



Geography:

- Area: 4,326,243 Km²

Population: (source: CIA World Factbook)

- 501.260 millions inhabitants (1.1.2010)
- Crude natural change rate: 1.2‰ (est. 2009)
- Crude net migration rate: 1.9‰ (est. 2009)
- Total Population Growth: 3.1‰ (est. 2009)
- Life Expectancy: Men 75.84 years, Women 82.01 years (2006)

Economy: (source: Eurostat)

- GDP: 12,408.824 milliards € (est. 2010)
- GDP per inhabitant (PPS): 25.100 € (2008)
- GDP growth: -4.1% (est. 2009); 0.71% (2010 est.)
- Unemployment: 8.9% (2009)
- Inflation: 1% (2009 est.)
- Public Deficit: 7.5% of GDP (2010 est.)
- General Government Debt: 79.3% of GDP (2010 est.)
- Stock of foreign direct investment from the entire world: 7,582.639 billion € (2008)

Member of the Euro zone: 16 Member States of the European Union (EU):

- Austria
- Belgium
- Cyprus
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Ireland
- Italy
- Luxembourg
- Malta
- Netherlands
- Portugal
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Spain

Member States outside of the Euro zone:

At the moment Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Sweden, and United-Kingdom are members of the EU, but not of the Euro zone. Denmark, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Slovakia take part in the European Exchange rate Mechanism II (ERM II), which means that the Danish crown, the Estonian crown, the Cypriot pound, the Latvian lats, the Lithuanian litas and the Maltese pound are linked to the Euro. In the future, other countries should integrate the ERM II.

Political Systems in the Member States:

Parliamentary Republics:

- Bulgaria
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Estonia
- Finland
- France
- Greece
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Italy
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Malta
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- Slovakia
- Slovenia

Parliamentary and Federal Republics:

- Austria
- Germany

Parliamentary Monarchies:

- Belgium
- Denmark
- Spain
- Luxembourg
- Netherlands
- United Kingdom
- Sweden

Institutions and political situation: (sources: www.consilium.europa.eu et www.europarl.europa.eu)

The legislative branch of the European Union is made up of two organs: The Council of Ministers or Council of the European Union and the European Parliament.

➤ The Council of the European Union

The Council is composed of ministers from the EU member states, who meet together in nine configurations, according to the subjects being addressed:

- General Affairs and External Relations (CAGRE)
- Economic and Financial Affairs (Ecofin)
- Cooperation in the fields of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA)
- Employment, Social policy, Health and Consumers Affairs
- Competitiveness
- Transports, Telecommunications and Energy
- Agriculture and Fisheries
- Environment
- Education, Youth and Culture

The presidency of the European Union Council changes every six months according to a predefined order:

- January – June 2010: Spain
- July – December 2010: Belgium
- January – June 2011: Hungary
- July – December 2011: Poland
- January – June 2012: Denmark
- July – December 2012: Cyprus
- January – June 2013: Ireland
- July – December 2013: Lithuania
- January – June 2014: Greece
- July – December 2014: Italy
- January – June 2015: Latvia
- July – December 2015: Luxembourg
- January – June 2016: Netherlands
- July – December 2016: Slovakia
- January – June 2017: Malta
- July – December 2017: United Kingdom
- January – June 2018: Estonia
- July – December 2018: Bulgaria
- January – June 2019: Austria
- July – December 2019: Romania
- January – June 2020: Finland

The number of votes accorded to each Member State is set by the Treaties, which also outline the cases in which a simple majority, a qualified majority, or unanimity are required.

Since January 1st, 2007, a qualified majority is reached when the following two conditions are fulfilled:

- A majority of the Member States give their approval (in certain cases a 2/3 majority) ;
- A minimum of 255 votes in favour of the proposition, which is 73.9 % of the total.

Every State can, in addition, ask to verify that the favourable votes represent at least 62% of the total population in the Union. If these criteria are not respected, the decision will not be adopted.

Distribution of votes by State:

| | |
|--|-----|
| Germany, France, Italy, United Kingdom | 29 |
| Spain, Portugal | 27 |
| Romania | 14 |
| Netherlands | 13 |
| Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Portugal | 12 |
| Austria, Bulgaria Sweden | 10 |
| Denmark, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Finland | 7 |
| Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Slovenia | 4 |
| Malta | 3 |
| TOTAL | 345 |

The Lisbon treaty, entered into force in December 1st 2009, provides that from 2014, decisions will be taken according to the double majority rule calculated according to two criteria:

- State: 55% of EU States (ie at 27, 15 Member States)
- Population: 65% of the EU's population

A blocking minority has to include at least 4 Member States.

➤ The European Parliament

The European Parliament has its headquarters in Strasbourg, while its committees as well as certain plenary sessions are held in Brussels; its Secretariat resides in Luxembourg. The Parliament brings together 736 MEPs who represent each of the 27 Member States of the Union. The Lisbon Treaty, entered into force on December 1st 2009, provides that the European Parliament will comprise 751 MEPs from the next European elections in 2014. Below you will find the number of MEPs per country (for the 2009-2014 legislature, according to the Treaty of Nice):

| Member States | Number of Seats |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| Germany | 99 |
| France | 72 |
| United Kingdom | 72 |
| Italy | 72 |
| Spain | 50 |
| Poland | 50 |
| Romania | 33 |
| Netherlands | 25 |
| Belgium | 22 |
| Czech Republic | 22 |
| Greece | 22 |
| Hungary | 22 |
| Portugal | 22 |
| Sweden | 18 |
| Austria | 17 |
| Bulgaria | 17 |
| Denmark | 13 |
| Finland | 13 |
| Slovakia | 13 |
| Ireland | 12 |
| Lithuania | 12 |
| Latvia | 8 |
| Slovenia | 7 |
| Cyprus | 6 |
| Estonia | 6 |
| Luxembourg | 6 |
| Malta | 5 |

Women in the European Parliament: 258/736.

For more information on the European Parliament and its election, see the website: <http://www.elections-europeennes.org/en/>