

Introduction

Opponents of the European Union, most commonly described as Euro-sceptics, include those who are critical of certain areas of EU policy, as well as those who believe the EU should be disbanded. Their views generally relate to the broad themes outlined below. These are opinions - you should decide if you agree with them or not.

The EU does not safeguard peace

Attributing the peace in Europe today to the EU does not take into account the Allied victory over Hitler and Nazism in 1945, and the creation of NATO in 1949. National sovereignty is perfectly compatible with free trade and friendly co-operation in a Europe of self-governing liberal democracies.

The EU is too costly

For wealthy countries, such as the UK, the cost of being a member of the EU is greater than the benefits they receive. The UK will make a net contribution to the EU budget of £10.4 billion in 2015. Much of this money pays for the outdated and wasteful Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), while a sizeable amount goes towards the Structural Funds, which transfer money to poorer areas of the EU. This money could be better spent in the UK.

The costs of EU membership could also be holding back faster developing countries, particularly the UK, which has a more global economy than many member states. The EU operates as a customs union, which means that the UK can only negotiate trade deals as part of the EU. The EU itself estimates that during the next 15 years, 90% of world demand will be generated outside Europe. Yet the EU does not have free trade agreements with major economies like India and China. Britain is locked into a customs union with diverse interests and cannot negotiate trade deals on her own terms.

The EU is too powerful

The European Community was set up as an economic organisation. However, it has expanded its role to cover many areas where it would be better for member states to make their own decisions. This process has been accelerated since the Maastricht Treaty (1992), which expanded EU power into new areas. Its powers now extend into traditionally national policy areas with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Justice and Home Affairs Policy (JHA). Many EU policies affect ordinary Europeans in the form of EU regulations that attempt to impose a single standard across the EU, but which are never debated by national parliaments. Trying to impose one-size-fits-all structures on 28 different member states, with diverse economies, demographics and cultures cannot work. There are also many intergovernmental bodies that deal with issues such as peace, security and the environment that do not require surrendering national sovereignty to a supranational body.

The EU is undemocratic

The European Union has a lot of power but is much less accountable to the people than national governments. Most EU decisions are made or shaped by the EU Commission which is led by unelected Commissioners and run by an appointed bureaucracy. The democratic element of the EU model – the European Parliament – has fewer powers than a national legislature and co-decides but does not propose EU legislation. Turnout at European Parliament elections is so low that it is difficult to proclaim its legitimacy. The other key decision-making body – the European Council – takes the majority of its decisions using qualified majority voting, which means that British voting power is only 8%. All of this demonstrates contempt for democracy and a reluctance to engage with voters.

The EU undermines the nation state

Many of the things that the EU does are based on the principle of **supranationalism**. In order for this to work, member states have to agree (normally through signing a treaty) to hand over sovereignty to the EU. Certain areas, such as defence, taxation or currency should not be handed over to a supranational body because to do so would undermine the nation state. Nevertheless, many have been. Sadly, the EU is not as effective at managing many policy areas as nation states have been. The conflicts within the **eurozone** provide an example of the difficulties caused by handing over sovereignty. The EU often ends up reaching a compromise that no-one finds satisfactory because it always has to try to please all of its members.

“The problems are getting more complicated. For each European country it is more complicated than before to find convergence with any other.”

Hubert Vedrine, French Foreign Minister 1997-2002

“Recent votes in the real world suggest the peoples of Europe have lost confidence in this project.”

Nigel Farage, UK Independence Party Leader, 2005

Technical Terms

- ❖ **Gross Domestic Product:** the value of goods produced within a country.
- ❖ **Supranationalism:** a form of organisation through which decisions are made by international institutions, not by individual states.
- ❖ **Eurozone:** the nickname commonly used to describe the 16 member states that use the Euro.

Links

- ❖ <http://www.ukip.org/page/ukip-history>
- ❖ <http://www.brugesgroup.com/index.live>