

EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union is a unique economic and political union between 28 European countries that together cover much of the continent.

The EU was created in the aftermath of the Second World War. The first steps were to foster economic cooperation: the idea being that countries that trade with one another become economically interdependent and so more likely to avoid conflict.

The result was the European Economic Community (EEC), created in 1958, and initially increasing economic cooperation between six countries: Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Since then, a huge single market has been created and continues to develop towards its full potential.

From economic to political union

What began as a purely economic union has evolved into an organization spanning policy areas, from climate, environment and health to external relations and security, justice and migration. A name change from the European Economic Community (EEC) to the European Union (EU) in 1993 reflected this.

The EU is based on the rule of law: everything it does is founded on treaties, voluntarily and democratically agreed by its member countries.

The EU is also governed by the principle of representative democracy, with citizens directly represented at Union level in the European Parliament and Member States represented in the European Council and the Council of the EU.

Mobility, growth, stability and a single currency

The EU has delivered more than half a century of peace, stability and prosperity, helped raise living standards and launched a single European currency: the euro. In 2012, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for advancing the causes of peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe.

Thanks to the abolition of border controls between EU countries, people can travel freely throughout most of the continent. And it has become much easier to live, work and travel abroad in Europe.

The single or 'internal' market is the EU's main economic engine, enabling most goods, services, money and people to move freely. Another key objective is to develop this huge resource also in other areas like energy, knowledge and capital markets to ensure that Europeans can draw the maximum benefit from it.

Human rights and equality

One of the EU's main goals is to promote human rights both internally and around the world. Human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights: these are the core values of the EU. Since the Lisbon Treaty's entry in force in 2009, the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights brings all these rights together in a single document. The EU's institutions are legally bound to uphold them, as are EU governments whenever they apply EU law.

Transparent and democratic institutions

The enlarged EU remains focused on making its governing institutions more transparent and democratic. More powers have been given to the directly elected European Parliament, while national parliaments play a greater role, working alongside the European institutions. In turn, European citizens have an ever-increasing number of channels for taking part in the political process.

NATO

An international Security Hub

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is one of the world's major international institutions. It is a political and military Alliance of 28 member countries from Europe and North America. The Alliance takes all its decisions by consensus. Every member country, no matter how large or small, has an equal say in discussions and decisions. Member states are committed to individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. These values are at the heart of NATO's transatlantic bond.

Collective Defense

The greatest responsibility of the Alliance is to protect and defend NATO's territory and populations. Article 5 of NATO's founding charter, the Washington Treaty, sets out the Alliance's collective defense commitment. It states that an attack on one shall be considered an attack on all. Article 5 has been invoked only once in NATO's history, on 12 September 2001, the day after the terrorist attacks on the United States.

Standing forces

NATO has a number of standing forces on active duty that contribute to the Alliance's collective defense on a permanent basis. These include NATO's four standing maritime group fleets, which are ready to act when called upon. Additionally NATO has an integrated air defense system that links national air defense capabilities together and includes the Alliance's ballistic missile defense capabilities. The Alliance also conducts several air policing missions in which Allied fighter jets patrol the airspace of member nations who do not have fighter jets of their own. They defend NATO airspace over Albania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovenia on a 24/7 basis, 365 days per year.

Cooperative Security

Threats like terrorism, piracy, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and cyber warfare know no borders. That is why NATO has developed a global network of security partners that includes over 40 countries from around the globe, as well as international organizations including the United Nations, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the African Union. The Alliance's Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan includes 13 partner countries. NATO's operation in Kosovo includes 8 partners. Beside partners taking part in NATO missions and operations, the Alliance has developed a wide network of partnerships since the early 1990s, including the Euro-Atlantic Partnerships Council, the Mediterranean Dialogue, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, and many partners across the globe, including Australia, Japan and South Korea.

UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945. It is currently made up of 193 Member States. The mission and work of the United Nations are guided by the purposes and principles contained in its founding Charter.

Due to the powers vested in its Charter and its unique international character, the United Nations can take action on the issues confronting humanity in the 21st century, such as peace and security, climate change, sustainable development, human rights, disarmament, terrorism, humanitarian and health emergencies, gender equality, governance, food production, and more.

Maintain International Peace and Security

The United Nations came into being in 1945, following the devastation of the Second World War, with one central mission: the maintenance of international peace and security. The UN does this by working to prevent conflict; helping parties in conflict make peace; peacekeeping; and creating the conditions to allow peace to hold and flourish.

Protect Human Rights

The term “human rights” was mentioned seven times in the UN's founding Charter, making the promotion and protection of human rights a key purpose and guiding principle of the Organization. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights brought human rights into the realm of international law. Since then, the Organization has diligently protected human rights through legal instruments and on-the-ground activities.

Deliver Humanitarian Aid

One of the purposes of the United Nations, as stated in its Charter, is "to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character." The UN first did this in the aftermath of the Second World War on the devastated continent of Europe, which it helped to rebuild

Promote Sustainable Development

From the start in 1945, one of the main priorities of the United Nations was to “achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.” Improving people’s well-being continues to be one of the main focuses of the UN.

Uphold International Law

The UN Charter, in its Preamble, set an objective: "to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained". Ever since, the development of, and respect for international law has been a key part of the work of the Organization. This work is carried out in many ways - by courts, tribunals, multilateral treaties - and by the Security Council, which can approve peacekeeping missions, impose sanctions, or authorize the use of force when there is a threat to international peace and security, if it deems this necessary.