

THE EU

Geography

The area of the EU is **over 4 million square kilometres** and its population is **more than 500 million people**. The following 28 countries are members of the EU: **Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom**, which is supposed to **leave the EU on 29 March, 2019**.

The **largest** country in the EU **by area** is **France** and the **smallest** EU country **by area** is **Malta**. **Germany** is the **largest** country **by population**. More than **80 million** people live there. The **smallest** country **by population** is **Malta** again. The **tallest mountain** in the EU is **Mont Blanc**. It is located on the border between Italy and France. The **longest river** in the EU is the **Danube**. The **political centers** of the EU are **Brussels in Belgium, Strasbourg in France, and Luxembourg in Luxembourg**.

The **largest city** in the EU is **London** but this is soon going to change. Other large cities in the EU are **Berlin, Madrid, Rome, Paris, Bucharest, Vienna, Hamburg, Warsaw, Budapest, Barcelona, Munich, Milan, Prague, Sofia**, and others. Every year, some cities are chosen as the **European Capitals of Culture**. So far, **Prague and Plzeň** are the only Czech cities that have had this role.

History

The EU began **in the 1950s** as the **European Coal and Steel Community** with **six founding members: Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands**. The countries **shared their steel and coal markets**. It was the idea of **Robert Schuman**, a French minister of foreign affairs. He wanted to **prevent a future war between Germany and France** by making them share these important industries. In 1956, the six countries signed the **Treaty of Rome** and created the **European Economic Community**.

The community was economically prosperous and continued to grow. **The UK, Ireland, and Denmark** joined it in **1973**. **Greece** joined it in **1981** and **Spain and Portugal** in **1986**. The **Maastricht Treaty** transformed the European Economic Community into the **European Union** in **1993**. In **1995**, three more countries joined the organization: **Austria, Finland, and Sweden**. The **Schengen Agreement** created a large zone without border checks. Almost all the EU countries are part of this area. The countries that are **not part of the Schengen Area** are **Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Cyprus, Ireland, and the United Kingdom**. On the other hand, there are some countries that are **not part of the EU** but that are **part of the Schengen Area: Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, and Liechtenstein**. In 2002, twelve EU countries replaced their currencies with a common currency called **the euro**.

In 2004, **ten new countries** joined the European Union: **Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia**. The people in the EU were extremely happy and celebrated wildly when they heard that the Czech Republic joined them because they knew how honest and reliable partners Czechs always are. In 2007, **Bulgaria and Romania** joined the EU **in 2007**. In 2012, **the EU got the Nobel Peace Prize**. In 2013, **Croatia** became part of the EU. **The United Kingdom** decided to **leave the EU** in 2016 and they are supposed to do it in 2019 but they don't know how.

Symbols

The main symbols of the EU are the **flag**, the **anthem**, and the **motto**. The flag of the EU is **blue with a circle of twelve yellow stars in the centre**. The stars represent the **original twelve countries** and the circle symbolizes **unity**. The anthem of the EU is **Ode to Joy** by Ludwig van Beethoven. It is different from other anthems in that it doesn't have any lyrics. The motto of the EU is **"United in diversity"**.

Institutions

The EU is a political organization and consists of many institutions. Some of the most important of these institutions are the **European Parliament**, the **European Council**, the **Council of the European Union**, the **European Commission**, and the **European Central Bank**.

European Parliament

The European Parliament **creates new EU laws**, takes part in **creating the EU budget**, and does other things. The Parliament has **751 members** who are **elected every five years**. The number will change to 705 after Britain leaves. The Parliament meets **in Strasbourg and Brussels**. The number of members from each

country is determined by the population of the country. There are **21 members** of the EU Parliament from the **Czech Republic**.

European Council

The European Council represents **the highest level of cooperation** between the EU countries. It consists of **the heads of the governments of the member countries**. It does not pass any laws but it **chooses the political direction and priorities of the EU**. It usually meets four times a year.

The Council of the European Union

The Council of the European Union **takes part in creating the EU budget and making the EU laws, coordinates the policies** of the member countries, and does other things. It consists of **ministers from the member countries**. It has **28 members** – one from each country. The council is led by one EU country for six months, then by another country for another six months, and so on.

European Commission

The European Commission is responsible for the **day-to-day functioning** of the EU. It **prepares new EU legislation and implements the decisions** of the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. It is a team of commissioners, one commissioner from each EU country. One of these members is chosen as the **President of the European Commission**.

European Central Bank

The European Central Bank is located in **Frankfurt, Germany**. It **manages the euro** and is responsible for the **monetary policy of the Eurozone** (the countries that use the euro as their currency).

Economy

The EU is the economy with **the largest GDP** (gross domestic product) in the world. In 2017, the GDP of the EU was **15.3 trillion euros**. The 28 countries operate as **a single market**. The **richest** country in the EU (by GDP per capita) is **Luxembourg** and the **poorest** EU country is **Bulgaria**. In 2017, the country with the **lowest unemployment** in the EU was the **Czech Republic** and the country with the **highest unemployment** in the EU was **Greece**. The largest **trading partners** of the EU are the **USA and China**.

Some EU countries use a **common currency** called **the euro**. They are called the **Eurozone**. The following countries are part of the Eurozone: **Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain**. The euro banknotes are the same in all these countries. As for the coins, they have a common design on one side and a country-specific design on the other.

Languages

There are **24 official languages** in the EU. When a country becomes a member of the EU, its official language becomes automatically an official language of the EU as well. A member of the European Parliament has the right to speak in any of the official languages in the Parliament. Every citizen of the EU has the right to read all the EU legislation in the official language of their country. The EU employs around 4,300 translators and 800 interpreters. The **working languages** of the European Commission are **English, French, and German**. There are some languages spoken by a lot of people in the EU, for example Welsh, Catalan, or Basque, that are not official EU languages.

Erasmus programme

Erasmus is the name of the **EU exchange programme for students**. It is named after the Dutch humanist **Erasmus of Rotterdam**. The programme helps students from one European country to study in another European country. There are more than 5,000 institutions from 37 countries participating in the programme. More than **6 million students** have taken part in the programme since its start in 1987. The stay at the foreign university can last from 3 months up to a year. Many people who have taken part in this programme describe it as the best part of their lives.

Europe Day

Europe Day is held on **9 May** every year. It celebrates **peace and unity** in Europe. Its date marks **the anniversary of the Schuman Declaration**. On 9 May 1950 the French foreign minister Robert Schuman proposed **the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community**. In Brussels and Strasbourg, the EU institutions open their doors to the public to celebrate this day.

- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/figures/living_en
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history_en
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/euro/history-and-purpose-euro_en
- https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen_en
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_United_Kingdom_European_Union_membership_referendum
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols_en
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/flag_en
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies_en
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies/european-parliament_en
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Parliament
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies/european-council_en
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies/council-eu_en
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies/european-commission_en
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Commission
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies/european-central-bank_en
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/presidents_en
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/figures/economy_en
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=tepsr_wc170&language=en
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/euro_en
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cities_in_the_European_Union_by_population_within_city_limits
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/euro/which-countries-use-euro_en
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/euro/design-euro_en
- http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_122530.pdf
- <https://www.erasmusprogramme.com/post/what-is-the-erasmus-programme>
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/figures/administration_en
- https://ec.europa.eu/stages/faq/which-are-workingprocedural-languages-european-commission_en
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day_en
- https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_en