Since 1992, the European Union has become increasingly important for European economics and politics. The EU has created a common currency used by nineteen of its twenty-eight member states, people and goods easily flow across European borders, and the EU now sets policy in many other areas, affecting the daily lives of its over 500 million citizens. Originally, the European Union was composed exclusively of west European countries, but the 2004, 2007, and 2013 enlargements saw the addition of twelve post-communist central and eastern European countries. The result is that the EU is now the largest economy in the world, as well as an active player in international affairs. In recent years, non-EU members Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland have also worked to build strong ties with the EU, demonstrating that the integration of European economics and politics extends even beyond the member states of the European Union.
10 THINGS STUDENTS SHOULD LEARN ABOUT:

Europe and the European Union

1. After the Second World War, six west European countries began a process of cooperation and integration that eventually culminated in the European Union (EU). Since those initial first steps, the EU has expanded to twenty-eight members and is the most integrated international organization in the world.

2. Despite occupying an area only a fraction of the size of the US, Europe is home to a multitude of nationalities, linguistic groups, and cultures. This diversity contributes to Europe’s appeal to tourists and natives alike, enticed by the idea that only a short train ride separates them from new cultural experiences.

3. Europe has been home to philosophers and thinkers who have had a profound influence on the world’s cultural, economic, and political development. From the symphonies of Beethoven and the paintings of Claude Monet, to the novels of Charles Dickens, European art and literature is to this day widely studied, imitated, and appreciated. America’s founding fathers, for instance, were heavily influenced by Montesquieu, John Locke, and other renowned European thinkers.

4. The EU insists that liberal democracy is the only legitimate form of government and that human rights should be rigorously protected. New member states must demonstrate their democratic credentials before they are allowed to join the EU, and the EU and individual European countries work together with the United Nations to promote democracy in other regions of the world as well.

5. The US and Europe are bound together by strong cultural, political, and economic ties. Tens of millions of US citizens trace their ancestry back to various European states. In the political arena, the US counts many European countries among its closest allies, while Europe is a major trading partner for the US.

6. After the Second World War ravaged Europe, European countries made a concerted effort to ensure such a tragedy never repeated itself on the continent. This desire to preserve peace was one of the main motivations behind the formation of the EU, which was made possible by a rapprochement between France and Germany. Today, the EU is a major contributor to peacekeeping efforts around the globe.

7. During the Cold War, west European countries were cut off from their east-central neighbors by the Iron Curtain. Since the collapse of communism nearly three decades ago, European nations have worked to rebuild those ties. Twelve formerly communist governments have joined the EU, with others being considered for future membership. The prospect of joining the EU remains a powerful incentive to promote democracy and market economies in post-communist countries.

8. Until the middle of the twentieth century, many European countries ruled over colonial possessions in Africa and Asia. Countries such as the United Kingdom and France have struggled to deal with this legacy. Today, immigrants from those former colonies have made homes in Europe, while European countries have tried to establish strong, mutually respectful relationships with their former colonies.

9. Recognizing the potential threat of human-induced climate change, the EU has been in the vanguard of countries trying to reduce carbon emissions. It launched an emissions trading scheme in 2005 under which the region hopes to reduce emissions up to 20% by 2020. European countries have also actively promoted clean energy technologies such as solar and wind power.

10. Current challenges facing the EU include the sovereign debt crisis, the refugee crisis, and the ongoing terrorist threat following the attacks in Paris and Brussels.
Independence Movements within EU Countries

Description: Several countries in Europe are home to large minority groups who speak distinct languages and conceive of themselves as separate from the majority groups in their respective countries. The current conflict in Ukraine is an extreme manifestation of this problem, with Russia-sympathizing Ukrainians resorting to violence in the hope of forming their own separate, non-European state. To a lesser extent, countries such as Spain, the United Kingdom, and Belgium have also been grappling with questions over how much political and cultural autonomy separatist groups should have. In Spain, Basque separatists have used violence to achieve their aims, while groups such as the Catalans and Galicians have used peaceful means to gain a certain level of autonomy. In the UK, power has been truncated in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, yet there are Scottish nationalists who still hope for outright independence even after the results of the 2014 Scottish Referendum did not favor Scottish secession. In Belgium, conflict between the two major linguistic groups, the Walloons and the Flemish, has produced a political stalemate along ethnic lines. The two groups disagree about how much power should reside with the national government and how much should be given to communities and regions. Paradoxically, as the EU has integrated countries more closely together, at the sub-national level nationalism threatens to break some countries apart. Further, countries such as Switzerland and Norway have elected not to join the EU due to concerns about national sovereignty.

