

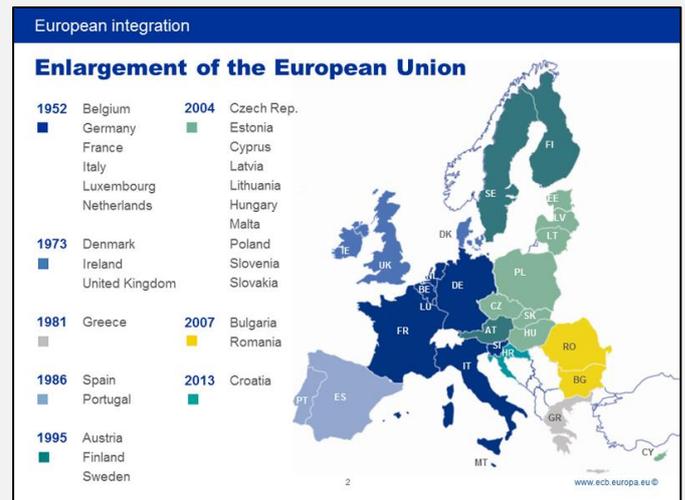


Introduction

The European Union (EU) was founded in 1957 with the aim of creating 'an ever closer union between the peoples of Europe'. Initially concerned with improving economic co-operation between member states, the EU has expanded its role in recent decades to play a significant part in areas of policy that had traditionally been the reserve of nation states. The EU operates on a mixture of **supranational** and **intergovernmental** models, where nation states pass the right to decide on certain issues to the EU but retain the power for independent action in others.

Membership

The EU was founded by six countries: France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. It has since undergone several waves of enlargement, which are indicated in the figure on the right. Turkey is currently negotiating membership, along with Serbia, Montenegro and FYR Macedonia. Accession negotiations with Iceland were opened in 2012 but were put on hold by the Icelandic government in May 2013 and broken off permanently in March 2015. Albania is an official candidate country, but has not yet begun formal membership negotiations. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are considered potential candidate countries.



Legal framework

The EU is based on a series of legal treaties between the member states.

- ❖ *Treaty of Rome (1957)*
Established the European Economic Community (EEC).
- ❖ *Single European Act (1986)*
Set a deadline to create a full single market by 1992 and deepened European integration by making it easier to pass laws, strengthening the EU Parliament and laying the basis for a European foreign policy.
- ❖ *Treaty of Maastricht (1992)*
Created the European Union and began the process of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU).
- ❖ *Treaty of Amsterdam (1997)*
Absorbed the Schengen Convention into EU law, increased the influence of the Commission in home affairs and changed the decision-making procedure in the Council by extending Qualified Majority Voting (QMV).
- ❖ *Treaty of Nice (2001)*
Further extended Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) in the Council, removed national vetoes from 39 areas and limited the number of future Commissioners and MEPs.
- ❖ *Treaty of Lisbon (2007)*
In 2003, the EU drafted a Constitution for Europe, which was designed to replace all existing treaties as the sole legal document governing the operation of the EU. However, the EU Constitution was rejected in referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005. The Lisbon Treaty was drafted as a replacement and signed in 2007, but there was huge controversy when Ireland rejected it in a referendum in 2008. Following a second referendum in Ireland, the Lisbon Treaty was ratified by all member states in 2009.

Institutions

The EU has a complex government structure made up of bodies known collectively as the EU institutions. They are responsible for making EU laws, managing EU projects, distributing EU money and deciding the future direction of the EU.

Commission

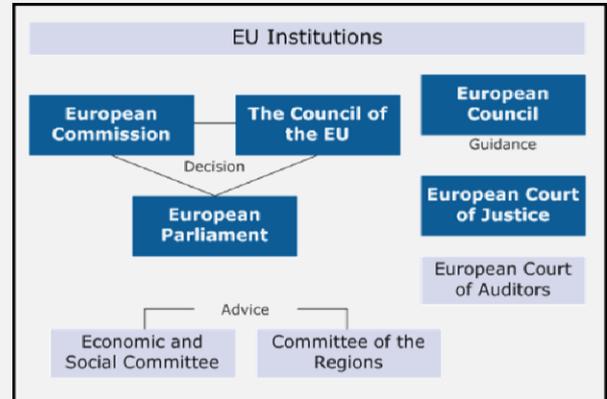
The Commission is the most powerful EU body and has many different responsibilities. It is the only institution which has the power to propose EU laws and is also responsible for enforcing them.

European Council

The European Council is headed by a President and is made up of the heads of state and government of the member states and the President of the European Commission. It meets for summits four times a year to discuss the direction of EU policy and has a key role in guiding policy alongside the Commission.

European Court of Justice

The Court of Justice of the European Union is made up of 28 judges, assisted by 11 advocates-general. A General Court deals with cases brought by private individuals and competition law cases. The EU Civil Service Tribunal rules on disputes between the EU and its staff.



Council of the EU and European Parliament

Any laws proposed by the Commission are passed to the Council of the European Union, which is made up of government ministers from all the member states, and to the European Parliament. Both institutions must approve a law for it to pass. The European Parliament is the only directly elected EU institution, and currently consists of 751 members (MEPs) - it is seen as giving democratic legitimacy to the EU, but it cannot propose legislation, only discuss and vote on laws proposed by the Commission.

Responsibilities

The EU has influence over a very wide range of policy areas. In economic policy, it has sole responsibility for the Euro, external trade negotiations, overseeing the single market, competition policy and the EU budget. It also operates various funds, including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). In addition the EU has responsibilities in many areas of justice and home affairs, foreign policy, and social policies, such as working hours, and health and safety. Finally it regulates numerous areas of peoples' lives relating to issues including the environment and consumer protection.

Hot topics

- ◆ Immigration
- ◆ Energy and climate change

"We want European Union, a United States of Europe."

Helmut Kohl, German Chancellor, 1982-1998

"[Is] British democracy, parliamentary sovereignty, the common law, our ability to run our own affairs – to be subordinated to the demands of a remote bureaucracy, resting on very different traditions?"

Margaret Thatcher, UK Prime Minister 1979-1990

Technical Terms

- ❖ **Supranationalism:** a form of organisation through which decisions are made by international institutions, not by individual states
- ❖ **Intergovernmental:** a form of international organisation where governments work together to achieve shared goals