



Securing and Defending Europe: A Model EU Activity for Students

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For questions or feedback about this activity (which would be appreciated), email trosclair@jesuitnola.org

Cover Image by Harry Haysom for *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2023 issue, pg. 67

Introduction for Teachers

What is this and what is it about?

This is a Model United Nations-style activity in which students take on the role of the political leaders of the 27 different EU member states and meet together in a simulation of a European Council meeting where they try to make decisions together concerning the EU's policy toward Europe's security and toward aiding Ukraine.

While important issues like the environment, energy, and migration tend to dominate discussions about the European Union, this activity will focus on a traditionally somewhat underemphasized issue that's been growing in importance especially in recent years: Europe's defense and security. Given Russia's invasion of Ukraine beginning in February 2022 and the talk of the possibility of US withdrawal from NATO, the coordination of a European security and defense policy has become a hot topic in Brussels.

Who's this for exactly and how should I implement it?

This activity is intended for high school students, but it could also be used at the post-secondary level. It is also designed primarily as practice for Model UN students, but this activity can also be used in a classroom. It is left broad enough so that teachers can decide how best to implement it for their particular students and courses. They are more than welcome to adjust the following instructions however they see fit.

What can students get out of this?

- This activity allows for students to learn more about NATO, the EU, the EU's foreign relations and its security and defense initiatives, Russia's war against Ukraine, and the EU's responses to it.
- By engaging in a Model UN-style simulation, students can further develop their research, writing, public speaking, and negotiation skills.
- By researching a country and representing its perspectives on issues, students can learn about that particular country and its national interests.
- By playing the role of EU member states, students will get a better understanding of how the EU functions and how the member states play a significant role in making EU policy. They will also see the challenges of trying to get all member states to come to a consensus.



Instructions for Teachers

1. Explain the Scenario to Students and Give Them Their Instructions

Explain to students that:

- they will be representing the head of an EU member state at an upcoming meeting of the European Council, the supreme body of the EU composed of all the political leaders of the EU member states
- they will have to make decisions on what to do about Europe's security and EU aid to Ukraine
- they will have to research their country well and know its history and perspectives on these topics in preparation for the European Council meeting in order for it to be successful
- they will have to work toward drafting their 'conclusions' (EU policies and decisions) about these topics and agree *unanimously* on them so that the EU can speak with one voice.

Teachers should also explain to students how they will be assessed on this activity (if they choose to do so). Students could turn in position papers (essays) explaining their country's perspectives and/or they could be assessed based on their participation in debate. Teachers should also notify students if the debate will have a formal structure (i.e. parliamentary procedure) or be discussion-based (which is what the Council does).

2. Assign Students a Country and Give Them Parts I – IV

Assign countries randomly or have students note their preferences before being assigned. There are 27 member states. Should there be fewer than 27 students, teachers can assign countries based on population size (*see box to the right*), but certain countries should ideally be included to ensure different perspectives are represented in debate. In making foreign policy, for example, France and Germany have traditionally voiced support for more European autonomy from the US, while countries like the Czech Republic and Poland have advocated maintaining stronger ties with the US and NATO. Austria and Ireland, which are traditionally neutral countries, are in the EU but not in NATO. Hungary is the most pro-Russian EU and NATO country.

If there are more than 27 students, teachers could add the role of President of the European Commission (who sits on the European Council) or add guest observers such as the NATO Secretary-General, the President of Ukraine, or the President of the European Parliament. Research questions for students with those roles will have to be adjusted accordingly.

Provide students Parts I – IV online and/or in printed form.

- Part I includes information about the histories and political structures of NATO and the EU.
- Part II lays out the issues students will have to resolve and the questions they will have to answer as individual countries and together as the EU. (Teachers can shake up their Council meeting if they choose, by making Topic C a surprise *during* the debate instead of making it known to students beforehand.)
- Part III is the questions students should find answers for in preparation for the European Council Meeting.
- Part IV contains resources that students can use to conduct their research.

EU Countries by Population (Largest to Smallest):

Germany
France
Italy
Spain
Poland
Romania
Netherlands
Belgium
Czech Republic
Greece
Sweden
Portugal
Hungary
Austria
Bulgaria
Denmark
Finland
Slovakia
Ireland
Croatia
Lithuania
Slovenia
Latvia
Estonia
Cyprus
Luxembourg
Malta

3. Have Students Research and Prepare for Debate

Students must read the “Background Guide” in order to understand the histories and political structures of NATO and the EU and “The Issues to Resolve” to understand the questions they will have to address. For discussion to be substantive, students should research thoroughly the answers to the “Research Questions.”

4. Moderate Debate and Oversee the Drafting of Conclusions

Before the Debate:

- The teacher will play the role of the President of the European Council in order to moderate and facilitate the debate. Therefore, the teacher should understand the issues and know some of the countries’ perspectives on the topics to prod discussion along, if necessary.
- Set up desks in the classroom in an oval or circle so students can face one another like the members of the European Council do.
- Print on cardstock the placards with country names that are attached to the end of this activity. The country names are in their native languages just like they are in the European Council. In simulating the EC, set out the placards in order of the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union (*see box to the right*). The President – the teacher – can sit between the current president country of the Council of the EU and the next president.

The Debate:

- Begin by reminding students of the rules for debate (regardless as to whether it’s a formal or an informal structure).
- As the President of the European Council, the teacher can welcome the member states’ leaders, restate the issues to resolve and their importance, and remind them of their objective in this meeting (to produce conclusions).
- Begin having students debate Topic A and once that debate is done, do Topic B. As stated above, the teacher can make Topic C a surprise crisis situation that they can introduce at the time of their choosing.
- Students can draft conclusions in different ways. For example, the teacher can type them during the debate and have the working document put up on a projector screen. Students can also write their own as individual countries or as groups of countries that can be produced for the whole European Council as a basis for debate and discussion. Conclusions should be bullet-pointed statements reflecting the European Council’s positions, policies, and goals for the future. It should use action words and phrases like “the EU reiterates,” “the EU reconfirms,” “the EU condemns,” and “the EU will continue.” As a model, here is the EC conclusions from its meeting on June 29-30, 2023: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7-2023-INIT/en/pdf>.
- In the end, all EU member states must agree with the conclusions drafted during the debate/discussion. Do not take a vote, but ask if everyone is agreed, and if not, ask them for their reasoning and have students rework the wording of the conclusions until all 27 leaders find them acceptable . . . *if* they ever do, but that should be part of the fun . . . and the lesson about the EU.

EU Countries in Order of the Council of the EU’s Rotating Presidency:

Spain
Belgium
Hungary
Poland
Denmark
Cyprus
Ireland
Lithuania
Greece
Italy
Latvia
Luxembourg
Netherlands
Slovakia
Malta
Estonia
Bulgaria
Austria
Romania
Finland
Croatia
Germany
Portugal
Slovenia
France
Czech Republic
Sweden

I. Background Guide

NATO: Its History & Structure Today¹

The Formation of NATO

On April 4, 1949, representatives of the United States, Canada, and 10 Western European countries gathered together in Washington D.C. to sign the treaty that established NATO, **the North Atlantic Treaty Organization**. This military alliance continues today with its core mission being to promote peace and security through dialogue, defense, and deterrence across not just the North Atlantic, but the world.