Related Resources:

- A collection of articles on the Scottish independence movement: www.guardian.co.uk/politics/scottish-independence
- “Catalonia independence timetable” www.guardian.co.uk/world/blog/2012/nov/24/catalonia-independence-timetable
- “Regional Independence: Opening Pandora’s Box” (discusses Flanders and Scotland) www.euractiv.com/future-eu/eu-discourse-regionalist-parties-analysis-514982

The Future of the EU

Description: Since most European countries are EU members, the transnational organization has a tremendous influence on the economic and political fate of the region. From the very start, the development of the EU involved trade-offs. Countries would give up some of their sovereignty to the EU, enabling the EU to make policies and decisions in pursuit of member states’ collective goals. However, there has never been consensus among EU member states over how much sovereignty they should surrender. In 2005, French and Dutch voters

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rejected a planned EU constitution. Irish voters then rejected a new EU treaty. And in the European Parliament elections of 2014, “Euroskeptic” parties in the UK, France, and Greece made large gains. In general, far-right parties such as the Italian Lega Nord, the Hungarian Jobbik, and the German NDP have been gaining increased visibility, fueling anti-EU sentiments. With the region facing economic crisis and the EU gaining even more powers to monitor the economic policies of its members, national resentment towards the supranational entity has become a serious concern. Specifically, there has been a recent growth in Euroskepticism in the Polish and Hungarian governments, and on June 23rd 2016 British Prime Minister David Cameron will host a referendum that will decide whether Britain will leave or stay in the EU.

Related Resources:

- “Return to Maastricht: Twenty years on, the euro’s birthplace has become suspicious of Europe,” www.economist.com/node/21531445
- “The UK’s EU referendum: All you need to know” http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-32810887
Environment and Sustainability

Nuclear Power

Description: France and Germany represent two different approaches to nuclear power. France receives more than 75% of its electricity from nuclear power. In a country with few natural oil or gas resources, nuclear energy has been viewed as an effective, safe, and relatively pollution-free method of producing electricity. Yet, as nuclear power plants have begun to deteriorate, politicians and interest groups have raised important questions concerning the disposal of nuclear waste. Suggestions for the long-term underground storage of this waste have provoked very negative reactions from the French public, who has historically been highly supportive of the country’s nuclear energy program. As old plants are decommissioned and new ones are built to keep pace with France’s growing energy needs, the country will have to face the increasingly important question of how radioactive waste can be disposed of in an environmentally sound way. In contrast, the German public has become more opposed to nuclear power and wishes to close the country’s nuclear power plants by 2022, but Chancellor Angela Merkel has tried to delay these closures. In the immediate aftermath of the March 2011 nuclear accident in Japan, Germany temporarily shut down seven of its seventeen reactors as a precaution and since then anti-nuclear protests have increased across Germany.

Related Resources:
- The German Federal Office for Radiation Protection: www.bfs.de/en/bfs
- On the debate on nuclear power in Germany: http://www.thelocal.de/national/20130104-47135.html#UWLXUpj2kM

European Union Emission Trading System

Description: Climate change has become an important environmental issue and as responses are debated in the US, many environmentalists look to Europe for potential solutions. The EU’s main approach to reducing member states’ carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions is the Emission Trading System (ETS), which creates a price and market for CO2 in Europe. Since 2005, firms that produced CO2 have received allowances from their national governments and are then free to emit that much CO2. If a firm produces less CO2 than their allowance, the company can then sell the remainder of the CO2 to another firm that wants to produce more CO2 than in its allowance allows. By gradually reducing the total size of the allowances, the EU hopes to force companies to produce less CO2 or buy increasingly expensive CO2 allotments on the market. The goal is for CO2 emissions to decrease by 21 percent by 2020 from 2005 levels in the EU.

