

# The European Union

## UNITED IN DIVERSITY<sup>1</sup>

**The European Union – 4,328,000 km<sup>2</sup>, 28 countries and a population of over 500 million – is a large and powerful group of countries. What is it and how does it work?**

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### What is the EU?

The European Union (EU) is a confederation of 28 countries in Europe. It's a common economic area which lets people from one EU country live and work in another. Nineteen of the countries in the EU (the eurozone) also use the same currency<sup>2</sup>: the euro.

The EU exists to improve human rights and democracy in member countries. There are rules about fair trade, law and security.

### History

After two world wars, Europeans wanted to live peacefully together and help rebuild their countries. The first member countries – (West) Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxembourg – created the European Coal and Steel Community in 1952. In 1957 the Treaty of Rome was signed, which created the European Economic Community (EEC), to improve trade and customs agreements<sup>3</sup> between the member countries.

In 1973 the community was enlarged and other countries joined, including Denmark, Ireland and the UK. Since then the community has grown to include 28 countries in the EU (see map), with a total population of 508.2 million. To compare, in the USA, there's a population of 325.1 million, in China 1.4 billion.

### Government<sup>4</sup>\*\*

The EU is governed<sup>4</sup> by four main institutions: the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, the European Council and the European Parliament.

*The European Commission* is based in Brussels, and is the government of the EU, with one representative from each country. It makes new laws and negotiates<sup>5</sup> international treaties<sup>6</sup>.

*The Council of the European Union* is based in Brussels, and is made up of government ministers from member states. It implements<sup>7</sup> new laws in the EU and coordinates economic and social policy<sup>8</sup>.

*The European Council* is also based in Brussels. It is a meeting of the heads of government of member states, but has no legislative power. It advises on the development and future aims<sup>9</sup> of the EU.

*The European Parliament* is based in Strasbourg and Brussels, and is elected<sup>10</sup> by the people of Europe. It sits for five years. It has democratic control over the other EU institutions and elects the members of the EU Commission.

There are other institutions including the European Central Bank (in Frankfurt am Main), which controls the euro and sets out EU economic policy, and the Court of Justice of the

European Union (in Luxembourg), which helps countries apply EU rules and solves disagreements<sup>\*</sup> between member states.

### Treaties

What is a treaty? It is an agreement between EU member countries, which sets out the aims of the EU, rules for EU institutions, how decisions are made and the relationship between the EU and its member countries.

There are a number of treaties which countries in the EU have signed. Here are three of perhaps the most important:

*The Treaty of Maastricht (1993)* changed the old EEC's name to the European Union. This included cooperation in politics, economy, currency, law, and foreign policy.

*The Schengen Agreement* was implemented in 1995, and allows people from 22 EU countries to travel from one country to the other without a passport or identity card. The Czech Republic joined Schengen in 2007.

