

Member States of the EU

Austria

- **Year of EU entry:** 1995
- **Political system:** Federal republic
- **Capital city:** Vienna
- **Total area:** 83 858 km²
- **Population:** 8.3 million
- **Currency:** euro
- **Listen to the official EU language:**

[German](#)



The Alps dominate the western and southern parts of Austria while the eastern provinces, including Vienna, the capital, lie in the Danube basin.

Until the end of World War I, Austria was for centuries the centre of a vast empire, which controlled much of central Europe. Austria is now a federal republic, consisting of nine states.

Vienna hosts a number of international organisations, including the Secretariat of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

The Austrian Parliament has two chambers. The National Council, or Nationalrat, has 183 members, who are elected by direct popular vote to serve a four-year term. The Federal Council, or Bundesrat, is the upper house with about 62 members who represent each province. Its members serve a four or six-year term.



Austria has a rich cultural heritage. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart occupies a place of his own as a composer, while Franz Schubert enjoys great popularity too. In the world of philosophy and ideas, Sigmund Freud continues to provoke controversy while Ludwig Wittgenstein was one of the major influences in 20th century thinking. The paintings of Gustav Klimt are widely admired.

Austria has a mixed industrial and agricultural economy, while tourism is also an important source of income.

In cuisine, some of Austria's specialities like Wiener Schnitzel and Apfelstrudel have become international dishes which need no translation.

Member States of the EU

Belgium

- **Year of EU entry:** Founding member
- **Political system:** Constitutional monarchy
- **Capital city:** Brussels
- **Total area:** 30 158 km²
- **Population:** 10.5 million
- **Currency:** euro
- **Listen to the official EU language:**

[French](#), [Dutch](#), [German](#)



Detailed map - click on the map



Belgium is a federal state divided into three regions: Dutch-speaking Flanders in the north, Wallonia in the south where the language is French, and Brussels, the bilingual capital, where French and Dutch share official status. There is also a small German-speaking minority of some 70 000 in the eastern part of the country.

Belgium's landscape varies widely: 67 kilometres of seacoast and flat coastal plains along the North Sea, hills in the centre and the uplands forests of the Ardennes region in the southeast.

Brussels hosts several international organisations: most of the European institutions are located there as well as the NATO headquarters.

Independent since 1830, Belgium is a constitutional monarchy. The two houses of Parliament are the Chamber of Representatives, whose members are elected for a maximum period of four years, and the Senate or upper house, whose members are elected or co-opted. Given its political make-up, Belgium is generally run by coalition governments.



Among the best known Belgians are Georges Rémi (Hergé), creator of Tintin, writers Georges Simenon and Hugo Claus, composer and singer Jacques Brel and cyclist Eddy Merckx. Painters like James Ensor, Paul Delvaux and René Magritte are the modern-day successors of Rubens and the other Flemish masters of yesteryear.

Belgium is famous for its chocolates, which are appreciated the world over. Its favourite dish is mussels and chips (French fries) which, according to legend, are a Belgian invention.



Member States of the EU

Bulgaria

- **Year of EU entry:** 2007
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Sofia
- **Total area:** 111 000 km²
- **Population:** 7.7 million
- **Currency:** Lev
- **Listen to the official EU language:**

[Bulgarian](#)



Detailed map - click on the map



Located in the heart of the Balkans, Bulgaria offers a highly diverse landscape: the north is dominated by the vast lowlands of the Danube and the south by the highlands and elevated plains. In the east, the Black Sea coast attracts tourists all year round.

Founded in 681, Bulgaria is one of the oldest states in Europe. Its history is marked by its location near Europe's frontier with Asia. Some 85% of the population are Orthodox Christians and 13% Muslims. Around 10% of the population are of Turkish origin while 3% are Roma. Similarly, its traditional dishes are a mixture of east and west. The most famous Bulgarian food is probably yoghurt, with its reputed gift of longevity for those Bulgarians who consume it regularly.



The Bulgarian National Assembly (the single chamber parliament) consists of 240 members who are elected for a four-year period.

Bulgaria's main exports are light industrial products, foods and wines, which are successfully competing on European markets.

Bulgaria is famous for its folk music. A Bulgarian folk song was recorded on the Voyager Golden Record which was sent into outer space by NASA. Famous Bulgarians include philosopher Julia Kristeva and Elias Canetti, Nobel Prize winner for literature in 1981 and Christo Javachev ("Christo"), the creator of many unorthodox outdoor sculptures.

Member States of the EU

Cyprus

- **Year of EU entry:** 2004
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Nicosia
- **Total area:** 9 000 km²
- **Population:** 0.8 million
- **Currency:** euro
- **Listen to the official EU language:**

[Greek](#), [English](#)



Cyprus is the largest island in the eastern Mediterranean, and is situated south of Turkey. The two main mountain ranges are the Pentadactylos in the north and the Troodos in central and south-western part of the island, with the fertile plain of Messaoria in between.

