

Europe on the move

The story of the European Union (EU)

Follow the timeline as it spirals down from top left to bottom right.

Yellow panels describe EU events.
Blue panels describe more general events in Europe.

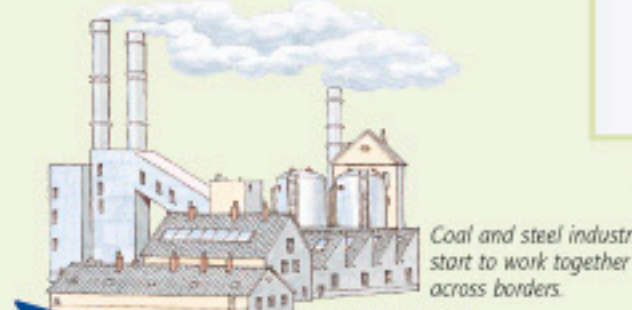


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'EUROPE DIRECT' answers your questions about the EU: call 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 or e-mail via europedirect.europa.eu

The historical roots of the European Union lie in the Second World War. Europeans are determined to prevent such killing and destruction ever happening again. Soon after the war, Europe is split into East and West as the 40-year-long Cold War begins. West European nations create the Council of Europe in 1949. It is a first step towards cooperation between them, but six countries want to go further.



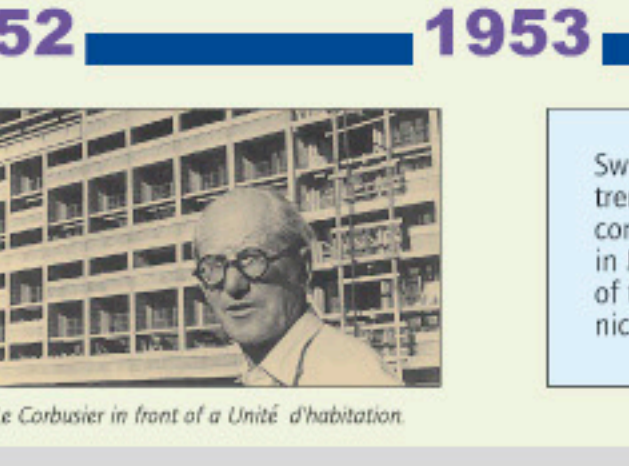
18 April 1951
Based on the Schuman plan, six countries sign a treaty to run their heavy industries – coal and steel – under a common management. In this way, none can on its own make the weapons of war to turn against the other, as in the past. The six are Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg.



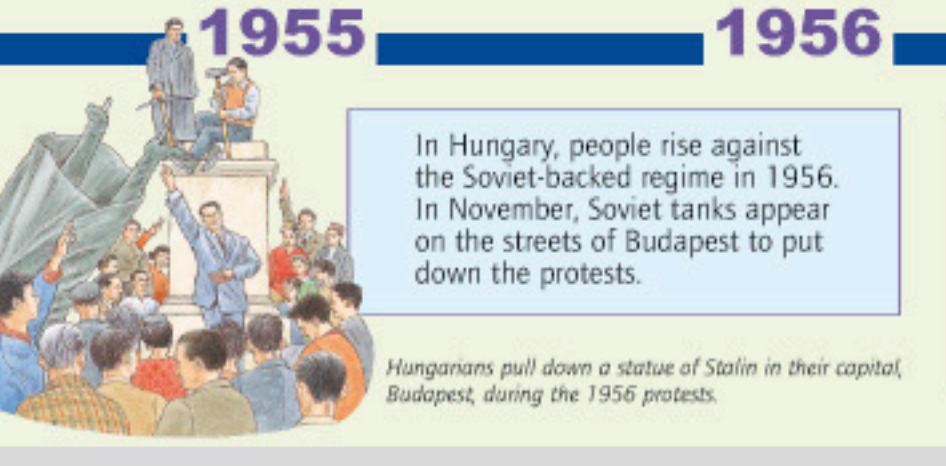
25 March 1957
Building on the success of the Coal and Steel Treaty, the six countries expand cooperation to other economic sectors. They sign the Treaty of Rome, creating the European Economic Community (EEC), or 'common market'. The idea is for people, goods and services to move freely across borders.