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Related Resources:

- BBC “EU climate package explained”: news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7765094.stm
- EU’s website on climate change: http://ec.europa.eu/clima/index_en.htm
- Norwegian Climate & Pollution Agency video explaining the general idea of the Emission Trading System: www.vimeo.com/8057561
- Climate and energy policy information from the German government (in English): www.bmu.de/en/topics/climate-energy/
Regional Protections and Tainted Meat

**Description:** As the borders between European countries open as never before to migration and trade, the food industry has seen greater regulation within the EU. Various EU bodies, such as the European Food Safety Authority, have been established to ensure that there are certain standards of quality that all products coming from or going into EU countries must meet. Specialized EU sub-organizations monitor food production and distribution in the member states in order to guarantee hygiene, animal welfare, and the proper labelling of food products. However, recent events have called into question how food moves across borders within Europe, as several supposed beef products have been found to contain other kinds of meat. This incident was followed weeks later by the discovery of pork in elk-meat lasagna. These mix-ups occurred because of the increasingly convoluted path food travels throughout Europe to become a final product. While the food industry has come under scrutiny for its methods of production, companies continue to be ultimately concerned with the “bottom line” of profits. Food production is an important part of the European economy, but these instances of negligence and oversight threaten to undermine the high standards of that tradition, putting into question the efficacy and reliability of food production in Europe.

**Related Resources:**
- EU Agricultural Product Quality Policy: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/quality/

The EU’s Common Agriculture Policy

**Description:** Although farming has declined in importance in the post-WWII era, agriculture remains an important policy area for the EU. In fact, expenditures on the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) comprise the largest share of the EU’s budget. Those opposed to the policy argue that the subsidies and price supports built into the policy keep food prices artificially high while giving incentives to farmers to increase yields, leading to wasteful surpluses. However, those in favor of the CAP believe it helps maintain high standards in food production, as well as encourages a closer connection between consumers and the land. This is particularly important to Europeans, as they have generally been weary of the “McDonaldization” of European food practices brought about by the growing number of fast food chains and supermarkets that have been incrementally drawing business away from local producers and lowering the quality of food. While Slow Food movements are emerging in small scale throughout the United States, the connection Europeans feel to the land and the importance they place on food quality is so engrained in European mentalities that the CAP, despite its drawbacks, benefits from wide-spread support from the EU public.

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Food Security

Related Resources:

- www.farmsubsidy.org/: This page contains a database with information on the amount of farm subsidies received by EU countries over time, as well as the top recipients within countries.
- “Common Agricultural Policy in Europe – Pros and Cons,” www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCSaITFx84k&feature=related
Future of the Euro

Description: The adoption of a single currency, the euro, was intended to simplify trade and economic transactions within the EU. The single currency would also serve as a symbol of the European unity that had been achieved in preceding decades. For the first few years of its existence, the euro exceeded expectations and rivaled the dollar as a global currency. However, the recent economic crises in Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and Italy have raised questions about the viability of the single currency. Every euro zone member is now tied to the fate of every other member, increasing risk and resentment in times of crisis. The recent economic troubles in Greece, for instance, have had a direct impact on the economies of every other euro zone state, and have prompted significant resentment from Germany, the most successful of Europe’s economies. Is it possible to have a single currency without a single government or system of taxation? A pressing question now facing EU governments is how much power to give the EU officials in Brussels over national economic decision making.

Related Resources:

- The European Central Bank has a number of educational resources: www.ecb.int/ecb/educational/html/index.en.html.

Is Austerity the Solution?

Description: Since the onset of the euro crisis, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain have been forced to turn to the EU and the International Monetary Fund for financial bailouts. In return for these rescue packages, these international institutions have required countries to slash government spending and raise taxes in order to reduce deficits. These austerity policies have produced significant backlash, with demonstrators across Europe protesting against cuts to social programs in their countries. The outrage in Greece has been so great that the 2015 legislative elections saw the ascendancy to power of the leftist, anti-austerity Syriza party. Some economists argue that austerity is a foolish strategy for countries mired in economic recession, and that governments should increase spending instead. Although this will increase deficits in the short term, they believe that it will spur economic growth and reduce deficits in the long run. Some west European politicians, such as the French President François Hollande, have joined the chorus, stating that job-creation programs must be implemented in conjunction with deficit-reduction policies.

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Trade and Economics

Related Resources:
- Mark Blyth, a critic of austerity measures: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=go2bVGi0ReE

Free Trade between the EU and US?

Description: Trade deals have been negotiated between the United States and other regions in the world, such as the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to expand trade between the United States, Canada and Mexico. Crafted more than 20 years ago, its intent was to make these countries more competitive in the global market place. In June 2013, President Obama and officials from the European Council and European Commission announced that the US and EU would launch negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) which is intended to be “an ambitious and comprehensive trade agreement that significantly expands trade and investment between the United States and the EU, increases economic growth, jobs, and international competitiveness and addresses global issues of common concern.” Obama recently met with Angela Merkel to discuss the agreement in April 2016 in Hanover and was preceded by protests by an “anti-free-trade alliance” made up of numerous associations including unions, activists and church groups concerned that TTIP could threaten Germany’s environmental and legal standards. Other countries within the EU have witnessed similar protests alleging that the details of the treaty have been crafted in secret and benefit corporate interests over those of citizens.