Cyprus has long been a crossing point between Europe, Asia and Africa and still has many traces of successive civilisations – Roman theatres and villas, Byzantine churches and monasteries, Crusader castles and pre-historic habitats.

The island's main economic activities are tourism, clothing and craft exports and merchant shipping. Traditional crafts include embroidery, pottery and copper-work.



The local dishes are the traditional meze which is served as a whole meal, the halloumi cheese and the zivania schnapps.

Since Turkey occupied the north of the island in 1974, the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities have been separated by the so-called Green Line.

Cyprus is well known as the island of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, who, according to legend, was born

there.

Member States of the EU

Czech Republic

- **Year of EU entry:** 2004
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Prague
- **Total area:** 79 000 km²
- **Population:** 10.3 million
- **Currency:** Czech koruna
- **Listen to the official EU language:**

[Czech](#)



The Czech Republic became an independent state in January 1993 after Czechoslovakia split into its two constituent parts. Before World War II, Czechoslovakia was one of the 10 most industrialised states in the world, and the only central European country to remain a democracy until 1938.

The Czech capital, Prague, is more than 1 000 years old and has a wealth of historic architecture of different styles. Because of this, the city has become a favoured location for many international film makers.



Manufacturing is still a major economic activity, especially the production of automobiles, machine tools, and engineering products. Iron and steel industries are important in Moravia. The chief crops are maize, sugar beet, potatoes, wheat, barley, and rye.

Hills and mountains cover about 95% of the country – ideal for skiing, mountain biking and hill walking. Wild boar and fox are found in the abundant woodlands.

The Czech Republic produces world-famous beer as well as mineral water from more than 900 natural springs (a world record). Wine is produced in the southern regions of Moravia and in part of Bohemia. Traditional dishes often include “knedlíky”, which is a type of dumplings made from potatoes or bread.

Among the famous Czech people are the Art Nouveau artist Alfons Mucha, composers Antonin Dvořák and Bedřich Smetana, as well as the writer Milan Kundera.

Denmark

- **Year of EU entry:** 1973
- **Political system:** Constitutional monarchy
- **Capital city:** Copenhagen
- **Total area:** 43 094 km²
- **Population:** 5.4 million
- **Currency:** Danish krone
- **Listen to the official EU language:**

[Danish](#)



Denmark consists of the peninsula of Jutland (Jylland) and some 400 named islands. Of these, 82 are inhabited, with the largest being Funen (Fyn) and Zealand (Sjælland).

Denmark has a large fishing industry, and possesses a merchant fleet of considerable size. The leading manufactures include food products, chemicals, machinery, metal products, electronic and transport equipment, beer and paper and wood products. Tourism is also an important economic activity.



From the 8th to the 10th century, the Danes were known as Vikings. Together with Norwegians and Swedes, they colonised, raided and traded in all parts of Europe. Modern-day Danes pride themselves in their country's welfare state with its widespread social protection for everyone.

Denmark is a constitutional monarchy, ruled today under the 1953 constitution. The single-chamber parliament or Folketing consists of 179 elected members.

Among the best-known Danes are the writer Hans Christian Andersen, famous for his fairy tales, the author Karen Blixen and the designer Arne Jacobsen. Danish cinema has gained international recognition thanks largely to the experimental film director Lars von Trier.

Specialities of Danish cooking include open sandwiches, smørrebrød, boiled or sugar browned potatoes, boiled red cabbage, roast pork or roast duck.

Estonia

- **Year of EU entry:** 2004
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Tallinn
- **Total area:** 45 000 km²
- **Population:** 1.3 million
- **Currency:** Euro
- **Listen to the official EU language:**
[Estonian](#)



Estonia, the most northerly of the Baltic states, regained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. It is a mainly flat country on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea, with many lakes and islands. Much of the land is farmed or forested.

The Estonian language is closely related to Finnish, but bears no resemblance to the languages of the other Baltic republics, Latvia and Lithuania, or to Russian. About one quarter of the population is of Russian-speaking origin.

The capital, Tallinn, is one of the best-preserved mediaeval cities in Europe, and tourism accounts for 15% of Estonian GDP. The main sectors of the economy are engineering, food products, metals, chemicals and wood products.



Throughout history, many other nations who ruled the region – Danes, Germans, Swedes, Poles and Russians – have influenced Estonian cuisine. Among the traditional dishes are marinated eel, blood sausage and sauerkraut stew with pork.

Famous Estonians include the writer Jaan Kross whose work has been translated into 20 languages, the author of the national epic (Kalevipoeg) Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, and the writer, film-maker, diplomat and politician Lennart Meri

Finland

- **Year of EU entry:** 1995
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Helsinki
- **Total area:** 338 000 km²
- **Population:** 5.3 million
- **Currency:** euro
- **Listen to the official EU language:**

[Finnish](#), [Swedish](#)



Finland, a country of forests and lakes, is perhaps best known for its unspoilt natural beauty. In the far north, the White Nights, during which the sun does not set, last for around 10 weeks of the summer. In winter the same area goes through nearly eight weeks when the sun never rises above the horizon.

