



# The Easy Book on the EU

The European Union explained in easy to read language





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## What this book is about

In Europe, there is a very special community of countries. It is called the European Union, or short the EU.

The EU consists of 27 countries and the people of these countries. There are about 450 million people living in the European Union.<sup>1</sup>

The countries have their independent governments.

Each country has its own rules and laws.

The laws that are created by each country's government apply only to that country.

For example, the laws made in Germany only apply to people living in Germany. The laws issued in France apply only there and do not affect people in Spain, and the other way round.

The countries of the European Union have decided to take many decisions together and to unify their laws: one and the same rules should apply everywhere.

This has many advantages for all citizens, for example when they make holidays in another country, or when they buy and sell things across borders, or when they want to take a job in another country.

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers as in 2022

The European Union has been created in order to improve the lives of the citizens of its member countries. Not everybody always agrees with everything the European Union does. Still when criticizing the European Union and what it does, it is best to know the facts.

This book has been written to give you an easy-to-understand source of information about what is the European Union, how it works and what it does.

This book gives information about

- The history of the EU
- What the EU does
- Important institutions in the EU
- Benefits and disadvantages of the EU

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## Europe – the continent

Europe is a continent.

There are several continents on our planet (Earth):

Africa, America, Asia, Australia, Antarctica, and Europe.

In Europe there are about 50 countries.

For example Italy, Hungary, and France.

Also Germany is part of Europe.



### ***People coming to live in Europe***

Recently, many refugees are crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

Many refugees come from Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

They want and sometimes need to live in Europe.

People want to live in Europe for many reasons. For example:

- War or genocide in their current country
- Climate catastrophe
- Lack of jobs and opportunities
- Lack of healthcare
- Human Rights violations
- Lack of food or resources
- Skills that countries in Europe can benefit from

#### **Have a think!**

Can you think of any other reasons why a refugee may want and need to live in Europe?

## **The European Union**

There are many countries in Europe. Larger ones are for example France, Spain, Italy, Germany, and Poland. Smaller ones are for example Hungary, Bulgaria, Portugal, Estonia, Slovakia, Ireland, Denmark and Austria.

These countries, and many others in Europe, have teamed up and agreed to work closely together.

The coming together and unity of these countries can be called a **Union**.

This union of countries in Europe is called the **European Union**. For short, you can call it the EU.

Countries in the EU are called **members** of the EU.

There are advantages of being a member of the EU.

There is a saying: “Two heads are better than one.” This is true also for the EU. The EU countries can work together, find solutions to problems and work towards achieving their goals.

The countries in the EU have agreed on common goals, the most important of which are peace, freedom and wellbeing.

### ***Why is it called Europe?***

The name Europe originates from an old Greek legend.

A legend is an old story.

In this story there is a Phoenician princess named Europe. The god Zeus falls in love with her, makes himself a bull, and takes her to a country in the North.

### ***Famous places in Europe***

One of the most famous attractions in Europe is the Eiffel tower in Paris (France).

Another famous attraction is the Colloseum in Rome (Italy).

The Akropolis in Athens (Greece) is a very old temple site.



### ***Seas around Europe***

Europe is surrounded by seas. They have different names.

France, Italy and Greece are countries on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea.

Germany and Denmark, and others are on the shore of the North Sea. People like to go on holidays there.

Other seas around Europe are the Arctic Ocean, the Atlantic Ocean, the Celtic Sea, the Bay of Biscay, the Baltic Sea, the White Sea and the Black Sea.

#### **Have a think!**

Do you know your seas? What are the seas that border the country you live in?

## People coming to live in Europe

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- War or genocide in their current country
- Climate catastrophe
- Lack of jobs and opportunities
- Lack of healthcare
- Human Rights violations
- Lack of food or resources
- Skills that countries in Europe can benefit from

### Have a think!

Can you think of any other reasons why a refugee may want and need to live in Europe?

## The European Union

Germany is a country within the European Union. Its official name is Federal Republic of Germany.

Other countries in Europe are France, Italy, Sweden, Spain, Hungary, and so on.

These countries, and many others in Europe, have teamed up and agreed to work closely together.

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## Peace

### ***What is peace?***

Peace is when countries do not fight with each other. They do not use violence. They may have different opinions or interests, but they speak with each other and solve their problems that way.

The opposite is war. War is when countries fight with weapons. During war, buildings, towns and cities get destroyed, and many people die.

### ***World War II (1939-1945)***

About 70 years ago, there was a big war in Europe, called the Second World War. A different name for the Second World War is World War II.

It started when Germany, under the rule of Adolf Hitler, invaded its neighbours, for gaining land and power.

World War II started in 1939 and ended in 1945.

Over 60 million people died as a result of the war. Many towns in Europe were destroyed.

When the war ended, countries began to communicate with each other and wanted to create peace.



### ***The Treaty of Rome (1957)***

The war caused many countries and the people living there to lose everything they owned: their homes, food, jobs, money, and so on.

As a result, many citizens and politicians in Europe agreed: “This must not happen again”. People throughout Europe felt that war must be avoided.

This was an important reason why countries in Europe decided to unite.

The first countries to enter into an agreement were Belgium, West-Germany, France, Italy,



Luxemburg and the Netherlands - all of these countries were heavily affected by World War II.

Their agreement was called the *Treaty of Rome*. It created the *European Economic Community* in 1957. Its purpose was to create closer co-operation in the economy, for example through lowering of customs duties and making the exchange of goods, labour, services and money easier.

### ***Peace and well-being in Europe***

Since that time there has been peace in Europe. That peace has now lasted for over 70 years. Never before had there been such a long time of peace in Europe.

But don't forget: Not far from the European Union people are being killed in wars today, for example in Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen.

Countries in the EU today are working very closely together.

Many goods and services that are made in Germany are sold in other EU countries, for example in Italy and in Poland. Things produced in other countries are sold in Germany, and so on.

Germans today like to buy French wine, Dutch cheese, Italian tomatoes, Swedish canned fish.

This close co-operation improves the lives and well-being of the citizens of those countries.

People from Germany have jobs in other EU countries. People from other countries work in Germany.

That way, countries are closely connected together, in the economy and in other aspects of life.

When people travel, and when goods are brought in from other countries, people can learn about these other countries, their laws and culture, their differences and similarities. This is called diversity. This is one of the reasons why countries in Europe live in peace.

## Wellbeing through cooperation

Economy: that's all the things together that people do to earn money, to produce and sell goods including food, to produce and sell things and services.

For example, the following contributes to strengthening the economy:

- Farms where food is produced;
- Factories where things are made;
- Shops where things are sold and can be bought;
- People who produce and buy
- E-commerce (= trading services and goods online).

People and countries usually want to have a stable and growing economy.



A **stable** economy means that everybody can work and do their job consistently, without problems or change arising.

On the other hand, some degree of change is desired. This is called development. Without development society would, for example, still use steam locomotives instead of electrical high-speed trains.

A **growth** in economy means that the total of goods and services provided over a year is larger than the previous year. Most people find this helpful for the common good, although others say that it is dangerous over the long run because our planet Earth has limited resources.

A stable, but growing economy allows for countries to develop and for citizens to have a better quality of life.

### ***How to measure growth in the Economy?***

One way to tell if a country's economy is strong, healthy and growing is looking at the country's **Gross Domestic Product** (GDP). This is the sum of all goods produced and all services provided over a year, expressed in money.

Another way to tell if a country's economy is strong and healthy is looking at the **quality of life** of the people living in that country. This includes healthcare, education, and the rates of employment (how many people have a job).

#### **Have a think!**

What is the GDP in the country you live in? Can you find out?

Is the GDP in your country high or low in comparison to other countries in the EU and other countries in the world?

### ***How the economy is maintained***

How does a country maintain and increase its economy?

This is different from country to country. Many things are involved, for example whether a country has natural resources (water, oil, coal, minerals, forests, good soil for farming), good weather (sunshine, wind and enough rain), skillsets (a well-educated and skilful population), technology, population size, supply and demand.

One of the ways a country's economy can grow, is by trade. Trade is buying and selling things. One can do this within a country, or from one country to another. Selling goods and services to different countries means more citizens may buy those goods and services.

This can increase the profit and economic success of both the buyer's and seller's country.

### ***Selling goods or services in different EU countries***

When factories produce goods, those goods have to comply with rules, guidelines and standards set by the EU.

For example, if a factory in Germany produces and sells electronics, toys, medical products or even food, the factory owners must comply with those standards. Only then they can

#### **Have a think!**

Can you list 5 to 10 things in your room that are made or produced in a country different to the country you live in?

sell their products in their own country and in other countries.

Rules, guidelines and standards that come from the EU are called **Regulations** and **Directives**. These are different types of rules.

Factories in all EU countries are legally required to follow those Regulations and Directives.

For factory owners, these Regulations and Directives may make it more challenging to produce and sell their things. The Regulations and Directives are made to protect and benefit consumers and citizens.

But there are also advantages for factory owners. For example having common rules for how things are made can help factories and shops sell their products because customers can trust the quality of those products without extra checking.

Also, it is easier to sell products when they are made identically. A large part of what the EU does is creating such common rules that apply across countries.

An example of this is producing electrical devices. All electrical devices must be suitable to be sold and used everywhere in Europe.

A consumer may recognise that a product has been assessed and complies with high safety, health, and environmental protection standards

when the 'CE' symbol is used on the product and its packaging.

The main benefit of the 'CE' symbol is that it consumers to trust that the goods or product is safe to use.

A business whose products include the CE symbol can sell those products in the EU without restrictions.

A consumer can also be confident that the product has the same level of health, safety, and environmental protection throughout the entire EU (and some other countries who use the CE sign).

### ***EU countries co-operating***

EU countries producing and selling products in large amounts can be cheaper, and so the same products can be sold at a cheaper price to consumers.

Co-operation across countries is useful also for people looking for a job.

People in some European countries may have skills that are required by factories and shops in other countries.

This means people get a better chance to find a job that matches their skills and interests.

That way many people in Europe have a better life. Having a good life is also called **well-being** or **prosperity**. It means people have what they



### **Have think!**

Can you find and list 5 products that have the 'CE' symbol?

Can you think of why those products have the 'CE' symbol?

need for a good standard of living. It also means that their lives get better. They have enough food, a place to live (housing), health care, and money left for hobbies.

## Why common rules for products are useful

### Larger markets

Without common rules, a German car company can sell their cars to the 83 Million people living in Germany.

With common rules, the same company can sell their cars to the 450 million citizens all over the EU.



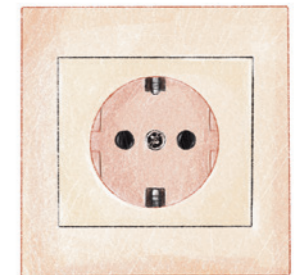
### Easier use

Most countries in Europe use the same type of electrical socket.

This means that a person from Italy can travel to Denmark and use their hair dryer or mobile phone charger in that country without any problem.

That's because manufacturers of electrical devices use the same standards in Italy and Denmark, and other EU countries.

However, if the person from Italy visits Great Britain, they will have to use an extra device because Great Britain has separate standards for electrical sockets.



### Health

Some of the rules in the EU are made to protect the health of the citizens.

Factories and shops must follow these rules so that citizens stay healthy.

There are rules in the EU for toys.

There must not be any harmful substances in toys which could make children sick.

Regardless of in which country they buy it, people in the EU can be sure that there is nothing harmful in those toys.



## Poor countries and rich countries

Different countries in Europe have different degrees of well-being.

Poorer countries on the Mediterranean Sea say: „Countries such as Germany have more use of the EU than us.“ Germany for example sells a lot of products to other countries, and thus Germany makes a lot of money.

Some people in Germany and other countries in the EU say: „Germany should do more to help other countries in the EU.“

Other people say: „Germany should not spend so much money on helping other countries in the EU.“

In the EU, there are many different opinions on this topic.

### Have a think!

Watch the construction workers in the pictures on the next page.

What are they doing?

Why did the authors of this book choose this picture to illustrate a chapter on the European Union?





## The symbols of the EU

### The flag of the EU

The EU has a flag.

The flag is a symbol for the EU.

A symbol helps people recognise a particular idea or organisation.

The flag of the EU has 12 stars, arranged in a circle.

The number of the stars does not stand for the number of countries in the EU; the number of countries in the EU is currently 27.<sup>1</sup> The number of 12 stars in the flag was chosen because 12 stands for unity and perfection.

The circle means: Europe is united and connected. All countries in the EU are of equal importance. The countries and the citizens in the EU belong together. They see each other and help each other.

<sup>1</sup> As in 2022. More countries may join in the future, or some may decide to leave.

## The anthem of the EU

The EU also has an anthem.

An anthem is a special type of a song, used as a symbol for a distinct group of people or an organisation. All countries have their anthem. Also some other organisations have their anthems, for example sports clubs.

When countries have an anthem, this is called a national anthem. The national anthem is played when there is something of importance to celebrate. It is also played for example at the beginning of an international football match.

The purpose of a national anthem is to bring people together despite any differences those people may have.

The anthem of the EU is a piece of music by *Ludwig van Beethoven*. Beethoven was a German composer who lived from 1770 to 1827. He created the music as part of his 9th Symphony, for singing the poem "Ode to Joy" which was written by *Friedrich Schiller*. Schiller is a German poet who lived from 1759 to 1805. The poem is about people being friends and loving each other.



### Have a think!

Do you support a sports club and do you know what their anthem is? Can you sing it?

## The motto of the EU

A motto is a short sentence used to explain an important idea.

For example, the USA have as their motto “In God we trust”. The city of Paris has the motto “Fluctuat nec mergitur”, which is Latin for “She is rocked by waves but does not sink”, which means that the city of Paris will stand firm even in difficult times.

The motto of the EU is:

***United in diversity***



## What is diversity?

People in the EU are different from each other. Each individual is different, and people also are raised in different conditions.

- They use different languages
- They have different cultures and traditions
- They look differently
- They love different things
- And so on

This is called diversity. One of the goals of the European Union is to preserve diversity in Europe.

## What does ‘united’ mean?

People in the EU belong together despite being different.

