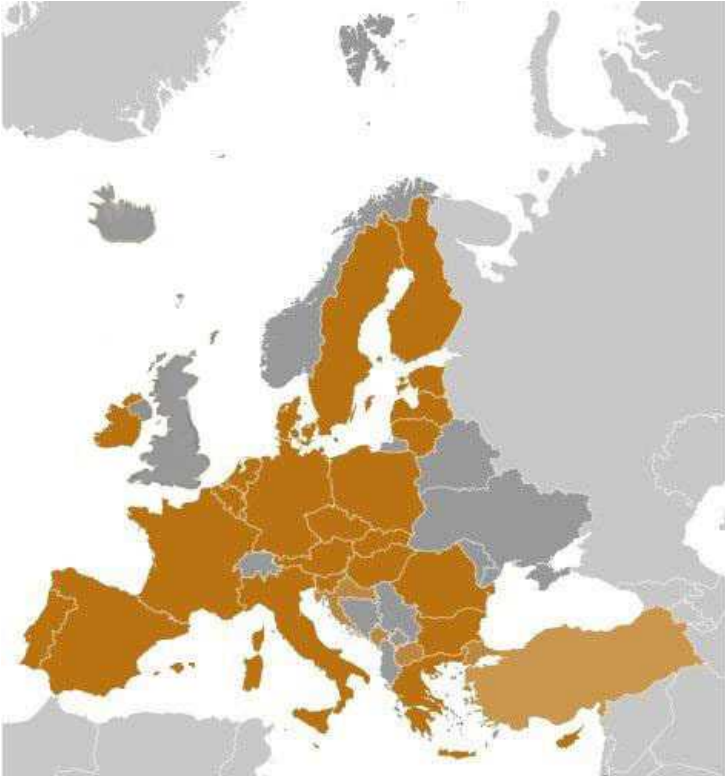




# European Union



<b>Background</b>	<p>In the aftermath and devastation of the two World Wars, a number of far-sighted European leaders in the late 1940s sought to respond to the overwhelming desire for peace and reconciliation on the continent. In 1950, French Foreign Minister Robert SCHUMAN proposed pooling the production of coal and steel in Western Europe, which would bring France and West Germany together and be open to other countries as well. The following year, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was set up when six members -- Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands -- signed the Treaty of Paris.</p> <p>Within a few years, the ECSC was so successful that member states decided to further integrate their economies. In 1957, envisioning an "ever closer union," the Treaties of Rome created the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), which eliminated trade barriers among the six member states to create a common market. In 1967, the institutions of all three communities were formally merged into the European Community (EC), creating a single Commission, a single Council of Ministers, and a legislative body known today as the European Parliament. Members of the European Parliament were initially selected by national parliaments, but direct elections began in 1979 and have been held every five years since.</p> <p>In 1973, the first enlargement of the EC added Denmark, Ireland, and the UK. The 1980s saw further membership expansion, with Greece joining in 1981 and Spain and Portugal in 1986. The 1992 Treaty of Maastricht laid the basis for further cooperation in foreign and defense policy and judicial and internal affairs, as well as the creation of an economic and monetary union -- including a common currency. The Maastricht Treaty created the European Union (EU), at the time standing alongside the EC. In 1995, Austria, Finland, and Sweden joined the EU/EC, raising the total number of member states to 15. On 1 January 1999, the new euro currency was launched in world markets and became the unit of exchange for all EU member states except Denmark, Sweden, and the UK. In 2002, citizens of the 12 participating member states began using euro banknotes and coins.</p> <p>In an effort to ensure that the EU could function efficiently with an expanded membership, the Treaty of Nice in 2000 set forth rules to streamline the size and procedures of the EU's institutions. An effort to establish a "Constitution for Europe," growing out of a Convention held in 2002-2003, foundered when it was rejected in referenda in France and the Netherlands in 2005. A subsequent effort in 2007 incorporated many features of the rejected draft Constitutional Treaty, while also making a number of substantive as well as symbolic changes. The new treaty, referred to as the Treaty of Lisbon, sought to amend existing treaties rather than replace them. The treaty was approved at a conference of member states, and after all member states ratified, the Lisbon Treaty came into force on 1 December 2009, at which point the EU officially replaced and succeeded the EC.</p> <p>Ten new countries joined the EU in 2004 -- Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Bulgaria and Romania joined in 2007 and Croatia in 2013. UK citizens on 23 June 2016 narrowly voted to leave the EU; the formal exit, widely known as "Brexit," took place on 31 January 2020. The EU and the UK negotiated a withdrawal agreement that included a status quo transition period through December 2020, when the follow-on EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement was concluded. Current EU membership stands at 27. Eight of the newer member states -- Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovakia, and Slovenia -- have now adopted the euro, bringing total euro-zone membership to 20.</p>
<b>Capital</b>	name: Brussels (Belgium), Strasbourg (France), Luxembourg, Frankfurt (Germany)