As a result of the fact that Finland was a part of Sweden for seven centuries, (from the 12th century until 1809) some 6% of the population is Swedish-speaking. Finland became an independent state following the Russian revolution in 1917. Since this date Finland has been a republic. It has a one-chamber parliament whose 200 members are elected every four years.

The country has developed a modern, competitive economy, and is a world leader in telecommunications equipment. Main exports include telecoms equipment and engineering products, paper, pulp and lumber, glassware, stainless steel and ceramics.



Its remote northern beauty has inspired many artists, including the composer Jean Sibelius and the designer Alvar Aalto.

Finnish food has been influenced by continental, Russian and Swedish cuisines. Traditional specialities include fish (especially salmon and turbot roe), as well as reindeer meat. Specific dishes to look for include karjalanpiirakka (rice or potato pastry) and kalakukko (fish and pork fat baked inside a loaf).

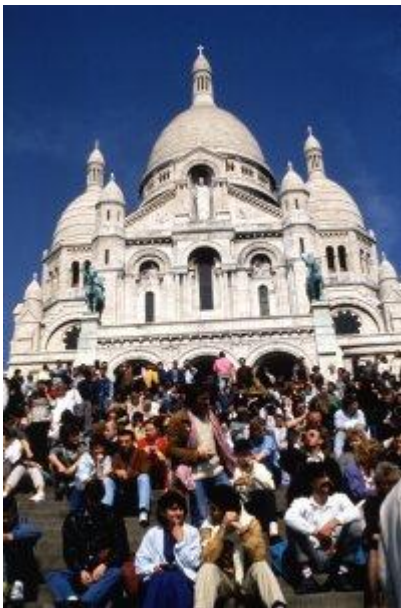
France

- **Year of EU entry:** Founding member
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Paris
- **Total area:** 550 000 km²
- **Population:** 60.9 million
- **Currency:** euro
- **Listen to the official EU language:**

[French](#)



France is one of the largest countries in Europe, stretching from the North Sea to the Mediterranean. The landscape is diverse, with mountains in the east and south, including the Alpine peak of Mont Blanc (4 810 m) which is western Europe's highest point. Lowland France consists of four river basins, the Seine in the north, the Loire and the Garonne flowing westwards and the Rhone which flows from Lake Geneva to the Mediterranean Sea.



The president of the Republic has an important political role. He chairs the meetings of the Council of Ministers (cabinet), and retains overall responsibility in key areas of foreign affairs and defence. The day-to-day running of the country is in the hands of the prime minister. The president is elected by direct suffrage for a period of five years. The parliament consists of a National Assembly, directly elected every five years, and a Senate whose members are chosen by an electoral college.

France has an advanced industrial economy and an efficient farm sector. Main activities include automobile manufacture, aerospace, information technology, electronics, chemicals and pharmaceuticals and fashionware.

France has produced some of the continent's most influential writers and thinkers from Descartes and Pascal in the 17th century, to Rousseau and Voltaire in the 18th, Balzac, Baudelaire and Flaubert in the 19th and Sartre and Camus in the 20th. In the last two centuries it has given the art world the works of Renoir, Monet, Cezanne, Gauguin, Matisse and Braque, to name but a few.

French cuisine is one of the finest in Europe; cooking and eating are part of French culture and lifestyle.

Germany

- **Year of EU entry:** Founding member
- **Political system:** Federal republic
- **Capital city:** Berlin
- **Total area:** 356 854 km²
- **Population:** 82.5 million
- **Currency:** euro
- **Listen to the official EU language:**

[German](#)



Germany has the biggest population of any EU country. Its territory stretches from the North Sea and the Baltic in the north to the Alps in the south and is traversed by some of Europe's major rivers such as the Rhine, Danube and Elbe.

Germany is a federal republic. The lawmakers at the national level are the Bundestag, whose members are elected every four years by popular vote and the Bundesrat, which consists of 69 representatives of the 16 states (Bundesländer).

After the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the former GDR (German Democratic Republic) was incorporated into the Federal Republic. Five new Bundesländer joined the European Union.

German is the most widely spoken first language in the European Union. Germany is the world's third largest economy, producing automobiles, precision engineering products, electronic and communications equipment, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, and much more besides. Its companies have invested heavily in the central and east European countries which joined the EU in 2004.



As birthplace of Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, Johannes Brahms and Richard Wagner, among others, Germany's gift to European classical music is important. In thought and word, Germany's huge heritage includes the works of Luther, Goethe, Schiller, Nietzsche, Kant, Brecht and Thomas Mann.

Germany is the second largest producer of hops in the world and the country is known for its quality beers. Wine is produced in the Moselle and Rhine valleys.

Member States of the EU

Greece

- **Year of EU entry:** 1981
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Athens
- **Total area:** 131 957 km²
- **Population:** 11.1 million
- **Currency:** euro
- **Listen to the official EU language:**

[Greek](#)



Located near the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Greece forms the southern extremity of the Balkan peninsula in south-east Europe. Its territory includes more than 2 000 islands in the Aegean and Ionian seas, of which only 170 or so are inhabited. Mount Olympus is the highest point in the country.