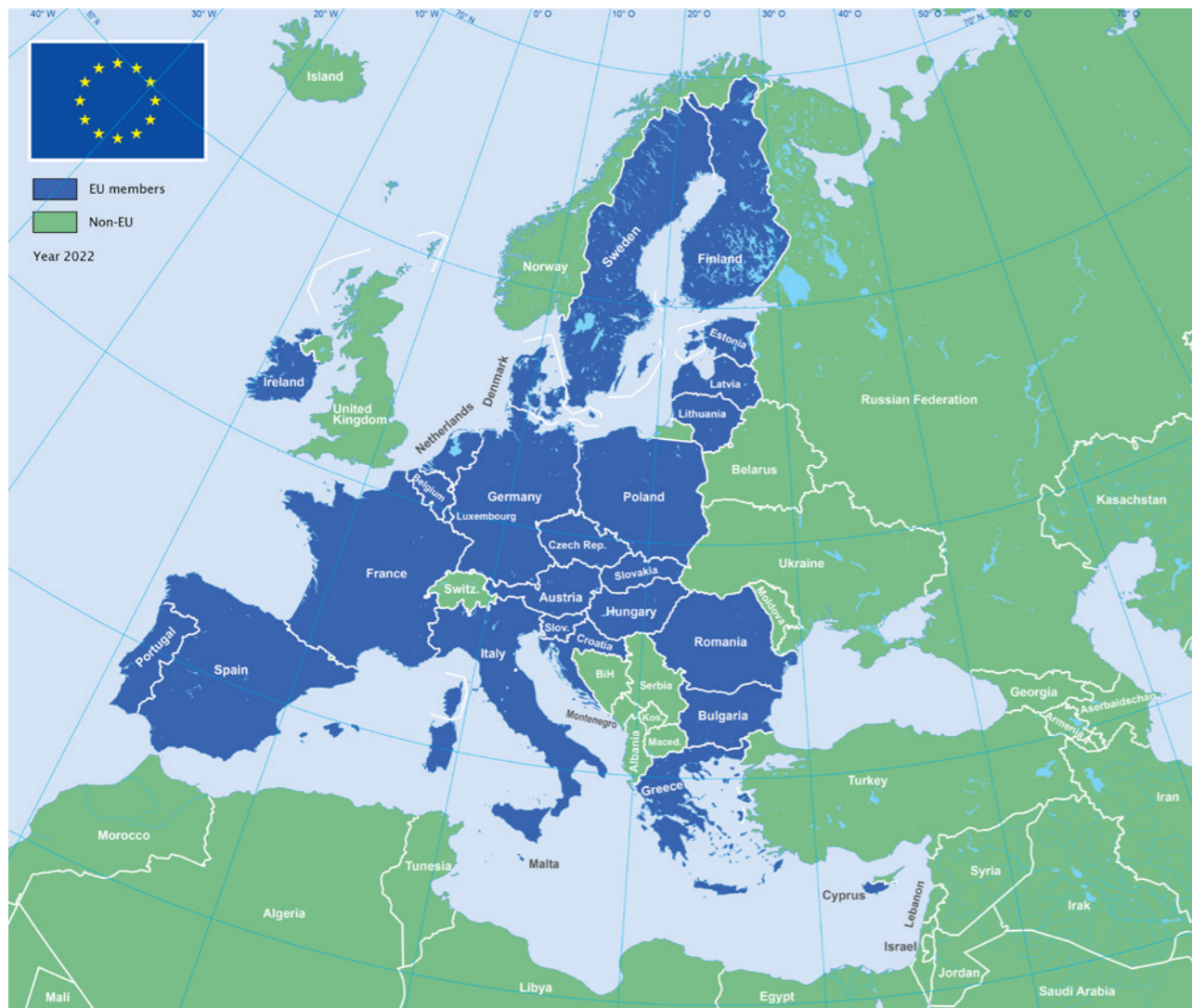
They speak different languages, have different holidays, prefer different kinds of food, live in different countries, follow different laws, and so on. But they also have a lot of things in common. When cooperating and bringing together their diverse skills, they can achieve more.

Therefore, the motto of the EU is *United in diversity*.

## Have a think!

Think about traditional food in the European country that you currently live in, and tell us about those foods.

Do you know other types of food typical for other countries?



The European Union has currently 27 member countries (in the year 2022). In this map they are coloured blue.

## Members of the EU

Europe and the EU are two different things.

Europe is a continent – a large piece of land surrounded by seas.

The EU is an association (club) of countries, most of which are within Europe (the continent).

Many countries in Europe (the continent) are not members of the EU. But since the EU was founded, the number of EU member countries has grown.

There is no limit to the number of countries that can become members of the EU.

Some countries that are not members of the EU currently want to become members, for example Serbia, Northern Macedonia, Turkey and Ukraine.<sup>1</sup>

In order to become members, countries have to meet certain requirements, and fulfilling them often takes a lot of effort and time.

Most of these requirements are about financial stability, democracy and the rule of law.

It is also possible for a country to want to leave the EU. For example, in 2019, the United Kingdom decided to leave the EU.

<sup>1</sup> The book was written in 2022.

When the UK left the EU, people wanted a short name for this event. They called it „Brexit“.

### The UK leaving the EU in 2019

The United Kingdom consists of several parts: England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Another name for the United Kingdom is Great Britain.

In June 2016, the citizens of the UK voted on the question: „Should Great Britain remain in the EU, or should it leave the EU?“

The majority of people in the UK voted to leave the EU.

The UK left the EU in March 2019.

Before, the EU had 28 member countries. Now it has 27.

When the UK left the EU, people wanted a short name for this event. They called it „Brexit“.

### Brexit

The word Brexit is glued together from two other words.

Britain + Exit → Brexit

Britain is a short word for Great Britain

Exit means „leaving“ or “door out”

### Who can become a member state of the EU?

Principally, each country in Europe can become a member of the EU. To become a member of the EU, a country must fulfil some requirements. These requirements were set by the EU in various agreements (called *treaties*) between its member countries.

A very important requirement is that a country must be **democratic**.

Another condition for countries to be members of the EU is that they follow the **rule of law**.

Also, countries can only become members of the EU when they accept that **Human Rights** apply to its citizens.

You find more about these ideas in the red boxes on the following pages.



Voting is an important part of democracy.

### **More conditions to be a member of the EU**

You saw that EU countries must be democratic, follow the rule of law, and respect Human Rights.

However, before becoming a member of the EU, other conditions to be met. Some of them are rather complex and abstract.

For example:

- The country must be politically stable.
- The people in the country must agree. (Such an agreement is usually given through voting in parliament).
- The country must use market economy (as opposed to centrally planned economy).
- The country has to follow certain rules for managing their state finances.
- The country accepts the obligations and goals of the EU.
- The country has to accept EU legislation in all its details. The totality of these rules is called the *Acquis communautaire*, which is French for “Common achievements”. It includes rules for all areas of life: trade, travel, banking, media, agriculture, food safety, taxation, justice, science, education, and many more.



#### **Have a think!**

Above we said:

“A country has to be politically stable.”

What could that mean?

#### **Have a think!**

Do you have an idea what “market economy” as opposed to “centrally planned economy” could be?

## What is democracy?

The word democracy comes from the root Greek words *demos* and *kratos*. *Demos* can be translated as 'the people' and *kratos* as 'power'. Thus democracy means *the power of the people*.

### Majority and minority

The main idea in a democracy is that decisions are taken according to what people want. But people want different things. People express what they want by voting in elections, so that their government can act as people voted.

This is called a decision by majority.

The opinion of the majority is important. The opinion of the minority is also important.

A country can be undemocratic even if the majority of people agree with its political decisions. A good democracy should also consider the opinions of smaller groups (minorities).

### Citizens must be treated equally

In a democracy, all citizens should be treated equally.

They are treated equally even when they think differently from the government or the majority.

People of all religions are treated equally. Also people who do not follow a religion.

### Freedom of expression

Everybody has the right to express their opinion publicly.

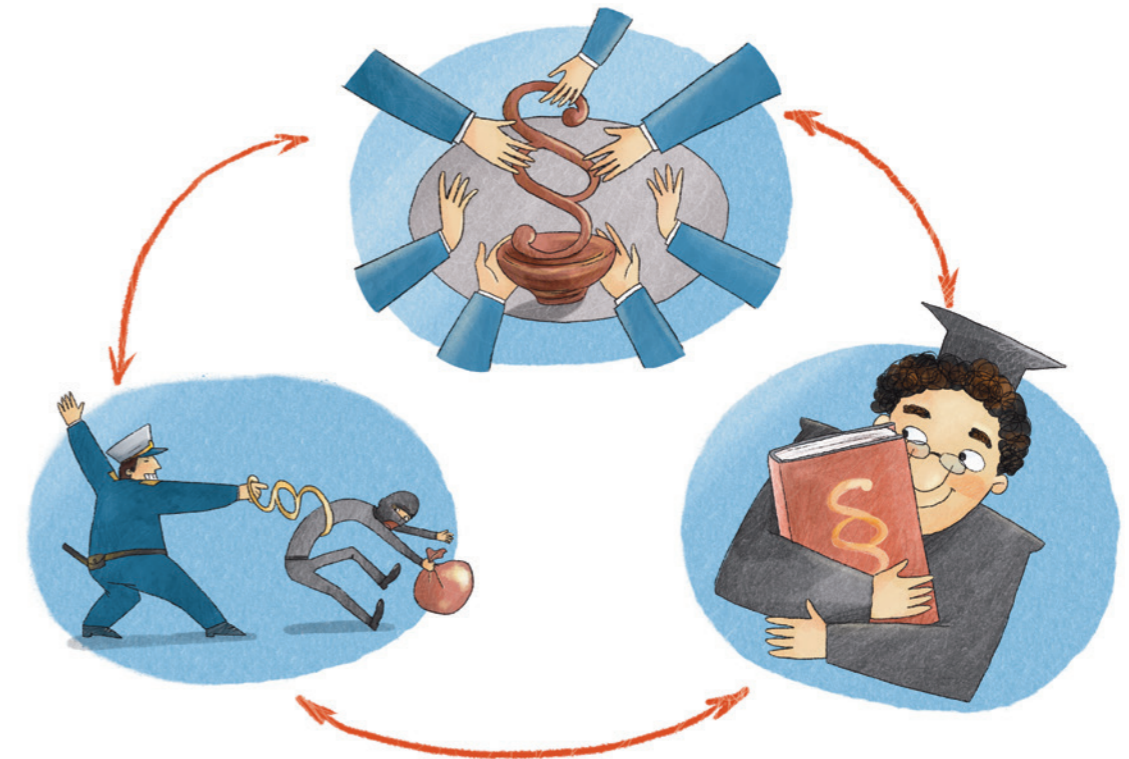
(In reality, there are limits to this. For example in most countries you are not allowed to publicly ask others to commit crimes, express hateful speech or ideas.)

### Governments can change

In a democracy, it is possible that a government changes. Elections are held usually every four or five years. Citizens elect a different parliament, and the new parliament forms a new government.

### Separation of powers

An important democratic principle is separation of powers. This means that in a democratic country the government, the parliament, and the courts of justice are separate. They work independently from each other. The government cannot tell



Separation of powers

the parliament or the courts what to do. They have specific and individual roles.

There are certain ways how these institutions can (and must) work with each other. Parliament makes law, which government must apply. Government can propose new laws, which parliament may accept. Citizens can ask the courts to check if what the government did or will do is in line with the law.

The interaction between these bodies are defined and limited.

You find this principle in most European countries. For EU-countries, it is obligatory.

The opposite would be an autocratic ruler who can do whatever they want, even tell the courts how to make decisions, for example to treat certain people differently.

The opposite would be an autocratic ruler who can do whatever he wants, even tell the courts how to judge, and for example to treat certain people differently.



## What is the rule of law?

Rule of law means that all citizens are treated equally. No one is above the law. A government also has to follow the law.

All government authorities have to follow the law, for example, the police, the local authorities and the courts.

Courts of law are where legal experts work (judges, prosecutors, barristers/ solicitors). They interpret the law, and they decide if the behaviour of a person, a company, or even the government is legal.

The courts are independent from the government. This means that

no one is allowed to tell judges how to decide. Judges are only bound by the law and by the rules of their profession. Judges cannot be removed from office just because they think differently from government.

The rule of law means that citizens are treated by the law equally. A rich, poor, powerful or weak person should all be treated equally.

## What are Human Rights?

Human Rights are rights that every person has.

Human Rights are recognised by most countries in the world.

Human Rights are basic rights for every human being.

Human Rights have developed over thousands of years of human history.

Human Rights include:

- The right to live; nobody may be killed
- Nobody may be tortured
- Slavery and forced labour are forbidden

Human Rights are written in international treaties (= agreements between countries). One of them is the *European Convention of Human Rights* from 1953. Countries who signed the Convention promise to respect these rights.

The EU accepts only countries as a member state who respect Human Rights.

For more about Human Rights see the Section on the *Council of Europe* on Page 115.

### Human Rights in the UK

The UK decided to make some of the Articles of the *European Convention of Human Rights* part of their own national laws. These laws are called the Human Rights Act 1998 ("HRA").

The HRA became a law in 2000. This was done to make it easier for citizens of the UK to bring a claim under Human Rights within the UK legal system.

## People, parliament and government

In a democracy the opinions of the people are important when decisions are made.

Taking decisions can be time-consuming and complicated.

Therefore, citizens elect people to act for them. These elected people are called Members of Parliament (MEP). They gather in a big hall called the parliament building. They discuss important questions. They decide on new laws by voting.

In some countries, the Members of Parliament elect the government, that is the prime minister (the head of government) and the ministers (his/her assistants for certain areas of work). This is how things are done for example in Germany.

In other countries, the head of state is elected by citizens directly. This is how things are done in France. The citizens also elect Members of Parliament.

In some countries the head of government is called a President. In other countries, a Prime Minister. The names depend on the tradition of the country.

Parliaments have different names. In Germany the parliament is called *Bundestag*. In Poland it is called *Sejm* (meaning “gathering”). In other countries the parliament is called *National Assembly* etc.

## It is undemocratic when...

- Citizens are treated worse when they have other opinions than the government
- The police does not follow the law;
- The police arrests people who speak against the government
- The courts of justice are influenced by politicians
- Media (newspapers, TV, internet) present only the view of government
- Government never changes

## What are public authorities?

In a modern country, there are many different authorities for many purposes. An example of an authority is the police.

There are different authorities that are responsible for things such as

- Issuing social aid to people
- Collecting taxes
- Maintaining streets,
- Running schools

Public authorities are organisations run by government. Their role is defined by laws. Authorities fulfill tasks important for the public's benefit.

Some authorities have the right to tell people what to do. For example the police tells people to not drive too quickly.

## When Human Rights are violated

A country that breaks an Article of the *European Convention of Human Rights* can be punished by the EU.

The punishment may include fines or sanctions.

**Fines** are money that the country has to pay.

A **sanction** is when money or other support is stopped. For example, stopping trade to and from that country.

See also ry, see Chapter “*Common laws for multiple countries*” on Page 67,

### Have a think:

Discuss why these things are not democratic!

## What does the EU do?

The EU is about countries coordinating with each other, and taking decisions together. The idea is to have common rules for all countries, and through this for all citizens, all companies, and so on. In one word, the EU is about making life easier.

In this chapter we discuss the EU's most important areas of work.

## Freedom to movement and travel

An important idea that the EU applied is its idea of making it easy for people to move and travel.

### Citizens of the EU may work everywhere in the EU

For example, a doctor from Poland may work in Germany.

A chef from Germany may open a restaurant in Mallorca.

A carpenter from Austria may take a job in Italy.

There are many people who live in one country but work in a different country. Many people for example live in France and travel to Germany to work.





### Citizens of the EU may live everywhere in the EU

This is called *Freedom of Movement*. Freedom of Movement is the right of every EU citizen. This right comes from EU Law.

This law is called Article 21 of the *Treaty on Functioning of the EU*.

In some countries there are stricter laws on movement.

Individuals must have their own income and not burden the country economically.

Exceptions to this are Refugees.



### Countries in the EU have open borders

Normally when traveling to another country, people have to show their passport or ID card. This is called border checks.

Many EU countries have agreed that citizens do not have to show their passport or ID cards.

These countries together are called the Schengen area. (That is because the agreement about this was signed first in the city of Schengen in Luxembourg.)

