

Introduction

The EU represents one of the greatest experiments in political history. For the first time nations have chosen to surrender aspects of their national sovereignty to a central body that has a responsibility to ensure that they act for the good not only of themselves but of other nations as well. Those who support the concept of the EU are called pro-Europeans or Europhiles. They base a lot of their arguments on the themes outlined below. These are opinions – you should decide if you agree with them or not.

The EU safeguards peace

The European Community was established to ensure that the great European powers that had been at war for hundreds of years would never again enter into armed conflict with each other. By creating a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) the intention was to make France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Luxembourg co-operate by forcing them to share their coal and steel resources in the rebuilding of western Europe after World War II. This rapidly evolved into a wider European Community and eventually the European Union. When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 there were predictions that the former communist states in eastern Europe would degenerate into civil war. Instead, thanks to the efforts of the EU, within fifteen years nearly all of those nations had become democratic and been welcomed into the EU.

It is now inconceivable that a major European war will occur, something that people could not have imagined at the end of either World War II or the Cold War. This has been achieved because European nations are now locked into reliance on each other, with shared laws, shared political leadership from Brussels, shared economic policies and even shared defence. The EU provides the first example of a truly *supranational* body where the ambitions of nations are curbed by a need to co-operate in order to succeed. This body has helped to bring incredible political stability to Europe and to remove the chance of a repeat of World War II within its boundaries.

The EU gives us more power on the global stage

EU membership gives states increased influence on the global stage. While nations would find it easy to ignore Britain or any European nation acting on its own, the combined influence of all 28 states acting together is harder to ignore. As other nations begin to club together in multi-national bodies, such as the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the African Union, it will become more and more difficult for individual European nations to make their voices heard without the support of the EU as a whole.

One major example of this is in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks, where global trading rules and standards, including *tariffs*, are set and monitored. When the EU negotiates on behalf of its members in this organisation, it represents the world's biggest single market and as a result has more influence. Other nations are much keener to make concessions to the EU than to individual member states as they see the rewards of gaining access to the EU market as much greater than the rewards of gaining access to any individual national market.

The EU makes us better off

A principle aim of the European Community has been to enable the rebuilding of the European economy after the disasters of the Great Depression and World War II. By creating a customs union and later the single market it has been hugely successful at doing this. The Single Market gives UK businesses access to the world's largest trading bloc with 500 million people and 21 million companies generating £11 trillion in economic activity. Since 1992, the UK's bilateral trade with EU member states has more than trebled and trade with Europe accounts for roughly 3.5m jobs in the UK, around 11% of the workforce.

The EU encourages our neighbours to reform

The EU shares land or sea borders with a great variety of nations including Egypt, Libya, Serbia, Turkey, Syria and Israel, with unstable governments, histories of conflict or different cultural and political outlooks to our own. Despite this, the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) ensures stability with the region by offering favourable relations with the EU in exchange for nations living up to standards such as the rule of law and democracy. Meanwhile, nations that look to join the EU are encouraged to reform their national institutions in order to fit in with the European liberal democratic model. This encourages wider stability and improves people's lives.

"There is no future for the people of Europe other than in Union."

Jean Monnet

"The prospect of EU membership...is the primary reason why [new member] countries have been able to reform their economies and politics so radically and so beneficially."

Tony Blair, British Prime Minister, 2004

Technical Terms

- ❖ **Tariffs:** a type of tax imposed on imports or exports.
- ❖ **Supranational:** a form of organisation through which decisions are made by international institutions, not by individual states.

Links

- ❖ www.euromove.org.uk
- ❖ http://europa.eu/abc/index_en.htm
- ❖ <http://www.europarl.org.uk/>