

The European Union

The European Union (EU) is a customs union of 25 member nations. France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg formed the EU by signing the Treaty of Rome in 1957 to stimulate the economic integration and recovery of Western Europe. The United Kingdom, Ireland, and Denmark joined in 1973; Greece joined in 1981; and Spain and Portugal in 1986. East Germany was unified with West Germany in 1989. Austria, Finland, and Sweden joined in 1995 to form the EU-15. Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Cyprus, and Malta joined in May of 2004 to form the EU-25. Bulgaria and Romania are scheduled to join in 2007 if they can meet the EU's requirements for membership. General criteria for EU membership require that a country be governmentally democratic, geographically European, and economically viable. A country joining the union must also adopt the *acquis comunitaire*, the body of laws and rules that apply to EU members.

The EU began as a compact between sovereign nations that created a successful customs union for industrial goods. Control of most economic policy except for agriculture was formally retained by the national governments. The economies of EU member nations became more closely linked with the enactment of legislation in 1993 to form a single market that eliminated border controls between the member states. Diverse economies, language, cultural differences, and historical barriers have complicated economic and political integration.

However, the EU took a major step toward deeper economic integration in 1999 with the adoption of a single currency by 11 members (12 in 2001). The EU's monetary union integrates national economies through a common monetary policy and a common currency, the euro. A single currency was seen as a necessary step in creating a unified European market to ultimately allow the free flow of capital, goods, services, and people.

The EU is a major political and economic force. With a population of 450 million in 2004, the EU has about 175 million more people than the United States. The EU's economy, measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP), was over 40 percent larger than the U.S. economy in 2004. However, when measured by purchasing power parity, which adjusts for living standards and costs, EU-25 and U.S. GDP are nearly equal. In per capita terms, U.S. per capita GDP is about 50 percent higher than that for the EU-25. The United States has grown faster economically in the early 2000s than the EU-15, and with the relatively poor 10 new member states, U.S. per capita income has moved to a significantly higher level than that of the EU-25.

Agriculture

EU agricultural production is dominated by livestock products (including dairy), grains, vegetables, wine, fruits, and sugar. Major export commodities include grains (wheat and barley), sugar, dairy products, beef, poultry, pork, fruit, vegetables, and wine. Most agricultural imports are products not suited to the climate of northern Europe and include soybeans and soybean products, cotton, tobacco, tropical products, off-season fruits and vegetables, coffee, cocoa, tea, and spices. The EU imports large quantities of animal feed to supplement domestically produced supplies.

The EU is the world's largest importer of agricultural commodities and the largest agriculture importer from developing countries due to the numerous trade preferences granted to former colonies. However, these preferences are being reexamined and may be challenged to conform to World Trade Organization (WTO) rules on reciprocity. The United States is the EU's largest single trading partner.

Responsibility for agricultural policy is centralized in the European Commission and the Council of Agricultural Ministers. The [Common Agriculture Policy \(CAP\)](#), the cornerstone of EU agricultural policy, helped change the EU into a major food exporter (although it remains the world's largest food importer). EU agriculture has thrived under a system of generous support to farmers. These high subsidies have led EU farmers to overproduce, building up large surpluses of grain, butter, skim milk powder, beef, olive oil and other products. According to estimates by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), EU-15 subsidies and other transfers from governments of member nations accounted for 37 percent of farm revenue in 2003, compared with 17 percent in the United States.

CAP farm support is a very large component of the EU's budget. For example, CAP expenses were 49.2 billion euros (US\$61 billion) in 2004 and accounted for 45 percent of the EU's total budget, even though agriculture is a very small part of the economy. In 2004, agriculture accounted for only 1.7 percent of EU GDP, and only 4.3 percent of the EU population was employed in agriculture.

The CAP can also be a source of tension among EU member states because the amount a country contributes to the CAP budget can differ dramatically from the amount received in agricultural support. For example, Germany has the largest economy in the EU and contributes the most to the EU's budget. In 2003, Germany's net contribution accounted for over 40 percent of the EU budget. Since agriculture is less than 1 percent of Germany's total GDP, Germany is helping finance agricultural support for other EU countries, particularly France, the largest agricultural producer in the EU.

EU commitments under the [Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture](#) imposed limits on the EU's ability to support its agricultural sector, raise barriers to imports, and subsidize exports. [CAP reforms](#) in 1992, 1999, 2003, and 2004 were undertaken, in part, to adhere

to WTO rules, prepare for future negotiations on agricultural trade, and adjust to EU enlargement.

European Union Member States

These are the main governmental sites for each country, which usually include the sites for the Head of State, the Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and sometimes a portal site for the national civil service.



Candidate countries

These are the main governmental sites for each country, which usually include the sites for the Head of State, the Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and sometimes a portal site for the national civil service.

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The **European Union** (EU) is a family of democratic European countries, committed to working together for peace and prosperity. It is not a State intended to replace existing States, nor is it just an organisation for international cooperation. The EU is, in fact, unique. Its member states have set up common institutions to which they delegate some of their sovereignty so that decisions on specific matters of joint interest can be made democratically at European level.

The historical roots of the European Union lie in the Second World War. The idea was born because Europeans were determined to prevent such killing and destruction ever happening again. In the early years, the cooperation was between six countries and mainly about trade and the economy. Now the EU embraces 25 countries and 450 million people, and it deals with a wide range of issues of direct importance for our everyday life.

Europe is a continent with many different traditions and languages, but also with shared values such as democracy, freedom and social justice. The EU defends these values. It

fosters cooperation among the peoples of Europe, promoting unity while preserving diversity and ensuring that decisions are taken as close as possible to the citizens.

In the increasingly interdependent world of the 21st century, it is more necessary than ever for every European citizen to work together with people from other countries in a spirit of curiosity, openness and solidarity.