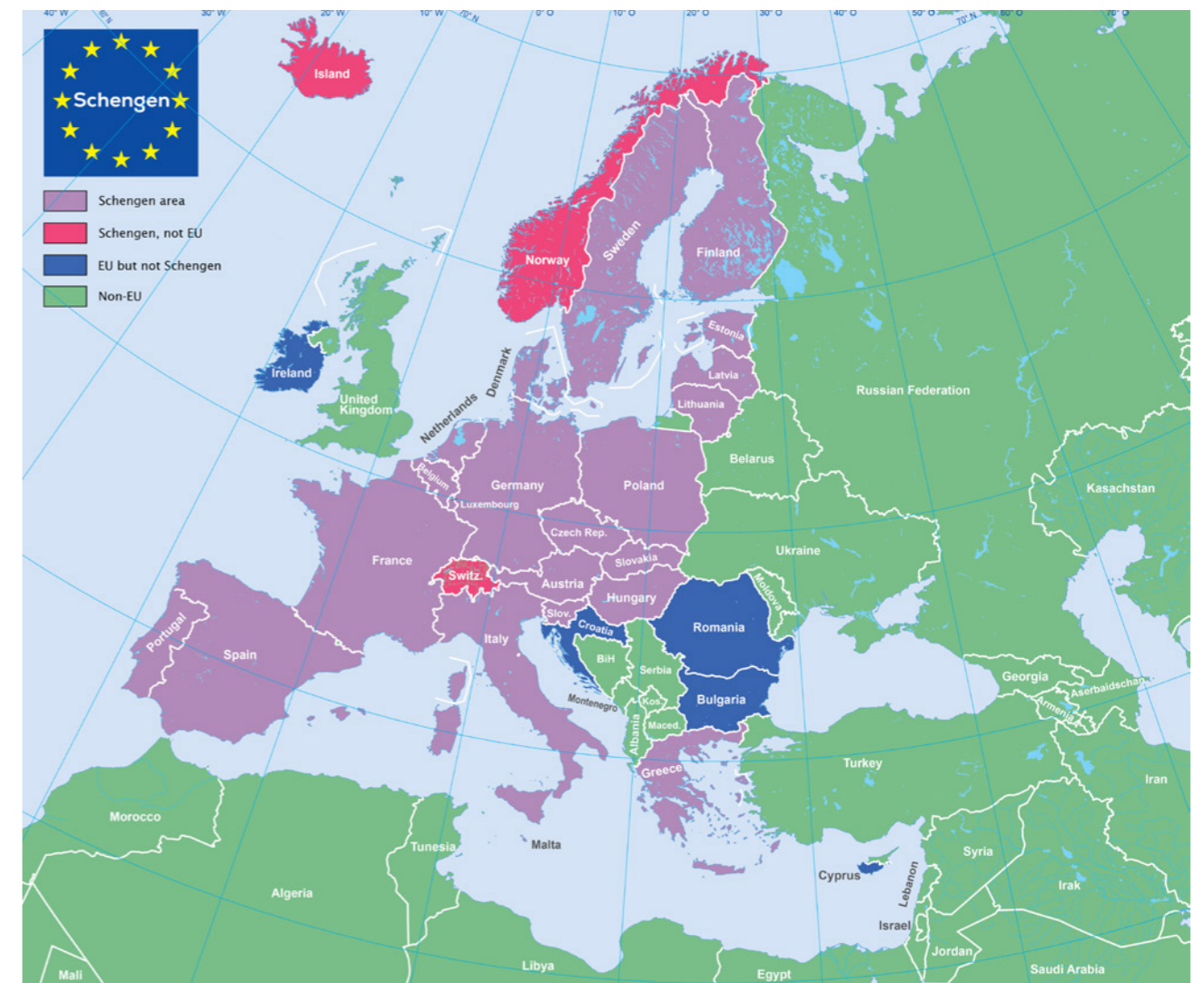
This makes travelling through EU countries easier. Also, it makes it easier to live or work in EU countries.

The freedom of movement for workers can be found in Article 45 of the *Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*.

This states that EU citizens are allowed to:

- Look for a job in another EU country
- Work there without needing a work permit

- Reside there for that purpose
- Stay there even after employment has ended
- Have the same rights as nationals related to finding employment, working conditions, taxes, and getting help from social systems.



The Schengen area: Violet countries are part of the Schengen agreement. Travelling here is widely possible without border checks. Red countries participate although not being members of the EU. Blue countries are EU-members but not yet part of the Schengen area.

## Refugees – people who seek protection

In 2021, about 84 million people world-wide were refugees.<sup>1</sup> They were fleeing from war or from other problems that made it impossible for them to stay in their countries.

Refugees do not want to leave their home country. But they feel that they do not have a choice.

Most people flee their countries because:

- There is war in their country;
- They are persecuted because of their skin colour, their sex or gender, their political views, their religion;
- They have very bad living conditions, and there is no hope that conditions will get better

The refugee issue is one that affects all countries across the world. No country can solve this problem alone. The EU also cannot solve this problem. However, with the co-operation of all its member countries, the EU can do more than if the countries were acting alone.

Some people offer simple solutions to the problem of refugees. But these people only focus on a small part of the problem. Some people say: “Let us take in all the refugees to help them”, but they see only part of the problem. Other people say: “We should not take refugees at all”, but they see only part of the problem, too.

<sup>1</sup> Source: UNHCR, data published November 2021, still found unchanged in June 2022.



## Moving to another country for work or education

Individuals all across Europe have skills in their jobs which they can put to good use in other countries, especially when these countries' citizens lack such skills.

### United Kingdom

When London hosted the Olympic games in 2021, the years before, thousands of builders from Europe worked towards preparing the

different sites including the London stadium (also called the Olympic stadium).

### Germany

Thousands of construction workers from other countries such as Poland, Bulgaria and Romania have come to Germany to work in Germany. This is because they can get better income than at home. Also many doctors and nurses in Germany have come from other countries in the EU. Also many people from EU countries move to Germany to study at university.

### Hungary

Many students from other countries go to Hungary to study at university, for example because they did not get a place at university in their own home country. Hungary offers good education, even for students who do not know Hungarian.

## Common market

A market is a place where people buy and sell goods. A good example for this is a farmers' market.

Each market has its own rules. There are rules about when market stalls may be put up and when they have to be removed, what items can be sold, and so on.

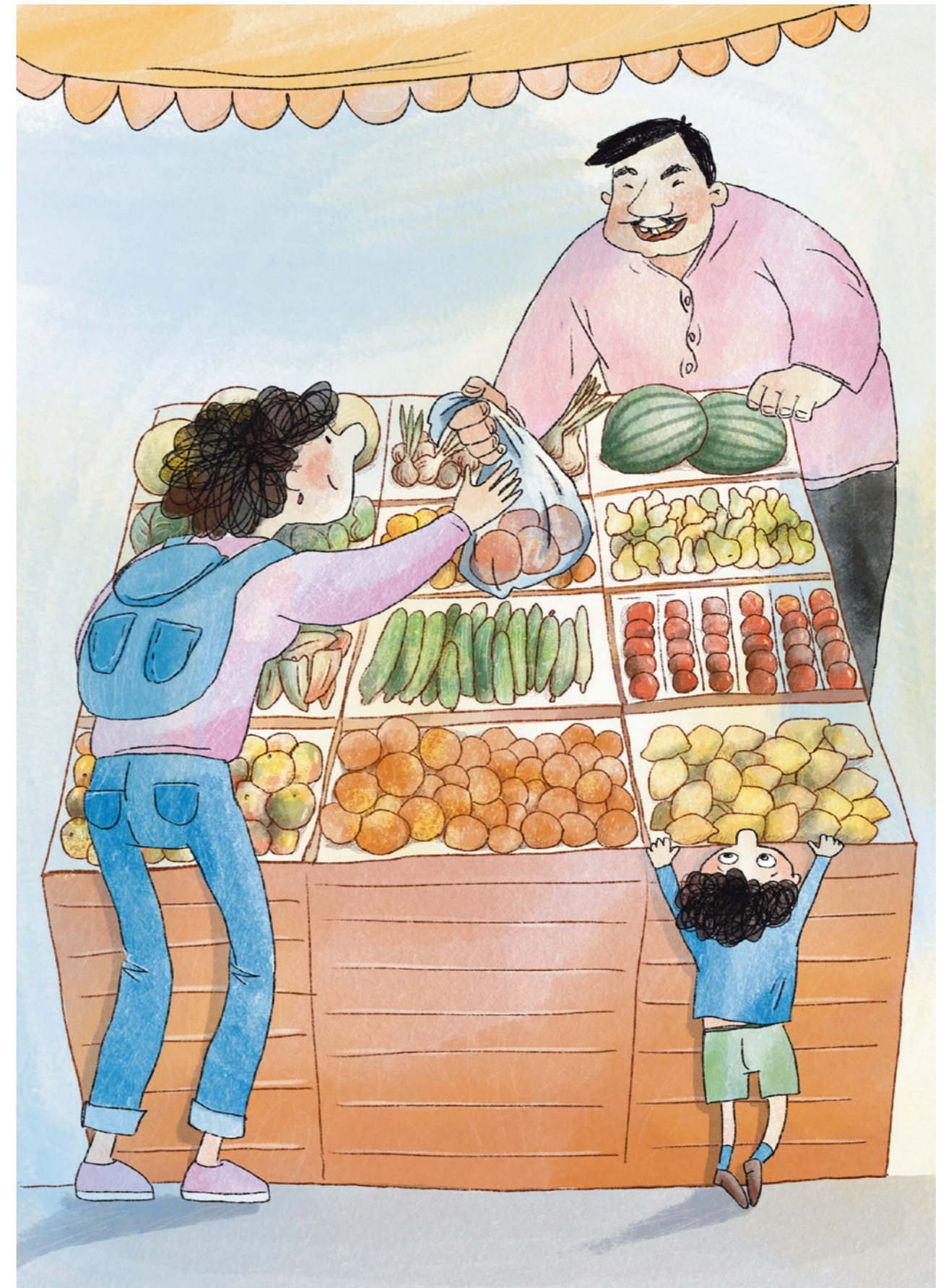
We speak of a "market" also when speaking about trade in an entire country.

Goods can also be sold from one country to another. For example, cars from Germany are sold to the USA.

However, in the USA there are different rules for selling cars. For example, cars in Europe have yellow indicators, but in the USA they must be red, and so cars from Germany need to be built differently for USA customers. Whoever wants to sell cars to the USA, must know the rules for selling cars there.

We say: "The USA have a different market."

In the EU, the rules for selling, buying and producing goods (cars and any other things) are identical. Therefore we say that the EU uses a single market. This is also called the **European Single Market**.



## The European Single Market

- Goods can be brought from one European country to another. So, lorries and trains usually can pass borders without being checked.
- Traders inside the EU do not have to pay customs. That means, they do not have to pay money when their goods go into another EU country.
- When goods come in from countries outside the EU, the same customs apply everywhere, in all EU-countries.
- In the EU, there are rules to protect people who buy goods to use them (these people are called customers). Creating such rules, and enforcing/applying those rules, is called customer protection. Customer protection is an important task of the EU.

### Have a think!

The European Single Market is another example of where the EU creates laws that affect all countries in the EU.

For doing so, the EU needs a good reason. Do you remember the name of the principle followed by the EU?

- ☐ Principle of Sustainability
- ☐ Principle of Suspiciousness
- ☐ Principle of Subsidiarity
- ☐ Principle of Supportability

If you don't know, look it up on Page 81.



Trade between countries outside the EU: Usually, customs must be paid.



Trade between countries inside the EU: there are no customs any more..

## What the Single Market offers

The European Single Market has many advantages. Here are three examples.



### Clear information about products

You can buy apple juice from Poland.

The bottle has a label where you find information what is actually in it. The label is written in several languages.

If it writes “juice”, it must consist of 100 per cent real juice of the fruits.

If there is anything else in the bottle (sugar or water), it may not be called “juice”, but something else (“juice drink”, “fruit nectar” or so) Thus you know exactly what you get: is it real juice, or is it something else.

These rules are the same all over the EU. You can enter a supermarket in Portugal, and you will have the same rules.

### Warranty for electric devices

Another rule in the EU is:

Electric devices come with a warranty period of two years.

For example, you buy a toaster, and after a couple of weeks it does not work anymore.

The place where you bought the toaster has to repair it, or to give you a new one.

This is the same all over the EU.



## Work in any country you want

There are even more advantages of the single market for people:

You would prefer to live in another country, and you have a profession that is in demand there? Then you can look for a job in that country.

Depending on your profession, you should of course know the local language.

Many people in professions like tiler, plumber, carpenter, roofer, bricklayer or electrician work in other European countries. Many doctors and nurses do as well. Also many scientists.

The other way around: Imagine you are building a house and need construction workers. You can hire construction workers from anywhere in the EU.





## Common currency

Currency is another word for money.

Traditionally, each country has its own currency (kind of money).

All countries in the EU had their own currency. France had Franc (₣) Germany had *Deutsche Mark* (DM), Austria had *Schilling* (öS), the Netherlands had *Gulden* (ƒ), Italy had *Lire* (L.) Travelling to these countries meant that you had to change your money. You went to a bank and bought the country's currency.

Trading with the countries was also more difficult because all prices had to be calculated again and again.

In order to save everybody this additional work, countries in the EU decided to give up their national currency and use a common one. The common currency is called Euro (€).

Countries have agreed to use the Euro because it makes many things easier: travel, trade, and dealing with banks.

Countries using the Euro means that when you go on holiday to those countries, you do not have to change your currency. You can pay using the same money you are using at home, the Euro.

With the Euro as a currency, trade in the EU is much easier.

A company in Germany that produces furniture can buy wood from Finland and tools from Italy and sell their furniture to France. They can use the same currency for each step. This saves time in having to convert the currency and value.

Currently 19 out of the 27 EU countries use the Euro. The other 8 countries still use their own currency: Sweden uses Krona, Poland uses Złoty, Bulgaria uses Lev, and so on .

A note on the UK:

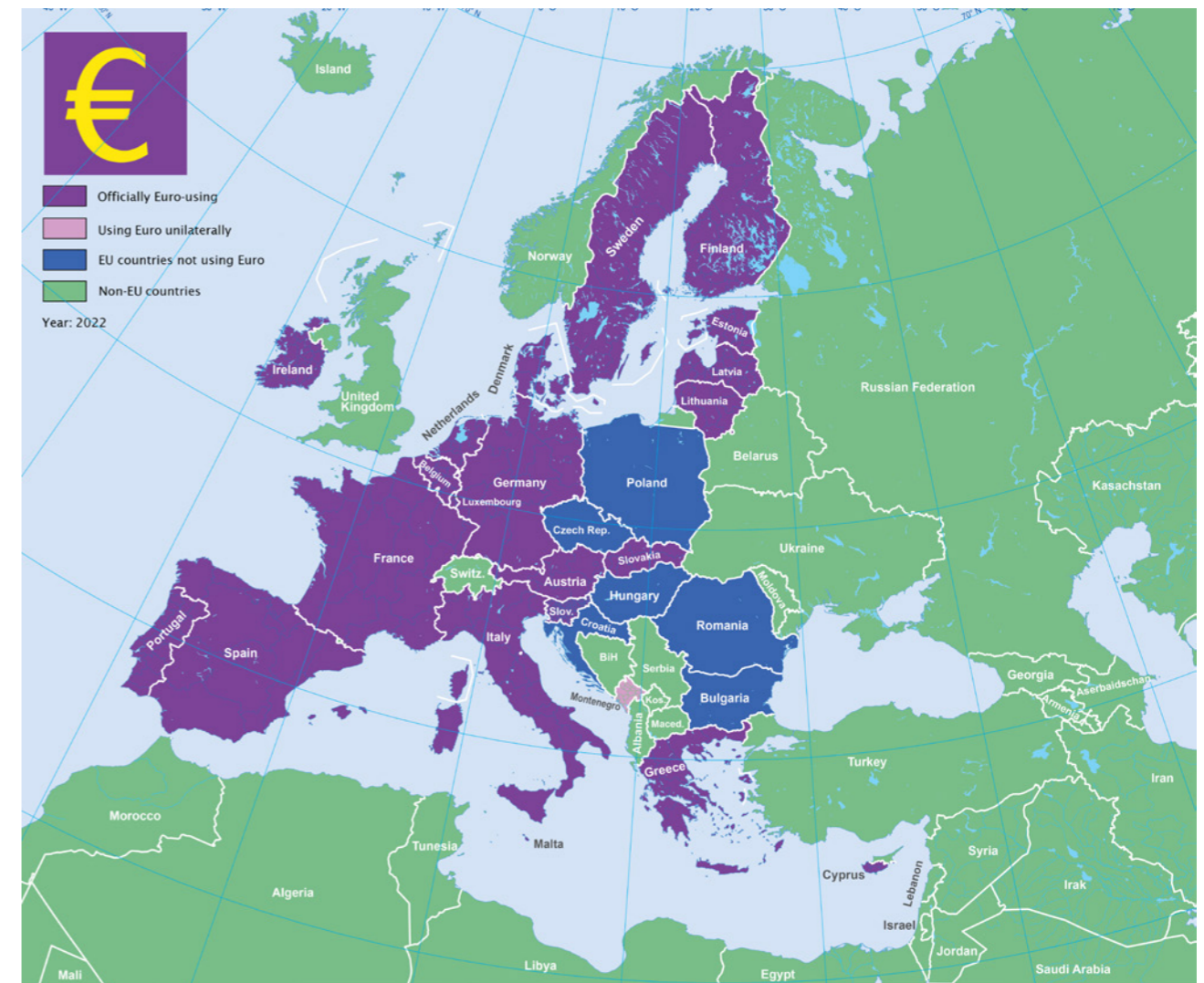
The UK has never used the Euro and has kept its traditional currency, the Great British Pound (£). This means that if you travel from the UK to other countries you will have to change your money.

