

The European Union: Achievements and Challenges

1

Time to Read!

Read the AI-generated descriptive article and learn about the EU and democracy.

The European Union (EU) is a political and economic union of 27 countries. Its main institutions are the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission. There is also the European Council.

The EU was created after World War II to promote peace, stability and economic cooperation among its member states. One of the main reasons for its foundation was to prevent another devastating war in Europe. Based on the Schuman plan, six countries (Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg) signed a treaty to run their coal and steel industries under a common management, so no single country could make weapons to turn against others, as in the past. The European Coal and Steel Community was founded in 1952. The Maastricht Treaty (formally known as the Treaty on European Union), which was signed on February 7, 1992 (and came into force on November 1, 1993), created the European Union. The EU has been very successful in achieving its goals. For example, there has not been a major conflict between its member states since it was created. It has also helped to improve living standards in many parts of Europe. However, it faces many challenges today, such as the migration crisis, Brexit and the rise of anti-EU parties.

One of the most important rights that EU citizens have is the right to vote in the European elections. These elections take place every five years and are held in all EU member states. The next European elections will be in June 2024. The purpose of these elections is to choose the members of the European Parliament. The European Parliament is one of the most powerful institutions of the EU. It has the power to propose laws, approve the EU budget and monitor the work of the European Commission.

Voting in the European elections is an important way for citizens to participate in democracy. Democracy is a system of government in which all citizens have the right to participate. However, many young people do not vote in the European elections. For example, in Greece, only 10% of young people voted in the last European elections. (Do you know that Ancient Athens is hailed as the birthplace of democracy and that the word "democracy" derived from Greek words signifying "power of the people"?) This is a problem because young people's views and concerns are not represented in the European Parliament.

There are many ways to encourage young people to participate in the democratic process. For example, schools could teach students about the importance of voting and how the EU works. Political parties could also do more to engage with young people and listen to their concerns.

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Can You Match These Words to Their Definitions?

1 foundation	a a formal agreement between two or more countries or groups.
2 propose	b obtained or developed from a source or origin.
3 derived (from)	c to participate in or become involved with something.
4 treaty	d praised or acclaimed enthusiastically.
5 signify	e causing great damage or destruction.
6 devastating	f to suggest or put forward an idea or plan for consideration.
7 engage	g worry or anxiety about something.
8 hailed	h the base or support of something, often used to describe an organization or idea.
9 concern	i to indicate or represent something.

3

Let's Discuss These Interesting Questions!

- 1 What is the main purpose of the European Union?
- 2 How many countries are currently part of the EU?
- 3 Which institutions make up the EU?
- 4 When was the Maastricht Treaty signed and what did it create?
- 5 Why was the European Coal and Steel Community founded?
- 6 What challenges does the EU face today?
- 7 When do the European elections take place and why are they important?
- 8 What powers does the European Parliament have?
- 9 Why is it a problem that young people do not vote in the European elections?
- 10 What can be done to encourage more young people to participate in the democratic process?

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Let's Go Through the Transcript!



00:00 – 00:57

<https://youtu.be/4sJ2gYPsrAI>



What is the European Parliament? It's the only EU body directly elected by the people.

Every five years, voters choose over 700 members or MEPs to represent nearly 450 million Europeans. MEPs work on your behalf, debating, shaping and passing laws on issues central to our daily lives.

Parliament defends freedom, equality and the rule of law across the EU and promotes democracy and human rights around the world. It elects the President of the European Commission and makes sure EU institutions are doing their job properly.

MEPs decide how the EU's money is spent and sign off on the EU budget. The European Parliament is your link to the decisions that matter.

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Pick the Right Answer!

1

What is the role of the European Parliament?

- a To directly elect the President of the European Commission.
- b To represent the people and pass laws.
- c To allocate the EU budget.
- d To promote democracy and human rights worldwide.

2

How often are MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) elected?

- a Every two years.
- b Every three years.
- c Every five years.
- d Every ten years.

3

What is one of the main responsibilities of MEPs?

- a Defending freedom, equality, and the rule of law.
- b Enforcing the decisions of the European Commission.
- c Appointing EU institutions.
- d Shaping the national laws of European countries.

4 What does the European Parliament do with the EU budget?

- a Allocates it to member countries.
- b Signs off on it.
- c Determines how it is spent.
- d Raises funds for it.

5 How many members are there in the European Parliament?

- a Over 500.
- b Over 600.
- c Over 700.
- d Over 800.

6 Let's Go Through the Transcript!



How are EU laws made?

The European Parliament is at the heart of EU lawmaking.

First, the European Commission proposes a new law. MEPs examine and shape this proposal, taking into account your interests as voters, their political position and advice from experts.

This work happens in their constituency offices, committees, delegations, political groups and in negotiations with other institutions.