Related Resources:
- Office of the United States Trade Representative; Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP) for fact sheets and timeline, https://ustr.gov/ttip
- Monbiot, George. “This transatlantic trade deal is a full-frontal assault on democracy.” http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/04/us-trade-deal-full-frontal-assault-on-democracy
- for an updated compendium of coverage on TTIP by the Independent, http://www.independent.co.uk/topic/ttip
Nationalist Rap in Eastern Europe

Description: While many people in Europe speak English and have embraced the “Americanization” of European culture, others have made efforts to bring national culture to the forefront of arts and fashion. These efforts have come in various forms, with perhaps the most prominent being nationalist rap. Although in countries like Germany this musical form has taken a worryingly neo-Nazi turn, in eastern Europe nationalist rap has been used to express frustrations with the social, political, and economic problems that have plagued the region since the fall of communism. Romanian rapper Puya, for instance, released a top hit in 2009 entitled Undeva-n Balcani (Somewhere in the Balkans), in which he mocks the corruption and apathy that have characterized post-communist Romania. This theme is also prominent in the rap lyrics of other eastern European artists, with rappers from Serbia and Bosnia also incorporating into their music reflections upon the unresolved ethnic conflicts that have torn former Yugoslavia apart since the late 20th century. Serbian group Beogradski Sihdikat (The Belgrade Syndicate) and Bosnian group Discipliltska Komisija (Disciplined Committee) display their political agendas prominently even in their names. Much like the impoverished and disenfranchised African American artists of the 1980s used rap to vent about the issues plaguing their communities, so eastern European artists today use nationalist rap to raise awareness about the conflict and disillusion that continue to characterize their societies.

Related Resources:


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Eurovision Song Contest

Description: Next year, the Eurovision Song Contest will celebrate its 60th anniversary. Since its inauguration in 1956, the Eurovision contest has been bringing together artists and viewers from across the continent in an attempt to create a greater sense of European community while simultaneously celebrating national cultures. Each member country of the European Broadcasting Union enters one original song into the contest, which is broadcast live on television, radio, and the internet across the world, and then casts votes to decide which of the other entries gave the best performance. All songs are required to have lyrics and, while the guidelines regarding language have changed several times, the current rule allows the participants to choose the language in which they wish to perform. This has led to a wide array of linguistic combinations, with some artists mixing languages and others even fabricating their own. The Eurovision Song Contest has been a platform for artists to debut their talents, with the now world-famous ABBA, Celine Dion, and Julio Iglesias kick-starting their international careers in precisely this way. Given the high publicity and cultural mélange of the contest,

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Eurovision has become a source of pride for many European nations. However, aside from national prestige, the Eurovision Song Contest also creates lines of demarcation between who may be considered European and who may not. In this sense, while encouraging rapprochement between European nations, the Eurovision Song Contest also establishes unspoken criteria for what European culture ought to be.

Related Resources:

- European Hit Radio Top 40 Chart: http://www.europeanhitradio.com/topi
- Eurovision official channel on Youtube: www.youtube.com/user/eurovision?feature=watch
Europe’s Demographic Crisis

Description: As European governments and economies have been modernizing, European population has been increasingly aging. This is particularly true in west European countries such as Spain and Italy, where formerly traditionalist societies have begun to lose interest in the culture of family life. Last year, approximately one in five Europeans were 65 years of age or older, and fertility rates have for the most part been dropping. While some national governments have tried to encourage reproduction by offering social benefits for parents, this has not spurred any significant growth in birth rates. On a continent in which the retirement age is traditionally low and unemployment high, the demographic crisis threatens not only Europe’s current economy, but also the prospects of future generations. While the large influxes of immigrants across the European continent have helped the aging labor force and lowered the median age of receiving countries, immigration is for the most part a contested issue in Europe. Older, conservative Europeans fear the new cultures and mores of newcomers, while younger Europeans resent the labor competition in countries such as Spain and Greece in which overall unemployment has reached over 25% and youth unemployment is at approximately 50%.