### Currencies in other EU countries

Bulgaria - Bulgarian lev - lv.  
Czechia - Czech koruna - K  
Denmark - Danish krone - kr.  
Hungary - Hungarian forint - Ft  
Poland - Polish złoty - zł  
Romania - Romanian leu - lei  
Sweden - Swedish krona - kr

### Currencies in some non-EU countries

United kingdom - Pound sterling - £  
Switzerland - Swiss franc - CHF  
Norway - Norwegian krone - kr,  
Montenegro - Euro - € (yes, they use the euro)



Countries using the euro currency are violet. Some EU countries do not use the euro. They are left blue. One country does use the euro without being a member of the EU (pink).



## Common foreign policy

### *What is foreign policy?*

People can speak to each other, agree something, and solve their problems. Countries can do this too. When countries speak to each other, it is called foreign policy. Another word is external policy.

Representatives of the countries meet and speak to each other. These representatives are often their Ministers of the Exterior (other word: Foreign Ministers), or their assistants, the diplomats.

Every country in the EU has its own foreign policy.

### *The advantage of speaking with one voice*

In Europe, there are many small countries with few citizens, for example Luxemburg and Northern Ireland. There are also large countries with many citizens, for example, Germany and France.

All the countries in Europe are much smaller than the USA or China, both in terms of their land area, wealth, and in numbers of their citizens.

Big and powerful countries are unlikely to listen to countries that are small and have less power.

With countries being united in the EU and speaking with one voice, it is more likely that larger and more powerful countries everywhere in the world will listen to them and treat them on equal footing.

All EU countries together have about 450 million citizens. This is much more than the USA (330 Million) and Russia (145 million). It is much less than China (1400 million, or 1.4 billion); China's population is three times more than the whole of EU.

Being united, the EU countries can achieve better results in foreign policy. For example, being united, the EU can agree better contracts with China, Russia, and the USA.

Being united, the EU is also more likely to promote what it finds right, for example Human Rights or policies to fight the climate catastrophe. The EU is also more likely to fight against things that it finds wrong, for example, wars and corruption.

### ***Foreign policy institutions of the EU***

Starting with the year 2009, the EU has created its own foreign policy bodies. They enable the EU to do its own foreign policy without relying on the foreign policy experts (= diplomats) of its member countries.

Most important are

- *The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs.* This is, so to say, the Foreign Minister of the EU. He (or she) is also Vice-President of the EU Commission. Currently (2022) this is Josep Borell from Spain.
- *The European External Action Service.* This is the EU's diplomatic service, and can also be seen as its defence and foreign ministry. It has about 4000 staff members.

These offices were created after the EU member countries had signed contracts (treaties) on it. A big step was the *Treaty of Lisbon*, which was signed in 2009.

The EU co-operates with all important international organisations, associations of countries, etc. For example, it cooperates with the United Nations (UN) and also with many smaller regional associations all over the world.

The EU does not have its own military. Instead, the EU can ask its member countries to send their military to places in the world where the EU wants to help preserve peace, to create security and to help in crises.

## Aims

The aims of the EU's foreign policy are:

- Protect the common values and interests of the EU countries
- Democracy, the rule of law, Human Rights
- Security
- Peace
- Sustainable development
- International trade
- Protection of the environment
- Assist other countries in natural or man-made disasters

These aims are written in the *Maastricht Treaty* (Article 21). This treaty was signed in 1992. It is called “Maastricht Treaty” because it was signed in the city of Maastricht, Netherlands.

## Work done

Important common foreign policy of the EU has been done in recent years regarding the following regions of the world:

- the Balkans – countries in South-Eastern Europe
- the Horn of Africa – Africa's most eastern part with the countries Ethiopia and Somalia
- the Sahel region – across all Africa, South of the Sahara desert
- the Middle East – the Arabian countries and their neighbours

### Have a think!

Take a map of the world, or even better a globe, and find the regions mentioned in the text above: Balkans, Horn of Africa, Sahel, Middle East.

What countries/regions were you able to find?

What do you know about these regions, for example from the news?

Do you know people from these parts of the world?



## Common laws for multiple countries

### What is a law?

Laws are rules that countries give themselves, to be followed by all citizens, but also by the government.

There are different types of laws:

- Laws to punish criminals, and hopefully stop them (Penal Law)
- Laws to regulate how people do business with each other (Civil Law)
- Laws to regulate how the state deals with citizens, and how government institutions have to conduct themselves (Public Law)
- Laws to regulate what institutions are there at all in a country (Constitution)

There are also many other types of laws. Some of them are called differently, for example regulations, codes, and many other names. A more universal name for laws is “legal acts”. Some legal acts are not issued by the government but on other levels of the state. For example, the city council can issue a legal act. This is then valid only for this city.

Laws are usually written down. This is so that everybody can look up what is in the law. This is important so that citizens can follow those

laws. It is also important in case there is a dispute about the law.

### **How laws are made**

In a democracy, laws are issued in a democratic process, usually by parliament. Some deputies in the parliament write the law, in form of a proposal. All deputies read it, and when they find it makes sense, they vote in parliament for it. Then the law is published so that everybody can read it. After that the law is in force and has to be followed by everybody.

Government has to make sure that everybody follows the law.

Instead by deputies in parliament, the law proposal can also be written by government officials. But anyway it is the deputies in parliament who will accept or refuse it by voting on it.

### **How laws are executed**

In a democratic country, power is divided in three branches:

- The legislative, to issue the laws. – Often this is parliament.
- The executive, to make sure the law is followed – This is the government with all its subordinate (= lower) institutions.
- The judicative, to solve disputes – These are the Courts of law.



*A judge has to try to be impartial and not be drawn to whatever third parties say.*

This is called **separation of powers**.

It is the task of the government to make sure that laws are followed. To this end the government has various institutions, for example administration, and police, and many other agencies for specific purposes. People working in such positions for the government are usually called *civil servants*.

### **How to settle disputes about laws?**

Sometimes people do not follow the law.

For example, somebody steals something.

Or there is a dispute on whether something is legal or not. (“Legal” means: “according to the law”, “as the law says”.) For example, the mayor of a town decides to take away land from a land owner to build a new road. The land owner may ask a court to check if what the mayor is doing is legal.

Courts of law are institutions where people work who are highly trained in understanding the law. They are called judges. Judges are decision makers. Their task is to decide if something is according to the law, and how the rules set by the law have to be applied in detail.

An important thing in democracies is that judges must be independent. The government (and anybody else) must not be able to influence judges in their decisions. Therefore judges are usually assigned to this duty once for a lifetime.

### **Laws in one country vs. laws between countries**

So far we spoke about laws that apply in one country.

However, there are also laws that apply to more than one country. Countries decide to issue such laws together. This has many advantages. For example, it can make it easier to travel, trade, or to look for a job.

Also it is easier for everybody to follow the law when the law is the same everywhere.

Laws applying to more than one country is called *International Public Law*.

The EU is based on such international public laws.

Everything the EU decides, applies to all of its member countries.

There are different ways on how decisions of the EU are put into national law (= the individual laws of the member countries). The most important ways are:

- **Regulations** – This is when the law the EU issues applies directly in all member countries
- **Directives** – This is when the EU issues only a framework, and member countries implement this with some room for adjustments to their individual needs or desires.

**(For more on Regulations and Directives see the Box on Page 80.)**

**All laws that the EU makes must answer the needs and desires of the citizens in all countries. The laws should help the quality of life of people in Europe.**

## Where the EU is responsible and where not

The EU has the power to decide on certain matters. Many things continue to be **decided by the countries themselves**, without the influence of the EU.<sup>1</sup>



### Money

Some EU countries decided to use the Euro as their currency.

Others use a different currency; for example Sweden uses Krona, and Bulgaria uses Leva. They have different coins and different banknotes.

It is the country's choice what currency to use.

### Military / Defence

EU countries make decisions on their military.

They decide how to organise their army, navy and air force.

They decide how much money to spend on it.

The EU does not set rules about military.

### Högtider

The 3rd of October is a German national holiday. Germans celebrate that the former two German states (East and West) have become a single state again. This is a holiday only in Germany.

Other countries pick other days for holidays.



<sup>1</sup> For more on this, see below the red box *Principle of Subsidiarity*, Page 81.

Some matters are decided **entirely by the EU**. Decisions on such topics apply to all EU countries.

### Customs

When individuals or companies sell or buy goods or services outside the country, those individuals or companies usually have to pay money to the government. This is called customs fees.

EU countries, however, do not ask for customs fees when things are traded between EU countries. Everybody can sell and buy things across borders without obstacles or additional costs.

Trading with countries outside the EU, generally requires customs fees to be paid. The EU makes sure that these are equal for everybody in the EU.

For example, customs fees for trading with China are equal for people in Italy and for people in Sweden.



### Airport security

Airport security is governed by the EU. All EU countries must apply the same rules.

At all airports in all EU countries there are the same rules for how to check passengers and their baggage.



### Protecting sea creatures

The EU has the right to make laws to protect animals and plants in the sea ("*protection of marine biological resources*"). All countries have to follow these laws.

The reason for this is because all seas are connected.



### More

There are more such policy areas. They are listed in the *Treaty on the functioning of the European Union* from 2012, Article 3.

There are some matters that **both the EU and EU countries decide** on. This means the EU may issue laws; the countries may also issue laws on this, but only as far as the EU has not. – This is called *shared responsibility*.

### Consumer protection

An example of *shared responsibility* is consumer protection.

Consumer protection are rules to protect consumers.

Consumers are people who buy goods and services.

These rules help to make sure that all consumers are safe, and not taken advantage off by sellers.

The EU has certain rules on consumer protection. Some countries have additional rules.

### Telephone fees when abroad

The EU has made a rule that people can use mobile phones in other EU countries with no extra fees.

This means that an individual will pay the same fees they would pay if they were in the home country.

Without this EU law, telephone companies could charge people more if using their phones in other countries, for example during holidays.

There are however many other details in telecommunication that are regulated by the individual countries, and not by the EU.



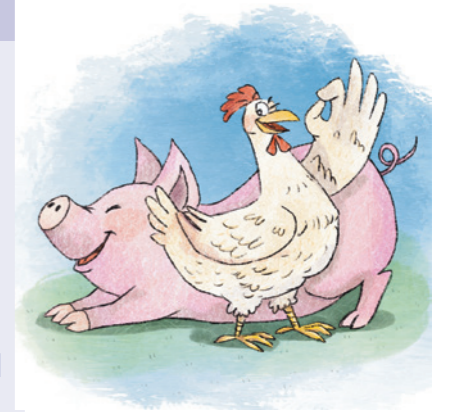
### Agriculture

The EU has a focus and interest in agriculture.

The EU supports farmers financially to encourage farming and production.

The EU also tries to make farmers protect the environment.

But countries have also their own, additional laws and rules for agriculture.



There are many more policy matters that the EU and EU countries have shared responsibility for. These areas are listed in the Treaty on the functioning of the EU (from 2012), Article 4. Here are some of them:

- Internal market
- Social policy
- Fisheries
- Environment
- Transport
- Energy
- Security
- Justice
- Health
- Tourism
- Education



### Have a think!

What do these notions mean?

Can you find concrete examples for those policy areas?

What activities of citizens and authorities could be meant?

### **Why does it makes sense to have the same rules in all countries?**

The benefit of having the same rules and laws applied in all EU countries is tis that it enables for consistency, stability and fairness.

An example of this is laws on environmental protection.

The reason for this is because pollution does not stop at country borders. A country can try to protect its environment but this will not really help when neighbouring countries continue polluting.

Above (Page 13) we discussed that EU promotes unity and working together. When all countries work together and unite, goals are achieved more effectively and efficiently.

The same rules apply throughout the EU for plastic waste and use. Therefore, all EU countries are required to follow the same rules on plastic waste.

This helps the EU contribute to reducing plastic waste.

The EU countries decided that regulations on plastic waste should be made on the EU level. This means all EU countries must follow those rules.

## **Avoiding plastic waste**

People in Europe use a lot of plastic bags.

Plastic bags are bad for the environment.

Many plastic bags are thrown away and wind up in the sea. This is bad for the animals living in the sea.

It does not help when people in only one country use less plastic bags.

Therefore the EU decided:

*“By the end of 2019, one person in the EU must not use more than 90 plastic bags per year. And by the end of 2029, one person shall use at most 40 plastic bags per year.”*

All counries have to take steps to reduce the use of plastic bags.

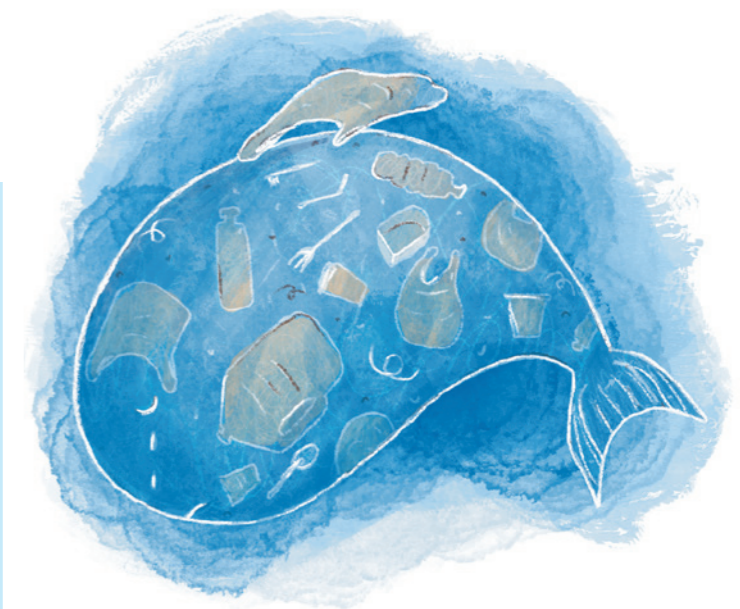
They also have to take steps to make sure that plastic waste is not simply thrown away but re-used in some way. This is called recylcing.

### **Have a think!**

What are you doing with your old plastic bottles and plastic bags?

Is plastic waste collected in your town? How?

Do you know what happens with the plastic waste after it is collected?



## Regulations and directives

There are two different types of laws in the EU.

They are called Regulations and Directives

When there is a **Regulation** about something, countries have to do exactly what it says. When the EU issues a regulation, that regulation becomes law immediately in all member countries. It replaces national laws that may have been there on the same topic.

An example for a Regulation is

*Regulation (EU) No 524/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2013 on online dispute resolution for consumer disputes.*

The regulation is about improving consumer protection.

When there is a Directive, countries have to do what the Directive says. However, they are free to do apply the Directive in different ways. Each country can apply the Directive in a way that they think is best for the country.

Directives do not take effect immediately. The country has to issue national laws to achieve the

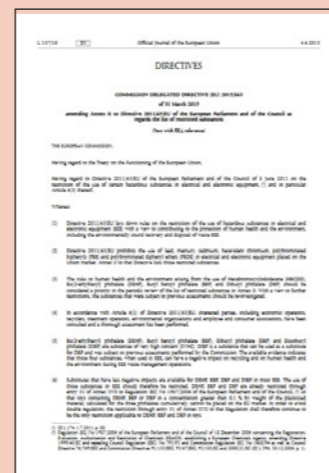
goals set in the Directive. In doing this, countries have some freedom and flexibility. This is because member states have different legal and procedural systems, traditions, terminology (= they use different words for things).

