**European Union - An Introduction**

**Why the European Union is in the news?**

The European Union has been declared as LGBTIQ Freedom Zone. The European Parliament through a resolution on 11th March 2021 symbolically declared the union as ‘Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender-Intersex-Queer Freedom Zone’.

With this, IAS Exam candidates should know which countries comprise the European Union and what are the objectives of the EU among other relevant information.

**What is the European Union?**

European Union is an international organisation consisting of European Countries, which was formed in 1993. It came into force after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty by 28 countries. The Maastricht Treaty is also known as the Treaty of the European Union (TEU). Maastricht is a city located in the Netherlands. The Maastricht Treaty was amended thrice. The amendments are listed below.

1. Treaty of Amsterdam (1997)
2. Treaty of Nice (2001)

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Current European Commission President

Ursula von der Leyen [Her term will expire in May 2024]

Official Language of EU

European Union has 24 official languages

EU Flag

Is Euro an official currency of all the 27 members of the EU?

No, the Euro is the official currency for 19 of the 27 EU member countries

European Union – Objectives

The objectives of forming the European Union are listed below.

1. To increase political cooperation
2. To enhance economic integration by creating a single currency the EURO.
3. Unified security and foreign policy
4. Common citizenship Rights
5. Enhanced cooperation in the areas of judiciary, immigration and asylum.

European Union was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2012.

European Union – Origins

Following the aftermath of World War II, European leaders realised that only large-scale integration would be an antidote to the extreme nationalism that was the cause of the global war. Winston Churchill went further and advocated the emergence of the United States of Europe. The 1948 Hague Congress was a pivotal moment in European federal history, as it led to the creation of the European Movement International and of the College of Europe, where Europe’s future leaders would live and study together. The founding of the following unions which eventually evolved into the European Union:

1. European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) – Treaty of Paris 1951
2. European Economic Community (EEC) – Treaty of Rome 1957
The original 6 members of European Communities were

1. France  
2. Italy  
3. Netherlands  
4. Belgium  
5. West Germany  
6. Luxembourg

European Union – Brexit

On January 31, 2020, the United Kingdom (U.K) formally left the European Union. U.K is the first country to leave the E.U. The exit was in accordance with Article 50 of the Treaty of the European Union.

Read more about BREXIT and its impact on India at the linked article.

European Union – Decision-Making Bodies

The 7 important decision-making bodies of the European Union are listed below.

1. European Parliament  
2. European Council  
3. European Commission  
4. Council of the European Union  
5. Court of Justice of the European Union  
6. European Central Bank  
7. European Court of Auditors.

European Parliament

1. It is one of the 3 legislative institutions of the E.U.  
2. On the basis of proportional representation, Members of the European Parliament are elected by European Union citizens every 5 years.  
3. There are 705 Members of the European Parliament (MEP) in the European Parliament.

European Council (E.C)
1. Political direction for the European Council is given by the European Council.
2. European Council was established as an informal summit in 1975. However, with the enactment of the Treaty of Lisbon EC was formalised as an institution in 2009.

**European Commission**

1. European Commission acts as the executive arm of the European Union. It is responsible for the day to day functioning of the European Union.
2. European Commission is considered as the guardian of the treaties signed.
3. It also has legislative powers like proposing laws for debate.

**Council of the European Union**

1. It is made up of government ministers from each member state.
2. It has executive powers like addressing common foreign and security policy.

**European Union – Economy**

1. EU has a share of around 14% of the global Gross Domestic Product (PPP)
2. In 2020, the combined GDP of E.U is $ 20 trillion
3. E.U also has representation in the World Trade Organization (W.T.O)
4. 19 member states of E.U are part of the Eurozone.
5. Euro is used as the common currency in the Eurozone.
6. Euro is the 2nd most traded currency in the world.
7. Euro is the 2nd largest reserve currency in the world.
8. As of 2010 data, out of the top 500 largest corporations in the world, 161 of them had their Headquarters in the European Union.

**Questions and Answers**

**Q 1) Why is the United Kingdom (U.K) leaving the European Union?**

As per some reports, some of the main reasons for the U.K leaving the E.U are mentioned below.

1. To regain control over immigration and its borders.
2. The Brexit vote was larger in areas that saw a huge rise in the proportion of immigrants between 2004 and 2011.
3. English national identity.
4. Citizens taking back power from the elite and big merchant banks
5. The 2008 financial crisis and Eurozone crisis may have encouraged the separation to protect the UK’s economy.

Q 2) Is Switzerland a member of the European Union?

Switzerland is not a member of the European Union. However, it has signed a number of treaties with the European Union. E.U is the largest trading partner of Switzerland.