The treaty's preamble states that its members are "determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law." But the thing these countries especially seek to defend is each other. **Article 5** of the treaty contains the bedrock principle of NATO: an attack against one member is an attack against them all. What the treaty did was establish a collective security arrangement for their mutual defense; they would come to each other's aid should one be attacked. And in 1949, the main threat they were worried about was the Soviet Union.

In the late 1940s, Europe was still recovering from the devastation of the Second World War. Despite having been allies with the US, Great Britain, and France against Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union began to emerge as a new rival and threat under its leader Joseph Stalin who had different ideas about what to do with postwar Europe. Even before WWII had officially ended, **the Cold War** was already beginning. For almost fifty years, this geopolitical rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union and their respective allies and ideologies (capitalism and democracy versus communism and totalitarianism) dominated international affairs.

By the time NATO formed in 1949, the Soviets were backing communist parties across Europe and actively aiding communist takeovers in Eastern European capitals where they established Soviet-style governments loyal to Moscow. Stalin's attempt to spread communism and extend Soviet influence over Eastern Europe resulted in the division of the continent. Behind this "iron curtain" – as British prime minister Winston Churchill called it in 1946 – was the German capital of Berlin. The Allies had divided postwar Germany into four occupation zones at the end of the war, and sitting in the Soviet zone was Berlin, which itself was divided into occupation zones by the Allies. From June 1948 through May 1949, Stalin tried to force the Western allies out of West Berlin by blockading their zones by land. The "Berlin Blockade" was countered by the US-led "Berlin Airlift" in which planes continuously ferried food and supplies to the city. This allowed West Berlin to survive and resulted in Stalin ending the blockade. By the spring of 1949 it was clear to the US, Canada, and Western European countries that it was time to unite against the Soviet threat. And, thus, NATO was born.

In 1949 the Western allies also backed the creation of a capitalist and liberal, democratic government of "West Germany," and in 1955 – a decade after WWII ended – they allowed West Germany to not only form a military again, but to also join NATO. This angered the Soviets who consequently formed their own military alliance known as **the Warsaw Pact**, which included most of the communist countries of Eastern Europe, like Poland (where the treaty establishing it was signed) and East Germany (which the Soviets had also established in 1949). For the next several decades, Europe was divided into these two armed camps as tensions between the US and the Soviet Union waxed and waned.

¹ See "Resources for Students" for sources and places to find more information about NATO.

NATO after the Cold War

By the 1980s, changes were happening in Eastern Europe that would bring about the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War. The communist economies of the East had been slowing for years and failing to provide a good standard of living like many people in the capitalist West enjoyed. Mikhail Gorbachev came to power as the new Soviet leader in 1985 and attempted to save the communist system by introducing policies to reform it. These reforms, however, opened the door to the collapse of the Soviet system. Reform movements in the countries of Eastern Europe more boldly challenged their communist governments which fell in 1989 and 1990 after Gorbachev refused to support them against their own peoples. By 1991 communist, totalitarian governments in the East had been replaced by new capitalist, democratic ones. In December 1991 the Soviet Union itself came to an end. Its constituent “republics” dissolved into newly independent countries – such as Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia – who left what remained: today’s Russian Federation.

Some began to question the purpose of NATO once the Cold War ended, but the alliance continued with a new focus: promoting peace and stability abroad as a way to ensure security for the member states at home. While there was much optimism and a sense that a new era of freedom, democracy, and human rights was dawning in the world in 1989-1991, there were also new crises, most notably in Southeastern Europe, in the Balkans. The collapse of communism in Yugoslavia was accompanied by the rise of civil war, nationalism, and ethnic violence as Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia declared their independence and Serbia tried to stop it. As reports emerged of Serbian forces committing genocide against Bosnia’s Muslim population, the United Nations approved NATO establishing a naval embargo against Serbia and a no-fly zone over **Bosnia**. Eventually NATO conducted an aerial bombing campaign in 1995 against Serbian forces that helped lead to the end of the war. This was the first time in its history that NATO conducted real combat operations. NATO forces then helped maintain peace in Bosnia until the European Union took over that task by 2004.

Similarly, in 1998 NATO conducted airstrikes in nearby **Kosovo** to stop Serbian ethnic cleansing once again; this aided in ending the conflict and allowed NATO forces to enter Kosovo to help maintain peace there, a deployment that continues to this day. NATO’s experience in the Balkans showed the alliance’s potential as an active force for promoting peace and stability in the world, and not just a passive, defensive one that by its, and specifically Article 5’s, existence could deter threats like the Soviet Union.

NATO invoked Article 5 for the very first time in response to the **September 11, 2001 attacks** on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center in the United States by the terrorist group al-Qaeda. NATO countries and other American allies joined the US in invading Afghanistan to destroy al-Qaeda. With the toppling of the Taliban government, which had allowed the terrorist group to exist in Afghanistan, NATO took over command of the UN-approved multi-national force in 2003 that was designed to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. In 2015 NATO’s combat role in Afghanistan came to an end, and in 2021 remaining NATO and American forces were withdrawn from the country. The Taliban quickly regained control.

Once the Cold War ended, there were debates over whether NATO should expand and allow in the countries of the former Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. Some policymakers were wary of the idea, fearing that this would hurt relations with the new Russian Federation, while others worried how it would impact the internal dynamics of NATO. Other policymakers saw this as an opportunity to support these newly budding democracies and promote international stability. In 1994 NATO established the **Partnership for Peace (PfP)** program, in which countries could partner and cooperate with NATO without being full members. They would receive support as they further developed their democracies and reformed their militaries. The door to full NATO membership remained open, and in 1999 Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic became the first former Soviet bloc countries and PfP partners to become alliance members.

In the early 2000s, more Eastern European countries joined NATO, a development that – as some policymakers had predicted – bothered Russia’s leaders, especially President Vladimir Putin, who saw Russia’s historical influence in that region threatened. Russia claimed that the US had made verbal promises in the early 1990s that NATO would not expand eastward; the US denies these promises were made. Moscow became even more alarmed when in 2008 NATO announced that **Ukraine** could one day become part of NATO. For Putin, who had become an increasingly vocal critic of NATO, this was a step too far. Putin and other Russian nationalists see Ukraine as deeply tied to Russia both historically, religiously, and ethnically. Ukraine, a former territory of the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union, had become politically independent in 1991. Ever since then, its leaders oscillated between Moscow and the West. In 2014, as Ukraine was establishing closer economic ties with the European Union, Russia invaded and annexed the Crimean Peninsula. In February 2022, Russia launched another invasion of Ukraine to try and keep that country in its orbit. Putin has sought over the years to divide and weaken NATO, but his latest invasion of Ukraine has only strengthened the transatlantic alliance.



* At the time this was produced, Sweden had not yet officially become a NATO member.
 Source: AFP News Agency (<https://twitter.com/AFP/status/1527587434984243202/photo/1>)

How NATO Operates

Today, NATO is an alliance of 31 member states. At NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, each member state has a permanent **delegation** of staff and officials from that country. Each delegation is headed by a **permanent representative** (ambassador) who speaks for their country's government at NATO.