Member states are free to create laws that are even stricter than the EU Directive. However, Member states cannot create a law that is less than the Directive.

An example for a Directive is

*EU Directive 2009/20/EC*

which requires all ships visiting EU ports to have certain kind of insurance. When the Directive was issued, countries adjusted their national laws to fit.



*That's how an EU Directive looks. It is a simple document. You can download and read all EU Directives and Regulations from the EU website. They are there in all the languages of the member states.*

## Article 288

Article 288 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union says what kind of legal acts are there in the EU:

*„To exercise the Union's competences, the institutions shall adopt regulations, directives, decisions, recommendations and opinions.*

*A regulation shall have general application. It shall be binding in its entirety and directly applicable in all Member States.*

*A directive shall be binding, as to the result to be achieved, upon each Member State to which it is addressed, but shall leave to the national authorities the choice of form and methods.*

*A decision shall be binding in its entirety upon those to whom it is addressed.*

*Recommendations and opinions shall have no binding force.“*

## Principle of subsidiarity

Sometimes there is discussion whether a law should be made on the EU level or by the member countries themselves.

There is a legal principle that helps decide who has the power to make a decision. This is known as the *Principle of Subsidiarity*.

The word 'Subsidiarity' comes from a Latin word for "help". You could also say "Principle of Help".

The *Principle of Subsidiarity* says that things that can be regulated in the individual countries should be regulated by them, not on a higher level. Things may be regulated on the EU level (= for all countries together) only when there is really need to.

The *Principle of Subsidiarity* is derived from Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e-6da6.0023.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e-6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)

## In the EU, who takes decisions?

There are four institutions in the European Union that are most important for decision-making, and in particular for making new laws.

These are:

- The European Parliament
- The European Council (Heads of states)
- The Council of the European Union (Council of Ministers)
- The European Commission.

We will now explain what these four institutions do, and how they work together to make laws in the European Union.

## The European Council

### *Where Heads of State meet*

The *European Council* is a place where the heads of the EU member states work together. For example, the President of France, the Prime Minister of Italy, the Chancellor of Germany, the Chancellor of Austria, the Prime Minister of Bulgaria, and so on.

In the European Council, the 27 heads of states come together, usually every three months.

The meetings of the European Council are in Brussels, the capital of Belgium. Most institutions of the EU are in Brussels.

The heads of state in the European Council discuss important matters that affect the EU. They set the goals and direction the EU wants to go in general.

1



*The logo of the European Council is inspired by lantern-shaped inner part of its building.*



*Europa building in Brussels, entry hall.*

## Decisions they make

- Decide about the goals of the EU
- Decide which are the important topics in the EU
- Elect the President of the European Council who has the task to organise the work of the Council



One of the meeting rooms in the Europa building where the European Council meets.

## The Council of the European Union

### *Also called Council of Ministers*

The *Council of the European Union* is where the ministers of the EU countries meet. Therefore, this council is also called the *Council of Ministers*.

In the *Council of the European Union*, the ministers from national governments meet according to their responsibilities.

For example, when there are decisions to be made on agriculture, it is the Ministers of Agriculture who meet. When there is a decision to be made on environment protection, it is the Environmental Ministers who meet.

The *Council of Ministers* is important for deciding what should become European Union law. The European Parliament speak for the citizens of the EU. The Ministers in the *Council of Ministers* speak for the governments of the member countries.

The *Council of Ministers* is for example responsible for deciding the European Union's budget. This means: the *Council of Ministers* decides how and for what the EU spends its money on. First the EU Commission makes a proposal. Then the *Council of Ministers* (= *Council of the European Union*) decides. Then the European Parliament has also to agree.

2



Yes, the logo is exactly the same as that of the European Council.



Don't confuse the *Council of the European Union* with

The *European Council* (see Page 83)

The *Council of Europe* (see Page 115)



In the Council of the European Union, the ministers for certain topics from all 27 member countries meet to discuss topics from their area of expertise. For example, when questions of farming are on the table (see the cow!), the ministers of agriculture will meet. For other topics, other ministers will meet.

### Have a think

Watch the picture. There, ministers of the member countries discuss their various topics. Can you name the topics?

## What are Ministers?

Ministers are the leading members of a government.

Usually Ministers are responsible for a certain area of work. There is for example typically a Minister of Economy, a Minister of Agriculture, a Minister of Foreign Affairs, a Minister of Domestic Affairs, a Minister of Social Affairs, a Minister of Defence, and so on.

Nowadays a typical government has about 15-20 minister.

Each minister is the head of a large bureaucratic organisation, the Ministry, with often hundreds of experts to give the minister good advice and to prepare legislation (= prepare new laws).

## Remember: two different councils

To summarise, there are two separate councils. In both are members of the governments of the EU countries.

1) The *European Council* - with the Heads of Government of member states (usually called Presidents, Prime Ministers or Chancellors)

2) The *Council of the European Union* (= Council of Ministers) - with ministers for specific topics

## How the Council of Ministers came about

In the 1950s, Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxemburg and the Netherlands closed a contract. They agreed: "We want to decide common rules for trading with coal and steel." To this end, the ministers of these countries came together.

Then these countries started to cooperate in more and more areas. They started cooperation also in agriculture, air traffic, border controls, and many other areas.

This way the European Economic Community (EEC) was created. It developed further, and later became the European Union (EU).



*In 1951 in Paris, heads of state signed the contract for the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).*

## The European Parliament

### *Elected by the Citizens of the EU*

3

The European Parliament represents the citizens in the EU. The Parliament consists of deputies who are elected by the citizens.

The European Parliament meets in Strasbourg (France) and in Brussels (Belgium). The official seat is in Strasbourg.



*The logo of the European Parliament is inspired by the parliamentary hall.*



*The European parliament in Strasbourg.*

### Why is there a parliament?

Approximately 450 million people live in the EU. As citizens of their countries, they are also citizens of the EU.

In the EU, many things have to be decided, and many of them are complicated. The 450 million citizens of the EU cannot reasonably and practically discuss and decide on every single topic. The ordinary citizen simply does not have

the time for it, and often also does not the knowledge and skills.

Because of this, citizens elect their representatives to work for them in the parliament. The representatives discuss and make decisions. This is the same as in the municipal council (your town's parliament) and in the national parliament.

Representatives in a city parliament are called city councillors. Representatives in a national parliament are called Members of Parliament (MP). The representatives in the EU parliament are called *Members of the European Parliament (MEP)*. The MEP travel from their home countries to Strasbourg (France) and Brussels (Belgium) to discuss and decide on behalf of the citizens.

All representatives together form the parliament.

### **How many MEPs are there?**

There are MEPs from every country.

In total, there are 705 MEPs in the European Parliament.<sup>1</sup>

Smaller countries send fewer MEPs. Larger countries send more.

<sup>1</sup> Numbers as in 2022. The number may change over time.



*The European Parliament in Strassburg is where the 705 parliamentarians from the 27 countries meet to decide on new laws. .*

Germany for example sends 96 MEPs. Germany is the largest country in the EU, with about 80 million inhabitants.

Bulgaria has about 7 million inhabitants. Bulgaria sends 17 MEPs into the European Parliament.

Malta is a very small country. It has only 500 000 inhabitants. Malta sends only 6 representatives into the European Parliament .

The EU has decided that smaller countries can send a bit more parliamentarians per citizen into the parliament than large countries. Small countries have about one parliamentarian per 100 000 citizens. Large countries have roughly one parliamentarian per 1 million citizens. This

is to help smaller countries have a bit more influence. Otherwise large countries such as Germany or France would dominate every decision easily.

The parliamentarians elect a President for the parliament.

### ***What does the EU Parliament do?***

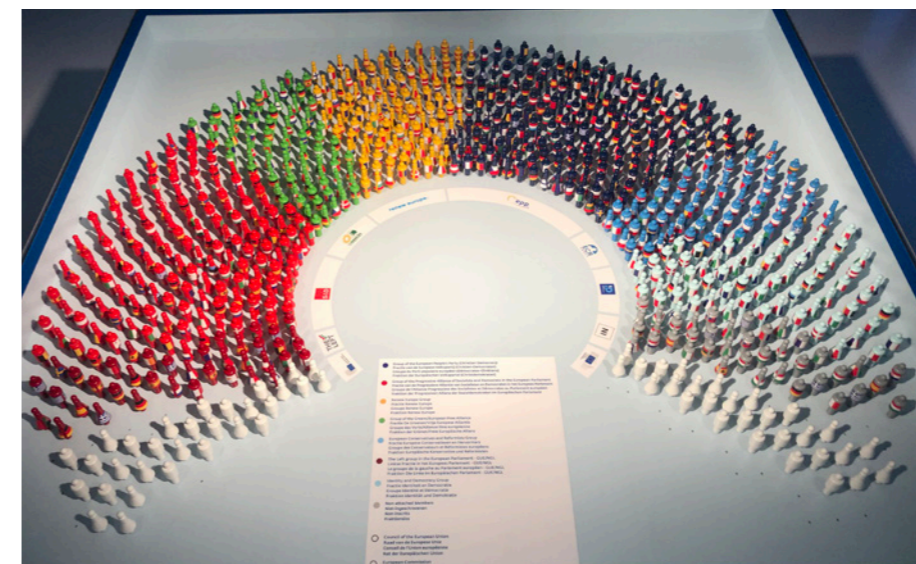
- The European Parliament decides on laws in the EU, together with the Council of Ministers
- It has to be asked to agree when the EU wants to sign a contract with another country. For example with the USA, India or China.
- It has a say in the budget of the EU. When the EU wants to spend money, this has first to be agreed with parliament.
- The parliament also checks if the EU follows the rules when spending money.
- It checks if the European Commission does its work correctly. (The European Commission is yet another important institution in the EU. See below on Page 97.)

### ***Parliamentary groups***

Elected Members of the European Parliament (MEPs, deputies) work together in *Parliamentary Groups* which are created along the general world-view (convictions, beliefs, way of thinking) of the parliamentarians joining them.

Parliamentary Groups in the European Parliament mostly coincide with traditional political parties in the member countries. There are for example Parliamentary Groups of

- The Greens
- The Conservatives / Christian Democrats
- The Socialists / Social-Democrats
- The Liberals



*Parliamentarians in the EU Parliament, represented by 705 wooden figures, coloured along their world-view groups. This is an exhibit in the EU visitor centre in Brussels.*

- The extreme right-wing and nationalists (currently this group calls themselves “Identity and Democracy”)

The Parliamentary Groups include MEPs from many countries. Another word for this is: they are *trans-national*.

For forming a Parliamentary Group, there must be at least 23 MEPs from at least 7 member states (one fourth of all member states).

## History of the European Parliament

In the beginning, there were meetings of representatives from national parliaments. That's the parliaments of the individual countries [states] in the EU.

These meetings were called *Consultative Assembly*.

This assembly could give recommendations, but they did not have a say in the decision.

Later, this assembly was called *European Parliament*.

Step by step it got more and more powers.

Since 1979, citizens in the EU elect their representatives for the European Parliament directly. The elections are every 5 years. Parties in the member countries present to citizens their lists of candidates, and the citizens can vote for those lists or candidates.

## Contacting the European Parliament

The European Parliament may seem far away for many of the EU citizens, especially as its buildings (seats) are in Strasbourg and Brussels.

Therefore, there are Liaison Offices of the European Parliament in each EU country.

The people working there can be contacted if an EU citizen has a question about the European Parliament.

Citizens may also write letters or e-mails to the MEPs from their country, or from any other country.

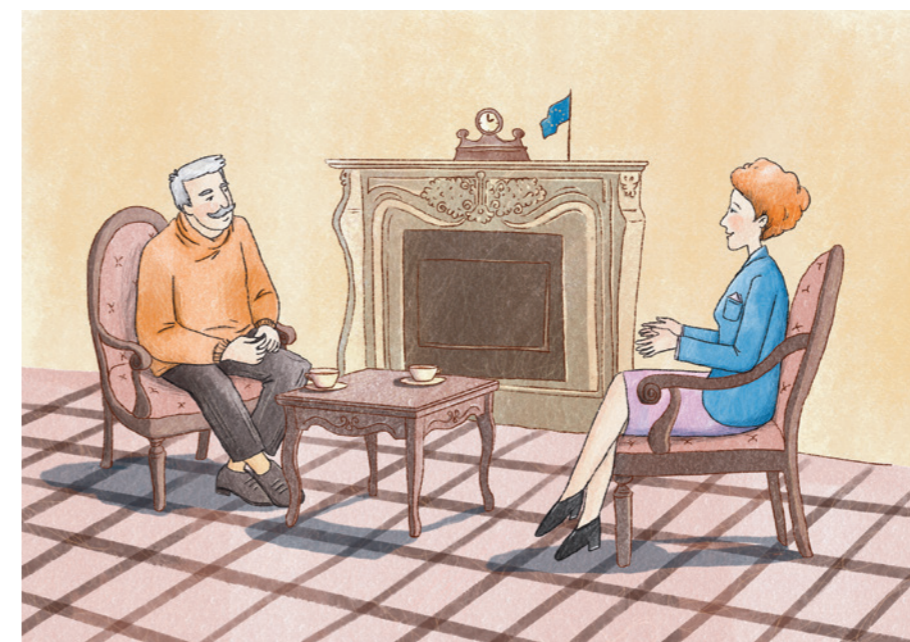
Addresses can be asked from the Liaison Offices. They can also be found on the internet.

Citizens also may speak directly to their MEPs.

### Do it!

Find your liaison office via this link:

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/stay-informed/liaison-offices-in-your-country>



Citizens can visit their MEPs in their citizens' offices and talk to them.

The parties have Citizens' Offices in their home countries.

Many MEPs invite citizens to their offices, so that citizens can talk to the MEPs.

If you want to talk to your MEP, ask for their party's office: "Where and when can I meet an MEP?"

## Liaison office of the EP

### United Kingdom

Europe House  
32 Smith Square  
London SW1P 3EU

Phone: +44 020 7227 4300  
Fax: +44 020 7227 4302  
Mail: eplondon@europarl.europa.eu

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/unitedkingdom>

### Ireland

12-14 Lower Mount Street  
Dublin D02 W710

Phone: +353 1 605 79 00  
Fax: +353 1 605 79 99  
Mail: epdublin@europarl.europa.eu

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/ireland>

## The European Commission

### *The administrative body of the EU*

The European Commission is the European Union's administration. You can also call it the **EU's executive**. Its task is to implement the policies decided by the other bodies. "Implement" means: seeing after the work being really done, and decisions being really executed.

4



*The Logo of the European Commission is inspired by the building.*



*The Berlaymont-Buidling in Brussels is where the EU Commission has its headquarters.*

You can compare the task of the European Commission with what the heads of departments in your municipals administration do. They execute the decision of the municipal council (which is the local parliament). The European Commission executes the decision of the European Parliament and the other decision-making bodies (Council of Ministers and European Council).

The Commission consists of 27 commissioners, one from each country.

The word Commissioner is derived from an old Latin word for “being responsible for something”.

Each commissioner is responsible for a certain area of topic, for example, Economy, Environment, Foreign Policy, Crisis Management, Trade, Transport, Social Problems, and so on.

To help them do the work, the Commission has thousands of employees. They come from all countries. They write proposals for new laws, write reports, collect information, prepare decisions, and so on.

### Tasks of the European Commission

- **Proposes new laws:** If a new law for the EU needs to be made, it is the EU Commission who has to prepare a draft and submit it to the other EU institutions for approval (the Parliament and the Council of Ministers).
- **Manages EU policies** and allocates EU funding. The Commission sets up annual budgets for approval by the Parliament and Council.
- **Enforces EU laws:** The European Commission tries to make sure that all countries follow the rules of the EU. This task is shared with the European Court of

Justice (which is a separate institution of the EU).

- **Represents the EU internationally.** The EU Commission speaks on behalf of all EU countries in international bodies, in particular in areas of trade policy and humanitarian aid. The EU Commission also negotiates international agreements for the EU.

