

Fact sheet on the European Union

Source: CVCE. European Navigator.

Copyright: (c) CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/fact_sheet_on_the_european_union-en-1bf0d568-a917-4f89-a398-b28b31ee3a5e.html

Last updated: 08/07/2016



Fact sheet on the European Union*

* European Union = European Communities, supplemented by the policies and forms of cooperation introduced by the Treaty on European Union (Article 1 of the Treaty on European Union).

Constituent instruments

— Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC Treaty)

Signed in Paris on 18 April 1951

Entered into force on 23 September 1952

Expired on 23 July 2002

— Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (EEC Treaty) which, in 1993, became the Treaty establishing the European Community (EC Treaty)

Signed in Rome on 25 March 1957

Entered into force on 1 January 1958

— Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom Treaty)

Signed in Rome on 25 March 1957

Entered into force on 1 January 1958

— Treaty on European Union (EU Treaty)

Signed in Maastricht on 7 February 1992

Entered into force on 1 November 1993

Instruments reforming the founding Treaties

— Treaty establishing a Single Council and a Single Commission of the European Communities

Signed in Brussels on 8 April 1965

Entered into force on 1 July 1967

— Single European Act

Signed in Luxembourg on 17 February 1986 and in The Hague on 28 February 1986

Entered into force on 1 July 1987

— Treaty on European Union (EU Treaty)

Signed in Maastricht on 7 February 1992

Entered into force on 1 November 1993

— Treaty of Amsterdam amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related Acts

Signed in Amsterdam on 2 October 1997

Entered into force on 1 May 1999

— Treaty of Nice amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related Acts

Signed in Nice on 26 February 2001

Entered into force on 1 February 2003

Nature of the constituent instruments (primary law)

International legal agreements (multilateral treaties subject to ratification by the Member States).

EC Treaty = ‘the constitutional charter of a Community based on the rule of law’ (case-law of the Court of Justice of the EC).

Member States

Number: 27.

Number of founding Member States: 6.

Founding Member States: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

Countries that acceded subsequently: Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom (1973); Greece (1981); Portugal and Spain (1986); Austria, Finland and Sweden (1995); Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia (2004); Bulgaria and Romania (2007).

Conditions for accession

— Being a European State which respects the principles set out in Article 6 (1) of the EU Treaty (liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law) (Article 49 of the EU Treaty);

— Having achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. Ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union (Conclusions of the Copenhagen European Council, 21–22 June 1993).

Task

To organise, in a manner demonstrating consistency and solidarity, relations between the Member States and between their peoples in the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe.

(Article 1 of the EU Treaty)

Objectives

Economic and social progress, a high level of employment, balanced and sustainable development through the creation of an area without internal frontiers, economic and social cohesion, economic and monetary union; assertion of the identity of the Union on the international scene, a common foreign and security policy; protection of rights, citizenship of the Union; an area of freedom, security and justice; maintenance and development of the *acquis communautaire*.

(Article 2 of the EU Treaty)

Principles

— Liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law;

— Respect for the national identities of the Member States.

Activities

— European Community: fundamental freedoms (free movement of goods, services, capital; free movement of persons; visas, asylum, immigration); common policies (agriculture, transport, trade, competition, economic and monetary policy, social policy, employment, culture, public health, consumer protection, trans-European networks, industry, economic and social cohesion, research, environment, development cooperation) (EC Treaty);

— Euratom: Promotion of research, dissemination of information, health protection, investment, joint undertakings, supplies, safeguards, property ownership, nuclear common market, external relations (EAEC

Treaty);

— Common foreign and security policy (CFSP): common foreign and security policy; common defence policy; humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping, crisis management, peacemaking ('Petersberg tasks'); respect for the Member States' obligations vis-à-vis NATO;

— Police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters (PJCC): combating crime, cooperation between police forces, Europol; cooperation between judicial authorities, Eurojust; approximation of rules on criminal matters.

Allocation of powers between the Member States and the Communities

— Principles governing the allocation: principle of the allocation of powers (Article 5 of the EC Treaty, Article 3 of the EAEC Treaty), adapted in accordance with the theory on implied powers (case-law of the Court of Justice of the EC) and by the clause on powers for which the Treaty has made no provision (Article 308 of the EC Treaty);

— Principles governing the exercise of Community powers: principle of subsidiarity, principle of proportionality (Article 5 of the EC Treaty).

Institutions and bodies

Institutions:

European Parliament, Council, Commission (the decision-making triangle);
Court of Justice, Court of Auditors (supervisory bodies).

Bodies:

Economic and Social Committee, Committee of the Regions (advisory bodies);
European Investment Bank, European Central Bank (financial institutions).

Decision-making

Decision-making procedures: consultation, conciliation, assent, cooperation, codecision.

Institutions and bodies participating in the decision-making process: European Council (instigating action and laying down general political guidelines); Commission (legislative initiative, implementation); Council, Parliament (legislative and budgetary powers); Economic and Social Committee, Committee of the Regions (advisory bodies).

Terminology used by the institutions (Community acts = secondary law)

Legislative acts:

Regulation = an instrument of general scope, binding in its entirety and directly applicable in all Member States [*law*];

Directive = an instrument of general scope, binding on each Member State as regards the result to be attained and leaving to the national authorities the choice of form and methods [*outline legislation*];

Non-legislative acts:

Decision = an act that is binding in its entirety on all those to whom it is addressed;

Recommendation = a non-binding act that includes an invitation to adopt an action;

Opinion = a non-binding act setting out a judgment or an assessment.

Publication of Community acts

Official Journal of the European Union (L series).

Principles of the Community legal order

Autonomy, direct effect, supremacy over the domestic law of the Member States, responsibility of the Member States for damage caused to individuals by breaches of Community law.

Mechanism for the scrutiny of the legality of Community acts

Permanent judicial body (Court of Justice of the EC).

Material resources

- Permanent international staff (European civil servants);
- Own financial resources.

Official languages

Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovakian, Slovenian, Spanish and Swedish.

Seats of the institutions

Strasbourg (European Parliament), Brussels (Council, Commission) and Luxembourg (Court of Justice, Court of Auditors).

Legal personality

European Communities: yes (Article 281 of the EC Treaty, Article 184 of the EAEC Treaty);
European Union: no.

Classification of the organisation

According to its composition: a regional organisation (Europe).

According to its areas of activity: an economic and political organisation.

According to its functions: a regulatory organisation (adoption of common rules in the Member States).

According to its working method: an organisation for supranational integration (European Communities) supplemented by areas of intergovernmental cooperation (CFSP and PJCC).