

Europe in a nutshell

What is the European Union?

It is European = it is situated in Europe.

It is a union = it unites countries and people.

Let's have a closer look: What do Europeans have in common?

How has the European Union developed? What does the EU do today?

Europe – our continent

Europe is one of the world's seven continents. It stretches from the Arctic Ocean in the north to the Mediterranean Sea in the south, and from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Ural Mountains in the east.



More than 700 million people live in Europe: 500 million of them in the European Union.

Europe – our history

Europeans do not only share a continent, we share a common history. Greek philosophy, the Roman Empire, Christianity, Reformation and Enlightenment have shaped the way we think, feel and behave to this day.

Our languages reflect that: many words in European languages have common roots in ancient Greek and Latin, words such as 'Europe' and 'democracy' (Greek) or 'union' (Latin).

Over the centuries, new styles of music, architecture and literature inspired artists all over Europe. Gothic churches in Spain and Poland or classical music written by Italian and Austrian composers are just a few examples.



The Mozart family (Wolfgang Amadeus with his father Leopold and his sister Nannerl) toured Europe several times.

European wars

Sadly, the story of Europe is not all about great achievements that we can be proud of. Throughout history, European nations have fought terrible wars against each other.

In the 20th century, two wars that started on this continent spread and involved countries all around the world.



Almost all buildings in Warsaw were destroyed by the end of the Second World War.

The two 'world wars', as they are called, killed millions of people and left Europe poor and in ruins.

At the end of the Second World War, people in Europe asked themselves:

"Can anything be done to stop these terrible things from happening again?"

"Will Europeans ever learn to work together instead of fighting each other?"

Let's see what happened next.

Founding of the European Union

European Coal and Steel Community

If you want to prevent war, you have to work together. You have to make sure that things needed to prepare for war are jointly controlled: steel for weapons and energy for factories and transport.

That's why six European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) agreed to unite their coal and steel industries. They set up the 'European Coal and Steel Community'.



The Treaty on the European Coal and Steel Community was signed in Paris in 1951.

European Economic Community (EEC)



The European flag was adopted by the European Economic Community in 1985.

The six countries got on so well that they decided to go a step further and to set up the European Economic Community (EEC). 'Economic' means to do with money, business, jobs and trade.

The main idea was to create a 'common market'. That means getting rid of all national obstacles to free trade, such as border checks, delays and customs duties, as if Europe were one country.

European Union (EU)

Over the years, more and more countries joined the EEC. They started working together in many more areas, for example to protect the environment and to build better roads and railways across Europe. That's why the EEC decided to change its name to the 'European Union'.

Meanwhile, exciting things had happened beyond the EU's borders. In 1989, countries from central and eastern Europe broke free from Communist rule. The terrible separation between the eastern and western parts of Europe, the 'Iron Curtain', ceased to exist.

The countries that had gained freedom reformed their laws and economies and joined the EU. The EU now has 28 member countries (see page 6).



Remains of the Iron Curtain in former Czechoslovakia

What the European Union does today

The EU tries to make life better for all of us. Let's have a look at some examples.

Freedom for everybody

People in the EU are free to live, work or study in whichever EU country they choose. You no longer need a passport when crossing borders between most EU countries.



(©Fotolia/Rido)

Freedom for young people

The EU supports students and young people who want to spend some time studying or training in another European country.



(©Shutterstock/Gena96)

Money

In the past, each country in Europe had its own kind of money, or 'currency'. Now, many EU countries use one single currency, the euro.

Helping poorer regions

Some areas in Europe need money to build new roads and railways; in other places many people are looking for a job.

The EU tackles these problems. It provides money for new roads and rail links, and it helps businesses to create new jobs.

Helping neighbouring countries

The EU helps other countries improve schools, hospitals and social protection.



Lida and Alina from Moldova have benefited from this.

There are many more things the EU is doing today:

- making the air cleaner and fighting climate change
- making phone calls and texts cheaper
- making sure the food we eat is safe
- helping to save energy
- and lots, lots more ...

The EU is even working in space, with satellites that help cars navigate more intelligently and that make air travel safer.



How the European Union makes decisions

The European Commission

is made up of 28 politicians ('Commissioners'), one from each EU country. They are helped by experts, lawyers, secretaries and translators. Their job is to think about what would be best for the EU as a whole and to propose new EU laws.



The European Parliament

represents all people in the EU. Its members are chosen in an election every five years where all adult citizens in the EU have the right to vote.

The Parliament discusses and decides on new EU laws together with the Council.

The Council is the voice of the EU countries. Government ministers from every EU country meet regularly to pass new EU laws.

In the **European Council** all the leaders of the EU countries (Presidents, Prime Ministers or Chancellors) get together to set Europe's general strategy.



The Court of Justice makes sure that all EU countries stick to the laws that they have agreed on. The Court also checks that these laws respect "fundamental rights", such as the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press.

Member States of the European Union

Which countries are members of the EU and when did they join?

Have a look at the table and map below to find out!

1951	Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands
1973	Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom
1981	Greece
1986	Portugal, Spain
1995	Austria, Finland, Sweden
2004	Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia
2007	Bulgaria, Romania
2013	Croatia



Ready for more?



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There is a **brochure**:

http://europa.eu/teachers-corner/9_12/index_en.htm

And an **online game**:

<http://europa.eu/europago/explore/init.jsp>



You'll find many more EU games and quizzes on **Kids' Corner**. There's so much to find out... and this is a good place to start!

http://europa.eu/kids-corner/index_en.htm

Have fun!

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