

The Evolution of the European Union: A Brief History

Introduction:

The European Union is comprised of 27 nations that have joined together to form a common market and have agreed to laws guaranteeing the free movement of people, goods, services, and capital. As a supranational organization, the EU has authority that transcends the national borders of its member nations. States give up some of their national sovereignty in order to gain broader collective rights. The EU is premised on the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

The evolution of the EU—the content of this lesson—is viewed by some as the most impressive economic, political, and social development of our time. In this lesson, students place events demonstrating the evolution of the EU on a timeline and select important events in each of six decades to explain a particular theme about the EU.

Objectives:

- Place events about the EU in chronological order.
- Identify major events and significant steps in the evolution and enlargement of the EU.
- Develop generalizations about EU enlargement, integration, and the importance of the EU—in Europe, in the world, and to the United States.

Materials and Preparation:

- Make enough copies of the Evolution of the EU cards so that each group of four or five students can have a set.
- Cut the cards apart and shuffle them so that they will be out of chronological order.

Teaching Time: 1-2 class periods

Procedure:

1. Begin the lesson by reviewing with students the condition of Europe following World War II. Students will probably know that Europe was almost destroyed twice in the 20th century and that World War II left Europe in ruins. Ask students to find evidence in their U.S. or world history textbooks about the destruction of Europe during both World Wars.
2. Introduce the idea that a united Europe could be the basis for European strength and security and was considered the best way of preventing another European war. Through the efforts of several leaders—the founding fathers of the EU, who were determined to never witness war again on the continent—Europeans could

change the course of their history. These leaders shared a goal—to bind the economies of European nations together so that they could never go to war. This strategy, they believed, would prevent the rise of another Hitler. In this lesson, students will learn the story of the evolution of the European Union.

3. Organize students into small groups and hand out sets of the Evolution of the EU cards, which tell about important events in the development of the European Union. Groups should first arrange the events in chronological order and then answer a series of question: Are there some themes that are common within the cards? How many of the events did the United States participate in? What were some of the most significant events in bringing cooperation among European nations?
4. Next, have each group select five or six cards to present a particular story or theme about the evolution of the EU. Assign a storyline to each group such as (1) EU enlargement and integration; (2) EU-US relations; (3) the EU and the world. Each group should present their story to the whole class or another group.
5. Conclude the lesson with a class discussion of the following question: How has Europe changed in the years since Jean Monnet proposed that Europe should be a union among people?

Web Resources:

- http://europa.eu/abc/history/index_en.htm
- <http://www.doi.gov/mt/en/archive/EU-book/chapters/eng/chapter1.pdf>