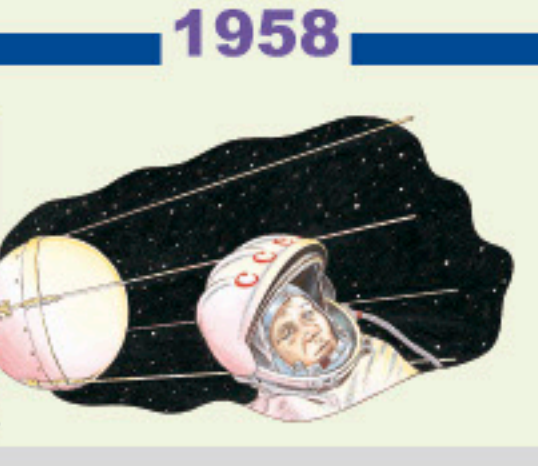
9 May 1950 – French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman presents a plan for deeper cooperation. Later, every 9 May is celebrated as 'Europe Day'.



Swiss architect Le Corbusier marks a new trend with the opening (1952) of his self-contained 'vertical city' (Unité d'habitation) in Marseilles, France. The stark appearance of this concrete complex provokes the nickname 'The new brutalism'.



In Hungary, people rise against the Soviet-backed regime in 1956. In November, Soviet tanks appear on the streets of Budapest to put down the protests.



In the 1950s, most children have little pocket money. They wear the same kind of clothes as their parents. But their taste in music changes with the start of rock and roll.

Later, blue jeans appear, mainly for boys. Girls still wear full skirts and ankle socks. One of the most popular crazes of the decade is the hula hoop.

24 April 1972
The EU's first plan for a single currency dates from 1970. To maintain monetary stability, EU members decide to allow their currencies to fluctuate against each other only within narrow limits. This exchange rate mechanism (ERM), created in 1972, is a first step towards the introduction of the euro, 30 years later.



Soviet tanks thunder into Prague in August 1968 to crush the short-lived Prague spring of fledgling democracy in Czechoslovakia. With over 600 000 troops occupying the country, the Czechs and Slovaks are powerless. One student, Jan Palach, burns himself to death in protest.

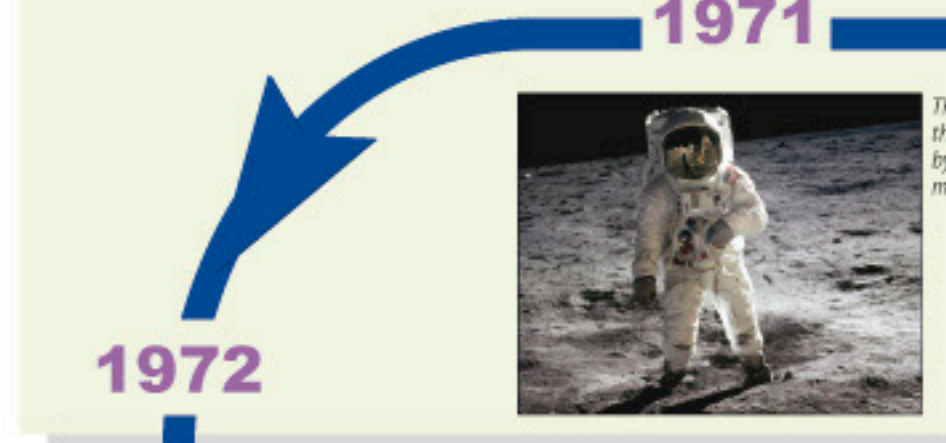
In the 1960s young people affirm their identity. Their ideas often differ from those of adults and a true youth culture emerges. The pop industry booms, helped by television, transistor radios and LPs (long-playing records). Teenagers make fashion statements: miniskirts and high boots for girls, and long hair and pointed shoes for boys. This is a time when EU countries experience growth and rising prosperity – the golden sixties.



'Beatlemania' sweeps the world in 1963. The Beatles, the first pop supergroup, attract huge crowds of teenagers wherever they appear. They stimulate a cultural revolution, widening the generation gap.