Greece is one of the cradles of European civilisation, whose ancient scholars made great advances in philosophy, medicine, mathematics and astronomy. Their city-states were pioneers in developing democratic forms of government. The historical and cultural heritage of Greece continues to resonate throughout the modern world - in literature, art, philosophy and politics.

Modern Greece has a republican structure based on the constitution of 1975. The 300 members of the single-chamber parliament are elected for a period of four years. The country is divided into 13 administrative regions.



More than 50% of Greek industry is located in the Greater Athens area. Greece's main economic sectors are agriculture, tourism, construction and shipping.

The best-known contemporary Greeks include the film-maker Kostas Gavras, the Nobel Prize winner Odysseus Elitis and composer Mikis Theodorakis.

Greek cuisine is based on goat meat and mutton. Fish dishes are also popular. Olive oil, which is produced in large quantities, adds to the distinctive taste of Greek food.

Member States of the EU

Hungary

- **Year of EU entry:** 2004
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Budapest
- **Total area:** 93 000 km²
- **Population:** 10.1 million
- **Currency:** Forint
- **Listen to the official EU language:**

[Hungarian](#)



Detailed map - click on the map



Hungary is a landlocked state with many neighbours – Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria. It is mostly flat, with low mountains in the north. Lake Balaton, a popular tourist centre, is the largest lake in central Europe.

The ancestors of ethnic Hungarians were the Magyar tribes, who moved into the Carpathian Basin in 896, conquering the people already in the region. Hungary became a Christian kingdom under St Stephen in the year 1000. The Hungarian language is unlike the other neighbouring languages and is only distantly related to Finnish and Estonian.

The capital city, Budapest, which originally was two separate cities: Buda and Pest, straddles the River Danube. It is rich in history and culture and famed for its curative springs. Hungary has a single-chamber parliament or national assembly whose 386 members are elected by voters every four years.



Hungary has some limited natural resources (bauxite, coal, and natural gas), as well as fertile soils and arable land. Hungarian wines are drunk throughout Europe. The country's main manufactured exports include machinery and transport equipment, foodstuffs and chemicals.

Hungary is a highly musical country whose traditional folk music inspired its great composers such as Liszt, Bartók and Kodály.

Member States of the EU

Ireland

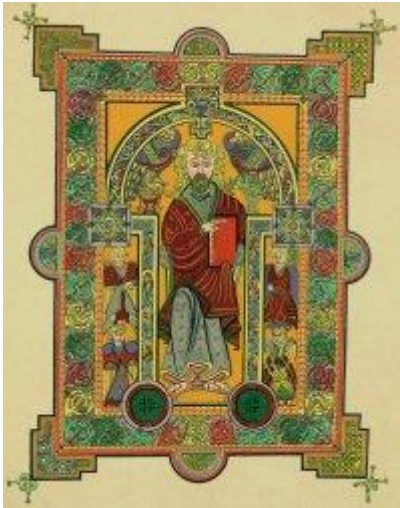
- **Year of EU entry:** 1973
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Dublin
- **Total area:** 70 000 km²
- **Population:** 4.2 million
- **Currency:** euro
- **Listen to the official EU language:**

[English](#), [Irish](#)



Since joining the European Union in 1973, the Republic of Ireland (Éire) has transformed itself from a largely agricultural society into a modern, technologically advanced Celtic Tiger economy.

Agricultural lowlands make up most of the interior, which is broken in places by low hills and includes considerable areas of bogs and lakes. There are coastal mountains to the west, rising to over 1 000m in places. Nearly a third of the population live in Dublin.



The Dáil, or lower house of Parliament, is composed of 166 members while the Seanad, or upper house, has 60 members. Parliamentary elections are held every five years.

Although the history of Ireland has seen troubles and turbulence, its people have always been associated with a love of music and storytelling. Often referred to as the land of saints and scholars, the country is the birthplace of many famous English-language writers, such as Yeats, Joyce, Beckett, Wilde and Shaw. Ireland is home to internationally known rock bands and singers such as U2, The Corrs and Sinéad O'Connor.

Simple meat dishes and boiled vegetables such as the potato, carrot, turnip and parsnip form the principal ingredients of traditional Irish cooking.

Member States of the EU

Italy

- **Year of EU entry:** Founding member
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Rome
- **Total area:** 301 263 km²
- **Population:** 58.8 million
- **Currency:** euro
- **Listen to the official EU language:**

[Italian](#)



Italy is mainly mountainous, except for the Po plain in the Emilia-Romagna region, and runs from the Alps to the central Mediterranean Sea. It includes the islands of Sicily and Sardinia, Elba and about 70 other smaller ones. There are two small independent states within peninsular Italy: the Vatican City in Rome, and the Republic of San Marino.

Italy has a two-chamber parliament, consisting of the Senate (Senato della Repubblica) of upper house and the Chamber of Deputies (Camera dei Deputati). Elections take place every five years.