### How do Commissioners get their job?

Each country sends one Commissioner. Hence with 27 member countries there are 27 Commissioners.

The government of the country can make a proposal of who should become that country's Commissioner. But then it is the European Council (Council of Ministers) and the European Parliament who have the final word. Only when they accept the proposal, a person will become Commissioner.

The head of the European Commission is called President. The President gets nominated by the European Council (the heads of states) and then elected by the European Parliament.

The current<sup>2</sup> president of the European Commission is Ursula von der Leyen. Previously she was Minister of Defence in Germany.



*Ursula von der Leyen, became President of the European Commission in 2019.*

<sup>2</sup> This book was written in 2022.

# The European Commission

The 27 commissioners as in the 2019-2024 period

 <b>Ursula von der Leyen</b> President Germany 08.10.1958	 <b>Janez Lenarčič</b> Crisis Management Slovenia 6.11.1967
 <b>Josep Borrell Fontelles</b> A Stronger Europe in the World Spain 24.04.1947	 <b>Johannes Hahn</b> Budget and Administration Austria 02.12.1957
 <b>Dubravka Šuica</b> Democracy and Demography Croatia 20.05.1957	 <b>Paolo Gentiloni</b> Economy Italy 22.11.1954
 <b>Valdis Dombrovskis</b> Trade Latvia 05.08.1971	 <b>Didier Reynders</b> Justice Belgium 06.08.1958
 <b>Frans Timmermans</b> Green New Deal Netherlands 06.05.1961	 <b>Janusz Wojciechowski</b> Agriculture Poland 06.12.1954
 <b>Margarete Vestager</b> Digitalisation Denmark 13.04.1968	 <b>Thierry Breton</b> Internal market France 15.1.1955
 <b>Marija Gabriel</b> Research Bulgaria 20.05.1979	 <b>Elisa Ferreira</b> Cohesion and Reforms Portugal 17.10.1955

 <b>Virginijus Sinkevičius</b> Environment, Oceans, Fisheries Lithuania 4.11.1990	 <b>Margaritis Schinas</b> European Way of Living Greece 28.07.1962
 <b>Mairead McGuinness</b> Finance Ireland 13.06.1959	 <b>Ylva Johansson</b> Home Affairs Sweden 13.02.1964
 <b>Maroš Šefčovič</b> Interinstitutional Relations Slovakia 05.08.1971	 <b>Helena Dalli</b> Equality Malta 13.02.1964
 <b>Vera Jourová</b> Values and Transparency Czech Republic 18.08.1964	 <b>Nicolas Schmit</b> Employment and Social Affairs Luxemburg 10.12.1953
 <b>Stella Kyriakides</b> Health, Food Safety Cyprus 10.03.1956	 <b>Kadri Simson</b> Energy Estland 22.01.1977
 <b>Adina Vălean</b> Transport Romania 16.02.1968	 <b>Jutta Urpilainen</b> International Partnerships Finland 04.08.1975
 <b>Olivér Várhelyi</b> Neighbourhood & Enlargement Hungary 22.03.1972	

## Example of legislation: a law for cleaner air

Here is an example of the work the European Commission does, together with the other institutions.

Scientists find that there is too much air pollution. They find there is too much fine particulate matter (dust) and nitrous gases (oxides of Nitrogen, also called NOx) in the air. These substances are created in car engines running on gasoline or diesel. They are harmful. They harm the health of people inhaling them, for example when they live next to a street and thus inhale them every day.

The Council of Ministers and the European Parliament agree that something has to be done about those pollutants. This opinion is shared by citizens all over the EU, by experts and doctors. Everybody says: "The air in towns needs to become cleaner." Politicians in the EU have to ensure that no harm is caused to EU citizens.

Therefore the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament want to issue a law to define limits for the amount of fine particulate matter and nitrous gases in the air

where people live.<sup>1</sup> The European Commission (here through the Commissioner for the Environment) is asked to draft such a law. The law is written by experts in the Commission. The law has many pages of text, and it includes a lot of technical and chemical details. When the draft is ready, it is given to the Council of Ministers and the Parliament, who after some back and forth eventually agree it. Thus the law comes into force.

In our example this is the *Directive 2008/50/EG of the European Parliament and the Council of 21 May 2008 on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe*. – Laws in the EU often have such long and complicated names.

This law came into force in January 2010.

EU member countries had to make sure that their national laws are in line with this EU law. The countries can decide stricter laws, if they want, but they have to keep at least the minimum requirements as set by the EU law.

<sup>1</sup> EU Directive 2008/50/EG, in force since 2010 – Directive 2008/50/EG of the European Parliament and the Council of 21 May 2008 on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe.

If in a country there is more particulate matter or nitrous gases in the air than recommended by the EU, that country would be in breach of the EU's rule and could be punished.

What the EU Commission now has to do: check if the countries are following the European Directive.

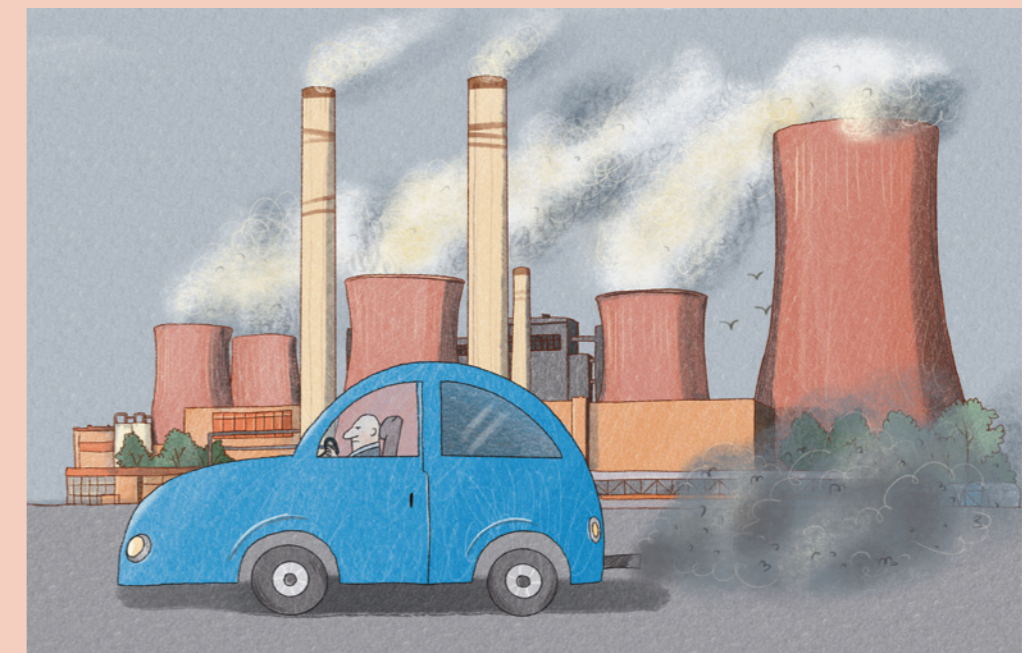
The EU Commission finds: In some countries there is still too much fine particulate

matter and too much nitrous gasses in the air in certain cities; for example in Germany, France, Hungary, Italy and Romania.

Then the EU Commission decides to sue<sup>2</sup> these countries at the Court of Justice of the European Union. This is the highest court in the EU. When

the Court finds that the countries have breached their obligations, they have to pay a fine (= lots of money).

This was an example for what the EU Commission does. In brief:



the Commission drafts new laws (which then have to be accepted by the Council (ministers) and the Parliament, and once a law has come into force, the Commission has to make sure that EU member countries follow it.

<sup>2</sup> In European legalese (= the way how law experts talk), this is called: „The Commission **refers** the members states to the European Court of Justice“. Likewise, a decision of the Court will be correctly expressed in sentences like: "The Court of Justice of the EU **ruled** that the member states had breached their obligation under the EU Ambient Air Quality Directive (2008/50/EC)".

The current<sup>2</sup> president of the European Commission is Ursula von der Leyen. Previously she was Minister of Defence in Germany.

### How Commissioners work

The Commissioners do not work for the interests of the country they come from. They work for the entire EU. They have to think of the interest of all member countries and of the EU.

They have to champion the common interests and principles of the EU, including:

<sup>2</sup> This book was written in 2022.

### From EU directives to national legislation

The EU decided: countries shall look after having less fine particulate matter and less nitrous gases in the air.

Every country can decide on its own how exactly it will achieve this.

But they have to do something. Doing nothing, or doing too little, is not allowed.

Many pollutants come from automobiles burning fuels like diesel or gasoline. Countries can take different measures to reduce these pollutants.

For example:

- A country can prohibit highly polluting cars to drive in cities

- A country can ensure that more people use public transport (bus, tram) or use a bicycle instead of a car. The country can for example provide for better bus and tram lines, or make bus tickets cheaper. The more people use public transport and bicycles instead of their own cars, the less pollution, and the better the air in the towns.

- A country can make sure that people use electric vehicles instead of vehicles with a combustion engine (vehicles burning fuel).

## Summary: the four big institutions

Unfortunately the names of the big EU institutions are a bit confusing because some of the names are quite similar.

On the previous pages the institutions were presented in detail. In this blue box you find a short summary, to help you get the institutions separate.

### What EU institutions are there?

- **The European Parliament:** This is the most democratic institution of the EU. People in all member countries elect deputies for the parliament. Large countries elect many deputies (up to 100). Small countries elect only a few (starting from 6).
- **The Council of the European Union,** also called the **Council of Ministers:** This is where ministers of the member countries come together to discuss their special topics. For example, the Ministers of Agriculture come together to agree on something related to agriculture. Or the Ministers of Energy come together to decide on how electricity should be produced in the future.
- **The European Council:** This is where the **Heads of State** of the member countries come together in order to decide on the wider goals of the EU. *Heads of State* means the Prime Minister, the President, or what other name is used for the country's highest person in government.
- **The European Commission:** This is the administration of the European Union. You can also call it the EU's executive, as its task is to implement the policies decided by the other bodies. ("Implement" means "doing something", or "making sure something is done".)

### Where are these EU institutions?

The European Parliament has its main building in Strasbourg (a city in France next to Germany). This is the official seat of the Parliament. The Parliament has a second seat in Brussels (Belgium). Meetings are held in both places.

The other big EU institutions have their seats in Brussels. (Belgium).

Some smaller EU institutions are in different towns in various EU member countries. You find a list of such smaller EU institutions at the end of the book, Page 110.

### Council of Europe – something different from the EU

There is another institution which has a very similar name, but it is separate from the EU. This is called the **Council of Europe**.

The *Council of Europe* is an organisation separate of the EU. It brings together all countries that belong to Europe (the continent) geographically. 47 countries are members of the *Council of Europe*. This includes all 27 member states of the EU, and many others.

The task of the *Council of Europe* is to ensure Human Rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

As the *Council of Europe* has nothing to do with the EU, you find more on it at the end of the book on Page 115.

## Dispute in the EU

Sometimes co-operating is difficult. Countries in the EU can agree or disagree with each other when trying to make a common decision.

These difficulties are normal and can be beneficial as it allows for many different opinions to be heard. This is democracy in action, one of the values which the EU is founded on.

An example: Germany in 2015 took a very welcoming approach to refugees from Syria and allowed them to live in Germany without lengthy bureaucratic procedures. The German decision was praised by some neighbouring countries, but it was criticised by others.

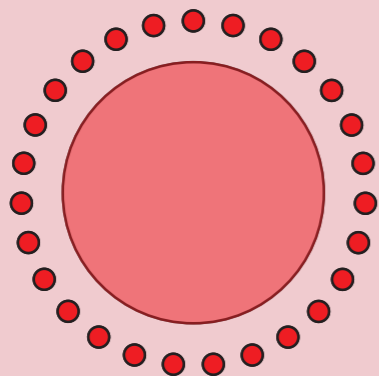
A decision made in one country can have effects on other countries. Sometimes it can be difficult for countries to agree and reach a common decision. Reaching an agreement may take a great deal of time, money and resources. Therefore decision-making in the EU on something often takes many years.



*With 27 member states, decision making in the EU can take a long time because people have different opinions and it needs a lot of discussion to finally come to an agreement..*

# Institutions of the EU

## European Council



Heads of member countries meet.  
They decide about the larger objectives of the EU

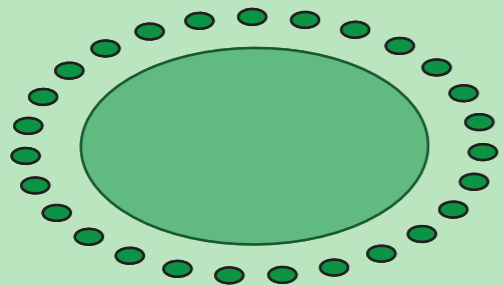
## European Commission



Each country sends one commissioner.  
Each commissioner is responsible for a topic.  
They make sure that laws are being followed.  
Proposes new laws to be made.

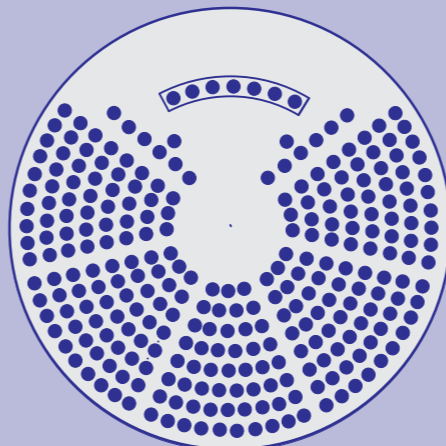
Suggests  
new  
laws

## Council of Ministers *Council of the European Union*



Ministers of member countries meet, according to  
their topics of responsibility. They decide on new  
laws, together with the European Parliament.

## European Parliament



Elected representatives of the citizens. They decide  
on new laws, together with the Council of Ministers.



Deciding on laws



## European Central Bank – ECB



The ECB is an independent bank for the countries using the Euro as their currency. For example it decides how many euros to print.

## European Court of Auditors – ECA



The ECA makes sure the EU's accounting is correct. It checks revenues and spendings.

## European Court of Justice – ECJ



The EJC is the court of the EU. It decides when there are legal disputes regarding EU law. National courts refer questions of EU law to the ECJ.

	AT	BE	BG	HR	CY	CZ	DK	EE	FI	FR	DE	EL	IT	IR	HU	AT	LT	LV	MT	NL	PL	PT	RO	SK	SI	ES	SE
Member states send...																											
Commissioner	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★
Head of state	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Minister in council session	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Parliamentarians (x10)	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●	●●	●●	●●●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●●●	●●●●	●●	●●	●●	●●	●●●●	●●

## Other institutions of the EU

In this book we described only the main institutions of the EU. The EU has many more institutions for all kinds of purposes. Here is a list of important ones you may have heard of in the news.

	Institution	Purpose	Seat
ECB	European Central Bank	Protection of the common currency (Euro)	Frankfurt
ECJ	European Court of Justice	Jurisdiction related to interpretation and application of the European treaties	Luxembourg
ECA	European Court of Auditors	Issues a yearly report about how the EU budget is used. This is used predominantly for budget control through the European Parliament	Luxembourg
EEAS	European External Action Service	The diplomatic service of the EU	Brussels
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee	Represents civil society, employers and employees	Brussels
ECR	European Committee of the Regions	Speaks for regional and local bodies (municipalities, regions, counties, etc.)	Brussels
EIB	European Investment Bank	Provides financing for the EU's investment projects. Also supports smaller enterprises through the European Investment Funds	Luxembourg
Om-buds-man	European Ombudsman	Listens to citizens' complaints about problems and mismanagement in EU institutions	Strasbourg
EDPB	European Data Protection Board	Ensures uniform application of European Data Protection Law	Brussels

## Criticism of the EU

Some people believe that the EU is a good thing. But not everybody thinks so.

Some people are critical about the EU. In all EU member countries there are people who want their country not to be in the EU.