<b>Area</b>	total : 4,236,351 sq km rank by area (sq km): 1. France (includes five overseas regions) 643,801 2. Spain 505,370 3. Sweden 450,295 4. Germany 357,022 5. Finland 338,145 6. Poland 312,685 7. Italy 301,340 8. Romania 238,391 9. Greece 131,957 10. Bulgaria 110,879 11. Hungary 93,028 12. Portugal 92,090 13. Austria 83,871 14. Czechia 78,867 15. Ireland 70,273 16. Lithuania 65,300 17. Latvia 64,589 18. Croatia 56,594 19. Slovakia 49,035 20. Estonia 45,228 21. Denmark 43,094 22. Netherlands 41,543 23. Belgium 30,528 24. Slovenia 20,273 25. Cyprus 9,251 26. Luxembourg 2,586 27. Malta 316
<b>Climate</b>	cold temperate; potentially subarctic in the north to temperate; mild wet winters; hot dry summers in the south
<b>Natural resources</b>	iron ore, natural gas, petroleum, coal, copper, lead, zinc, bauxite, uranium, potash, salt, hydropower, arable land, timber, fish
<b>Population</b>	total: 451,815,312 (2024 est.)
<b>Population growth rate</b>	0.1% (2021 est.)
<b>Religions</b>	Roman Catholic 41%, Orthodox 10%, Protestant 9%, other Christian 4%, Muslim 2%, other 4% (includes Jewish, Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu), atheist 10%, non-believer/agnostic 17%, unspecified 3% (2019 est.)
<b>Languages</b>	Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovene, Spanish, Swedish
<b>Executive branch</b>	note: for external representation and foreign policy making, member-state leaders appoint a High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; the High Representative's concurrent appointment as Vice President of the European Commission is meant to bring more coherence to the EU's foreign policy; the High Representative helps develop and implement the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and Common Security and Defense Policy components, chairs the Council of the EU's meetings of member-state foreign ministers, represents and acts for the Union in many international contexts, and oversees the European External Action Service, the diplomatic corps of the EU
<b>Legislative branch</b>	legislature name: Council of the European Union (Council) and the European Parliament (EP) (separate legislative bodies; see note 2)
<b>Diplomatic representation in the US</b>	chief of mission: Ambassador Jovita NELIUPŠIENĖ, Head of Delegation (since 27 February 2024)
<b>Diplomatic representation from the US</b>	chief of mission: Ambassador (vacant); Chargé d'Affaires Norman Thatcher SCHARPF (since 17 January 2025)
<b>Real GDP (purchasing power parity)</b>	\$24.436 trillion (2023 est.) \$24.308 trillion (2022 est.) \$23.457 trillion (2021 est.)
<b>Real GDP per capita</b>	\$54,400 (2023 est.) \$54,300 (2022 est.) \$52,500 (2021 est.)
<b>Exports</b>	\$9.667 trillion (2023 est.) \$9.41 trillion (2022 est.) \$8.712 trillion (2021 est.)
<b>Exports - partners</b>	US 20%, UK 12%, China 10%, Switzerland 7%, Turkey 4% (2023)
<b>Exports - commodities</b>	cars, packaged medicine, refined petroleum, vehicle parts/accessories, vaccines (2023)

<b>Imports</b>	\$8.969 trillion (2023 est.)
	\$9.061 trillion (2022 est.)
	\$8.022 trillion (2021 est.)
<b>Imports - partners</b>	China 21%, US 14%, UK 7%, Switzerland 6%, Norway 5% (2023)
<b>Imports - commodities</b>	cars, crude petroleum, natural gas, refined petroleum, vehicle parts/accessories (2023)