

European Union

Geography

The European Union covers more than 4 million km² and has about 500,000,000 inhabitants – the world's third largest population after China and India. The EU has 28 member states. The most populous country in the EU is Germany – it has about 80,000,000 inhabitants. By area, France is the biggest EU country and Malta the smallest.¹ The highest mountain in the EU is Mont Blanc – 4,807 m. Mont Blanc is situated on the border between France and Italy. Political centres of the EU are Brussels (Belgium), Strasbourg (France), and Luxembourg.²

Symbols

The European flag is blue with 12 gold stars in a circle in the centre. Blue represents the sky, the stars are the nations of Europe and the circle symbolizes unity. The national anthem of the EU is *Ode to Joy* by Ludwig van Beethoven. Unlike many other national anthems, it has no lyrics.³

Politics

Some of the main parts of the EU are the European Parliament, Council of the European Union, the European Commission and the presidency. The European Parliament makes laws and helps to decide how much money the EU should spend. Members of the European Parliament are elected every 5 years. The big political decisions are normally made in the Council of the European Union. The European Commission is responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the EU, for example it makes sure that the laws passed by the European Parliament are used properly. Every six months a different country gets the presidency of the EU.⁴

Economy

The EU is a major world economic power. Its GDP (gross domestic product) is bigger than the GDP of the United States. In 2010, the GDP of the EU was €12,268,387 million, but there are great differences in per capita GDP among member states. The EU is the world's biggest exporter and the second-biggest importer. The United States is the EU's most important business partner, followed by China.⁵ The Euro is the currency used in 19 of the 28 member states.⁶ Some of the most important areas of industry in the EU are metal production and processing, petroleum, coal, cement, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, aerospace, rail transportation equipment, shipbuilding, electrical power equipment, machine tools and automated manufacturing systems, electronics and telecommunications equipment, fishing, food and beverage processing, furniture, paper, textiles.⁷

Education

The EU supports education and helps people spend time abroad as part of their studies.⁸ The Erasmus programme is the most successful student exchange programme in the world. Each year, more than 230,000 people study abroad thanks to this programme. More than 4,000 schools from over 33 countries participate in this programme. In 2010–2011, the most popular destinations were Spain, France and Germany.⁹

Languages

There are 24 official EU languages. When a new country becomes a member of the EU, the national language of that country normally becomes an official EU language. All new EU laws are translated into all the official languages. The most common language is English. About 38 % of EU citizens speak English as their first foreign language. The most common mother tongue is German – more than 18 % of EU citizens are German native speakers. It is the major language of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The EU also supports language learning and teaching. Speaking another language makes it possible to move and find a job in another country. Knowing other languages can also increase tolerance and understanding. The 26th of September is the European Day of Languages.¹⁰

1 Read the text and answer the following questions.

¹ http://europa.eu/about-eu/facts-figures/living/index_en.htm

² <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ee.html>

³ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ee.html>

⁴ http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/find_out/guides/european_union/newsid_2139000/2139081.stm

⁵ http://europa.eu/about-eu/facts-figures/economy/index_en.htm

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/euro/index_en.htm

⁷ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ee.html>

⁸ http://europa.eu/about-eu/facts-figures/living/index_en.htm

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/erasmus_en.htm

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/pdf/doc3275_en.pdf

1) How many people live in the EU?

2) What is the biggest EU country by population?

3) What is the biggest EU country by area?

4) Where can you find the highest mountain in the EU?

5) Where is the political and administrative centre of the EU?

6) What does the EU flag symbolize?

7) What is special about the EU anthem?

8) What are some of the most important EU political institutions?

9) Which country is the EU's most important business partner?

10) What are some of the most important industries in the EU (write at least five)?

11) What is the Erasmus programme?

12) How many official languages does the EU have?

13) Why is the knowledge of foreign languages important?

14) When is the European Day of Languages?

2 Mark the following statements T (true) or F (false).

1) The European Union has more inhabitants than India.

2) The European national anthem was composed by Ludwig van Beethoven.

3) Elections to the European Parliament take place every five years.

4) The Euro is used in 23 states of the European Union.

5) EU laws are available only in English and German.

6) Most EU citizens speak English as their first foreign language.

3 Find the following words in the text (definitions adapted from <http://en.wiktionary.org>).

1) people who live in a particular place or country /Geography/

2) the line separating political or geographical regions /Geography/

3) a piece of cloth used as a symbol /Symbols/

4) the official song of a country /Symbols/

5) money /Economy/

6) in a foreign country /Education/

7) to take part in something /Education/

8) your native language (two words) /Languages/

KEY

1

1) How many people live in the EU?

About 500,000,000.

2) What is the biggest EU country by population?

Germany – about 80,000,000 inhabitants.

3) What is the biggest EU country by area?

France.

4) Where can you find the highest mountain in the EU?

On the border between Italy and France (It is Mont Blanc.)

5) Where is the political and administrative centre of the EU?

The political and administrative centres of the EU are Brussels, Strasbourg, and Luxembourg.

6) What does the EU flag symbolize?

Blue represents the sky, the stars are the nations of Europe and the circle symbolizes unity.

7) What is special about the EU anthem?

It has no lyrics.

8) What are some of the most important EU political institutions?

The European Parliament, Council of the European Union, The European Commission, (the presidency).

9) Which country is the EU's most important business partner?

The USA.

10) What are some of the most important industries in the EU (write at least five)?

Metal production and processing, petroleum, coal, cement, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, aerospace, rail transportation equipment, shipbuilding, electrical power equipment, machine tools and automated manufacturing systems, electronics and telecommunications equipment, fishing, food and beverage processing, furniture, paper, textiles.

11) What is the Erasmus programme?

It is a very successful student exchange programme.

12) How many official languages does the EU have?

24

13) Why is the knowledge of foreign languages important?

Speaking another language makes it possible to move and find a job in another country. Knowing other languages can also increase tolerance and understanding.

14) When is the European Day of Languages?

On the 26th of September.

2

1) The European Union has more inhabitants than India.

F – India has more inhabitants

2) The European national anthem was composed by Ludwig van Beethoven.

T

3) Elections to the European Parliament take place every five years.

T

4) The Euro is used in 23 states of the European Union.

F – only in 19 states

5) EU laws are available only in English and German.

F – they are translated into all the official languages

6) Most EU citizens speak English as their first foreign language.

T

3

1) people who live in a particular place or country /Geography/

INHABITANTS

2) the line separating political or geographical regions /Geography/

A BORDER

3) a piece of cloth used as a symbol /Symbols/

A FLAG

4) the official song of a country (two words) /Symbols/

A NATIONAL ANTHEM

5) money /Economy/

CURRENCY

6) in a foreign country /Education/

ABROAD

7) to take part in something /Education/

PARTICIPATE

8) your native language (two words) /Languages/

MOTHER TONGUE