

The European Union

A brief overview

Let us start out our discussion by defining what the European Union is. We can call it a **group of countries** that operates as a united **economic and political block**.

Nowadays, it **counts 28 member countries**, but the EU was not always as big as it is today: in 1951, back when the European Economic Community was created, only Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands participated.

We usually say that the European Union's objective is to allow the **free movement of people, goods, services, and capital**. Even through that is true, the EU has many different goals, including:

- **Promoting peace**, its values and the well-being of its citizens;
- **Offering freedom, security and justice** without internal borders;
- **Establishing an economic and monetary union** whose currency is the euro;
- **Enhancing cohesion and solidarity** among member countries.

The Copenhagen criteria

In order to be a part of the EU, a country that wants to join must comply with a **series of different values**.

The **political values** are fundamental in a society where **tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination prevail**: the candidate country must have stable institutions that guarantee human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and human rights.

The **economic criteria** states that the candidate country must have a **reliable market economy** and ability to **compete with the market forces** within the European Union.

Finally, the **legislative alignment** asserts that prospective members must enact legislation to bring their laws into line with the ***acquis communautaire***: this means that countries accept the finalities and especially the obligations of the EU.

The members' obligations

Now that we have seen what the EU is, along with the values that a member country of the European Union should respect, we can proceed to talk about what it has to do to stay in the EU.

A particular document regulates the distribution of competences in various policy areas: the **Lisbon Treaty**.

Exclusive competence	Shared competence
<p><i>"The Union has exclusive competence to make directives and conclude international agreements when provided for in a Union legislative act."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the customs union the establishing of the competition rules necessary for the functioning of the internal market monetary policy for the Member States whose currency is the euro the conservation of marine biological resources under the common fisheries policy Common Commercial Policy conclusion of certain international agreements 	<p><i>"Member States cannot exercise competence in areas where the Union has done so."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the internal market social policy, for the aspects defined in this Treaty economic, social and territorial cohesion agriculture and fisheries, excluding the conservation of marine biological resources environment consumer protection transport trans-European networks energy the area of freedom, security and justice common safety concerns in public health matters, for the aspects defined in this Treaty
Other competence	Supporting competence
<p><i>"Union exercise of competence shall not result in Member States being prevented from exercising theirs in" ...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> research, technological development and (outer) space development cooperation, humanitarian aid <p><i>"The Union coordinates Member States policies or implements supplemental to their common policies, not covered elsewhere"</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> coordination of economic, employment and social policies common foreign, security and defence policies 	<p><i>"The Union can carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement Member States' actions in" ...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the protection and improvement of human health industry culture tourism education, youth, sport and vocational training civil protection (disaster prevention) administrative cooperation