NATO's primary political decision-making body is **the North Atlantic Council (NAC)**, which is composed of the representatives of every ally. Sitting around a table following the English alphabetical order, the Council meets in different levels. Every week the permanent representatives meet together in the NAC. Through the NAC, the countries' foreign ministers get together about three times a year, and the defense ministers meet about three times a year. At NATO **summits**, which since 2000 have occurred almost every year, the heads of government are their countries' representatives in the NAC; this is when and where the big decisions are made. The NAC and all other committees within NATO make decisions through **consensus-building**. There is no voting; a decision must be acceptable to all 31 allies. The NAC oversees and is supported by a number of committees that deal with a variety of political, military, organizational, and technical issues.

The Secretary-General is the top official of the alliance whose job is to chair the NAC meetings and facilitate discussion, to serve as the alliance's chief spokesperson, and to head and manage NATO's staff. The Sec-Gen is usually a high-ranking political figure from a member state (traditionally European). Candidates for the post are nominated and discussed informally among the member states. When a candidate is chosen through consensus, he or she is appointed for a renewable four-year term.

While the NAC is the political committee that oversees all NATO decisions, **the Military Committee (MC)** is the top military body within the alliance. Composed of military representatives of each member state (and sometimes the ministers of defense), the MC is the link between the NAC and NATO's military command structure. It gives advice and makes recommendations on military matters to the NAC and then translates the political decisions of the NAC into military action and policy. The MC oversees the international military staff and departments that handle things like intelligence, logistics, planning, and coordinating military exercises.

While NATO has a command structure, there are no NATO armed forces. Each member state maintains and controls their own militaries which they can still use outside of NATO. When the NAC decides to launch a NATO operation, member states contribute personnel and materials voluntarily for the duration of the mission. Should they choose to participate, the individual member state pays for the cost of what they contribute.

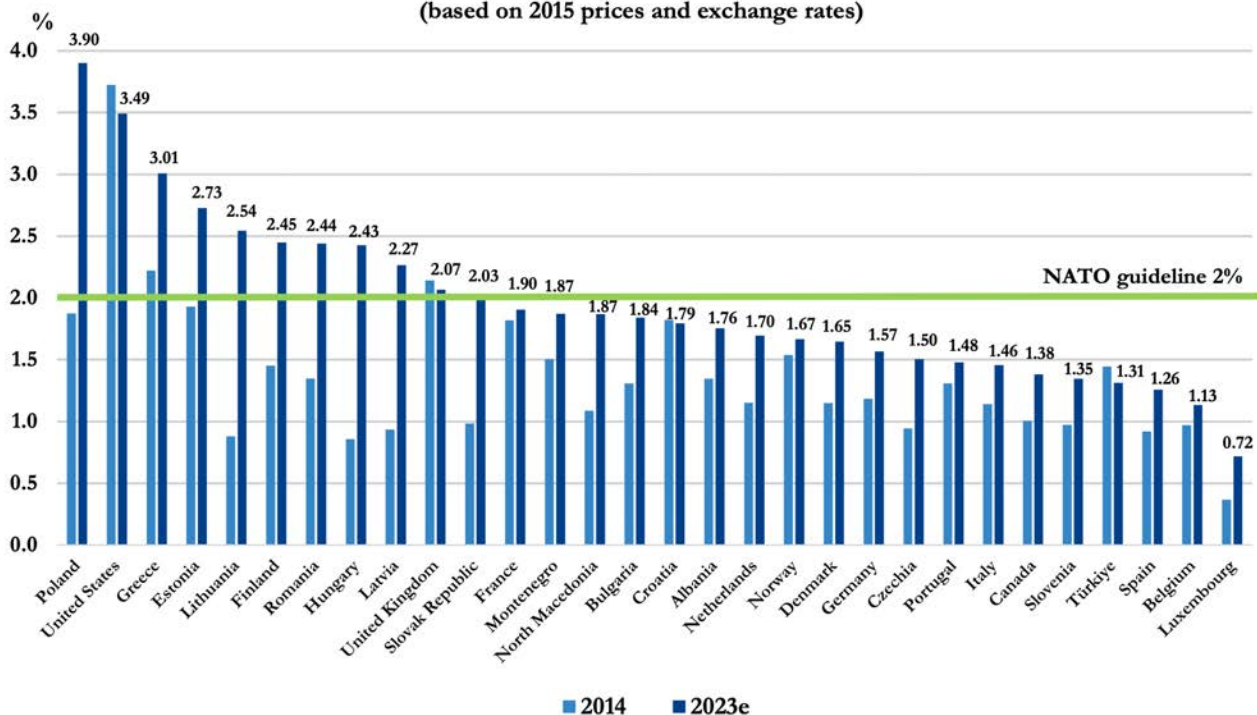
One example of a NATO operation is **Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP)**, first launched in 2017 as a response to Russia's 2014 seizure of Crimea from Ukraine. NATO stationed four multi-national battlegroups of about 1,000 soldiers each in Poland and the Baltic states to signal to Russia NATO's unity and commitment to mutual defense. Attached to the host country's army, each battlegroup is composed of soldiers from NATO allies and is led by the forces of one ally in particular. For example, the battlegroup in Poland is US-led and consists of American, British, Croatian, and Romanian soldiers. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, NATO added four more battlegroups and deployed them to the NATO countries of southeastern Europe.

NATO had a budget in 2022 of about \$3.3 billion. This money comes from the direct contributions of allies that are determined by a cost sharing formula in which the wealthier countries pay more.

In 2006 member states pledged to spend **2%** of their annual GDP on their own national defense capabilities, but few have ever met this goal. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, there was a renewed push for members to reach 2% by 2024. In 2022, only 9 of the 31 allies spent at least 2% on defense.

Graph 3 : Defence expenditure as a share of GDP (%)

(based on 2015 prices and exchange rates)



Note: Figures for 2023 are estimates.

Source: NATO – July 7, 2023 Press Release (https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_216897.htm)



Source: NATO – Enhanced Forward Presence (<https://shape.nato.int/efp/efp/map>)

The EU: Its History & Structure Today²

The Beginnings of the EU

After World War II, Europe was devastated, millions were dead, and the US and the Soviet Union were emerging as the new superpowers in the world. Western Europe's political leaders in the late 1940s had lived through both world wars and witnessed how nationalism had destroyed European society in the 20th century. They believed that the solution for maintaining peace and promoting prosperity in the future was to begin a process of economically and politically bringing together the countries of Western Europe. In 1946, former British prime minister Winston Churchill famously called for "a kind of United States of Europe."

The process of European integration really got underway on May 9, 1950, when France's foreign minister Robert Schuman presented a plan to put the idea of European unity into action. It was a small first step, and today, May 9 is celebrated as 'Europe Day' in the EU. What Schuman proposed was what would become the first organization formed on the path toward the current EU: **the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)**. Through the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1951, six countries – France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg – agreed to put their coal and steel industries under a common, supranational authority that would regulate them. Because coal and steel had been (and were still) crucial for modern warfare, the idea was that the individual members of the community – most notably the historical enemies of France and Germany – would not be able to wage war on one other in the future because they would not be able to fully mobilize their country's coal and steel resources. In other words, as Schuman put it, the founders of the future EU wanted to make war "not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible."

