

UNIT 1: WHAT IS EU ENLARGEMENT?

Objective: To provide students with a basic overview of the history and issues of European Union enlargement.

Backgrounder

The European Union is the most important development in European history since World War Two. Nothing else has had such a broad, deep, and lasting effect on the lives of Europeans, whether shopkeeper or statesman, all the way from Lisbon to Helsinki.

The European Union is not one single development, however. In fact, the process of European integration is ongoing. With leadership from Brussels, where many of the most important governing institutions of the EU are located, the EU member states are engaged in a project of both *deepening* and *widening*. Deepening refers to the degree to which the member states are integrated: in other words, how closely they are bound together, politically, economically, and even culturally. It is the goal of leaders in Brussels and in national capitals such as Paris, Berlin, Madrid, and Budapest, to pursue “ever closer union.”

Widening is the central concern of this curriculum. The process of expanding the number of states that belong to the EU is known as enlargement. From a core membership of six countries at the outset in 1957, in 2004 the EU’s membership reached 25 countries, with a total population of more than 470 million.

What is the EU?

The European Union is a grouping of sovereign states that have committed to pursue common policies in certain areas. These member states—25 as of 2004—are integrating economically above all, but politically as well. The EU itself is not a state: it is rather a unique creation in which the independent member states *pool their sovereignty*, surrendering the right to make independent decisions in certain areas such as fiscal, environmental, or employment policy.

The EU is different from the United Nations, as member states of the UN actually do not surrender their sovereignty. The UN leadership has no power to make member states comply with directives. The EU’s central decision-making institutions, however, do have the power to force members to comply. This power derives from the treaties that member states sign upon their entrance into the EU. Hence the EU is a *treaty-based* organization, and a series of treaties govern the operations of the Union. The EU, unlike the United States, does not as of yet have a constitution that applies to society, politics, and economics of all the member states. While a draft constitution has been approved, the member states have yet to ratify it and thereby bring the constitution legally into effect.

The process of European integration that has led to the European Union today began shortly after the Second World War, and was in large part inspired by the experience of that catastrophic conflict. European leaders such as Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet, both French, determined that never again should a war devastate the countries of Europe. The best insurance against such

destruction, as Monnet and Schuman saw it, was to tie the countries of Europe so closely together that they simply could not make war on each other. (See the Preamble, “What is the EU?”, in the Appendix.)

Prominent in their calculations was assuring that Germany’s main war-making industries—coal and steel—be bound to those of France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. Thus in 1951 the European Coal and Steel Community was born, and marked the first major step towards the European Union of today. In the years immediately following, the treaties establishing the European Economic Community were negotiated, increasing cooperation across a wide spectrum of issues. (See timeline in the appendix.)

The process of European integration began to take on a momentum of its own, impelled not so much by a fear of Germany as by a goal of strengthening the European economy through combining countries’ resources. This process continues today: European countries face no significant military threats in the world, but instead strive to realize the benefits of closer union. The past 50 years of expanding European integration have shown that such integration can bring peace, stability, and even prosperity to formerly troubled lands—and this is one of the continuing motivations for EU enlargement.

What is the history of EU enlargement?

The EU has gone through four previous rounds of enlargement. From the original six members of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg, nineteen new states have joined over the course of the last 30 years: (See map in the appendix.)

1973: Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom

1981: Greece

1986: Portugal, Spain

1995: Finland, Sweden, Austria

2004: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovenia, Cyprus, Malta

The 2004 enlargement is unprecedented: it featured three times as many entering countries as any previous enlargement, it increased the geographical expanse of the EU by 34%, and it added over 100 million people. It is no surprise that this enlargement is known as the EU’s “big bang.”

Why is the EU enlarging?

Most of the countries that joined the EU in 2004 are located in Central and Eastern Europe, behind what was once the Iron Curtain. These countries have had functioning democracies only since the fall of communist regimes in 1989-91. Also, most of the new countries are significantly poorer than the remainder of the EU member states. The size, diversity, and complexity of this enlargement pose some significant challenges for the EU. (See Key Issues, below.)

Nonetheless, the reasons for integrating these new states into the EU fold remain the very same as those on which the EU was founded: ensuring peace and prosperity on the European continent. The end of the Cold War presents a clear parallel with the end of World War Two. European leaders have decided that the best way to ensure peace and to increase stability is to embrace the former opponents. Where once it was Germany, today it is the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe—though Russia itself may never be invited to join.

EU enlargement promises benefits for both the older member states and the newer members, and it is no wonder that the leaders in most of the new member states were eager to join as quickly as their countries were able. The EU itself points to five particular benefits of enlargement:

- The extension of the zone of **peace, stability and prosperity** in Europe will enhance the security of all its peoples.
- The addition of more than 100 million people, in rapidly growing economies, to the EU's market of 370 million will **boost economic growth and create jobs** in both old and new member states.
- There will be a **better quality of life for citizens** throughout Europe as the new members adopt EU policies for protection of the environment and the fight against crime, drugs and illegal immigration.
- The arrival of new members will enrich the EU through increased cultural **diversity**, interchange of **ideas**, and better **understanding** of other peoples.
- Enlargement will **strengthen the Union's role in world affairs** - in foreign and security policy, trade policy, and the other fields of global governance.