The country's main economic sectors are tourism, fashion, engineering, chemicals, motor vehicles and food. Italy is a member of the G8 group of industrialised countries and it is the world's seventh largest economy. Italy's northern regions are per capita amongst the richest in Europe.

Already the centre of a vast Roman empire which left a huge archaeological, cultural and literary heritage, the Italian peninsula saw the birth of medieval humanism and the Renaissance. This further helped to shape European political thought, philosophy and art via figures like Machiavelli, Dante, Leonardo and Galileo.

The list of famous Italian artists is long, including Giotto, Botticelli, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Tintoretto and Caravaggio. The country has also produced opera composers such as Verdi and Puccini and film-maker Federico Fellini.

Italian cuisine is one of the most refined and varied in Europe, from the piquant flavours of Naples and Calabria, the pesto dishes of Liguria to the cheese and risotto dishes of the Italian Alps.

Member States of the EU

Latvia

- **Year of EU entry:** 2004
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Riga
- **Total area:** 65 000 km²
- **Population:** 2.3 million
- **Currency:** Lats
- **Listen to the official EU language :**

[Latvian](#)



Latvia regained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Situated on the Baltic coast, Latvia is a low-lying country with large forests that supply timber for construction and paper industries. The environment is rich in wildlife. Latvia also produces consumer goods, textiles and machine tools. The country attracts tourists from all over Europe. Ethnically, the population is 59% Latvian and 29% Russian, and more than a third live in the capital Riga. Founded, in 1201, Riga is the largest city in the three Baltic states with a population of 730 000. Its Freedom Statue is one of the highest in Europe, at 43 metres.



The 100-seat unicameral Latvian Parliament, the Saeima, is elected by direct, popular vote every four years. The president is elected by the Parliament, also every four years.

Among the best-known Latvians are the expressionist painter Mark Rothko and the contemporary composer Peteris

Vasks.

Characteristic specialities of Latvian cuisine are speķa pīrādžiņi (bacon pies) and a refreshing, cold sour cream soup.

Member States of the EU

Lithuania

- **Year of EU entry:** 2004
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Vilnius
- **Total area:** 65 300 km²
- **Population:** 3.4 million
- **Currency:** Litas
- **Listen to the EU official language:**

[Lithuanian](#)



Lithuania is the southernmost of the three Baltic states – and the largest and most populous of them. Lithuania was the first occupied Soviet republic to break free from the Soviet Union and restore its sovereignty via the declaration of independence on 11 March 1990.

Lithuania's landscape is flat, except for low hills in the western uplands and eastern highlands. The highest point is Aukštasis at 294 metres. Lithuania has 722 rivers, more than 2 800 lakes and 99 km of the Baltic Sea coastline, which are mostly devoted to recreation and nature preservation. Forests cover 28% of the country.



84% of the population are ethnic Lithuanians. The two largest minorities are Poles with some 7% and Russians with about 6%. The Lithuanian language belongs to the family of Indo-European languages.

The Lithuanian capital Vilnius is a picturesque city on the banks of the rivers Neris and Vilnia, and it has one of the most impressive and biggest old towns in Eastern Europe. Vilnius University, founded in 1579, is a Renaissance-style complex with countless inner courtyards, forming a city within a city.

The Lithuanian President is elected directly for a five-year term and has the greatest powers in the field of foreign and security policies. The unicameral Lithuanian Parliament, the Seimas, has 141 members.

Lithuanian cuisine is famous for cold beet soup, Lithuanian sausage and potato meals, the most popular of which are potato pancakes and Cepelinai – potato dumplings stuffed with meat, curd cheese or mushrooms.

In 2009, Lithuania will celebrate its Millennium - the name Lithuania was mentioned for the first time in 1009 in the Annales Quedlinburgenses books.

Luxembourg

- **Year of EU entry:** Founding member
- **Political system:** Constitutional monarchy
- **Capital city:** Luxembourg
- **Total area:** 2 586 km²
- **Population:** 0.5 million
- **Currency:** euro
- **Listen to the EU official language:**

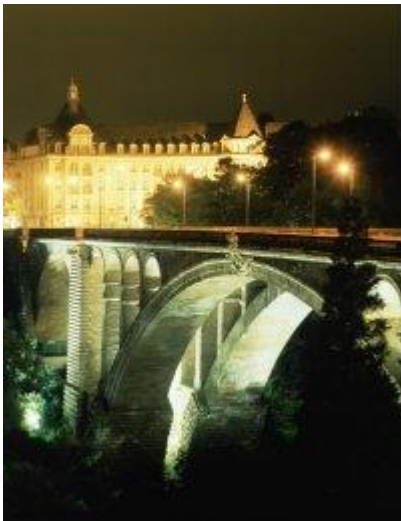
[French](#) , [German](#)



The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is a small country surrounded by Belgium, France and Germany, and its history has been inextricably linked with that of its larger neighbours. It is largely made up of rolling hills and forests.

