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EVROPSKÁ UNIE



MINISTERSTVO ŠKOLSTVÍ,
MLÁDEŽE A TĚLOVÝCHOVY



OP Vzdělávání
pro konkurenceschopnost

INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Zdroje

[1] *European Parliament* [online]. [cit. 2014-05-01]. Dostupné z:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/portal/en>



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Thy magic power re-unites

All that custom has divided,

All men become brothers

Under the sway of thy gentle wings. (from Ode to Joy, The EU official anthem; music: Beethoven's 9th symphony, words by F. Schiller)

History:

The EU was established in 1993. However, there had been some organizations we might call its "ancestors". The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC, 1951) later became the European Community (EC, 1967). There were 12 members originally: Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the UK. In 1992 their governments signed the Treaty on the European Union, commonly known as the Maastricht Treaty.

The EU was born on January 1, 1993.

Obviously, the EU started to help promote trade and economics. This goal has not become less important but step by step other issues have got incorporated into the EU agenda, for instance social issues, foreign policy, security and defence, judicial matters, education, regional development and, truly, the EU also serves its member countries as sort of a "watchdog" in the fields of human rights or fair workplace.

Another treaty called the Schengen Agreement is vitally important for the EU countries. It defines a space in which there are no border controls, in which no passports are needed. Not all EU countries have joined (e.g. Ireland, the UK), at the same time, there are some countries which are Schengen states, although they are not the EU members (e.g. Norway, Switzerland).

In 1995 Austria, Finland and Sweden joined the EU. In 2004 10 countries joined: Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. In 2007 Bulgaria and Romania joined, which means there are now 28 member countries (Croatia was the last one to join in July 2013).

The Capital:

In fact, there is nothing like the official capital of the EU. However, Brussels is commonly considered to be one. This city hosts the European Commission, Council of the European Union and the European Council. Strasbourg is the official seat of the European Parliament (so it might be called the legislative capital) and some other essential institutions of the EU, like the European Court of Justice and the European Investment Bank, are located in Luxembourg, which makes it the judicial and financial capital. And, as long as money is the topic, the European Central Bank is located in Frankfurt.

The Flag:

There is a circle made of 12 yellow/gold stars on a blue background.

Representatives:

The most important two are the President of the European Commission and the President of the European Council. José Manuel Durão Barroso from Portugal is the current President of the European Commission. Herman Van Rompuy, a Flemish (Belgian) politician, is the first full-time President of the European Council. He was selected on 19 November 2009 by the members of the European Council. Despite being literally one of the most powerful men in Europe, most EU citizens find his role rather vaguely defined and the establishing of this position itself represents in many member countries a controversial issue.



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The structure, bodies:

The European Commission is the highest administrative authority. It is in charge of the everyday running of the union and it also proposes the new law or policy which ought to be discussed by the Council, as well as it carries out the Council's decisions. In a way, it is the executive branch of European power. Its members are chosen by the governments and their term is 5 years long.

The Council of the European Union represents the views of the national governments. That's the body which in fact makes decisions, apparently the most powerful one. There is a seat in the Council for every member country, usually occupied by its Foreign Affairs minister (but it's not a rule). What may be found irritating is the fact that the voting power depends on each country's population. This leads to never ending discussions about "European fairness". The Council is one of the two "legislative houses" of the EU (suggests laws).

The European Parliament consists of 785 members constantly travelling between Strasbourg and Brussels (the secretariat is located in Luxembourg), which is often considered a terrible wasting of money. Its members are voted directly by the member countries citizens, in some countries there is a legal duty to take part in this election (Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece and Malta). The parliament is the other "legislative house" (making corrections and changes in laws before they get passed to the Council), oversees the work of the Council and of the Commission and, above all, has the power to reject the Community budget.

The European Court of Justice is the EU's judicial arm. Generally speaking, their main job is to check, correct and interpret. The European legislative is certainly not simple, that's why it is absolutely necessary to give someone such authority which can't be objected. Each member country has one judge in this European supreme legal body.

The Court of Auditors is also made up of 27 representatives of the member countries. Their task is to check that all financial transactions are made in accordance with the EU budget and laws. Every year they pass their report to the Council and to the Parliament.

The European Central Bank started to work in 1998. It has an exclusive authority concerning European monetary policy. It's independent from the other bodies mentioned above, just its executive board is chosen by the member countries governments.

Euro, the European currency, is a visible result of the work of the EU in terms of implying the Economic and Monetary Union. In 2002 it replaced the original national currencies in 12 countries. Today, it is used in the following countries: Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Austria, Greece, Slovenia, Slovakia and Spain. Surprisingly, it's also used outside the union: Monaco, Vatican, Andorra and a few other regions.

Topics for further research and discussion:

The Lisbon Treaty

Rotating European Presidency

The European Capital of Culture

The benefits for students, workers and, generally speaking, citizens of the EU.

Foreign politics, possible roles of the EU in today's global world.

The relationship between the national and European "identity"; is there anything to be worried about?

Sources

[1] *European Parliament* [online]. [cit. 2014-05-01]. Dostupné z:
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