

Nicola Pifferi

# MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD FROM THE ALPS!

DISCOVER HOW THE EU AND EUSALP WORK  
AND HOW YOU CAN MAKE A CHANGE





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AUTONOME  
PROVINZ  
BOZEN  
SÜDTIROL



PROVINCIA  
AUTONOMA  
DI BOLZANO  
ALTO ADIGE

PROVINCIA AUTONOMA DE BULSAN  
SÜDTIROL





*TRANSLATION*  
SARAH FARQUHAR

*EDITING*  
ELENA SBRANA

*LAYOUT*  
FABIANO BOSETTI

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GIORDANO PACENZA

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Tel. 0461 951500  
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[www.erickson.it](http://www.erickson.it)  
[info@erickson.it](mailto:info@erickson.it)

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**Nicola Pifferi**, born in Trento in 1996, lives in Bozen-Bolzano where he works at the University. He studied Economics and Public Policy and worked as a journalist in radio, podcast, web, print and television for various public and private media outlets in Italy, Germany and at the European level. He started going into schools to talk to young students about Europe, politics and journalism in 2016. He loves border areas and their fertile contradictions. He was director and editor-in-chief of Europhonica together with Antonio Megalizzi and is now a member of the scientific committee of the Foundation dedicated to him.

# What is this book for?

In daily political discourse, Europe is mentioned all the time. But are we sure that everything we hear about Europe is correct? When we hear, for example, «What is Europe doing?» are we sure that it can do something? And therefore, on what do the powers and limits of EU action depend? Who defined them?

Spoiler alert: We did.

This book serves to understand European history to tell the present and the future of Europe. Starting from the common principles that led six countries to unite after the Second World War, moving from the functioning of institutions and the relationship between Member States and the EU, focusing on the role of the regions and putting the focus on the European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region.

Happy reading!

# WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN UNION





# What is the European Union?

Let's start with a definition: the **European Union** is a **supranational organisation** made up of **27** so-called **member states that cooperate on a political and economic level**. It is unique in its kind and deals with, among other things, the single market, transport, environment, energy, rights, etc. We will try to understand together what this means in practice, but for now let's start with geography.

As we have already said, the European Union currently consists of 27 Member States, but it has not always had its current size. The first economic collaboration launched in Europe in **1951** brought together only **Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands**.

Over the years the Union has grown and many states have joined. Only one country has decided to leave the EU: in 2016 the citizens of the United Kingdom voted in favor of leaving the Union, which then took place on 31 January 2020. The particularity and uniqueness of the European Union in the panorama of international organisations, however, are given by its geographical-political composition: the 27 countries that are part of the EU delegate part of their decision-making powers to the European institutions to allow for democratic adoption at the European level to make decisions on specific issues of common interest through democratic decision-making procedures. Translated this means that while remaining sovereign and independent, EU countries have decided to share a part of their sovereignty in areas where it is appropriate to collaborate.

**▶ ▶ ▶ There have not always been 27 member states of the European Union. Obviously the EU has grown with the entry of new countries, but it has also lost one of its members: the United Kingdom. What may be the reasons why a country decides to join the EU? Which ones may have prompted the United Kingdom to leave the Union? Discuss it together.**

-  Austria
-  Belgium
-  Bulgaria
-  Czechia
-  Cyprus
-  Croatia
-  Denmark
-  Estonia
-  Finland
-  France
-  Germany
-  Greece
-  Ireland
-  Italy
-  Latvia
-  Lithuania
-  Luxembourg
-  Malta
-  The Netherlands
-  Poland
-  Portugal
-  Romania
-  Slovakia
-  Slovenia
-  Spain
-  Sweden
-  Hungary



# The history of the European Union

The history of the European Union is long and certainly cannot be told in one page. However, let's try to outline the fundamental steps that led to the formation of the EU.

The First (1914-1918) and the Second World War (1939-1945) destroyed Europe twice in less than 50 years. After the end of the Second World War, the European countries that had participated in the conflicts went through the so-called period of "reconstruction." In fact, infrastructures and economies devastated by the wars had to be rebuilt. However, they also wanted to prevent conflicts from arising for the third time that would again lead to horrible destruction.