Luxembourg has been under the control of many states and ruling houses in its long history, but it has been a separate, if not always autonomous, political unit since the 10th century. Nowadays, Luxembourg is a hereditary Grand Duchy with a unicameral parliamentary system.

Letzeburgesch, the national language, is akin to German. German is the first foreign language for most Luxembourgers and is used in the media. French is the administrative language.



The economic structure of Luxembourg is based mainly in banking, insurance, and the steel industry. Agriculture and wine production are also important.

Many of Luxembourg's speciality dishes are appropriate to forest areas: jugged hare and Ardennes ham. Other local dishes include trout and pike from the rivers.

Luxembourg shares the Moselle valley with Germany and the local white wines are well known. Like other northern European countries, Luxembourg is also known for its bee

Malta

- **Year of EU entry:** 2004
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Valletta
- **Total area:** 316 km²
- **Population:** 0.4 million
- **Currency:** euro
- **Listen to the EU official language:**

[Maltese](#), [English](#)



Malta is a group of islands in the Mediterranean Sea. Only the three largest islands, Malta, Gozo and Comino, are inhabited. The terrain is low and rocky with coastal cliffs.

Malta, in the heart of the Mediterranean, is a melting pot of civilisations with a history stretching back thousands of years. Malta has been inhabited since around 5200 BC and a significant prehistoric civilisation existed on the islands prior to the arrival of the Phoenicians who named the main island Malat, meaning safe haven. Later the islands were for centuries the seat of the Order of Knights of the Hospital of St John and then part of British Empire. It became independent in 1964.

The Maltese government is headed by the leader of the party with a majority of seats in the unicameral House of Representatives, known in Maltese as Kamra tar-Rappreżentanti.



The national language is Maltese but English is recognised as an official language, and many Maltese also speak Italian.

Tourism is important in Malta but the island also has an expanding services sector.

Traditional Maltese food includes soup (minestrone, fish), pasta and pastry dishes. Stuffed dishes are a feature of Maltese cuisine. Stuffat Tal-Fenek (rabbit stew) is a national dish.

Netherlands

- **Year of EU entry:** Founding member
- **Political system:** Constitutional monarchy
- **Capital city:** Amsterdam
- **Total area:** 41 864 km²
- **Population:** 16.3 million
- **Currency:** euro
- **Listen to the EU official language:**

[Dutch](#)



The Netherlands, as the name indicates, is low-lying territory, with one third of the country at or below sea level. Many areas are protected from flooding by dykes and sea walls. Much land has been reclaimed from the sea, the Flevoland polder being the most recent example.

The Dutch Parliament (or Staten Generaal) consists of two chambers. The first with 75 members is indirectly elected and has limited powers. The second chamber, or lower house, is directly elected and controls the government. Members of both houses serve a four-year term. Given the balance among Dutch political parties, all governments are coalitions.

Industrial activity is predominantly in food processing, chemicals, petroleum refining, electrical and electronic machinery. It has a dynamic agricultural sector. The port of Rotterdam is the busiest in Europe, serving a vast hinterland which stretches into Germany and central Europe.



The Netherlands has a history of great painters. The 17th century was the age of the Dutch Masters, such as Rembrandt van Rijn, Johannes Vermeer and Jan Steen. The 19th and 20th centuries are no less remarkable for their high-calibre artists like Vincent van Gogh and Piet Mondriaan.

Well-known Dutch specialities include raw herring, smoked eel and pea soup, not forgetting Dutch cheeses such as Edam or Gouda.

Poland

- **Year of EU entry:** 2004
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Warsaw
- **Total area:** 313 000 km²
- **Population:** 38.1 million
- **Currency:** Zloty
- **Listen to the EU official language:**

[Polish](#)



The north of Poland, stretching to the Baltic Sea, consists almost entirely of lowlands while the Carpathian Mountains (including the Tatra range) form the southern border. The Masuria region forms the largest and most-visited lake district in Poland.

The Polish state is over 1 000 years old. In the 16th century Poland was one of the most powerful countries in Europe. King Jan III Sobieski of Poland broke the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683, ending the threat of a possible occupation of western Europe.

Poland is rich in natural mineral resources, including rock salt. The Wieliczka salt mine contains an entire town below ground with sanatorium, theatre, church and café! Everything from stairs to chandeliers is made from salt.



Poland's current constitution dates from 1997. The President is elected by popular vote for a five-year term. The 460 members of the lower house of parliament (the Sejm) and the 100 members of the senate, are directly elected by a system of proportional representation to serve four-year terms

Poland's traditional dishes include beetroot soup, cabbage rolls (cabbage leaves stuffed with meat and rice) and *pierogi* (dumplings stuffed with cabbage and mushrooms, for example).

Famous Poles include the astronomer Copernicus, the composer Chopin, the scientist Maria Curie-Skłodowska, film-makers Roman Polanski and Krzysztof Kieslowski, and the late Pope, John-Paul II.