Related Resources:


United in Diversity?

Description: While diversity has always been a feature of the European continent and a key tenet of the EU (whose motto is “United in Diversity”), it is beginning to come under scrutiny by far-right parties who feel threatened by the increasing numbers of immigrants within their national borders. Of particular concern to supporters of nationalist parties across Europe is the influx of Muslim immigrants that has led, in their eyes, to the “Islamization” of Europe’s traditionally Judeo-Christian culture. Large populations of Roma from east-central Europe have also seen extreme discrimination in the west of the continent, with former French and Italian heads of state even ordering their forced expulsion. Anti-immigrant parties such as Vlaams Belang in Belgium, Jobbik in Hungary, Le Front National in France, and Lega Nord in Italy, among others, have gained increasing popular support, leading to rising tensions between those of European descent and new immigrants from Africa and the Middle East. In Germany, whose legacy of the Holocaust still very much weighs on the national consciousness, demonstrations by the organization Pegida (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West) have taken

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place all over the country. While the German chancellor Angela Merkel has vehemently condemned Pegida and local businesses and cathedrals have turned their lights off during Pegida demonstrations in sign of protest, the popularity of the organization is nevertheless highly alarming. With this much animosity against low-skilled immigrants and Muslims, it is not Europe’s culture that is under threat, but rather its stability and dignity.

Related Resources:

- “Has the European Multiculturalism Experiment Failed,” www.theworld.org/2011/08/has-the-european-multiculturalism-experiment-failed/

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**The Refugee Crisis in Europe**

**Description:** Widespread violence in the Middle East has led to a rapid increase in migrants seeking safe haven in Europe and the European Union. In 2015, 1,046,600 migrants arrived in Europe by land and by sea, a dramatic increase from 280,000 in 2014. The majority of migrants are from Syria, followed by Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo and Albania. Their journey is dangerous, 3,770 migrants died crossing the Mediterranean in 2015, primarily while making the crossing between North Africa and Italy. Upon arrival in Europe, the majority of migrants try to make the trek to Germany, which last year received 476,000 new asylum applications. For those migrants who make the journey overland through Greece and the Western Balkans, Hungary is the most popular destination, and processed the highest amount of asylum applications in 2015 in proportion to its population. Last September, EU ministers voted by a majority to relocate 160,000 refugees EU-wide, but for now the plan will apply only to migrants who are in Italy and Greece. In the plan, Germany takes the largest amount of migrants, followed by France, Spain, and Poland. As more and more migrants continue to set out in hopes of crossing the Mediterranean, this ongoing crisis continues to threaten the delicate balance between the EU political system and individual state sovereignty. Currently German Chancellor Angela Merkel is negotiating an accord with Turkey that aims to reduce and manage the influx of migrants into Europe.

**Related Resources:**

- “4 reasons the refugee crisis will shake the world in 2016” http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/06/europe/migrant-crisis-2016/
“Angela Merkel’s Trust in Turkey and Greece on Migrants Comes with Risks”
http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/21/world/europe/angela-merkel-faces-criticism-over-agreement-with-turkey.html?_r=0
Other Useful Resources

Europa, the Official EU website: http://europa.eu/index_en.htm

Resources from the European Union Center and the Institute for European Studies at Indiana University:
- Curricular resources: lesson plans, syllabi, links to external resources, and more: http://www.indiana.edu/~euroinst/k-12-teacher-resources.
- Across the Pond blog: This blog, maintained by EURO Institute staff and students, contains analysis of European news and updates on departmental events. http://iuwest.wordpress.com/

Links to European Union institutions:
- The European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm

Textbooks on the European Union:

News sources on the internet:
- EU Observer: http://euobserver.com/
- The Financial Times: http://www.ft.com/world/europe
- The Economist: http://www.economist.com/world/europe
- European Voice: http://www.europeanvoice.com/
- EU Business: http://www.eubusiness.com/
- Deutsche Welle: http://www.dw.de/
- Al Jazeera Europe: http://www.aljazeera.com/topics/regions/europe.html
- TV5Monde: http://www.tv5monde.com/
- The Guardian Europe: http://www.theguardian.com/world/europe-news
- Reuters Eurozone: http://www.reuters.com/subjects/eurzone

European Travel Guides:
- http://www.eurail.com/

Web Gallery of Art: http://www.wga.hu/index1.html. Contains 29,000 reproductions of European art from 1000-1850, as well as links, a glossary, and an extensive bibliography.