Six European countries (**France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg**) joined, under the impetus of France, in the **European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)**. The idea was presented in a speech on 9 May 1950 by the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, to whom the idea was presented by the politician and economic adviser Jean Monnet. By pooling the organisation of the production of steel (necessary for weapons) and coal (a

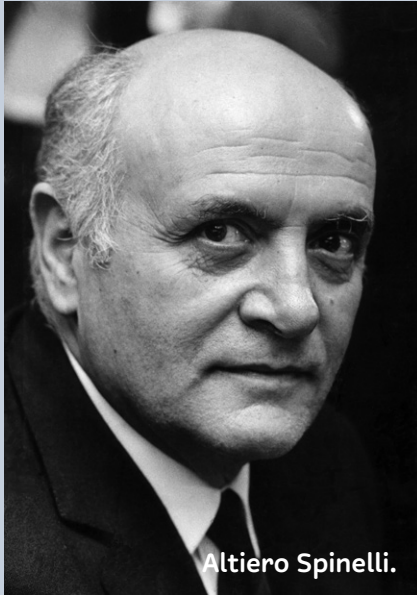
source of energy for industries and railways), it would have been impossible to organise a war. Thus, in 1952 the first embryo of the European Union was born.

The second fundamental step of integration between the European countries was cooperation in the economic field, which began in **1958** with the birth of the **European Economic Community (EEC)**.

The basic idea was that countries would create a single market, in which goods could move without border controls and, above all, without customs duties. It was the single market, together with the common agricultural policy, that became the main reason why other European countries wanted to join the EEC. **Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom** joined in 1973, **Greece** in 1981, **Portugal and Spain** in 1986, bringing the EEC to **12 members**. Meanwhile, the integration of member countries

Some signatures on a copy of the Treaty of Maastricht.





Altiero Spinelli.

## The Ventotene manifesto

In this quick summary of the history of the European Union, we have focused on the political and economic steps that led Europe to unite and become what we know today. However, we have left out the dream that inspired this cross-border integration and cooperation project. A dream born on an Italian island: Ventotene. Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi, who had been confined there by fascism during the Second World War, imagined Europe united in a great federal country. They outlined their revolutionary idea in the Ventotene Manifesto, later published in 1944 by Eugenio Colorni.



became ever greater, from the environment to transport. With the **Treaty of Maastricht in 1993**, the EEC became the EU, the **European Union**, and developed

on three fundamental pillars: the European Communities, the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and cooperation in the field of Justice and Home Affairs. In **1995 Austria, Finland and Sweden** also joined the EU. Meanwhile, with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the era of communism began to end in Eastern Europe and many countries that left the Soviet Union applied to join the EU. Access to the Union was and is however conditioned by respect for EU values, which we will discuss later, and certain criteria for economic stability (which became even more important after the introduction of the euro as the common currency in the EU countries). In 2004, **Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary** and also **Malta and Cyprus** joined the EU. In **2007 Bulgaria and Romania** and in **2013 Croatia** joined as well.

In **2009**, the **Treaty of Lisbon**, which regulates the EU as we know it now, came into force. The three fundamental pillars of Maastricht were overcome in its favor, and although it is not a European Constitution (a constitutional project was rejected in 2005 by two referendums in France and the Netherlands), it is very close to one.

The Lisbon Treaty reformed European democracy, giving **greater power to the European Parliament**, an institution which, as we will see later, is directly elected by EU citizens. It also made the **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union**, or the charter that regulates the protection of fundamental rights in Europe part of the treaties. Finally, it defined the competences of the European Union by dividing them into three groups: the **competences of the EU**, the **competences shared between the EU and the Member States** and the **competences of the Member States**.

It is essential to understand the mechanism of the division of competences, because it allows us to bring decisions back to the responsibilities of those who have the duty and the power to make them. For example: the EU has no direct competence in health matters. It is the Member States that decide in full autonomy in this area. The European institutions, therefore, must limit themselves to supporting cooperation between member states.

Since 2010, the EU functions foreseen by the treaties are finally in full swing, but the Union is experiencing difficult years, first due to the global economic crisis and then to the COVID-19 pandemic and finally Russia's invasion of Ukraine.



▶▶▶ **Within the Learning Corner of the European Union website you can find a much more detailed timeline of the history summarised in these pages. In fact, it contains not only institutional events, but also the most important socio-political events in Europe from 1900 to today. Find out what happened in your birth year. At what point was the EU integration process? Antonio Megalizzi, for example, was born in 1989, the year in which the Berlin Wall fell: what do you know about that event and what did it mean for Europe and the world?**

# United in diversity

The motto of the European Union is «United in diversity». Have you ever heard it? It indicates how, thanks to the EU, Europeans have managed to work together in favour of peace and prosperity, while at the same time keeping the different cultures, traditions and languages of the continent alive. The motto therefore sums up the values of the EU very well, always based on the concept of union that does not override the different cultures living together in peace.

The **first value** of the European Union is **democracy**. Candidate countries must demonstrate that they are democratic to join the EU, while member states are required to abide by democratic rules, as enshrined in the treaties, i.e. the legal texts on which the EU is based and which are almost like a Constitution.

These treaties are themselves the result of a democratic process and, therefore, approved and agreed upon by all Member States. The other values common to all EU member states are **human dignity, freedom, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights**, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.



