

# The History of the EU

## A brief introduction...



The European Flag

The European Union has its roots in the aftermath of the Second World War. Calls for a unified Europe, which began before the war, became stronger after the devastating effects of 7 years of war. In 1949 the Council of Europe was established by Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom, and it became the first organisation to unite the countries of Europe. In 1950 the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, introduced the idea of a community to unite the coal and steel industries of Europe. This was a reaction to coal and steel being the main method to create tools of war.

In 1951 the following countries signed up to the Treaty of Paris which created the European Coal and Steel Community:

- West Germany
- Belgium
- France
- Italy
- The Netherlands
- and Luxembourg

In 1957 the Treaty of Rome was signed by the founding members of the European Coal and Steel Community to create the European Economic Community (EEC) or the 'Common Market'. The EEC aimed to create a common market for the members, with the free movement of goods and capital. The 1957 Treaty of Rome, along with the Treaty of Paris and the European Atomic Energy Community Treaty (signed on the same day as the Treaty of Rome) form the basis of all legislation in the EU today. In 1967 the European Communities were born and this forms the basis of the European Union we see today.

The United Kingdom didn't join the European Communities until 1973, after an application process which took 6 years of negotiation. Also joining at the same time were Denmark and Ireland. This formed the first of a number of enlargements.

- 1981—Greece
- 1985—Greenland leaves (after gaining independence from Denmark)
- 1986—Spain and Portugal

In 1986 the European Flag was adopted, and the Single European Act was signed by members. The Single European Act extended the powers of the European Community, particularly relating to foreign policy.

In 1993 the Maastricht Treaty was signed which created the European Union as we see it today.

## Europe today

Since the beginnings of the European Union (EU) many things have changed in Europe. We have the EU to thank for the peace which has fallen in Europe since the second world war.

### Did you know:

- There were 6 founding members of the European Union
- The UK didn't join the EU until 1973
- Every member has to meet a stringent set of criteria to make it into the EU
- The EU has ensured peace in Europe since the Second World War
- The EU expanded to 27 member countries in 2007

We have also witnessed the introduction of a single currency for Europe. Whilst not all members of the EU have joined the single currency, the Euro is accepted as the currency of Europe.

The EU grew to 25 member states, and to 27 on 1st January 2007. Many of the Eastern European countries have joined, and further countries are in the process of applying to join.

The EU is faced with many challenges, not least the contentious issue of the European Constitution. The European Constitution aims to streamline the decision making process of the Union as it has grown much more than the initial Treaties anticipated. It also aims to organize the system and policy on human rights. The Constitution is in crisis as many countries have rejected it, or stalled on ratifying it.



Europe as it looks today

Being a member of the EU today allows us all to travel freely across Europe, work in other member states without a visa, study in other European states, and to have our qualifications recognized in all states. It allows businesses to operate across country lines, and transfer money without restriction.

The EU will continue to evolve as it increases in size, but arguably its greatest achievement so far is to enable peace throughout Europe since World War 2.

Europe Direct-Coventry and Warwickshire offer access to information on Europe. From information on the workings of the EU, to advise on working and studying in European countries, we have the answer. Europe Direct-Coventry and Warwickshire are based at Coventry TechnoCentre on Coventry University Technology Park. The walk-in centre has flyers and booklets to take away as well as the chance to find the information you need on the internet, or via a connection to experts in European matters over the phone.

We are also very interested in your thoughts on Europe. All feedback is taken on board and, where appropriate, it will be passed on to the European Commission.

**European Question?  
Europe Direct-Coventry  
and Warwickshire have**

Europe Direct-Coventry and Warwickshire run events on a variety of subjects every year, so watch out for a subject which interests you. Though if you want to see something specific why not come along and tell us about it.

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Individuals are advised to carry out their own research, and seek legal advice where appropriate.

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