Six years later those six countries came together again to sign the Treaty of Rome, establishing in 1957 the next big step in the process of European integration: **the European Economic Community (EEC)**. These countries sought to continue down the path of economic integration beyond just coal and steel. By 1968 the EEC had ended all internal tariffs (so goods were no longer taxed when being imported into one member state from another), and it created a common external tariff on goods being imported into the EEC). In 1973 Ireland, Britain, and Denmark joined the organization, and in 1974, Greece, Portugal, and Spain replaced their former dictatorships with liberal democracies, opening up the path to EEC membership in the 1980s.

The Formation of Today's EU

By the 1980s, the EEC was going beyond just the integration of economic matters. Political institutions and bodies within the organization were further developed. They were restructured and given more powers that increased the authority of the EEC, turning it into not just an economic union, but a political one, too. This process was formalized in the third and final major step toward European integration. In 1992, the 12 members of the EEC signed the Maastricht Treaty which formally brought into being the following year **the European Union**. The treaty also called for the creation of a single currency, European citizenship, and a common foreign and security policy. 1993 was also the year that the **single market** (or common market) finally came into being. This had been an objective of the EEC since its founding and thanks to the Single European Act signed in 1986, it was becoming a reality. The single market was based on the 'four freedoms': the free movement of people, goods, services, and capital. It was now even easier to engage in business, move, and find a job in another EU country. Compare it to the US where US citizens have the same basic rights in all states. They can easily move to, live, and work in another state without restrictions or seeking state approval.

² See "Resources for Students" for sources and places to find more information about the EU.

The 1990s saw other changes that furthered European integration. In 1995 **the Schengen Area** came into being. Based on an agreement signed in 1986 in the town of Schengen in Luxembourg, the Schengen Area is bloc of countries who have agreed to remove their internal border controls, allowing for free movement between them. For example, you can drive today through several countries without having to stop once and show your passport. You *do* have to show your passport at border control when arriving *in* the Schengen Area. Not all EU countries today are a part of the Schengen Area – like Ireland – and not all members of Schengen are in the EU – such as Switzerland and Norway. In 1999, the single currency – **the euro** – was introduced as an electronic currency, and in 2002 physical euro banknotes and coins started circulating and being used in the EU. While most countries joined **the eurozone** and stopped using their national currencies – like France and Germany – not all EU countries today use the euro – like Denmark, which kept its currency, the krone.

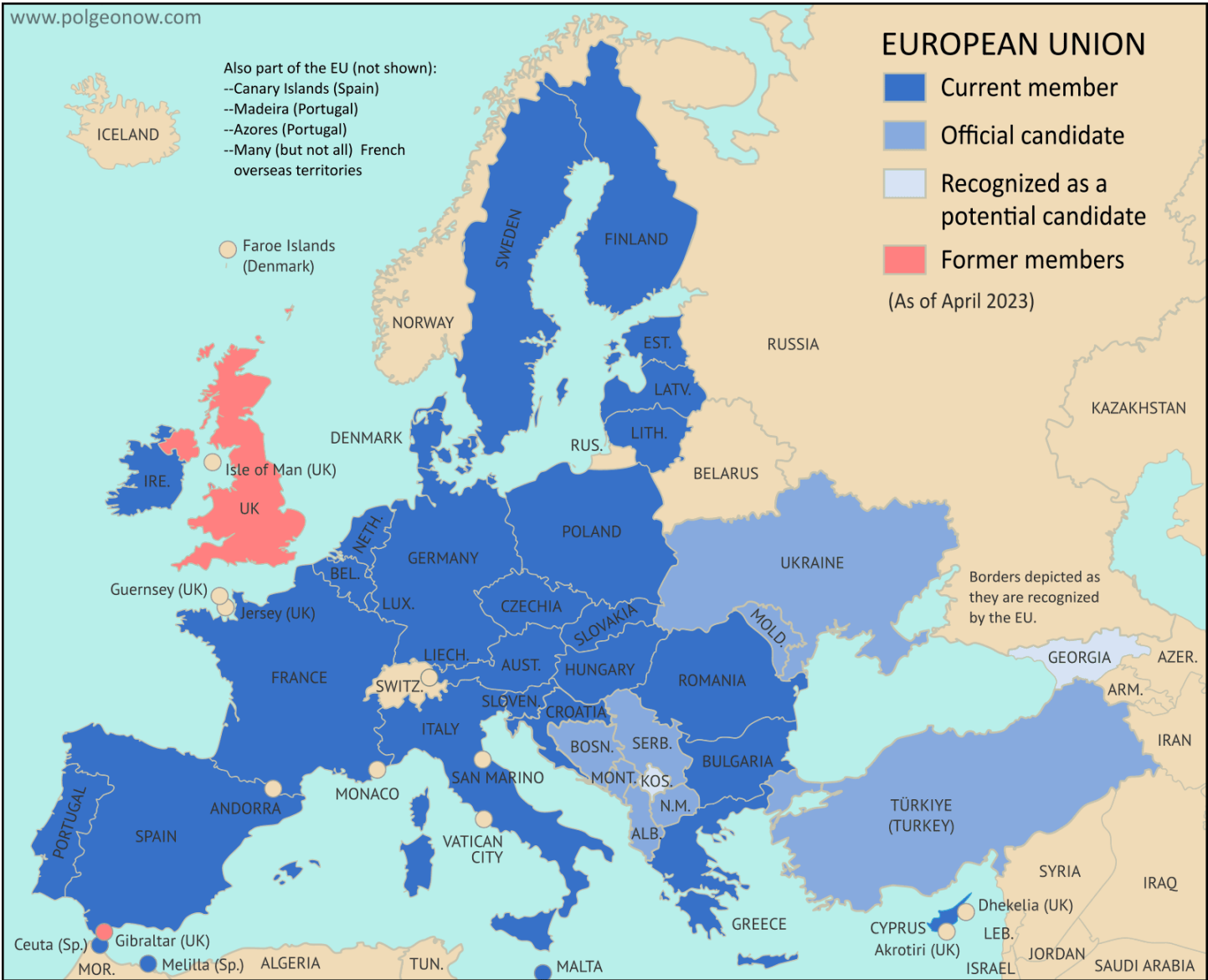
Maastricht and subsequent treaties signed in 1997 (Amsterdam), 2001 (Nice), and 2007 (Lisbon) further fleshed out the details of the EU's complex political structure while more countries in those years sought and gained membership in the EU. With the end of the Cold War and of Soviet control over Eastern Europe by 1991, the EU turned eastward. The debate over **enlargement** – whether, how, and when to admit the countries of Eastern Europe and their peoples into the union – was long, contentious, and complex. The largest single post-Cold War wave of new members occurred in 2004 when 8 states of the former Soviet bloc joined. (By that time the EU contained 15 countries after Austria, Finland, and Sweden had joined in 1995.)

Major challenges and crises for the EU dominated the 2010s. The **European debt crisis** began in 2009 when some countries, most notably Greece, had high levels of debt and were spending beyond their means. Because they used the euro, this threatened the whole eurozone. Debates on how to solve the crisis divided the poorer countries in the south of Europe and the wealthier countries in the north, most notably Germany, which was known for its economic stability. The EU created a bailout program that required Greece to engage in austerity (tax hikes and spending cuts). This was highly unpopular with Greek voters and led to years of political turmoil. **The 2015 migrant crisis** occurred when over 1 million refugees – most fleeing the Syrian Civil War – made the dangerous journey into the EU to seek asylum. While some countries welcomed them, others began to close their borders. The EU struggled to solve the humanitarian crisis, and anti-immigrant sentiment in the EU rose.

