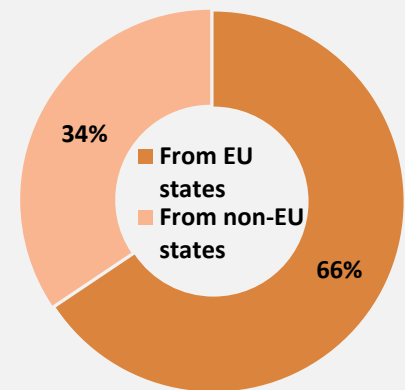
Germany and the EU

As a founding member of the EU, the German government has frequently been at the forefront of the process of European integration. Germany has signed up to all major integration policies – including the Schengen Convention and Economic and Monetary Union. However, several leading politicians in Germany have expressed concern about further enlargement of the EU, in particular Turkish membership. In addition, the Eurosceptic party Alternative for Germany was founded in 2013 and has since then gained significant representation in several *Bundesländer*.

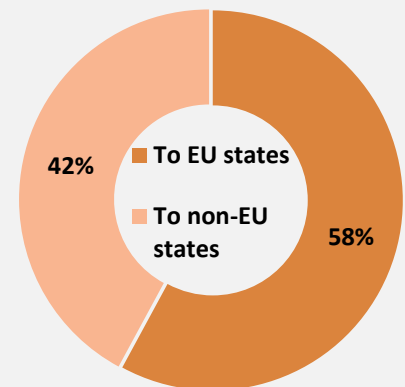
Many historians have seen the history of the EU as closely linked to the rehabilitation of Germany after World War II – often referred to as the solution to the German Question. This argument suggests the principle reason why many European politicians initially pursued the goal of a united Europe was to tie Germany into international relationships, in order to prevent a repeat of the aggression and mistrust that had led to conflicts between Germany and France in the previous century. While this is not the only reason for pursuing European integration, the resulting ‘Franco-German axis’ has played a significant part in the development of the EU.

As the largest member state, Germany is very influential in the EU. It has 29 votes in the Council of the European Union (the same number as the UK, France and Italy) and elects 96 MEPs. During its six-month presidency of the EU Council of Ministers, which began in January 2007, Germany successfully revived the EU Constitution project, producing a draft of the Lisbon Treaty, which came into force in 2009. In 2010, Germany played a central role in creating a Eurozone stability plan; promising money to Eurozone countries whose excessive debt threatened the stability of the single currency such as Greece, Ireland and Portugal. Following the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks in Paris in January 2015, anti-Islamisation protests were held in multiple German cities. They were organised by the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West (PEGIDA) movement.

German imports (2014)



German exports (2014)



Facts and figures

- ❖ Germany has the world's fourth biggest economy
- ❖ Germans have a life expectancy of 78 years for men and 83 years for women
- ❖ Germany's main exports are motor vehicles, electrical machinery and metals

“Germany stands at a crossroads where it is about whether we will preserve what makes this country strong - a social market economy - in times of globalisation.”

Angela Merkel, German Chancellor, 2005

Technical Terms

- ❖ **Consensus:** general political agreement around a majority opinion
- ❖ **PPS:** GDP per head is expressed in Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) to eliminate the differences in price levels between countries allowing meaningful volume comparisons of GDP between countries

Links

- ❖ <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Webs/Breg/EN/Homepage/home.html>
- ❖ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1047864.stm#facts
- ❖ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>
- ❖ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2145.html>