The European Union (EU) was established with the Treaties of Rome in 1958. Since then, it has evolved through a long history of successive Treaty reforms. The EU is both a political project and a form of legal organisation. It is a political project that reflects the will of the EU countries to create an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen (Article 1 of the Treaty on European Union).

To achieve this, the EU has a number of objectives:

- to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples;
- to offer European citizens an area of freedom, security and justice without borders;
- to establish an internal market which ensures the sustainable development based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy aiming at full employment, social progress, protection of the environment and promoting scientific advance;
- to combat social exclusion and discrimination and to promote equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and the rights of the child;
- to ensure economic, social and territorial cohesion between EU countries;
- to respect the cultural and linguistic diversity of EU countries and to protect European cultural heritage;
- to establish an economic and monetary union whose currency is the euro;
- to act in accordance with its values and international law in its relations with the wider world to ensure peace, security, sustainable development, development of people, and the protection of human rights.

The EU is founded on values: respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights. It is recognisable by its symbols: a flag (twelve stars on a blue background), an anthem (Ludwig van Beethoven's ‘Ode to Joy’), a motto ('United in diversity'), a currency (the euro) and a Europe Day (9 May).

The EU is a form of legal organisation founded on the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. EU countries confer
competences on the EU to attain objectives that they have in common. The 'Community method' applies to all policies coming under the EU's responsibility, with the exception of:

- police and judicial cooperation on criminal matters where EU countries have a right of initiative and a right of appeal to the European Council on legislative matters;
- the common foreign and security policy where the intergovernmental method prevails.

It has a single institutional framework (consisting of the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Commission, the Court of Justice, the European Central Bank and the Court of Auditors). Furthermore, the Treaty of Lisbon confers legal personality on the EU.

SEE ALSO
- Community and intergovernmental methods
- EU law
- European institutions
- Treaties
- European Union institutions portal: How the EU works