In August 1961, the communist authorities in East Germany build a wall across Berlin to prevent their citizens from escaping to a freer life in the West. A few people still escape; others are shot by guards in the attempt.



1 July 1968
The six remove customs duties on goods imported from each other, allowing free cross-border trade for the first time. They also apply the same duties on their imports from outside countries. The world's biggest trading group is born. Trade among the six and between the EU and the rest of the world grows rapidly.

Rioting by students and workers in France in May 1968 shakes the very foundations of the State. Milder student protests occur in other EU countries. They reflect frustration at remote and unresponsive governments as well as protests against the Vietnam War and the nuclear arms race.



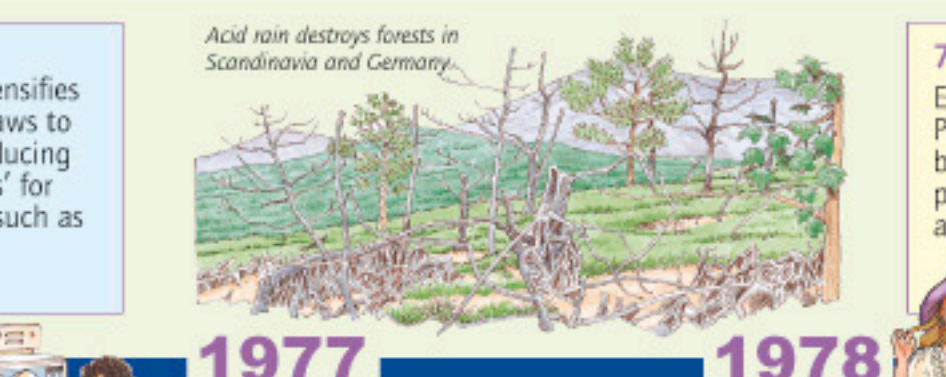
20 July 1963
The EU signs its first big international agreement – a deal to help 18 former colonies in Africa. By 2007, it has a special partnership with 78 countries in Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) regions. The EU is the world's biggest provider of development assistance to poorer countries. Its aid is linked to respect for human rights by recipients.

30 July 1962
The EU starts its 'common agricultural policy' giving the countries joint control over food production. Farmers are paid the same price for their produce. The EU grows enough food for its needs and farmers earn well. The unwanted side-effect is overproduction with mountains of surplus produce. Since the 1990s, priorities have been to cut surpluses and raise food quality.



10 December 1974
To show their solidarity, EU leaders set up the European Regional Development Fund. Its purpose is to transfer money from rich to poor regions to improve roads and communications, attract investment and create jobs. This type of activity later comes to account for one third of all EU spending.

The fight against pollution intensifies in the 1970s. The EU adopts laws to protect the environment, introducing the notion of 'the polluter pays' for the first time. Pressure groups such as Greenpeace are founded.



7-10 June 1979
EU citizens directly elect the members of the European Parliament for the first time. Previously they were delegated by national parliaments. Members sit in pan-European political groups (Socialist, Conservative, Liberal, Greens, etc.) and not in national delegations. The influence of the Parliament is constantly increasing.



In summer 1980, shipyard workers in the Polish city of Gdansk, led by Lech Walesa, strike for more rights. Other strikes follow across the country. In August, the government capitulates and Solidarność is created as an independent trade union. The government gradually reasserts its power and imposes martial law in December 1981, ending Poland's brief encounter with people power. But the seeds have been sown for later.

1 January 1973
The six become nine when Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom formally enter the EU.

Following an Arab-Israeli war in October 1973, Middle East oil-producing nations impose big price increases and restrict sales to certain European countries. This creates economic problems throughout the EU.

The overthrow of the Salazar regime in Portugal in 1974 and the death of General Franco of Spain in 1975 end the last right-wing dictatorships in Europe. Both countries commit themselves to democratic government – an important step towards qualifying for future membership of the EU.

The murder of former Italian Prime Minister, Aldo Moro, in 1978 is one of many acts of terrorism carried out by extremist groups in the 1970s. Among the victims are leading lawyers, businessmen and politicians, as well as 11 Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympic Games (1972).



1 January 1981
Membership of the EU reaches double figures when Greece joins. It has been eligible to join since its military regime was overthrown and democracy restored in 1974.