Who can join? Enlargement criteria

There are three key criteria according to which prospective member states are judged:

Democracy: Is the country a stable democracy, with a rule of law, respect for human rights, and the protection of minorities?

Market Economy: Does the country have a functioning market economy, able to compete in the EU's common market?

Adhering to EU Regulations: Can the country adopt all the common rules, standards, and policies that make up the body of EU law and participate in political, economic, and monetary union?

What are the key issues in EU enlargement?

The following four issues are among the most important challenges posed by taking 10 new members into the EU.

Institutional reform: One big question for the EU in its enlargement is how institutions that were designed to govern a union of 15 states will be able to work with 25 members. Many countries are therefore calling for the EU's core institutions to be reformed. However, the reforms countries desire can actually vary significantly from country to country. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is one example: this policy subsidizes farmers very heavily in some states (such as France and Spain), but given that new member states such as Poland have very large agricultural sectors in their economies, subsidies should switch away from benefiting the older member states in favor of the newer, poorer members. France and Spain are understandably reluctant to see their farmers' subsidies dwindle. Yet since the CAP is already hugely wasteful in terms of both money

and agricultural production, it must be reformed in some way to make it equitable. Equality also plays into the issue of institutional reform through the weighting of member states' votes in the important decision-making body known as the European Council. Under the current arrangements, Germany receives 29 votes, as many as Italy even though Germany's population is larger by 20 million. More controversial still is that Spain and Poland receive 27 votes though their populations are half that of Germany's. Reforming this weighted voting is difficult, though, because states are extremely unwilling to surrender their voting power—particularly since smaller countries such as Denmark or Lithuania are afraid of letting the big countries dictate the EU's policy. To ensure that all countries are represented fairly in some way, then, the voting system must also be reformed.

The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP): The EU's attempts to speak with a unified voice on the international stage represent a prominent goal of deeper integration. Here again, though, different countries have very different desires for what a CFSP should be. Some, such as France, are intent on creating a European military force that could eventually lead to the EU becoming a global superpower in many of the same areas as the US. Other countries, among them Britain, do not want to see this much coordination in the foreign policy and military fields.

External relations: Closely related to the last issue, the question of external relations is complicated by the fact that some countries are much more friendly to the US than are others. Obviously, France's relationship to the US is more problematic than are Britain's or Poland's. Relationships with Russia can also vary widely in their importance to member states, as can relationships with other countries, such as Cyprus' with Turkey. Possible divisions between what has been called "New Europe" (i.e., the newer EU members) and "Old Europe" (the more established members) are one of the major difficulties that the enlarged EU will have to manage.

Democratic support for European integration: The fourth key issue deals with what is known as Europe's "democratic deficit." Scholars, European policymakers, and European publics have alleged that the EU is too much a collection of unaccountable bureaucrats who take decisions without consulting the people. Bringing more democracy and transparency into decision making is another important goal of the institutional reform process. Enlargement adds an additional dimension to this issue, since publics in the new member states have had to vote on whether or not to join the EU. While these votes all passed, some commentators have claimed that people in these countries did not really understand what they were voting for—in short, that EU enlargement is also an elite-driven process that can be seen as almost forcing policies upon apathetic populaces.

Student Presentations: Directions

At the end of this first class day, teachers should have the students divide up into teams and pick a country that they will research. The size of the teams will depend on the teacher's class and how many countries he or she wants to cover, but an optimal team size would be two to four students. To outline for students what will be expected of them in the presentations, please see the explanation at the beginning of Unit 2. Once the students know which country they will be representing, they can begin researching that country's position on the issues below.

Students can choose from any of the 25 European Union members: Ireland, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg,

Germany, Italy, Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, or Denmark.

Begin by explaining the assignment: students will give a presentation of roughly ten minutes. The presentation should include information from the four topics (history, politics, economics, and culture, explained more fully in Unit 2). It must be detailed enough that other students will be able to gather sufficient information a later assignment comparing two or more countries. Multimedia aids are strongly encouraged, and can include items such as flags, souvenirs from the country, music, pictures, or even food dishes.

Activity: This is an activity for first and second-year students. Students will receive the included handout “A Brief History of the EU” (in the appendix). Working from this handout, they will then create a timeline of the major events or dates in the history of the EU. Each student should complete his or her own timeline.

Questions for teachers to discuss with the class:

- What happened in 1989 that changed the relationship between the US and Europe (West and East)? Why is 1989 a defining date for Europe?
- Some of the enlargement countries were communist until the early 1990's. What impact might that have upon their new status as EU members?
- What are some of the challenges for the EU in expanding to 25 countries?
- What are the problems and promises of adopting the euro for enlargement countries?

Questions for students (in-class assignment or homework):

1. Explain at least three challenges the EU will face after the expansion to 25 countries.
2. Pick an enlargement country and explain three challenges its government and citizens face now that they are in the EU.
3. In your opinion, what should a country do to be able to join the EU and/or the euro.

Optional homework assignment: Have the students begin their research for the Unit 4 presentations.

For further reading:

<http://www.eurunion.org/infores/euguide/euguide.htm>
http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/intro/index_en.htm