▶▶▶ **Let's try to understand together the values we have just listed. Based on the descriptions below, decide whether a country can or cannot join the EU. Also indicate which value(s) is / are respected or not in each case.**

	Can join the EU	Cannot join the EU	Why?
A country that does not guarantee freedom of the press.		X	Because it does not respect the values of freedom and democracy
A country that allows the death penalty.			..... .....
A country that allows citizens to protest against the government.			..... .....
A country where Parliament is periodically elected.			..... .....
A country in which a president governs for life and is replaced by their child once they die.			..... .....
A country where politics is determined by military leaders, who can also intervene militarily in domestic matters.			..... ..... .....
A country where people are considered innocent until a judge establishes their guilt.			..... .....
A country where there is only one party, which is always in power.			..... .....
A country that protects minorities even when the majority would like to repress them.			..... .....

Re-adapted from the European Commission, My EU (2020)

**Can you think of other examples in which the values of the EU are respected or not, both in countries that are part of the EU and in those that are not (yet) part of it? Discuss together.**

# What have you understood?

Test yourself and find out how much you understand and how much you remember about the topics we have covered so far. Answer the following questions individually and then compare the answers as a group. How many did you get right?

## **What are the founding countries of the EU?**

- Italy, France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.
- Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Denmark and Luxembourg.
- Austria, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

## **What did the six founding states join in 1952?**

- The EEC, the European Economic Community
- The EEA, the European Economic Area
- The ECSC, the European Coal and Steel Community

## **Which of these is an example of a violation of European values?**

- People are considered innocent until a judge finds them guilty.
- The national parliament is elected periodically.
- The national government has the power to censor tabloid headlines.

## **Which treaty was born from the draft of a European constitutional charter?**

- Treaty of Lisbon
- Treaty of Maastricht
- Treaty of Nice

## **During the confinement on which Italian island did Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi imagine Europe united in a large federal country?**

- Ischia
- Ventotene
- Procida

# How the European Union works

Although the European Union is not a country, its institutional set-up resembles that of a federal country, such as Germany for example. This is because the EU institutions must represent citizens, but also listen to the governments of the member states, a bit like in a federal system.

## THE POWERS OF THE MAIN INSTITUTIONS

Starting from the division of power that is studied in school (legislative, executive and judicial) we can try to outline what the basic institutional system of the European Union is.

- **Legislative power** is divided between the **European Parliament**, elected by citizens, and the **Council of the European Union**, which represents the governments and in which the ministers of the governments of the member states competent in the matter under discussion sit.
- **Executive power** is in the hands of the **European Commission**, which acts as the EU government and which is also entrusted with the power of legislative initiative, that is to start the process of approving a European law.
- **Judicial power** is exercised by the **Court of Justice of the European Union**, which settles questions of interpretation of European law. That is not all, however, because the national judicial systems of the Member States also apply EU law.

Outside of this simplified system is the **European Council**, which became an official EU institution only in 2009. Made up of the heads of state or government of the member countries, it defines the **general political orientation** and **priorities of the European Union**.

▶ ▶ ▶ **Who do you think of when you hear about the decisions taken in Brussels on the news or on the radio? Do you think the European institutions are all in Brussels? How do you imagine the European institutions work? Discuss it as a group.**

## THE LAW OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Before analysing the European institutions, let's pause for a moment to understand how European law works. As with any public law, European law also

has **primary sources** (which therefore have maximum value) and **secondary sources** (which are defined by the primary sources). **Primary sources** are the supreme sources of European law. They are, first of all, the treaties consolidated by the Lisbon Treaty, namely the **Treaty on European Union (TEU)** and the **Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)**. To these two fundamental EU treaties, which we can assimilate as a Constitution, we find the **Euratom Treaty** (of 1958 and still in force) and the protocols annexed to the TEU and TFEU, which regulate in detail some general matters of the treaties. However, it cannot be said that European law is perfect, mainly because it is not based on a constitutional charter like most national laws. In fact, there are some unwritten principles which are however assimilated as primary sources. One, in particular, is the **responsibility of the States**. It declares that Member States can be held responsible for violations of European law and that individual citizens can therefore take legal action against Member States if they violate EU law. This principle, like others, depends on the decisions of the Court of Justice of the EU which can broaden the primary sources by acting within the principles of the treaties.

The primary sources are the basis of the functioning and action of European institutions which, as we will see below, create laws and regulatory acts, or the **secondary sources of European law**: regulations, directives, decisions, recommendations and opinions.