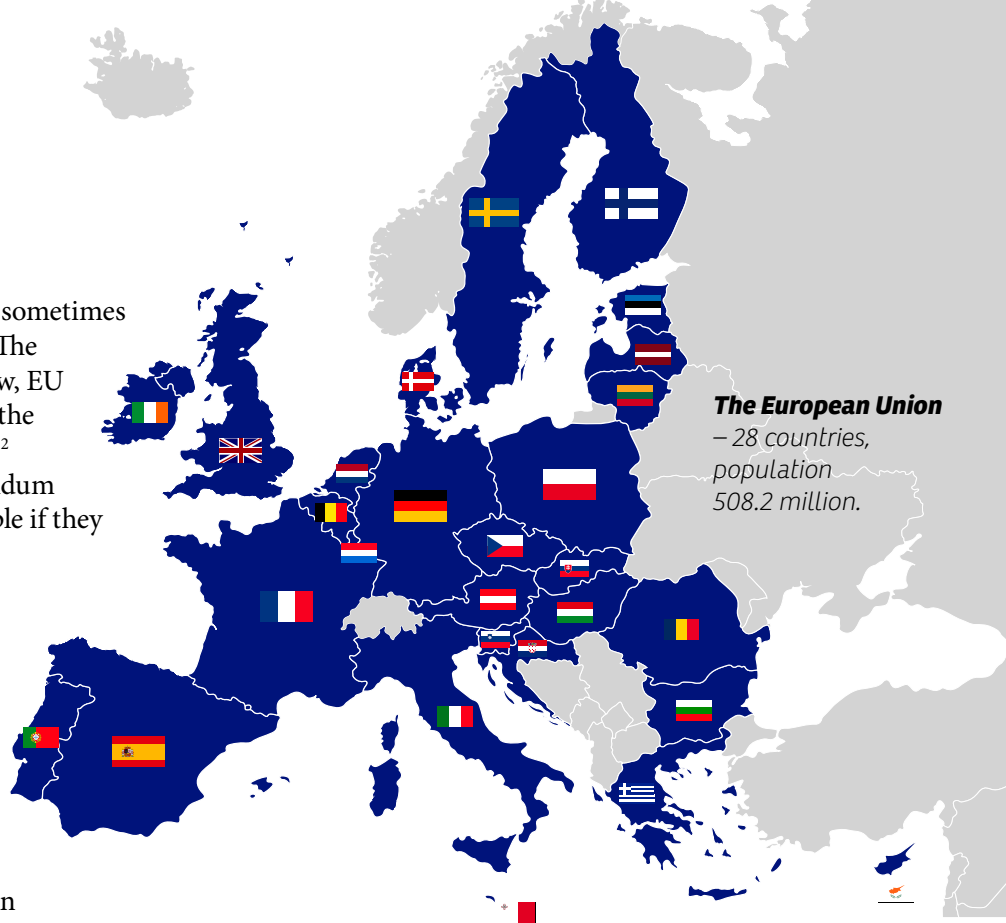
*The Treaty of Lisbon* was signed in 2007 to make the EU more democratic. It gave more powers<sup>11</sup> to the European Parliament, established a full-time president of the European Council, and a new EU diplomatic service.

## Recent challenges

Because the EU is now so big, there are sometimes disagreements\* over how to do things. The UK is critical of EU influence on UK law, EU internal fishing and trade policies, and the movement of immigrants and refugees<sup>12</sup> through Europe. There will be a referendum in the UK later this year to ask the people if they want to stay in the EU or leave.

The euro is a currency used in 19 countries in the EU. Greece, however, has had very serious economic problems. It has borrowed 252 billion EUR in the last five years from the European Central Bank, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund, which are all funded by tax-payers. This means that European tax-payers, rather than private banks, are paying for the public debt of Greece.

In 2015 over 1.5 million refugees arrived in Europe from wars in Syria and some African countries. These people came to Europe looking for a better life, but some Europeans worry about how Europe, which is already overcrowded, can manage so many immigrants.



## EU symbols



The EU has its own flag and an anthem. There are over 30 copyright versions of the anthem, and they all are inspired by the prelude to the *Ode to Joy* from Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony.

## TASK

### Match the translations.

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. The European Commission           | • a) Evropská rada                     |
| 2. The Council of the European Union | • b) Evropský parlament                |
| 3. The European Council              | • c) Rada Evropské Unie, Rada ministrů |
| 4. The European Parliament           | • d) Evropská komise                   |

*Solutions: 1d, 2c, 3a, 4b*

## MATURITA QUESTIONS

- How many countries are there in the EU?
- How many countries use the euro?
- What are the symbols of the EU?
- What are the main aims of the EU?
- Name some EU governing institutions. Where are they based?
- Name some EU treaties.

## LANGUAGE NOTE

- \* **to agree** (verb) – agreement (noun)  
disagreement – the opposite of agreement
- \*\* **government** – a group of people with the authority to rule (to govern) a country or a state

## VOCABULARY



- diversity** [daɪ'vɜːsəti] – rozmanitost
- currency** ['kʌrənsi] – měna
- customs agreement** ['kʌstəmz ə'gri:mənt] – celní dohoda
- to govern** ['gʌvɪn] – řídit
- to negotiate** [ni'gəʊʃieɪt] – vyjednávat, jednat
- treaty** ['tri:ti] – smlouva, úmluva
- to implement** ['ɪmplɪmənt] – zavést
- policy** ['pɒləsi] – politika
- aim** [eɪm] – cíl, záměr
- to elect** [ɪ'lekt] – (z)volit (si)
- power** ['paʊə] – pravomoc
- refugee** [ˌrefjuː'dʒiː] – uprchlík