1 January 1993
The single market and its four freedoms are established: the free movement of goods, services, people and money is now reality. More than 200 laws have been agreed since 1986 covering tax policy, business regulations, professional qualifications and other barriers to open frontiers. The free movement of some services is delayed.

7 February 1992
The Treaty on European Union is signed in Maastricht. It is a major EU milestone, setting clear rules for the future single currency as well as for foreign and security policy and closer cooperation in justice and home affairs. Under the treaty, the name 'European Union' officially replaces 'European Community'.

The collapse of communism across central and eastern Europe, which began in Poland and Hungary, is symbolised by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Faced by a mass exodus of its citizens to the West, the East German government throws open the gates. Germany is united after more than 40 years, and its eastern part joins the EU (October 1990).

A new thrill is bungee jumping. Parents gasp, but youngsters enjoy the sensation of jumping from a high place attached to an elastic rope, which breaks their fall and pulls them back before they hit the ground.

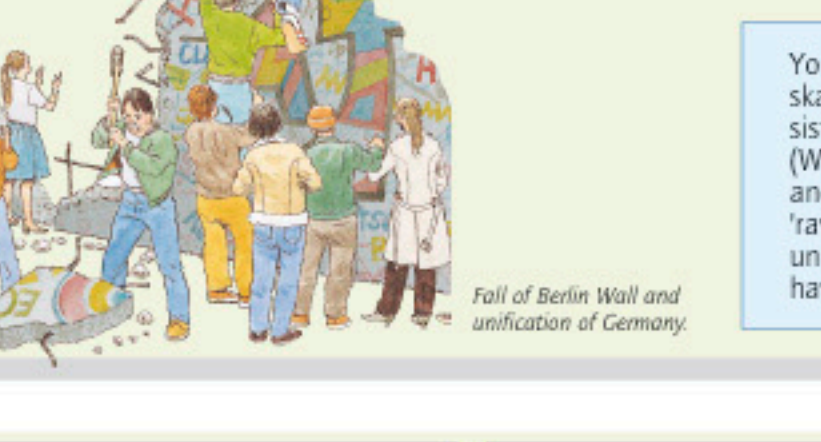
17 February 1986
Although customs duties disappeared in 1968, trade is not flowing freely across EU borders. The main obstacles are differences in national regulations. The Single European Act of February 1986 launches a vast six-year programme to sort these out. The Act also gives the European Parliament more say and strengthens EU powers in environmental protection.

28 February 1984
Computers and automation are changing the way we live and work. To stay in the forefront of innovation, the EU adopts the 'Esprit' programme in 1984 as the first of many research and development programmes it has since funded.



15 June 1987
The EU launches the 'Erasmus' programme to fund university students wishing to study for up to a year in another European country. More than two million young people have benefited from this and similar EU schemes.

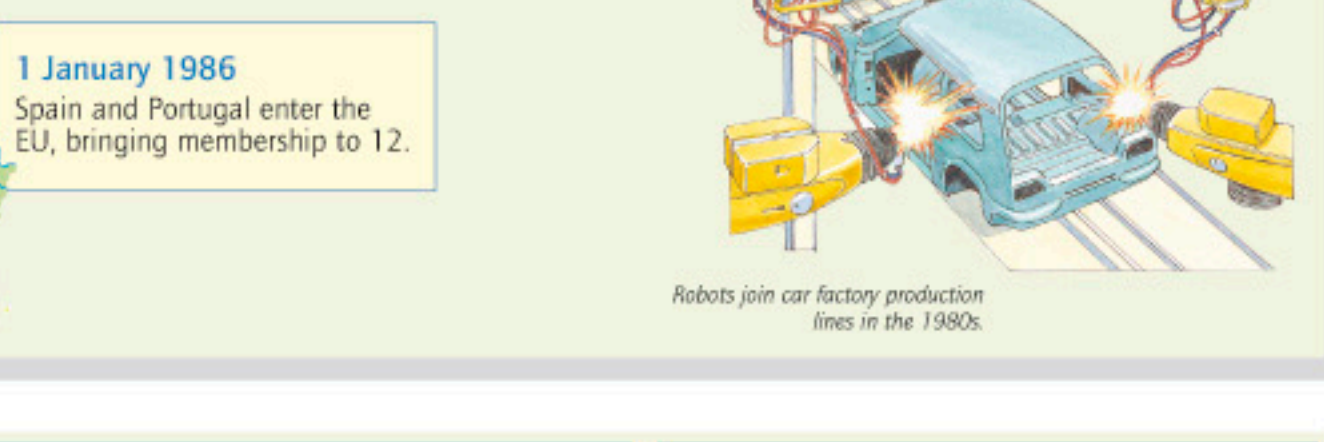
In the Balkans, Yugoslavia begins to break apart in 1991. Fighting erupts first in Croatia, then in Bosnia and Herzegovina where Serbs, Croats and Muslims fight in a bloody civil war.



