

## What is the EU?

### How did it start?

Started in 1952 with the European Coal and Steel Community whose aim was to promote economic development and cooperation in the aftermath of World War II.

The UK joined in 1973.

### Who can be members?

Any European country can apply to join, and any can leave.

The EU currently has 27 Member States, with over 490 million citizens.

### Why are we in it?

There are many issues that are best addressed by EU Member States working in cooperation.

This is why we joined the EU in 1973 and it's why we've remained in the EU ever since.

## What does the EU do?

Its Member States remain independent and sovereign states but transfer some specific competences to the EU to gain greater collective strength and influence in areas best addressed through cooperation. By doing so, Member States in the EU are able to maximise their collective weight in the world, such as on international policy issues. The EU seeks to:

- promote peace, security, stability and prosperity in the world, through enlargement, foreign, development and trade policy;
- boost trade between EU Member States by broadening the single market to increase growth and jobs, as well as prevent national protectionism;
- legislate on better environmental standards;
- allow for cooperation on international crime, immigration and asylum issues.

## How does it work?

### European Council

The European Council sets out the general political direction and the priorities of the EU.  
The UK is represented by the Prime Minister

### Council of Ministers

The Council of Ministers is the main decision-making body in the EU. Its main task is to consider and approve EU laws proposed by the Commission. It also develops policy in certain areas.

A Government Minister from each Member State sits on the Council each time it meets.

Different Ministers attend depending on the subject being discussed, for example an Agriculture Minister will attend discussions about agriculture.

### European Parliament

In 2009, 736 Members of the European Parliament (MEPS) were elected by citizens of each Member State to represent their interests. The UK currently has 72. The Lisbon Treaty increased the number of MEPs to 751 with an increase in the UK's number to 73.

It considers proposals made by the Commission and increasingly co-decides legislation with the Council.

The next elections will be in 2014.

### European Commission

There are 27 Commissioners - one from each Member State.

Baroness Ashton is the UK Commissioner and Vice President, as well as the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

The Commission's role is to propose new laws and to ensure - with the European Court of Justice - that these are implemented by all Member States.