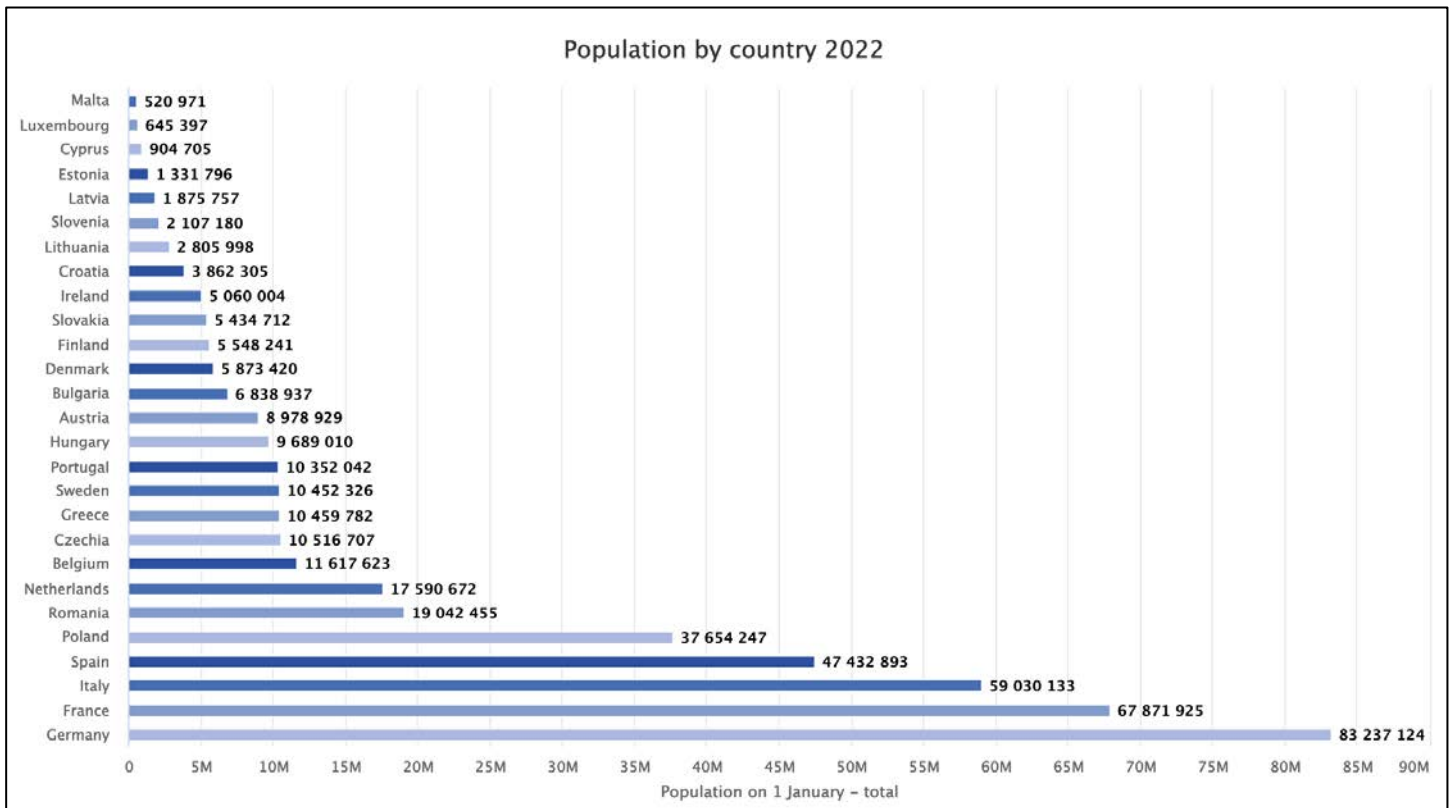
The migrant crisis further fueled growing **Euroscepticism** in the EU. Not every European was (or is) supportive of increased political integration and the EU playing a greater role in Europeans' daily lives. Eurosceptics criticize the supranational EU for infringing too much on national sovereignty and for having policymakers in EU institutions who are not directly answerable to EU citizens. This **democratic deficit** has long been one of the EU's major challenges. Populist and nationalist political parties across Europe embraced Euroscepticism and became significant political forces in countries such as Hungary, Poland, Austria, France, and Britain.

Britain long had a unique relationship with Europe and the EU. In the 1980s and early 1990s, its government was wary of the EU's moves in Brussels toward greater political integration. Britain never joined the Schengen Area or gave up the British pound for the euro. In 2015 Conservative prime minister David Cameron decided to hold a referendum (a national vote) on whether Britain should leave or remain in the EU. He expected it to fail and therefore quiet the Eurosceptic faction of his party. Concerns about sovereignty, immigration, and Britain's financial contributions to the EU fueled support for the Leave Campaign and the results shocked Britain, the EU, and the world: 52% of voters voted to leave. Cameron resigned and years of political turmoil began in Britain, especially as the government tried to negotiate with Brussels the terms of Britain's exit from the EU – or **Brexit**. On January 31, 2020, Britain officially left the EU; Brexit's consequences are still being debated today.

Although Brexit was a crushing blow to the EU, Russian's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 gave new life and purpose to the union, with which Ukraine was deepening ties and is now a candidate for membership.

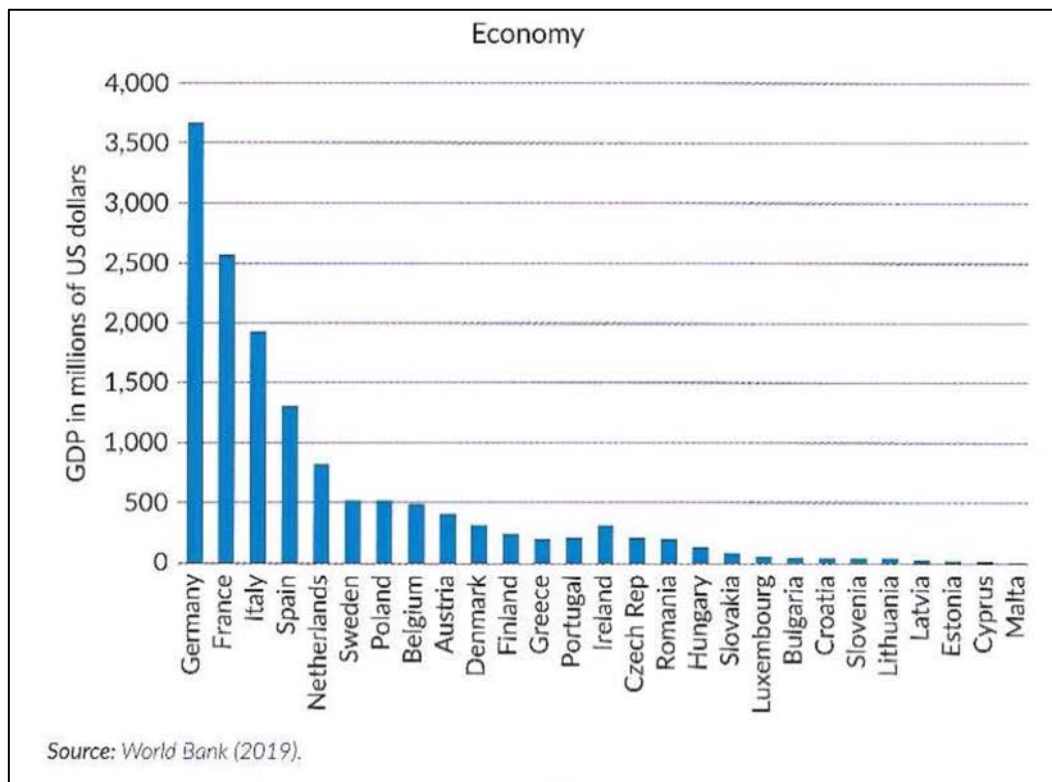


Source: Political Geography Now
 (<https://www.polgeonow.com/2016/06/map-which-countries-are-in-the-eu.html>)