- **Regulations** have a general scope: they are therefore mandatory and have a direct effect in all parts. They resemble national laws. Examples are the Roaming Regulation (2017/920) or the Air Passenger Rights Regulation (2004/261). EU institutions are reluctant to use the legal instrument of the regulation, because it leaves the member states no room for maneuver to take into account national specificities.
- To take account of this need, **directives** are used, which are intended only for Member States, which are obliged to legislate and achieve a certain result. In Italy they are normally converted into law through the so-called European law and the European delegation law, approved every year. One of the most important directives in force is certainly 2011/83 on consumer rights.
- **Decisions** always have direct value and can indicate the recipients (usually a Member State) or not (in this case they tend to have value only within the European institutions). They can be legislative acts or not, based on how they are formulated and how they are approved.
- Finally, **recommendations and opinions** do not have direct effects and must only be taken into account by the Member States in the definition of their internal decisions.

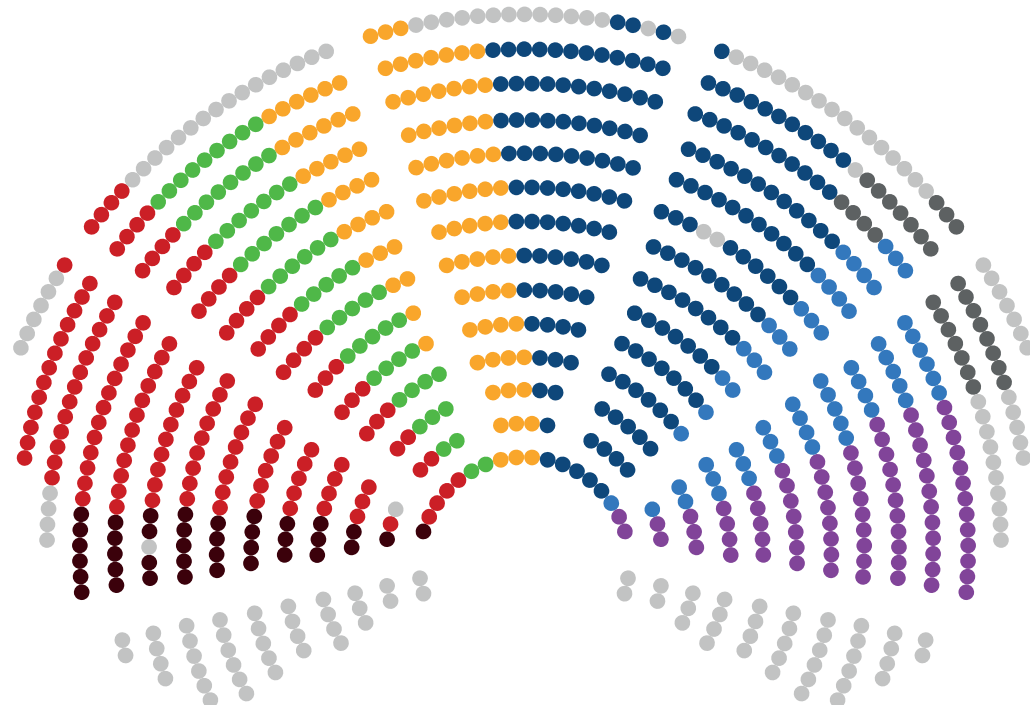




# The European Parliament

The European Parliament represents the citizens of the EU who are called to take part in the European elections every five years. In 2019, the date of the last election, they directly elected 751 MEPs (Members of the European Parliament). Today the European Parliament is made up of 705 MEPs (the number has dropped after Brexit). The most populous member states, such as Germany, France and Italy, have more representatives than other member states. However, the ratio between parliamentarians and inhabitants is not the same in all Member States. Germany (the largest state) has 96 MEPs for 83 million inhabitants (1.16 for every million inhabitants). Malta (the smallest state) has 6 MEPs for just over 500,000 inhabitants. This ensures that the different political orientations of each country are well represented within the European Parliament. MEPs do not sit divided by country of origin, but by **political party**. Each national party that stands as a candidate in the European elections is affiliated with a European party and a European parliamentary group.

-  European People's Party (EPP)
-  Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)
-  Renew Europe (RE)
-  Identity and Democracy (ID)
-  European Greens - European Free Alliance (V - EFA)
-  European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)
-  European United Left / Nordic Green Left (GUE / NGL)
-  Mixed group, where there are MEPs who do not identify with any of the groups or who have left a group.