Portugal

- **Year of EU entry:** 1986
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Lisbon
- **Total area:** 92 072 km²
- **Population:** 10.6 million
- **Currency:** euro
- **Listen to the EU official language:**

[Portuguese](#)



Portugal, a country with a rich history of seafaring and discovery, looks out from the Iberian Peninsula onto the Atlantic Ocean. Portugal's history has had a lasting impact on the culture of the country: Moorish and Oriental influences in architecture and the arts are prominent.

During the past 3 000 years, Portugal has witnessed a constant ebb and flow of civilisations. Phoenician, Greek, Celt, Carthaginian, Roman and Arabic cultures have all left their imprint. In the 15th century, Portugal's intrepid maritime explorers led by Vasco da Gama discovered new territories, leading to the accumulation of an overseas empire.

The President, elected for a five-year term by universal suffrage, has limited powers. The parliament has 230 members, whose mandate is for four years.

The university of Coimbra, established in 1290, is one of the oldest in Europe. Among the best-known Portuguese poets are Luís de Camões and Fernando Pessoa.



During the summer, in the month of June, festivities dedicated to three saints known as Santos Populares (Popular saints) take place all over Portugal. Folk dance and music, particularly the melancholy fado, remain vibrant.

Each region of Portugal has its traditional dishes with various kinds of meat and seafood, including the hundred ways of cooking cod, the national dish.

Romania

- **Year of EU entry:** 2007
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Bucharest
- **Total area:** 238 000 km²
- **Population:** 21.6 million
- **Currency:** Leu
- **Listen to the official EU language:**

[Romanian](#)



Romania, in southeast Europe, is mountainous in the north while the main feature in the south is the vast Danube valley. The river forms a delta as it approaches the Black Sea, which is a wildlife reserve for countless native and migratory birds.

The Romanian parliament consists of two chambers, the Senat (Senate), which has 140 members, and the Camera Deputaților (Chamber of Deputies), which has 345 members. The members of both chambers are chosen in elections held every four years.

Ethnically, the population is 90% Romanian and 7% Hungarian. The Romanian language, like a number of others in southern Europe, is directly descended from Latin, although Romania is separated from other Romance-language countries by Slav speakers. Romania has considerable natural resources – oil, natural gas, coal, iron, copper and bauxite. Metal-working, petrochemicals and mechanical engineering are the main industries.



Romanian specialities include grilled meatballs, pork stew with garlic and onions and doughnuts made with cream and cheese.

The spine-chilling tale of Dracula is based on the 15th century Romanian Count Vlad Dracul whose son was famous in wartime for impaling captured enemies. Well-known Romanians include the writer Eugene Ionesco, the gymnast Nadia Comaneci and the composer George Enesco.

Slovakia

- **Year of EU entry:** 2004
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Bratislava
- **Total area:** 49 000 km²
- **Population:** 5.4 million
- **Currency:** Euro
- **Listen to the EU official language:**

[Slovak](#)



Slovakia became an independent state in January 1993 after Czechoslovakia split into its two constituent parts.

Slovakia is in the heart of central Europe, linked to its neighbours by the River Danube. The most famous natural resort is the High Tatra mountains - popular for its spectacular views and skiing facilities. The lowlands of the Danube plain provide a fertile farming region producing wheat, barley, potatoes, sugar beet, fruit, tobacco and grapes.

The President, elected by direct popular vote for a five-year term, has limited powers. The country has a single-chamber parliament whose 150 members are elected for four-year terms.

Ethnically, the population is 86% Slovak; Hungarians are the largest minority.



Perched on many hilltops are fortifications that bear witness to Slovakia's long history of invasions. Bratislava, the coronation place for the kings of Hungary in the past, has a rich heritage of medieval and baroque architecture.

Traditional meals are potato dumplings with sheep's milk cheese and cabbage soup with sausage.

Among the best-known Slovaks are Štefan Banič who invented the parachute in 1913, the founder of pop-art Andy Warhol, born as Andrej Varchola of parents originating in Eastern Slovakia and the *Slovenská Filharmónia* orchestra founded in 1949

Member States of the EU

Slovenia

- **Year of EU entry:** 2004
- **Political system:** Republic
- **Capital city:** Ljubljana
- **Total area:** 20 000 km²
- **Population:** 2 million
- **Currency:** euro
- **Listen to the EU official language:**

[Slovenian](#)



Previously one of Yugoslavia's six constituent republics, present-day Slovenia became independent in 1991 as Yugoslavia fell apart. It is bordered by Italy, Austria, Hungary and Croatia.

Four major European geographic regions meet in Slovenia: the Alps, the Dinaric area, the Pannonian plain and the Mediterranean. The country is mountainous, and Slovenes are keen skiers and hikers. The national flag depicts the three-peaked Triglav, Slovenia's highest mountain at 2 864 metres.



The country was once part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. The capital, Ljubljana, was founded in Roman times. Its university, with more than 50 000 students, contributes to the city's busy cultural life. The main industries are car parts, chemicals, electronics, electrical appliances, metal goods, textiles and furniture.