EU Countries by Population Size (2022)

Source: Eurostat (https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/key-facts-and-figures/life-eu_en)



EU Countries by GDP (2019)

Source: McCormick, John. *European Union Politics*. 3rd ed., Red Globe Press, 2020.

How the EU Operates

Today, the EU is composed of 27 member states, has 24 official languages, contains about 450 million people, and accounts for about 15% of global trade. Underpinning the EU is the belief that the diverse countries of Europe are stronger together in the world and that the EU can help guarantee and promote peace, stability, prosperity, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. What began as an economic union now takes on broader issues such as climate change, energy, health, migration, and security threats.

The EU's very complex political structure is somewhere between a confederation and a federation; the EU is somewhere between the UN and the US. Member-state governments have a say in the EU, but they also cede some sovereignty to it and its institutions, based mostly in Brussels, Belgium. There are some policy areas such as the euro, trade, and competition, where the EU has **exclusive competence**; only it – and not the member states – can make decisions. There are many more policy areas like agriculture, the environment, and consumer protection, where the EU has **shared competence** with member states; both entities can make decisions about these policy areas, but EU legislation takes precedence over national laws. All other policy areas like education remain with the member states. The EU follows the rule of **subsidiarity**: except in areas where it has exclusive powers, the EU should only act on an issue if the EU level would be a more effective way to address it than on the national level. The legislatures of the member states can challenge the EU if they believe Brussels is not acting in accordance with subsidiarity.

The EU produces three types of legislation: **regulations** are binding on all member states and supersede national laws; **directives** are policies that individual states can implement in their own ways; and **decisions** are specific to certain member states or groups.

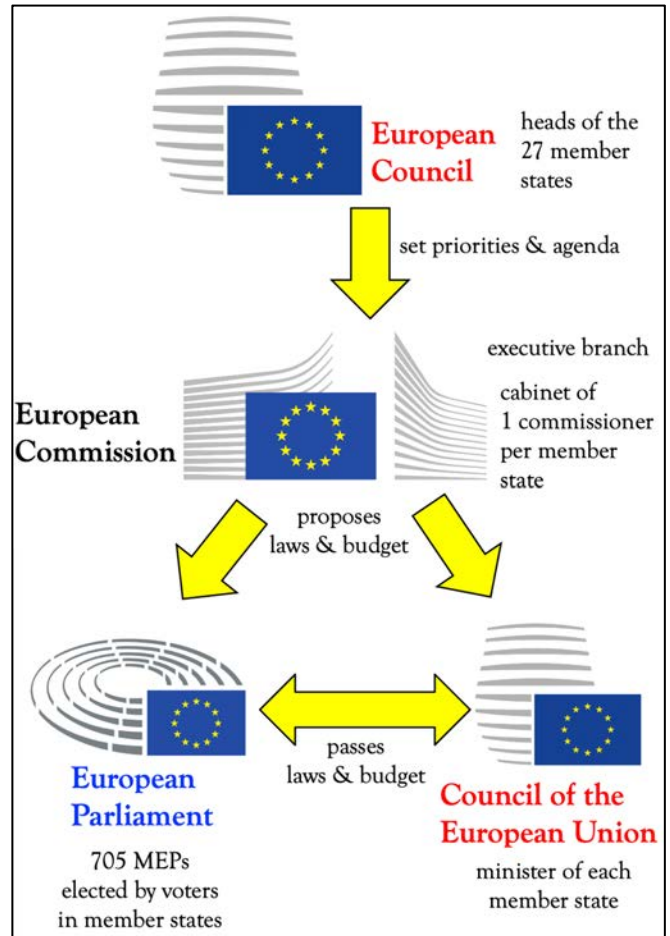
The European Council is the most supreme body of the EU. It is composed of the 27 heads of state or government from each member state – their prime ministers or presidents – and together they decide the priorities and direction of the EU. At least four times throughout the year, they meet together in summits. They do not make laws, but issue 'conclusions,' in which they identify major issues the EU should deal with. They form and agree to these conclusions through consensus (all member states must find the conclusions acceptable). **The President of the European Council** convenes and chairs the European Council meetings. He or she serves as a face of the EU to the world and serves for a once renewable two-and-a-half-year term.

The President of the European Council – and other top EU officials – are chosen by the European Council through **qualified voting**, in which *two* majorities are needed. When this system is required to pass or approve something at the EU, 55% of EU member states (or 15 out of 27 countries) need to vote in favor. *And then* of all those voting in favor, their combined countries' population must be at least 65% of the EU's total population. In other words, if 23 EU countries voted 'yes' (85%), but the four most populous countries voted 'no,' then the proposal would fail because the 23 least populated EU countries together contain only 42% of the EU population. Therefore, both the minimum requirements in qualified voting are not met.

The European Commission is the executive branch of the EU that – based on the conclusions of the European Council – proposes legislation and policies and sees that the laws, treaties, and the budget of the EU are implemented. The European Council elects **the President of the European Commission**, who – as with the entire Commission – represents and promotes the interests of the whole European Union. The Commission President chooses their College of Commissioners, which is composed of 27 commissioners (one from each of the member states) whose nominations are confirmed by the European Council. The commissioners form what is effectively a cabinet; each oversees a policy area like agriculture, justice, trade, etc. The commissioners serve a five-year term, meet once a week to discuss issues, and are assisted by a staff of over 30,000 people.

Legislation is only proposed by the Commission, which sends its proposals to two other EU institutions that together form the legislative branch of the EU. Both have to approve of a proposal in order for it to become law.

The Council of the European Union is where the member states’ governments have a direct say in, and approve, EU legislation. Not to be confused with the *European Council*, the Council of the European Union is sometimes referred to as “the Council of Ministers” because it is composed of the ministers of the member states’ governments who meet in 10 ‘configurations.’ These are committees that deal with different policy areas and are thus each composed of the ministers of the 27 EU countries who deal with that policy area. The Foreign Affairs configuration of the Council of the EU, for example, is composed of the 27 foreign ministers, the Environment configuration is composed of the 27 environmental ministers, and so on. They are the voice of member-state governments in EU legislation in their specific policy area. The presidency of the Council of the EU rotates between member states every 6 months. From July through December 2023, for example, the presidency is held by Spain. Being president means a member state gets the chance to decide the institutions’ priorities; its ministers also chair the configuration meetings.