# The Council of the EU



We have said that legislative power in the European Union is divided between the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. While Parliament directly represents citizens, the Council of the EU represents the governments of the member states. The **Council of the EU**, also referred to simply as the Council, is made up of **one representative from each member state**. The representatives are not fixed, but change according to the topic under discussion in the session to which they are called. In fact, it is the ministers who represent the national governments within the Council. For example, if a proposal on environmental protection is discussed, the ministers responsible for the environment of each Member State will attend the meeting. The **presidency** of the Council of the EU is not fixed, but is **formed on a rotating basis every six months by a member state**. Ministers meet in Brussels (except in April, June and October, when they meet in Luxembourg) and deliberate on bills. **Three methods of voting** are adopted in the Council of the EU: **unanimously**, **by simple majority** (used very rarely and only for decisions within the Council), or by **qualified majority** (the most used). Let's briefly look at the two most important ones: unanimity and qualified majority.

The Council votes **unanimously** on a series of issues (increasingly reduced over the years) considered sensitive for the Member States. For example: common foreign and security policy, granting new rights to EU citizens, EU membership, EU finances, some provisions on justice and home affairs, social security and social protection. When it comes to these issues, there is therefore the possibility that a representative of a member state puts a “veto”, or opposes the adoption of a decision and blocks the process.

In reality, the Council of the EU votes by **qualified majority** in more than 80% of cases. A qualified majority is reached, and therefore the proposal is approved, under the following conditions:

- 55% of Member States vote in favor (15 out of 27 countries);
- Member States that support the proposal represent at least 65% of the total EU population.

This system serves to prevent the government representatives of sparsely populated countries coming to an agreement and deciding for the governments of the most populous and largest member states.



▶ ▶ ▶ **With the qualified majority method, decide where to go on a school trip next year or where to organise a group meal. Each participant in your group will represent a member state. Scan the QR code and access the Council's official voting calculator. Were you able to make a decision? What would have happened if you had had to vote unanimously? Discuss.**

## The European Council



The **European Council** is made up of the **heads of state** or **heads of government** of the 27 countries of the Union, who meet at «European summits», and give priorities and political guidelines to the EU. In most cases, the European Council decides by consensus, i.e. without voting. However, in some specific cases it adopts decisions unanimously or by qualified majority. The European Council is the youngest European body: it was an informal meeting for many years and then became an institution with the Lisbon Treaty and the election of a permanent president starting in 2009.

## The European Commission



We have already defined the **European Commission**

as the government of the European Union and this is mainly because the **27**

**commissioners**, one per Member State, do not represent the country from which they come, but are competent for a specific subject or sector, such as ministers of a government. Commissioners are presented by governments and approved by the European Parliament, while the president is indicated by the European Council and then elected by the European Parliament. Together they sit in the «College».

On the one hand, the European Commission is, as the **executive body** of the Union, responsible for the functioning of the European machine: it manages the policies and the budget, runs the European administration and monitors the correct application of European law by the Member States. On the other hand, it is the only institution that has the **power to initiate the European**

**legislative procedure**. In fact, it is the Commission that proposes new laws to the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. Finally, the Commission is pursuing a single **political agenda** for the European Union.



One of the weekly meetings of the European Commission.

# The Court of Justice of the EU

It is the national judges who apply European law, but what can be done if the national judges are unsure of the interpretation of a European law? In this case, a clarification can be requested from the **Court of Justice of the EU**. However, as we have seen, Member States too are often obliged to apply or transform (in the case of directives) EU law. And what can be done if they don't? The European Commission (or possibly another country) can refer the matter to the Court of Justice of the EU. As in the case of the Commission, the Court of Justice is also composed of one member from each member state but does not represent national interests. The **27 judges** of the Court ensure that European legislation is applied and interpreted uniformly throughout the EU.

## The other EU institutions

In addition to those we have already described, the treaties define a number of other institutions.

### **THE EUROPEAN SERVICE FOR EXTERNAL ACTION**

The figure of the EU Foreign Minister was included in the proposed European Constitution. This figure was then remodeled in the Lisbon Treaty and named **High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy**. The person holding this role, in addition to being **Vice President of the European Commission**, is also the head of the **European External Action Service (EEAS)**. The Service deals with managing the EU's diplomatic relations with other countries and conducting the Union's foreign and security policies. In addition to its headquarters in Brussels, the Service manages EU delegations outside the Union in around 140 embassies.

### **THE EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK**

The institution that deals with managing the euro, the single currency of the EU, keeping prices stable and guiding the economic and monetary policy of the Union is the **European Central Bank** based in Frankfurt. To keep prices stable, the ECB

►►► **Do you know the people in these photos? They are the ones who lead the main European institutions. Write the number of the corresponding person next to the names and institutions.**

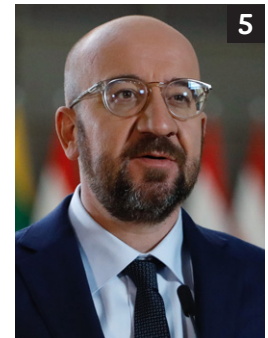
sets the **interest rates** on the loans it grants to eurozone banks, **authorises the printing of money** (euro) in individual countries, **manages foreign exchange reserves** and, in general, the European monetary policy.

