

# The development of the EU from 1950s to 2008,

by Tove Videbaek at the European Student Forum 2008 in Brussels

## How did it all start?

After the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, when European countries had bombed each other, many big cities were in ruins and millions of people had been killed, molested and homeless Europe was in a mess.

At this time many people thought about how to put an end to all these wars in Europe. For it was not just 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. We also had the 1<sup>st</sup> World war and several other wars between countries in Europe before that. Just imagine if we could start to work together and not destroy each other's cities - and kill each other's citizens.

What actually happened was that a group of brave statesmen like Konrad Adenauer, Winston Churchill and Robert Schumann started on a project which was: a new cooperation, which should be established on treaties, and guaranteed law and order and equality between the countries.

The project became a reality, and on May 9, 1950, the French Foreign Minister Robert Schumann proposed the establishment of The European Coal- and Steel Community. In the countries which before had fought each other the production of coal and steel, which before had been the raw materials of war now symbolically had been made tools of reconciliation and peace. The 6 countries in this community were in the beginning: Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands

This step was a great success, because this fellowship brought the victors and the defeated from the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War together - as equals around the negotiation table.

The 6 member states very soon decided to establish The European Economic Fellowship with a common market within a wide range of goods and services.

This initiative was so successful that another 3 countries decided to participate They were Denmark, Ireland and England. That happened on January 1, 1973.

In 1981 Greece became a member and in 1986 also Spain and Portugal joined the European Community. So now they were 12. The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 dramatically changed the political landscape of Europe.

Germany was re-united on Oct. 3, 1990,  
and the central- and eastern European countries became democratic - gradually  
as they moved out of the shadow and control of the Soviet Union.

The new dynamics in Europe and the changing political situation on the continent  
challenged 3 new countries to accede to the treaty of Maastricht of 1992,  
signed by the 12 older members.  
They were Austria, Finland and Sweden. So by January 1, 1995,  
the EU consisted of 15 member states.

The EU had just recently grown to 15 countries  
and now 12 other countries knocked at the door of the European Union.  
In the middle of the 1990's some of the countries from the former Soviet Union wished to accede.  
These were Bulgaria, The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Rumania and Slovakia  
and also the Baltic countries Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia  
together with Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta.

In the EU they really were happy for the possibility  
of being able to help stabilise the European continent  
and let these young democracies profit from the fellowship.

For 10 of the new candidate countries the negotiations ended on Dec. 13, 2002  
and they entered into the EU in May 2004. So now we had 25 member states.

The two latest countries joined on January 1, 2007.  
They were Bulgaria and Romania.  
So now we have the 27 countries in the EU  
which will cooperate for the common good.

The cooperation in the EU has been able to overcome very old enmity  
between the European countries.  
Arrogance and use of power to solve disagreements  
have been replaced by cooperation and fellowship.

March 25, 2007 the EU celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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### **But how does the cooperation between the 27 European countries function?**

Generally we have 3 very important organs or organisations,  
which are working with the specific political issues.

#### **Firstly of all you have the Council of the EU.**

It consists of ministers or heads of states from all the 27 countries.

#### **Secondly we have the European Parliament.**

EU-citizens from every member country - every 5<sup>th</sup> year - sends directly elected politicians to the  
EU Parliament

On the website of the European Parliament you can see the website of every member of Parliament  
their names and which issues and committees etc. they are involved in.

All the MEPs are members of a political group in the EP

for example the EPP-ED, which is the largest group in Parliament and consists of Conservatives and Christian Democrats from all over Europe. The second largest political group is the European socialists, PSE. Besides these groups we have the liberal group and many others.

**The third organ is the European Commission,**

which politically is totally independent.

Its responsibility is both to propose legislation and to make sure that the treaties are respected.

Each member country has a commissioner (until now, that may be changed),

And this commissioner almost is like a minister of a political area in our countries.

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**What are the political issues the 27 European countries cooperating on?**

On the website of the Commission and the European Parliament you can see all the political areas they are working on - within these organs

The more than 700 MEPs are very busy.

They have meetings, write reports, make legislation, go to committees, talk to people etc.

Very often we do not agree with the reports, laws and directives they write

but if we were to choose

I think that most of us would prefer the stability, cooperation and peace of the EU to all the wars, troubles and unrest that existed between the countries before 1957.

We prefer negotiations and directives for

Declarations of wars and the bombings of each other's cities,

which we have seen far too much - during the centuries in Europe.

One politician said:

"I prefer people negotiating quotas - to people cutting up each other's stomachs"

A little violent expression -

but actually a rather good picture of the reality in Europe – before and now.

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