The European Parliament is where the citizens of Europe have a voice in making EU law. Based in Strasbourg, France – but also meeting sometimes in Brussels – the body is composed of 705 MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) who are elected every five years. Seats are allocated to countries based on their population. For example, Germany – the largest in population – has 96, while Malta – the smallest – gets 6. MEPs are not there to represent their countries’ views, however, but the views of their citizens. In each member state, voters choose candidates for the position of MEP. Those candidates across Europe are typically members of almost 200 different national parties who are organized in the European Parliament into seven different political groups based on political ideology. For example, a newly elected MEP from the center-left Social Democratic Party of Germany would be a part of, and sit with, other European Social Democrats in the European Parliament’s S&D political group (the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats). A newly elected MEP from Germany’s center-right Christian Democratic Union would be a part of, and sit with, other European conservatives in the EPP political group (the European People’s Party). The Parliament elects its own President along with 14 Vice Presidents for a two-and-a-half-year term.

In the EU’s system of checks and balances, the President of the Commission, once they are chosen through qualified voting in the European Council, needs to be approved by the Parliament, which also has to approve the College of Commissioners as a whole.

Two other important institutions in the EU are the European Central Bank and the European Court of Justice. **The European Central Bank**, located in Frankfurt, Germany, manages the euro and monetary policy in the eurozone. **The European Court of Justice**, located in Luxembourg, is composed of one judge from each EU member state. It settles disputes over EU laws and makes sure they are applied properly in all member states.

II. Issues to Resolve

Topic A: Towards a *Military Union*?

The European Union first began in the 1950s as an economic union, and then it transformed by the 1990s into a political union. In recent years there has been discussion as to whether – or how much – the EU should also move towards transforming into a military union and engaging in military integration. If the EU is a major global player in the world in terms of trade and economic power, should the EU also be able to assert itself in the world and deal with security threats by developing its military power? If the EU’s mission is to promote democracy, human rights, peace, and stability, should it not have the military means to make that possible?

During the Cold War, Europe sought its security through US-dominated NATO. In the years since the 1990s, however, European leaders have sometimes sought to assert Europe’s autonomy from the US when it comes to matters of foreign policy and security. The post-Cold War treaties that established today’s EU laid out the foundation for EU military integration by calling for a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and a related Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). European countries have usually been divided between those supporting more European autonomy and those supporting closer coordination with the US and NATO. In 2018 French President Emanuel Macron, a major promoter of the EU and European integration, stated, “we must have a Europe that can defend itself on its own without relying only on the United States.”³

The US fears that NATO’s allies in the EU would spread their monetary and military resources too thin and thus weaken NATO, should the EU move to further develop its own military capabilities. NATO ultimately sees the EU as “a unique and essential partner,” but worries about what further EU efforts to integrate their militaries would mean for the transatlantic alliance. “NATO recognizes the value of a stronger and more capable European defense that contributes positively to transatlantic and global security and is complementary to, and interoperable with NATO,” the alliance stated in its 2022 Strategic Concept, adding, “Initiatives to increase defense spending and develop coherent, mutually reinforcing capabilities, while avoiding unnecessary duplications, are key to our joint efforts to make the Euro-Atlantic area safer.”⁴

Some European leaders want to adhere to NATO, but also want to make efforts to strengthen EU military coordination. As German chancellor Olaf Scholz wrote in *Foreign Affairs*, “NATO is the ultimate guarantor of Euro-Atlantic security . . . but NATO is also made stronger when its European members independently take steps toward greater compatibility between their defense structures, within the framework of the EU.”⁵

Should Europe seek its security through NATO or the EU? Or both? How would that work?

Should the EU develop its own military? If so, how would that work?

Should the EU find other ways to integrate militarily and to coordinate EU military operations? What would those solutions look like?

Should the EU have any military capabilities or integration at all?

³ “France’s Macron Pushes for a ‘true European army’”, *BBC News*, November 2018 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46108633>)

⁴ *NATO Strategic Concept*, 2022, point 43. (<https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>)

⁵ Olaf Scholz, “The Global Zeitenwende: How to Avoid a New Cold War in a Multipolar Era,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2023, pg. 35. (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/germany/olaf-scholz-global-zeitenwende-how-avoid-new-cold-war>)

Topic B: How Best to Support Ukraine?

Ever since 1991 – when Ukraine became independent from the Soviet Union – the country gradually looked westward as Ukraine oscillated between Europe and Moscow. In 2013 Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich decided not to sign the EU Association Agreement that would have created new political and economic ties between the EU and Ukraine. The agreement would have been a major step toward integrating Ukraine with Europe. Yanukovich's sudden refusal to sign it sparked a pro-Europe revolution in Ukraine in 2014 that led to his ouster and fleeing into exile in Russia. The new Ukrainian president signed the agreement. In four years, the EU replaced Russia as Ukraine's largest trading partner.

In 2014, Russia, which had refused to recognize the change in Ukrainian leadership, invaded Ukraine and seized the Crimean Peninsula. Russian aggression has only made Ukrainians turn more toward Europe, not just in 2014, but especially following Russia's invasion in February 2022 that sought to topple Ukraine's pro-EU government and install a pro-Russian one. Within a few days of the invasion, Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskyy submitted the application for Ukraine to become an EU member state. In June 2022 the European Council approved Ukraine becoming an official candidate for membership. Ukraine has a multi-year process ahead of it, in which it has to make various reforms in order for it to be able to join the EU. While that road may be long, the EU has felt a sense of purpose in supporting Ukraine in its efforts to defy Russian meddling and become a part of the European family.

How can the EU support Ukraine militarily in its war against Russian aggression?

Topic C: Crisis - The US is Withdrawing from NATO

The American president has just announced that the US will seek to formally withdraw from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the first peacetime military alliance the country had ever joined and an alliance it helped forge in 1949. The transatlantic alliance losing its largest military partner could have huge ramifications in the international arena.

What should Europe do? Should NATO's European member states try to keep NATO going without the United States? Should the EU develop its own military structure to replace NATO without non-EU NATO members like Canada and the United Kingdom?

III. Research Questions for Students

1. Describe your country. (*capital, official language, demographic and economic information*)

2. Describe your country's government. (*type of government, current leaders, leading political party or parties, current domestic issues, when upcoming elections are*)

3. What has been your country's history since World War II when it comes to defense and security?

4. What is your country's history and relationship with NATO?

5. What is your country's history and relationship with the EU?

6. What is your country's current military spending and capabilities?

7. What is your country's particular security concerns and current military involvements in the world?

8. What is your country's policy toward Ukraine and Russia? How has your country assisted Ukraine?

9. What is the EU currently doing when it comes to military integration and military initiatives and programs?
(*For example, what are the Strategic Compass and PESCO?*)

10. What is the EU currently doing to support Ukraine in its war against Russian aggression?
(*For example, what is the European Peace Facility?*)

IV. Resources for Students

These resources are just a launching pad for deeper investigations into the research questions!