## THE COMMITTEES

The Treaty on European Union also provides for two committees that play an advisory role for the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission:

- the **Economic and Social Committee**, which represents employers and workers' organisations and other economic and social interest groups in the Union;
- the **Committee of the Regions**, which represents local and regional authorities.

They must be consulted when drafting rules that affect the interests of these committees (for example, for a rule on public transport, which therefore concerns local administrations, the Committee of the Regions should be consulted).



..... Charles Michel

..... President of the European Parliament

..... Josep Borrell

..... President of the European Central Bank

..... Christine Lagarde

..... President of the European Commission

..... Roberta Metsola

..... High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission

..... Ursula von der Leyen

..... President of the European Council

# The EU regional policy

The European Union invests locally through regional policy. Targeted at all regions and cities in the EU, it includes measures to stimulate economic growth, create new jobs and improve the quality of life through strategic investments. All European institutions participate in regional policy. But who are the actors? The European Commission has a Directorate-General (like a national ministry) which develops and implements the Commission's policies on regional policy: the **Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy** (DG REGIO). The DG answers to the European Commissioner Elisa Ferreira.

The European Parliament, which like all parliaments works in committees divided by subject, has within it the **Commission for Regional Development** where a group of MEPs works on the European laws that are the basis of regional policy. Then there is the **European Committee of Regions**, the assembly of regional and local representatives of the EU, where mayors, presidents of regions, and councilors sit divided by political groups as in the European Parliament.

Within the regional policy one of the most important policies is the **cohesion policy**, which forms the political framework behind hundreds of thousands of projects across Europe that receive funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), and the Cohesion Fund.

Finally, there are the **macro-regional strategies**, such as EUSALP, which we will discuss in the following pages, which are part of the EU regional policy.

**▶ ▶ ▶ Have you ever taken part to a project funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), or the Cohesion Fund? Tell your groupmates about your experience and discuss how the funding provided by the European Union has affected your education/development thanks to projects like the one you have taken part to.**



**EU Strategy  
for the Baltic  
Sea Region:**  
[www.balticsea-region.eu/](http://www.balticsea-region.eu/)



**EU Strategy for  
the Adriatic and  
Ionian Region:**  
[www.adriatic-ionic.eu/](http://www.adriatic-ionic.eu/)



**EU Strategy for  
the Danube Region:**  
[www.danube-region.eu/](http://www.danube-region.eu/)



**EU Strategy for  
the Alpine Region:**  
[www.alpine-region.eu/](http://www.alpine-region.eu/)

# Macro-regional strategies

**Macro-regional strategies** are integrated strategic frameworks approved by the European Council with the aim of meeting the common challenges faced by a defined geographical area made up of Member States and third countries, which can therefore benefit from enhanced cooperation and thus contribute to the achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Four EU macro-regional strategies have been adopted so far, encompassing a variety of policies:

- EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (2009)
- EU Strategy for the Danube Region (2010)
- EU strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian region (2014)
- EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (2015)

All the macro-regional strategies adopted are also accompanied by a progressive action plan, to be updated regularly in the light of new emerging needs and changing contexts. The four macro-regional strategies cover 19 EU Member States and 8 non-EU countries.

**▶ ▶ ▶ Looking at the map on the next page, identify the four strategies and link the name and territory. Then identify the countries (EU and non-EU members) that are part of the four macro-regional strategies. Some regions are part of two or even three macro-regional strategies. Take the region where you live for example: is it part of a strategy?**

## CENTRAL PLAYERS IN STRATEGIES

Each macro-regional strategy has slightly different governance systems, which have been devised by taking into consideration regional specific characteristics. However, it is possible to define common key subjects for implementation.