People who strongly feel against the EU are sometimes called Euro-sceptics. Their way of thinking is called Euro-scepticism.

Some people want their country to be in the EU, but they want the EU change and improve.

Some people want the EU to have more powers. Some people want the EU to have less powers.

Some people want the EU to only focus on the economy and the ease of trade. Some people want the EU to work also on areas such as culture, education and science.

Some people want the EU to take on more of the tasks that the member states currently are in control of, for example foreign policy and the military.

Some people criticise how decisions are made in the EU. Many decisions made by the EU need each member country to agree. If one country does not agree, the decision cannot be made. With 27 member states, decision making is difficult.

The EU is very bureaucratic.

They mean that the EU has too many complicated rules and laws.

The EU does have a lot of rules and laws, but this is the same with every government.

The EU is undemocratic.

The EU has a parliament. The parliament consists of elected representatives of the people.

Lobbyists have too much power and influence in the EU.

Lobbyists are people employed by companies and industries (but also civic organisations) to influence policy makers (governments, parliaments).

Lobbyists indeed have a lot of influence in the EU. But their influence is not always undesired. They bring also expertise.

Also, lobbyists are everywhere around national governments. Criticism about lobbyists should not be directed towards the EU only.



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## The Council of Europe

In Europe (as a continent) there are about 50 countries. About half of them (27) are members of the European Union.<sup>1</sup> Many more however (47) are members of another organisation called the *Council of Europe*.

The *Council of Europe* was founded in 1947 (after the Second World War) to uphold Human Rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe.

Unlike the EU, the *Council of Europe* does not make laws for its member states. Rather, it enforces certain international agreements. These agreements mostly focus on Human Rights, Democracy, and the rule of law.



### European Court of Human Rights

The best known institution of the *Council of Europe* is the *European Court of Human Rights*. The court has its headquarters in Strasbourg (France). Its duty is to make sure that countries follow all the rules agreed in the European Convention on Human Rights.

Citizens can turn to this court for help when they think that the country they live in violates their human rights. They can turn to the court in Strasbourg particularly when courts in their country did not help them.

<sup>1</sup> Number of member countries as in 2022. The number can change over time.



The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Here people can turn who see their human rights violated by their countries.

## The European Convention on Human Rights

The European Convention on Human Rights states very important rights for people. They are described in 16 Articles (Chapters). Here are some of them:

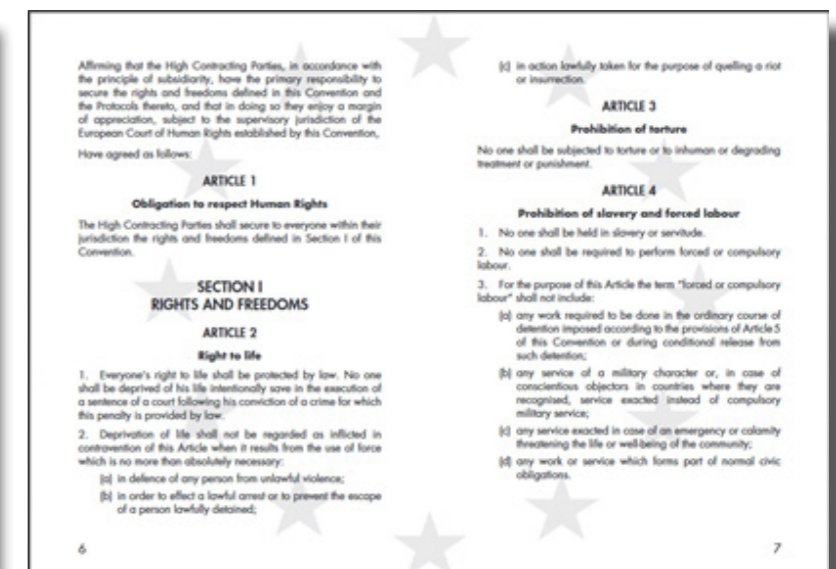
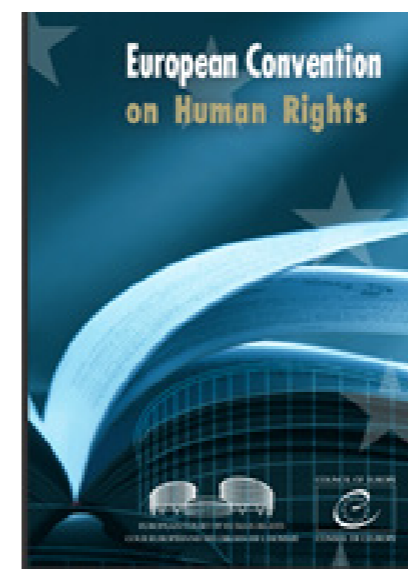
- Everybody has the right to life; so nobody may be killed.
- Nobody may be tortured
- Slavery and forced labour are forbidden
- People have the right of liberty and security
- People have the right to a fair trial. This means that everybody has the right to defend themselves in court, and to be treated fairly there.
- People may not be punished when what they did is not explicitly forbidden by law

- Private life and family are particularly protected
- Everybody has freedom of thought, conscience and religion. For example governments may not force citizens to follow any religion.

Such rights may seem “normal” to us in Europe. However, in other parts of the world they are not guaranteed. For example in China, other Asian countries, some Middle Eastern countries or in some countries in America. Another example: the USA still use death penalty. In Europe (member countries of the *Council of Europe*) death penalty is illegal because it would violate the Right to Life.

**Have a think!**

Do you remember which other important EU institution has its main building in Strasbourg?



Den europeiska konventionen om mänskliga rättigheter består av 59 artiklar.

## Countries in the Council of Europe

47 countries are members of the Council of Europe. These include all 27 members of the European Union.

Some of those who are not in the EU are large or otherwise important. For example

- Turkey – with 85 million inhabitants
- Switzerland – only 8 millions population, but in the centre of Europe and very rich
- Norway – only 5.5 million inhabitants, but also very rich, not least due to its oil
- Russia – with 140 million inhabitants. Russia was a member of the Council of Europe from 1996 to 2022. It gave its membership up in order to prevent being expelled in reaction to its attack against Ukraine in 2022.

The countries who are members of the Council of Europe have together 800 million inhabitants (640 million without Russia). The member countries of the EU have together only 450 million inhabitants.

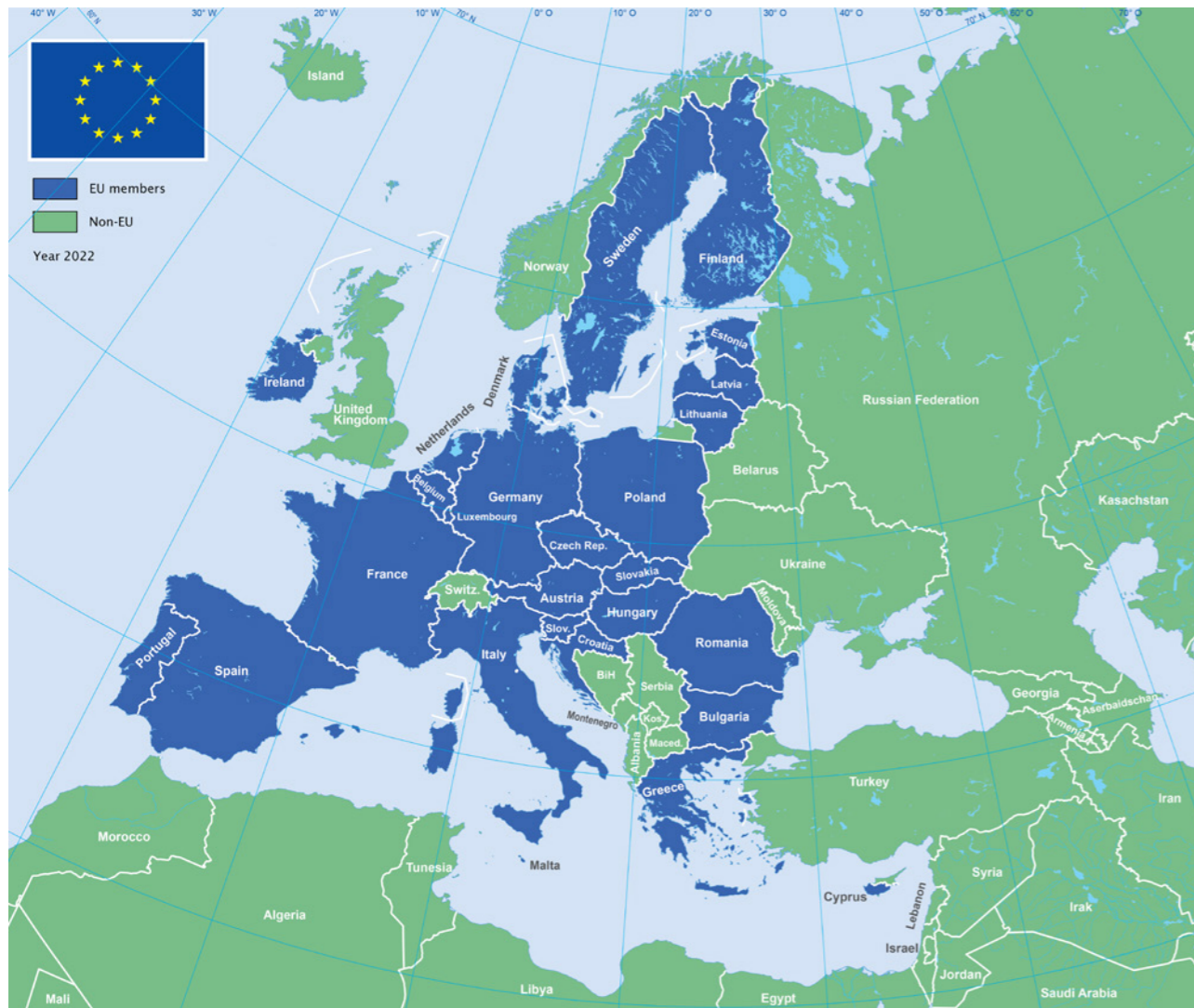


The Council of Europe has 47 member countries. These include all 27 who are members of the European Union (EU).

## Maps

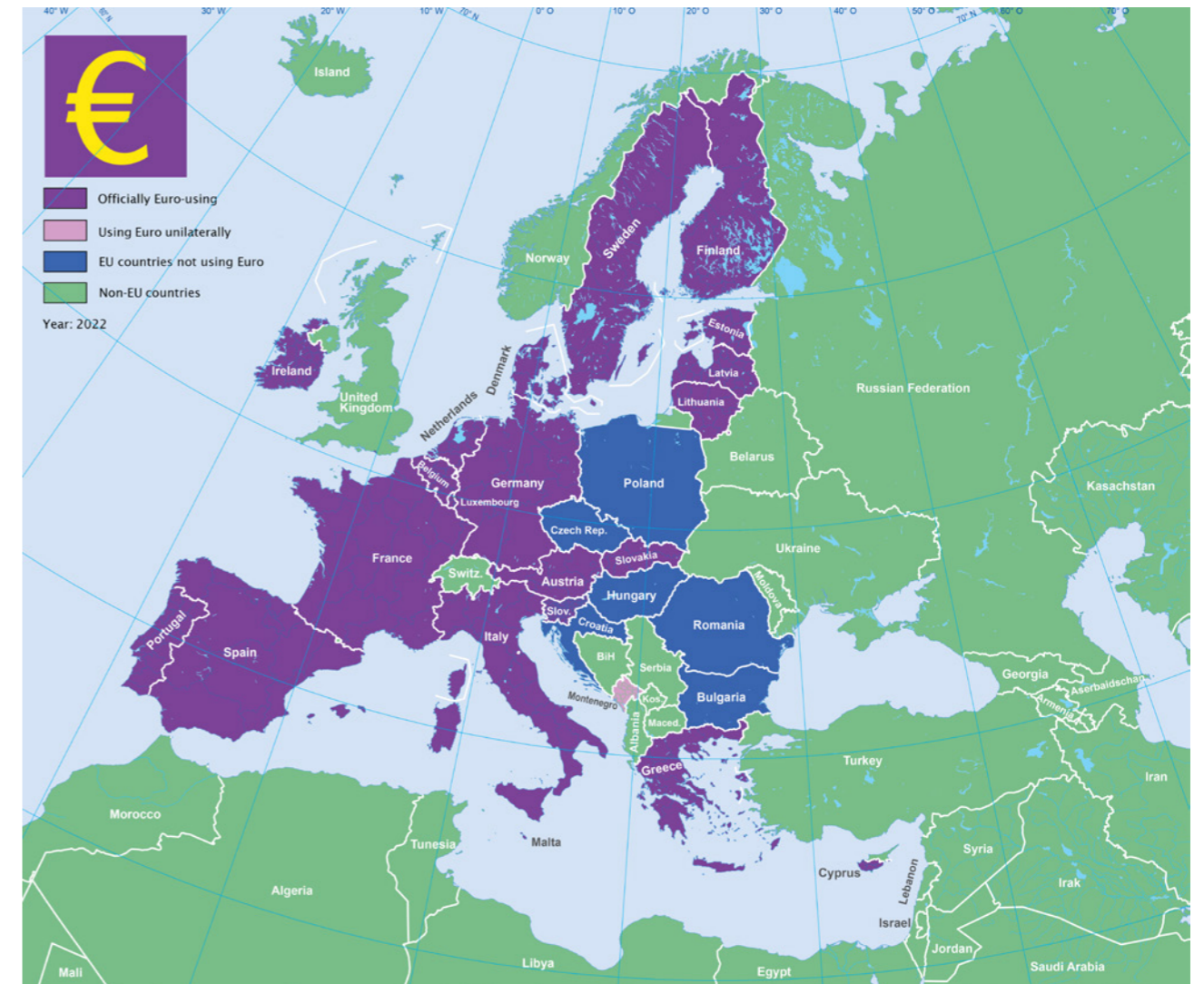
On the following pages we show again all maps used in the book. This allows you to compare the various communities of countries in Europe.

### The European Union



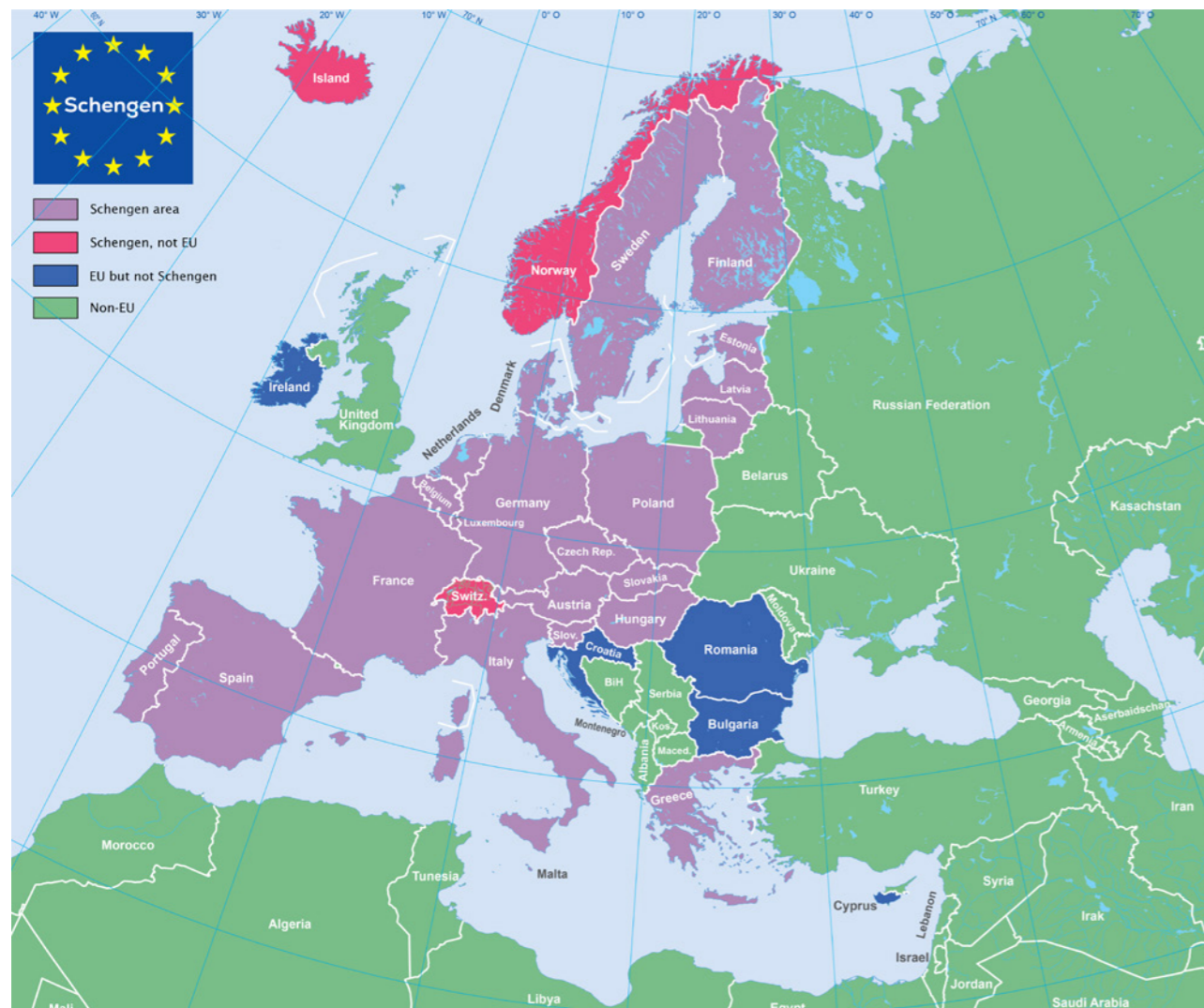
The European Union consists currently of 27 members countries. Some others want to join, for example Ukraine, and the West Balkan countries. (Data from 2022.)