On Countries:

- EU country profiles: https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/country-profiles_en
- CIA Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

On NATO:

- NATO's website: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/index.htm>
- The Council on Foreign Relations – “What is NATO?”: <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-nato#chapter-title-0-1>
- The Council on Foreign Relations – “Why has NATO become a Flash Point With Russia in Ukraine”: <https://www.cfr.org/background/why-nato-has-become-flash-point-russia-ukraine>
- The NATO Treaty: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm

On the EU:

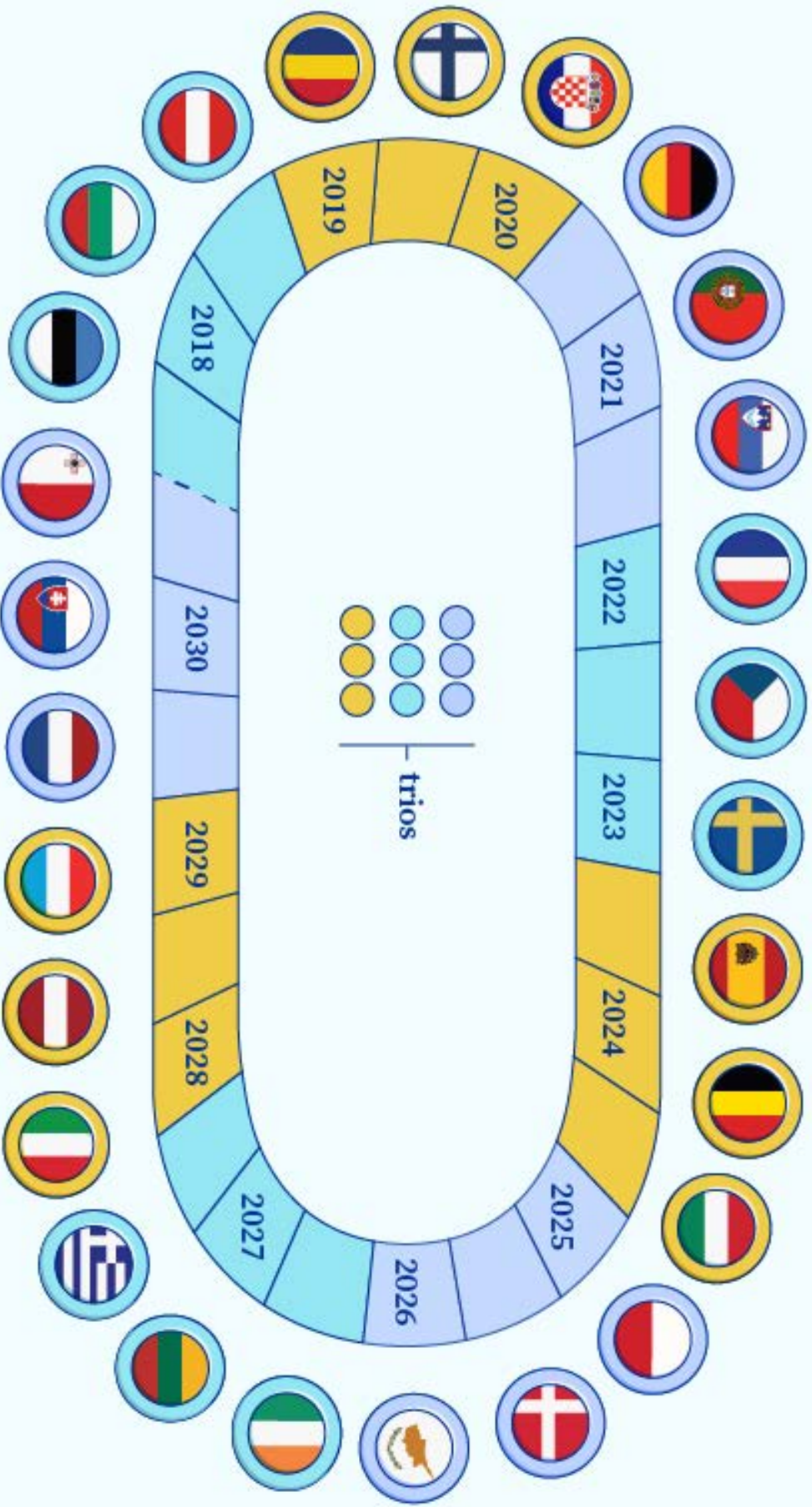
- The EU's Website: https://european-union.europa.eu/index_en
- *How does the European Union Work?* from the European Commission: https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/singapore/documents/more_info/eu_publications/how_the_european_union_works_en.pdf
- The History of the EU: https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu_en
- *The Collector* – “How did the European Union Come into Existence?”: <https://www.thecollector.com/how-did-the-european-union-start/>
- The Council on Foreign Relations – “The Eurozone in Crisis”: <https://www.cfr.org/background/eurozone-crisis#chapter-title-0-4>
- McCormick, John. *European Union Politics*. 3rd ed., Red Globe Press, 2020.

On Ukraine:

- UK in a Changing Europe – “Explainer: The Ukraine-EU Relationship”: <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/explainers/the-ukraine-eu-relationship/>
- Politico – “After Russia's invasion, Brussels is a military player but not a military power”: <https://www.politico.eu/article/after-russia-invasion-ukraine-brussels-eu-military-player-not-power/>
- Euromaidan Press – “EU to create €20 billion fund to support Ukraine's army for years”: https://euromaidanpress.com/2023/07/19/eu-to-create-e20bn-fund-to-support-ukraines-army-for-years/?_cf_chl_tk=S9VhVmsfH0h20ug16duUutjkFy43NfcY3lqmbRBpQT0-1689785180-0-gaNycGzNCdA

On Defense & Security Issues:

- EU Common Security & Defense Policy: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/common-security-and-defence-policy_en#8761
- EU Common Foreign and Security Policy: https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/common-foreign-and-security-policy_en
- The EU's 'Strategic Compass' https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en
- PESCO [*Permanent Structured Cooperation*]: <https://www.pesco.europa.eu/>
- *Foreign Affairs* – “Europe’s Real Test is About to Come: Will the Continent Ever Get Serious about its Own Security”: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/europe/european-union-defense-war-ukraine-radek-sikorski>
- “Czech President: EU army no longer in Macron’s mind”: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/czech-president-eu-army-no-longer-in-macrons-mind/>
- Texas National Security Review – “The Paradox of Europe’s Defense Moment”: <https://tnsr.org/2023/01/the-paradox-of-europes-defense-moment/>
- The EU Made Simple – “An EU Army will Never Happen”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NlpLGKJOc0s>
- The EU Made Simple – “Is NATO Enough for European Defense?”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CV-iwdPYr20>
- TLDR News EU – “Could the EU Form Its Own Army?”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pj4ZOgdX5BU>
- TLDR News EU – “Which European Army is the Most Powerful?”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjDvskjPHww>



**President
of the European Council**

ESPAÑA

BELGIQUE / BELGIË

MAGGYARORSZÁG

POLSKA

DANMARK

Κύπρος

(KÝPROS)

ÉIRE

(IRELAND)

LIETUVA

ΕΛΛΑΔΑ

(HELLADA)

ITALIA

LATVIJA

LUXEMBOURG

NEDERLAND

SLOVENSKO

MALTA

EESTI

България

(BULGARIA)

ÖSTERREICH

ROMÂNIA

IWONS

HRVATSKA

DEUTSCHLAND

PORTUGAL

SLOVENIJA

FRANCE

ČESKO

SVERIGE