MEPs, EU governments and the Commission must then reach a consensus before Parliament has its final say and approves the new law.

Remember, Parliament has a key role in shaping new EU laws, and throughout the process, members will represent you and your interests.

7 Can You Tell which Sentences are True and which are False?

- 1 The European Parliament is responsible for proposing new laws in the EU.
- 2 MEPs consider the interests of voters, their political position, and advice from experts when shaping new laws.
- 3 MEPs only work on lawmaking in their constituency offices.

- 4 Parliament has the final say and approves new laws in the EU.
- 5 Throughout the lawmaking process, MEPs represent the interests of the European Commission.
- 6 The European Parliament plays a significant role in shaping new EU laws.

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Let's Go Through the Transcript!



00:00 - 04:17

<https://youtu.be/1GY5paQfAaI>



Parliament is made up of groups, similar to political parties in national legislatures. There are currently seven groups in parliament, plus 57 non-attached or independent members.

A group needs at least 25 members from seven different EU countries. The European People's Party has been the largest political group in parliament since 1999. Following the 2019 elections, the EPP has 182 seats. Manfred Weber leads the group. Priorities are clear. We are the party who wants to have strict and strong border control, the readiness to help people who live in our health. We need fair trade agreements. Our global dimension is for us important. And as a third element, we want to create jobs in the EU, because especially young people cannot have a future without jobs.

S&D is also known as the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats. Irache Garcia Perez chairs the second biggest group of the parliament after the EPP. They have 154 seats from nearly all EU countries, aside from Czechia and Ireland. The Socialist and Democratic group wants to work and commit to an open Europe, a solid and diverse Europe, a Europe of opportunities for young people, a Europe that reduces inequalities. That is the commitment of our political family. During these five years we will work, always thinking about European citizenship and how to improve the lives of men and women in Europe.

108 members of parliament are gathered under the new Liberal and Democrat group, Renew Europe. Dacian Cholos leads the third biggest group in the parliament. Their members come from 15 EU countries. Our group is a group in the centre of the European parliament, strongly citizens oriented, defending values as freedom, individual rights, prosperity in Europe, sustainability in Europe and balanced economic and social development.

The Greens European Free Alliance or Greens EFA is a coalition of four parties led by Philippe Lambert and Scar Keller. They have 74 members and focus on... A more just society, a more sustainable society, a more democratic society. These are the three axes, the three fibres of DNA, of political ecology and in fact you can't separate them.

Identity and Democracy, also known as ID, is a new group in the European parliament. Set up after the 2019 European elections, they have 73 members. Their chair is the Italian Marco Zanni. Our motto for the next five years and for the EU cooperation will be let's do less together but better and trying to finally show some concrete and positive result on our common policy to

our EU citizens.

The European Conservatives and Reformists or ECR for short has 62 members from 15 EU countries making it the sixth group in parliament. Riccardo Legutko co-chairs the group with Raffaele Fito. The defence is the role of the national states, the role of the parliament and the relationship with the territory is fundamental. This is one of the main points of our group also because we are Euro-realists, we don't want to destroy anything but at the same time we are convinced that things have gone so far and that they are going wrong and that we need to change this Europe.

The European United Left, Nordic Green Left or GUE-NGL for short, unites 41 members from four smaller parties with similar political agendas. Martin Schiedewan and Manon Aubry co-chair this group. The GUE-NGL is the left-wing party in the European Parliament, the left-wing democratic opposition in this House, which stands for social justice, peace policy, fair trade policy and humanitarian human rights.

The groups will debate, scrutinise and shape European policy for the next five years.

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Let's Discuss These Interesting Questions!

- 1 What is the main purpose of having different groups in parliament?
- 2 How many members does a group need to have and from how many EU countries?
- 3 Which political group has been the largest in parliament since 1999?
- 4 Who currently leads the European People's Party?
- 5 What are the priorities of the EPP?
- 6 What is the name of the second biggest group in parliament after the EPP?
- 7 Who chairs the S&D group?
- 8 What is the main focus of the Socialist and Democratic group?
- 9 How many members are in the new Liberal and Democrat group, Renew Europe?
- 10 Who leads the third biggest group in parliament?

10

Can You Fill in the Gaps?

Fill in the gaps to name the benefits of being an EU member.

Opportunities are _____(1)

_____ (2) in the EU

The EU fights for fairness by addressing the _____ (3) and ensuring _____ (4) _____ (5), including _____ (6)

Guarantee of rights, including promoting _____ (7)

Improvement of conditions for _____ (8)

The EU is a global power that supports _____ (9).

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Let's Go Through the Transcript!



00:00 - 00:59

<https://youtu.be/C1gs4LPyyLY>



What's the EU doing for me? Well, a lot.