Tourist attractions include the famous caves at Postojna with their decor of stalactites and stalagmites. Graffiti in the caves shows that the first tourists came here in 1213.

Slovenian cuisine is strongly influenced by that of its neighbours. From Austria comes *Strudel* and *Wiener schnitzel*. Italy has contributed with risotto and ravioli and Hungary with goulash. The *potica* is a special Slovenian cake.

Among the most famous Slovenes are the physicist Jožef Stefan, the linguist Franc Miklošič and the architect Jože Plečnik

Spain

- **Year of EU entry:** 1986
- **Political system:** Constitutional monarchy
- **Capital city:** Madrid
- **Total area:** 504 782 km²
- **Population:** 43.8 million
- **Currency:** euro
- **Listen to the EU official language:**

[Spanish](#)



High plateaux and mountain ranges such as the Pyrenees and the Sierra Nevada dominate mainland Spain. Running from these heights are several major rivers such as the Ebro, the Duero, the Tagus and the Guadalquivir. The Balearic Islands lie offshore in the Mediterranean while the Canary Islands are to be found off the African coast.

Spain is a constitutional monarchy, with a hereditary monarch and a bicameral parliament, the Cortes or National Assembly. Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia have special status with their own language and other rights under the constitution of 1978 which enshrines respect for linguistic and cultural diversity within a united Spain. The country is divided into 17 autonomous communities (regions) which all have their own directly elected authorities.

Spain's main economic sectors include agriculture (especially fruit and vegetables, olive oil and wine), fish, textiles, automobiles and tourism.



From Velázquez in the 17th century, through Goya in the 18th and 19th, to Picasso, Dali and Miro in the 20th, Spain has a rich artistic culture. Spanish Flamenco music and dance are widely admired around the world while Cervantes' novel Don Quixote is one of the landmarks of modern European literature. Spanish film directors such as Pedro Almodóvar, Alejandro Amenábar and Luis Buñuel have received several international prizes.

Spanish cuisine is known for its paella (made with rice, chicken, seafood and vegetables), tortilla (omelette with potatoes) and sangria (refreshing wine served with fruit).

Sweden

- **Year of EU entry:** 1995
- **Political system:** Constitutional monarchy
- **Capital city:** Stockholm
- **Total area:** 450 000 km²
- **Population:** 9.0 million
- **Currency:** Swedish krona
- **Listen to the EU official language:**

[Swedish](#)



Sweden has the largest population of the Nordic countries. It is separated in the west from Norway by a range of mountains. It shares the Gulf of Bothnia at the north end of the Baltic Sea with Finland.

The southern part of the country is chiefly agricultural, with forests covering an increasing percentage of the land the further north one goes. Population density is also higher in southern Sweden, with centres being in the valley of Lake Mälaren and the Öresund region.

In 1971 the Riksdag became a single-chamber Parliament. Its 349 members are elected on the basis of proportional representation for a four-year term.

The country has at least 17 000 indigenous Samis (or Lapps) among its population. It also has a minority of ethnic Finns.



Sweden exports cars, engineering products, steel, electronic devices, communications equipment and paper products.

Swedes played a pioneering role of the early days of cinema, with Mauritz Stiller and Victor Sjöström. Later on, directors like Ingmar Bergman and actresses such as Greta Garbo, Ingrid Bergman and Anita Ekberg made careers abroad. Swedish music is in many minds synonymous with ABBA.

The Swedish cuisine is known for its Smorgåsbord (a buffet of savoury delicacies), Baltic herring, pea soup and pancakes.

Member States of the EU

United Kingdom

- **Year of EU entry:** 1973
- **Political system:** Constitutional monarchy
- **Capital city:** London
- **Total area:** 242 500 km²
- **Population:** 60.4 million
- **Currency:** Pound sterling
- **Listen to the official EU language:**

[English](#)



The United Kingdom consists of England, Wales, Scotland (who together make up Great Britain) and Northern Ireland. The highest mountain is Ben Nevis in Scotland which reaches a height of 1 343m.

The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy. The main chamber of parliament is the lower house, the House of Commons, which has 646 members elected by universal suffrage. About 700 people are eligible to sit in the upper house, the House of Lords, including life peers, hereditary peers, and bishops. There is

a Scottish parliament in Edinburgh with wide-ranging local powers, and a Welsh Assembly in Cardiff with more limited authority for Welsh affairs.

The English account for more than 80% of the population. The Scots make up nearly 10% and the Welsh and Irish most of the rest. The UK is also home to diverse immigrant communities, mainly from its former colonies in the West Indies, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Africa.



The economy - one of the largest in the EU - is increasingly services-based although it maintains industrial capacity in high-tech and other sectors. The City of London is a world centre for financial services.

Home to the industrial revolution, the United Kingdom has produced many great scientists and engineers including Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin. The father of modern economics, Adam Smith, was a Scot. English literature has produced an endless stream of poets, dramatists, essayists and novelists from Geoffrey Chaucer via Shakespeare and his contemporaries to a plethora of modern writers.