Young children take up roller skating. Older brothers and sisters listen to 'personal stereo' (Walkmans) and CDs, watch TV soap operas and enjoy Asian food. Huge parties or 'raves' attract teenagers. Skirts are getting uncommon, and short trousers for small boys have almost disappeared.

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1 January 1986
Spain and Portugal enter the EU, bringing membership to 12.



1 January 1995
Austria, Finland and Sweden join the EU. The 15 members now cover almost the whole of western Europe.

In 1996, scientists in Scotland succeed in cloning a sheep from a single cell of a six-year-old ewe, a breakthrough in genetic engineering. 'Dolly' is an identical copy of her 'parent'.

13 December 1997
EU leaders agree to start the process of membership negotiations with 10 countries of central and eastern Europe: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The Mediterranean islands of Cyprus and Malta are also included. In 2000, Treaty changes agreed in Nice open the way for enlargement by reforming EU voting rules.

The communications revolution continues. Many schools and homes now have high-speed access to the internet. Text messages and SMS are the favourite way for young people to stay in constant contact with each other. Wide-screen and flat-screen TV sets and DVDs set the pace for home entertainment.

31 March 2003
As part of its foreign and security policy, the EU takes on peace-keeping operations in the Balkans, firstly in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and then in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In both cases, EU-led forces replace NATO units. Internally, the EU agrees to create an area of freedom, security and justice for all citizens by 2010.

29 October 2004
The 25 EU countries sign a Treaty establishing a European Constitution. It is designed to streamline democratic decision-making and management in an EU of 25 and more countries. When voters in France and the Netherlands reject the constitution in June 2005, EU leaders declare a 'period of reflection'.

The Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty to limit global warming and cut emissions of greenhouse gases, comes into force in February 2005. The EU has consistently taken the lead in efforts to reduce the impact of climate change. The United States is not a party to the protocol.

26 March 1995
The Schengen Agreement takes effect in seven countries – Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain. Travellers of any nationality can travel between all these countries without any passport control at the frontiers. Other member states have since joined the passport-free Schengen area.

17 June 1997
Signature of the Treaty of Amsterdam. It builds on the achievements of Maastricht, laying down plans to reform EU institutions, to give Europe a stronger voice in the world, and to concentrate more resources on employment and the rights of citizens.

Nearly everyone wears trainers. Jeans and T-shirts are still popular. Teenage girls show a little midriff, and black is popular for a time. In the later 1990s, mobile phones and the internet change the way we communicate. The technology behind both is European. Young people travel more, and students often take a 'gap' year to see the world, using e-mail to keep in touch.

1 January 2002
Euro notes and coins arrive. Printing, minting and distributing them in 12 countries is a major logistical operation. More than 80 billion coins are involved. Notes are the same for all countries. Coins have one common face, giving the value, while the other carries a national emblem. All circulate freely. Using Finnish (or any other) euro coin to buy a Madrid metro ticket is something we take for granted.

11 September 2001, hijacked airliners are flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon building in Washington. Nearly 3 000 people die. The EU countries stand firmly alongside the United States in the fight against international terror.

1 May 2004
Eight countries of central and eastern Europe – the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia – join the EU, finally ending the division of Europe decided by the Great Powers 60 years earlier at Yalta. Cyprus and Malta also become members. Bulgaria and Romania follow on 1 January 2007. Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey are also candidates for membership.