First it opens up opportunities. You're free to live, work and travel across 27 countries in the world's biggest single market.

The EU fights for fairness, acting to tackle the energy crisis and ensure adequate minimum wages.

It protects us as citizens and consumers, making sure our food is safe, our air is clean and our online environment secure.

It also guarantees our rights, promoting gender equality and work-life balance, improving conditions for parents, carers and women in the workplace.

Listen, the EU is a global power, supporting democracy, protecting the environment, securing trade deals, promoting peace, progress and security.

It's all that and much more.

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Let's Dive into a Dialogue!

The dialogue was created based on an AI/Copilot-generated text (teacher's prompt was to name advantages and disadvantages of EU membership).

John So, have you heard anything back from the country you submitted your job application to?

Sarah Yes, I did. They replied yesterday and it turns out they're facing some economic difficulties right now.

John Oh no, that doesn't sound good.

Sarah Yeah, but they also mentioned that being part of the EU has helped them mitigate some of the challenges by giving them access to a larger market and favorable trade agreements.

John That's interesting. I've always thought the EU was just for easier travel within member states.

Sarah It is, but there are other benefits too. Like improved environment and job creation opportunities.

John But what about the disadvantages? Don't countries have to give up some decision-making power?

Sarah Yeah, that's true. Some see it as a loss of sovereignty, but others argue that it leads to more harmony and safety among European nations.

John And what about cultural concerns? Do you think EU integration threatens national identity?

Sarah It's definitely a hot topic, but personally, I think it promotes diversity rather than threatening it. Plus, having common commitments to human rights, rule of law, and a market economy helps modernize member countries.

John Hmm, I never thought about it like that. Thanks for shedding light on both sides.

Sarah No problem. Overall, joining the EU involves trade-offs, but it can lead to overall growth and development for member states.

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Four Opinions, One Discussion. Let's Go!

Mia I personally think that being a part of the EU is extremely beneficial, especially from an economic standpoint. As a business owner, I have seen firsthand how EU membership has helped increase my company's international trade and growth opportunities. It also makes it easier for me to travel and conduct business within member states.

Liam I don't see the point in being a part of the EU. We are constantly having to follow all these regulations and contribute financially, but what do we get in return? I think it's just a waste of resources and sovereignty.

Sophie I'm on the fence about this. On one hand, being a part of the EU has opened up many opportunities for me, like studying abroad and working in different countries. But at the same time, I feel like it's taking away some of our national identity and control over our own laws.

Noah

It's ridiculous how some people are against the EU. It has brought us so much prosperity, harmony, and modernization. Look at our beaches, they are so much cleaner now thanks to EU regulations. I can't imagine going back to how things were before.

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Explore Quotes from Famous People!

Being a member of the European Union means sharing a collective responsibility for the peace, stability, and prosperity of our continent.

- Angela Merkel

The European Union is a unique economic and political partnership that has brought unprecedented peace, stability, and prosperity to its member states.

- Jean-Claude Juncker

EU membership has allowed us to benefit from the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people, creating opportunities for economic growth and cultural exchange.

- Emmanuel Macron

Being an EU member state provides access to a single market of over 500 million consumers, offering immense opportunities for trade and investment.

- Mark Rutte

EU membership has enabled us to work together on global challenges such as climate change, security, and human rights, amplifying our collective voice on the international stage.

- Leo Varadkar

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Get Creative with Your Writing!

Writing tasks:

- 1 Write a social media post encouraging your friends to vote in the upcoming European Parliament elections. Use at least 3 of the target vocabulary words.
- 2 Create a blog post discussing the advantages of living in a democratic society and how the EU promotes democracy. Use at least 5 target vocabulary words.

- 3 Imagine you are an MEP and write an email to a group of youths explaining why their participation in the European elections is important. Use at least 4 target vocabulary words.

Target Vocabulary:

democracy, EU, vote, European Parliament, MEP, advantages, youths, Elections



Correct Answers

2 Correct Answers:

- 1 h 2 f 3 b 4 a 5 i 6 e 7 c 8 d
9 g

5 Correct Answers:

- 1 b 2 c 3 a 4 c 5 c

7 Correct Answers:

- 1 False -- The European Commission proposes new laws.
2 True
3 False -- MEPs work on lawmaking in various settings, including their constituency offices, committees, delegations, political groups, and negotiations with other institutions.
4 True
5 False -- MEPs represent the interests of voters, not the European Commission.
6 True

10 Correct Answers:

- 1 opened up 2 Freedom to live, work, and travel across 27 countries
3 energy crisis 4 adequate minimum wages
5 Protection of citizens and consumers
6 safe food, clean air, and a secure online environment
7 gender equality and work-life balance
8 parents, carers, and women in the workplace
9 democracy, protects the environment, secures trade deals, and promotes peace, progress, and security