## EU LEVEL

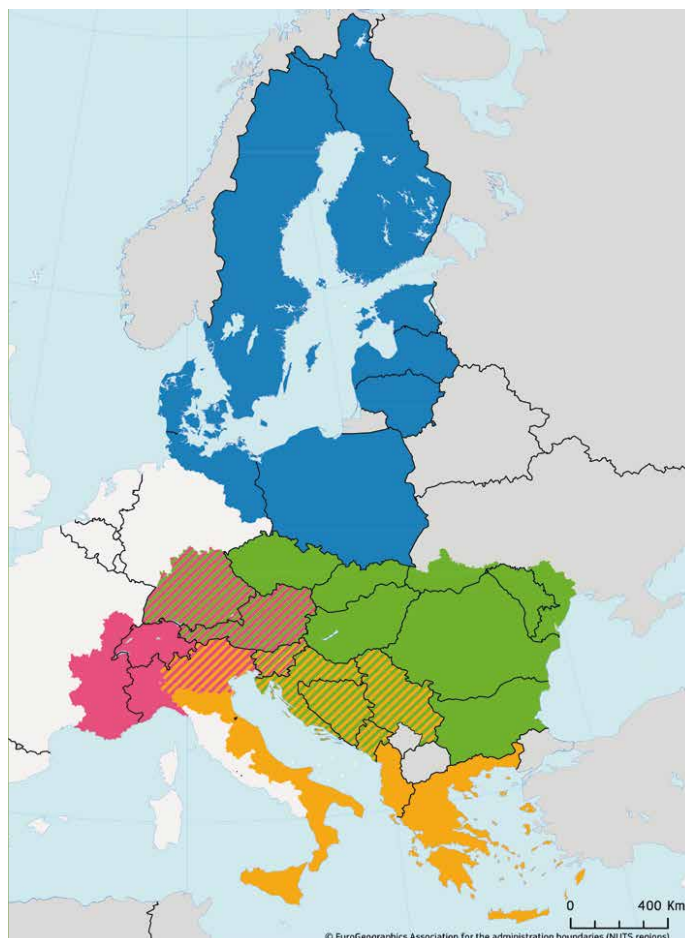
The European Commission plays a leading role in the strategic coordination of the main stages of implementation of the strategies. In addition, a high-level

group on EU macro-regional strategies, composed of representatives of all 28 EU Member States and non-EU countries involved in the strategies, meets to evaluate the general approach of all macro-regional strategies of the EU.

### **NATIONAL / REGIONAL LEVEL**

In each participating country, the national coordinators are responsible for overall coordination and support for the implementation of the strategy in the country of origin.

### **LEVEL OF THEMATIC SECTORS**



The thematic sectors are led by coordinators who represent the macro-regional interest. They are supported by interlocutors in the region and are organized in addressed groups. Their main role is to promote the creation of joint projects that contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the strategy. Furthermore, based on the results and success of these projects, their role is to influence the content and implementation of policies in the countries and regions concerned, in order to improve the global positioning of the macro-region in the long term.



## EUSALP: the EU strategy for the Alpine region

The Alpine space is made up of territories with demographic, social and economic trends that are not always common as well as a great cultural and linguistic diversity. This diversity goes hand in hand with a great variety of governance systems and traditions. However, there are many common characteristics of the Alpine area. Both the common characteristics and the variety and diversity are at the basis of the development of territorial cooperation.

The Alpine region represents a living and working space for a resident population of over 80 million inhabitants which is also an attractive tourist destination for millions of guests every year. The Alps are Europe's most important water reservoir and are known throughout the world for their natural beauty, variety of landscapes, rich biodiversity and cultural heritage.

The Alpine territory is a unique territory, which has an important potential for renewal, but which faces **important challenges**, such as:

- **economic globalisation** that requires the territory to reinvent itself to be competitive and innovative, developing its information technology and knowledge sector above all else
- **demographic trends**, characterised in particular by the combined effects of aging and new migration patterns
- **climate change** and its foreseeable effects on the environment, biodiversity and living conditions of residents
- the **energy challenge** at a European and global level, which consists in managing and satisfying energy demand in a sustainable, safe and cost-effective way
- the specific geographical position in Europe, as **a transit region** but also as an area with unique geographical and natural characteristics that frame all future developments

The Alpine macro-regional strategy offers the opportunity to improve cross-border cooperation in the Alpine states, as well as to identify common objectives and implement them more effectively through transnational collaboration.



# The governance of EUSALP

The governance of the EU strategy for the Alpine region is developed along several lines by bringing together political, institutional and expert representatives.

**The General Assembly** brings together the high-level political representatives of the Countries and Regions involved in the Strategy, the European Commission, and the Alpine Convention (as observers).

**The Executive Board** is made up of representatives of the Countries and Regions and representatives of the European Commission. As observers, members of the Alpine Convention and the Alpine Space Program are included as well. It oversees the implementation of EUSALP and is responsible for providing strategic guidance regarding the management and implementation of EUSALP and its Action Plan.

The core of the implementation level is made up of the **Action Groups** and the leaders of the Action Groups. The leaders of the Action Groups are the promoters of daily implementation.