### Euro zone — countries using the euro currency



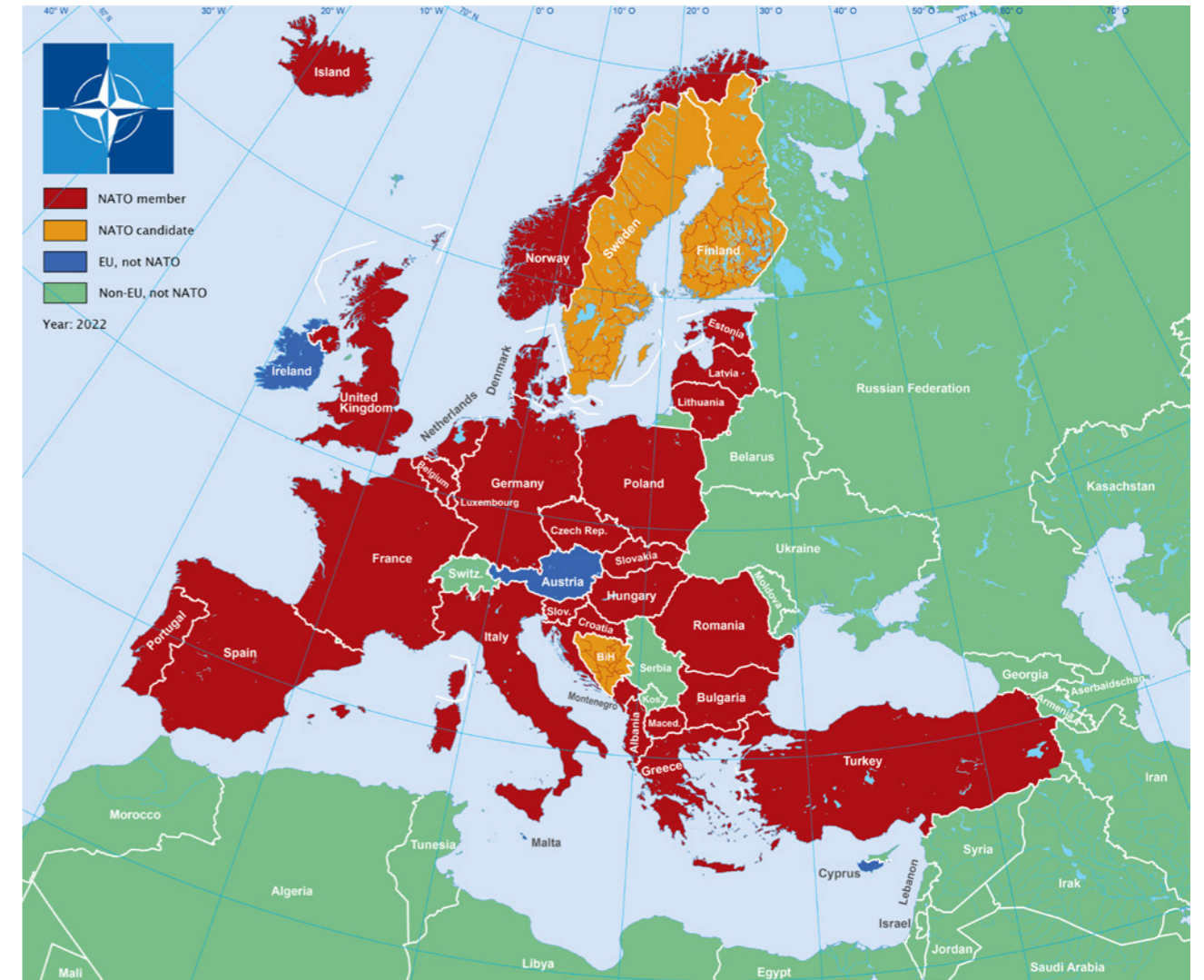
The countries coloured in violet use the euro as their currency. (Data from 2022). Some more countries want to join this community.

## Schengen area



The Schengen area is a community of countries who agreed to not use border controls between them (open borders), and to follow identical rules on their outside borders.

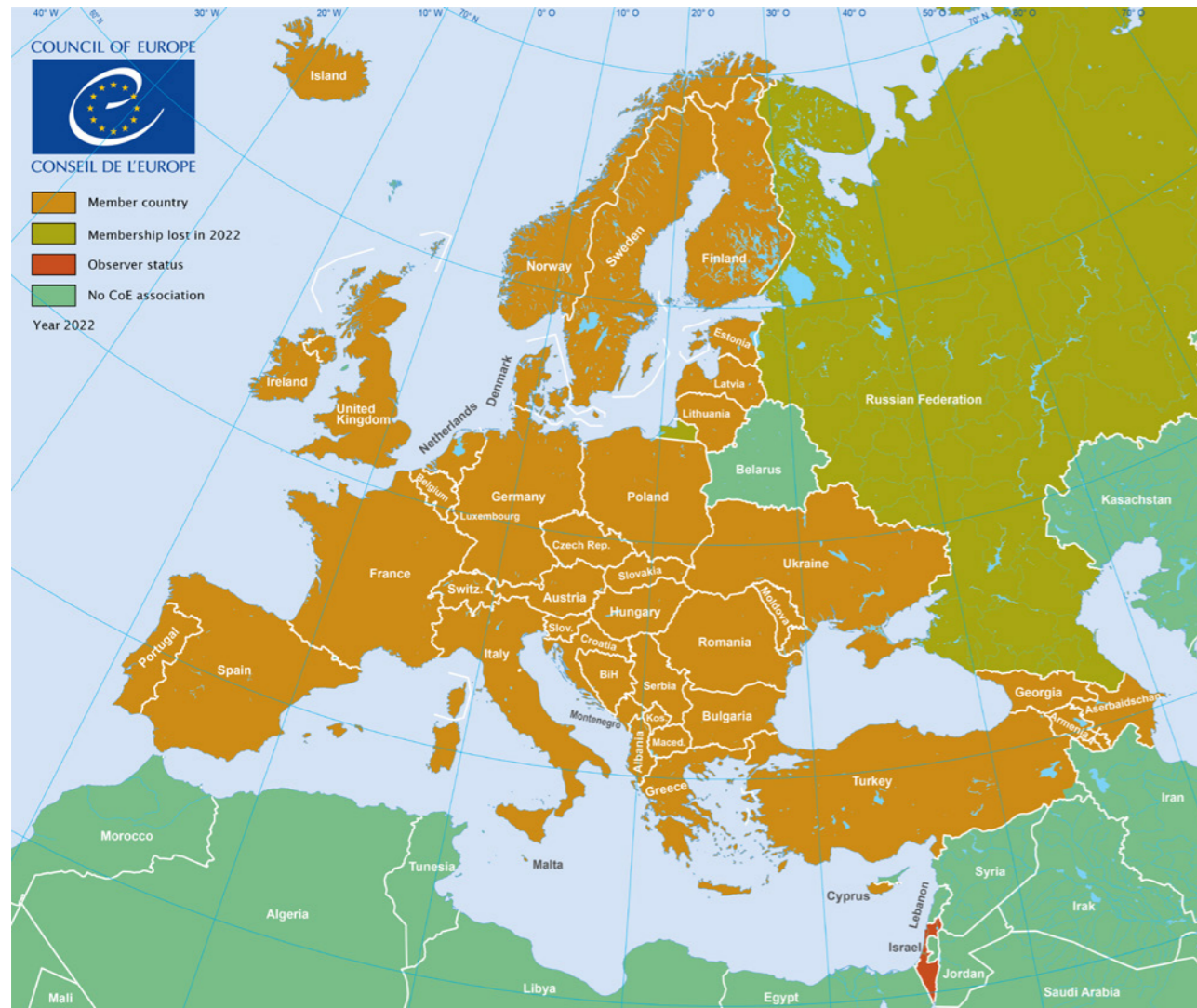
## NATO



NATO is a community of countries with the aim of assisting each other in defence against outside enemies in case of military conflict.

Also the USA and Canada are members of NATO.

## Council of Europe



The Council of Europe is a community joined by almost all European countries. It's main purpose is the protection of Human Rights.

## Seas around Europe



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## Notes to the Teacher

This book has been written to give information about the European Union (EU) – its history, its foundations, its values, its institutions, the way of its law-making, and generally what the EU means for the citizens of its member countries.

### **Who can benefit from reading this book?**

We have written this book in very simple language so that it can be used by everybody including individuals with lesser command of the language. These can be people who are new to the country and the language, or people who have been facing obstacles at school.

Still we assume that the reader is interested in understanding some basic facts about the European Union.

This Book can be used by teachers in delivering seminars, lectures and tasks to their students. It can also be used by individuals to improve their familiarity with the idea of the European Union, and key concepts and terminology to it.

The book may be used also a quick reference for looking up certain facts about the European Union, when in doubt.

For example, we use it in an educational Escape Room – a fun activity for everybody

to learn something about the EU without even recognizing that there is an educational purpose – as an optional source for people to find out facts about the EU as they need it in the game.

The book is published in English, German, Spanish, French, Italian, Hungarian and Swedish.

### **Why do we think this book is useful?**

The idea of the European Union has often been described as an idea that is difficult to grasp and articulate in a simple manner. This is necessarily so, as the European Union is a very complex thing. Also, from the perspective of most citizens, the EU's institutions are mostly in foreign countries, people working in the EU usually use English or French as working language, and the procedures how the EU takes decisions and influences our everyday life are complicated. Hence the EU is a very abstract entity. People in their everyday life do often not see where the EU plays a role for them, or how they can play a role in the EU.

Moreover, there are a lot of false impressions about the EU out there, and in recent years false information about the EU has been distributed on purpose by political actors who want to destroy the EU, or at least want to reduce its role in international or national politics and economy.

False information about the EU is an obstacle for citizens to take good decisions in elections. There is a lot of good information about the EU available in academic or other high-level language. What we found lacking is information on the EU accessible to really everybody.

Therefore, we saw the need of a source of information that gives reliable information on the EU in a language as easy to understand as possible.

### **Language used in this book**

For the language used in this book we tried to follow principles of so-called plain language. Other terms are in use are easy language, simple language, et cetera. With respect to this book being issued in 7 European languages in parallel, we could not stick to one established model plain language. Concepts of plain language very much differ between national contexts. In some countries they are widely used (with the purpose to be inclusive). In other countries the idea has just begun sprouting. Hence what we did is, we tried to derive common rules from those plain language concepts we found available for various languages when we started working on the book in 2019/2020.

## The process of writing this book

This book is one of the outcomes of the *Have Your Say* project – a three years co-operation of eight adult education organisations from seven European countries. The project was funded in 2019-2022 through the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union (as a “Strategic Partnership in Adult Education”). The project set out to develop new approaches to learning about the EU that should be both facts-oriented and entertaining. The book was to serve as a teaching aid to support the games and other learning activities. The book would give learners a source of information on the EU that is factually correct but easy to read.

For the contents of the book we took particular inspiration by a brochure published by Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (BPB, German Federal Center for Civic Education) in 2018 on occasion of the European Elections taking place that year.<sup>1</sup> The brochure was intended especially for readers with learning disabilities. It therefore uses highly simplified language along the principles of what is known, in German speaking countries, as *Leichte Sprache*. In practice we had found this brochure useful also for other audiences, e.g. for students in Second Chance classes where young adults can get a school-leaving certificate.

<sup>1</sup> *Einfach Politik. Europa. Heft in einfacher Sprache*. Available from BPB, [www.bpb.de/shop](http://www.bpb.de/shop), order number 9366. ISBN 978-3-8389-7176-6.

Starting from this model, after creating a first translation into English, we re-arranged and updated the contents according to the needs of our target public, and added topics we found missing. Various other publications on the EU issued by various organisations in various countries were also taken into consideration. The editing and authoring was done in English, the working language of the partnership, with contributions made by all partners. The final touch on the English text was provided by Joseph Karauli (West London Equality Council) and Christian Geiselmann (Volkshochschule Hannover). Partners then created the local language versions of this book based on the English.

Illustrations for this book were made by Kseniya Kochkina, Sankt Petersburg ([nocturne@bk.ru](mailto:nocturne@bk.ru)). She also drew the panorama picture for the cover pages.

## Other publications worth considering

Publications Office of the European Union (2020): **The European Union. What it is and what it does.** Luxembourg. Print edition ISBN 978-92-79-93648-8 (English version; available also in all other European languages; available also as PDF for download.) – This is a brochure presenting the EU and its policies. Nicely designed. The language however is complex and uses predominantly expert terminology.

Publications Office of the European Union (2021): **Let's Explore Europe!** Print edition ISBN 978-92-76-22840-0 (English version; available also in all other European languages; available also as PDF for download.) Target public: children 12-15 years old.

Daniel Kenealy, John Peterson, Richard Corbet (2018): **The European Union. How does it work.** Fifth Edition. Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-880749-0. – A highly complex book, discussing the functioning of the EU in detail. It gives orientation on the the large and long-term lines of EU policies, including sober criticism of its shortcomings.

## Imprint

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- West London Equality Council, London, UK
- Nevelök háza egyesület, Pécs, Hungary
- CEPA San Cristóbal de la Laguna, Tenerife, Spain
- Consorzio OPEN, Verona, Italy
- Folksuniversitetet Upsala, Sweden
- COOP SAPSE, Bastia (Korsika), France
- Europahaus Aurich, Germany

Opinions expressed in this book are of the editing team only. They are not necessarily opinions held by the European Commission or other EU bodies.

### Editors

The editing team consistet of members of the aforementioned organisation. Chief editors were Christian Geiselmann of VHS Hannover and Joseph Karauli of WLEC.

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### Illustrations

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Maps and diagrams created by Hosang Communications (Pingelshagen), Christian Geiselmann and Constanze Rose (VHS Hannover).

### Typesetting and Book Design

Typesetting and dook design were done by Hosang Communications (Pingelshagen), and Christian Geiselmann (VHS Hannover)

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**Have Your Say – New Ways to European Civic Education for Adults**

[www.haveyoursay-erasmus.eu](http://www.haveyoursay-erasmus.eu)



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