**The Presidency** of EUSALP is held on a rotational basis among the members. In 2022, Italy took over the presidency through the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bozen-Bolzano. In addition to managing the operation of EUSALP, the presidency is responsible for defining the political direction of the strategy, which is currently outlined in six priorities:

- 1 Effectively address the challenge of climate change by promoting **energy efficiency** and **energy transition** towards carbon neutrality
- 2 Promote **smart villages** and **sustainable local development**
- 3 Empower **young people** from EUSALP
- 4 Promote **tourism** and **sustainable transport**
- 5 Promote cooperation in **natural risk** management and **spatial planning**
- 6 **Strengthen the governance** of EUSALP and its roots

# EUSALP and young people

We have seen that one of the priorities of the Italian 2022 Presidency for EUSALP policy is to empower young people. But how can this be done? One of the main actions undertaken within the EU strategy for the Alpine region to listen to young people is the **Youth Council (YC)**, a council composed 28 members, representing the 7 EUSALP Alpine Countries (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Switzerland. The EUSALP regions and countries agreed to create a Youth Council as an official instance to represent the youth in the Alpine region.)

YC representatives can attend General Assembly and Executive Board meetings, as well as collaborate with Action Groups and the Presidency.

YC members can therefore directly contribute their viewpoints and ideas in the EUSALP institutions. This way young people have a sit at the same table with the EUSALP decision-makers. This offers them the rare opportunity to learn new skills to act legitimately and democratically in everyday life. They learn to cooperate by building on the different languages or cultural backgrounds, by communicating, making decisions, discussing and sharing ideas. The Councilors represent a forum for discussion, engagement, learning, and the creation of collaborative ideas. In return, **EUSALP has the opportunity to hear new perspectives** from those who live in the Alps and make EUSALP ready for the future.

## THE POLITICAL ACTION OF THE YOUTH COUNCIL

The Youth Council takes a position on a number of issues central to the EU strategy for the Alpine region each time it meets in plenary. During the meeting in Nova Gorica in November 2021 the YC produced a **Position Paper**. This position paper defines the priorities of the Youth Council's work, which is organized in four Thematic Groups. Let's take a look at the priorities and objectives of the four thematic groups.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THEMATIC GROUP**

- To seek positive examples of mountain villages fighting depopulation and to promote the actions implemented.
- Improve the cooperation of Alpine countries to give a clear voice to the problem of depopulation.
- Collaborate with other members to lobby the policy in order to bring awareness to the problem.

### **MOBILITY AND CONNECTIVITY THEMATIC GROUP**

- Improve cooperation between all European mobility partners with the aim of an integrated network to make public and freight transport sustainable, inciting and efficient.
- Discuss the incentives of public transport with mobility stakeholders and encourage targeted offers for young people.
- Collect data on mobility in the EUSALP region to inform politicians and citizens

### **ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY THEMATIC GROUP**

- To make young people more aware of the environmental issues of the Alpine region
- Enhance the cultural and heritage diversity of our region
- To act as a bridge between young people and experts on energy and the environment

### **EUSALP THEMATIC GROUP YOUTH SPECIFIC TASKS AND OVERARCHING PROJECTS**

- Improve the cooperation and organisation of youth initiatives in the Alpine area
- Act as a link and interregional contact point for local youth initiatives (in terms of structure and themes)
- Raise awareness and educate young people on the possibilities of participation in current political issues
- Provide information on youth initiatives and review proposals from EUSALP politicians

# Try it yourselves!

**IMAGINE BEING PART OF THE EUSALP YOUTH COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY THEMATIC GROUP AND HAVING TO IMAGINE CONCRETE ACTIONS IN THIS AREA. DISCUSS TOGETHER WITH THE HELP OF THIS SHEET.**

Today, energy and environmental issues are amongst the most crucial for the Alpine region. Creating a more sustainable Alpine region, which protects its natural and cultural heritage, while pushing for a transition towards renewable energy in the face of climate change, is one of the key challenges we face today. As the Alpine region develops and faces new challenges, its rich natural and cultural history must be maintained, so that future generations can get to know their region and fully appreciate it.

Young people have an important role in helping to shape the approach that the Alpine territory has towards these areas, so it is essential that they are involved in these issues. Therefore, the role of the EUSALP Thematic Group and Youth Council is to further involve young people on environmental issues and on the issue of maintaining and protecting cultural and natural heritage, in order to connect EUSALP institutions with the voices of young people.

**DIVIDE YOURSELVES INTO GROUPS OF 3-4 PEOPLE AND WORK ON ONE OF THESE THREE GOALS**

- Bring young people closer to the environmental issues of the Alpine region
- Enhance the cultural and heritage diversity of our region
- Act as a bridge between young people and experts on energy and the environment

**Once you have chosen the goal you want to work on, think of one or more concrete proposals of how you can contribute to achieving the goal. Write your group's proposal and present it to others.**

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Discuss it with the other groups and write down their ideas for your proposal.

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Return to your group and rework the proposal based on the ideas you have gathered from others.

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▶ ▶ ▶ **On the Youth Council website, you will find the members divided by countries. Send your proposal by e-mail to one of the members in your region.**