Introduction

Have you ever traveled from the United States to another country? If so, you know that crossing international borders is more difficult than crossing state borders within the United States. You likely had to stop and show your passport, and you may have traded your U.S. dollars for a different type of money.

Now imagine that you are in Europe, crossing the border from France to Germany. You do not have to stop to show your passport, and you use the same money in both countries. The main difference you notice after crossing the border is a change in language—people here are speaking German instead of French.

People today travel easily between many European countries because of the European Union, or EU. The EU is a supranational organization with 28 members as of 2018. Supra is a Latin prefix that means “above” or “over.” The government of the European Union stands above the governments of its members. Because it is supranational, the EU has been able to remove barriers that once made travel and trade between European nations complicated. In addition to having “open” borders with each other, many EU nations use a common form of money.

While EU countries use supranational cooperation to work toward shared goals, they remain separate countries. These countries are united in certain ways, but divided in others. In this lesson, you will learn about the forces that work for and against supranational cooperation in the EU.
World War II

Destruction On May 14, 1940, German planes bombed the city of Rotterdam in the Netherlands. Much of the city was destroyed. Many other cities in Europe were also bombed during World War II. The EU was formed to make sure
The Geographic Setting

Europe is a region that consists of many peoples and countries. Throughout the continent’s history, certain forces have brought its peoples together, but at the same time, others have pulled them apart. The forces that bring things together, or unite them, are called centripetal forces. The forces that divide things, or move them away from one another, are called centrifugal forces. The European Union was formed to unite countries that had repeatedly been torn apart by war.

A History of Bloody Conflict

For much of its history, Europe has been a battleground. During the first half of the 20th century, European nations were devastated by two wars that also spread to other parts of the world. Both wars were so widespread that people now remember them as “world wars.”

World War I, which began in 1914, was a bloody conflict that lasted for four years and caused the deaths of over 21 million people. World War II broke out in 1939. On one side of the conflict were the Axis powers—Germany, Italy, Japan, and other countries. The Allies—Great Britain, the Soviet Union, the United States, and their allies—opposed the Axis.

World War II was even more deadly than World War I. It lasted six years and claimed the lives of 50 million people worldwide. The fighting left European cities, industry, farms, and railways in ruins. When the guns finally fell silent in 1945, Europeans wanted to make sure that such horrors never happened again.

Creating a Future of Peaceful Cooperation

On May 9, 1950, a French leader named Robert Schuman made a famous speech in which he put forward ideas for bringing a lasting peace to Europe. These ideas led to what is now the European Union.
Schuman suggested that France, Germany, and other European countries work together to manage their coal and steel production. If these countries learned to cooperate, he said, they would not be so likely to make war with each other.

Six countries—Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands—agreed with Schuman. By 1952, they had all ratified a treaty that formed the European Coal and Steel Community and created a common market for steel and coal products. In a common market, countries reduce or remove trade barriers, such as tariffs. Tariffs are taxes on goods that cross country borders.

By 1958, the same six countries created the European Economic Community (EEC), which then removed trade barriers for all kinds of goods. The EEC came to be known as the Common Market. Over the years, six more European countries joined the Common Market.

In 1993, the Common Market was renamed the European Community and became one of the founding institutions of the European Union. The main goal of the EU is to promote peace and prosperity, which means economic well-being. The EU works toward this goal by seeking to create jobs, protect citizens’ rights, and preserve the environment. It also has programs to promote freedom, security, and justice for its members. In 2018, the EU had 28 member countries spread across Europe, with several other countries hoping to join. However, the United Kingdom began the process to leave the EU in March 2017.

▶ Geoterms

**centrifugal force** a force that divides people and countries

**centripetal force** a force that unites people and countries

**common market** a group of countries that acts as a single market, without trade barriers between member countries

**supranational cooperation** a form of international cooperation in which countries give up some control of their affairs as they work together to achieve shared goals
The Growth of the European Union
Before 2004, all of the European Union countries were in Western and Central Europe. In 2004, ten new member countries put Eastern Europe and more of Central Europe on the EU map. Two more countries joined in 2007 and one in 2013. The European Union promotes cooperation among member countries.

2. Economic Cooperation in the EU
In the United States, people move freely across state borders. For example, some work in one state and live in another. In Europe, before the EU, citizens did not have a similar freedom to move between countries. National laws made it difficult for citizens of one country to live or work in a different country.
Before the EU, each European country had its own policies about who could live or find work within its borders. Each country had its own currency, or type of money. Additionally, individual countries charged tariffs, or taxes, on goods imported from its neighbors, making these goods expensive for citizens to buy.

Today members of the EU work together toward shared economic goals. Many centripetal forces promote such economic cooperation, but at the same time, centrifugal forces work against unity.

**Economic Forces That Unite the EU** The creation of a common market was an important economic force in unifying the EU. This single market benefits EU consumers in several ways. With goods moving freely across borders, people have more choices about what to buy. The elimination of tariffs on EU goods has lowered prices for EU consumers. The common market benefits workers as well because they are able to travel freely to other EU countries to find work.

The introduction of a common currency in 2002 has also helped unite the EU. The common currency, called the euro, has replaced the national currency in many EU countries. The euro makes it easier to travel and trade across the EU, so people traveling in Europe no longer need to change money when they cross most borders.

By joining their economies, EU members have also created a powerful trade bloc. A trade bloc is a group of countries that act together to increase their influence over world trade. Hundreds of millions of consumers live in the EU trade bloc, making outside nations eager to do business in the EU. The size of its market has made the EU trade bloc an important force in the global economy.

**Gross Domestic Product of Five Economic Powers, 2016**

![GDP comparison graph](Source: Central Intelligence Agency)

**The EU Trade Bloc**

This graph compares the GDP of the EU and several large countries. GDP is the total value of goods and services produced in a place. By joining together, EU members have far more economic power than they would have if they acted alone.
EU countries share other economic goals. The EU works to create jobs, develop resources, and make improvements that encourage trade. For example, the EU has spent large sums to upgrade highways and to help farmers modernize their operations.

**Economic Forces That Divide the EU** Other forces work against economic cooperation. EU members do not always agree on the many issues they face, nor do they always see eye to eye on how EU money should be spent.

In general, the Western European members of the EU are wealthier than those in Central and Eastern Europe. In an effort to bring all of its members up to the same level, the EU spends large sums of money on projects in its poorer nations. Some Western Europeans object to so much EU money being spent outside their own area.

Economic differences between EU members create other strains. Generally, workers in Western Europe are paid higher wages than those in Central and Eastern Europe, but living costs are higher in Western Europe as well. These factors have led some Western European businesses to move manufacturing to poorer EU countries. Costs are lower there, and they can pay workers less. As a result, workers in Western Europe worry about losing jobs to poorer EU countries.

**The Euro Changeover**
In January 2002, the euro became the currency in 12 EU countries. About 291 million people traded in their old money for euros. To prepare for this change, banks were stocked with 12.5 billion new bills and 76 billion coins, and shops listed prices in old national currencies and the euro. These sale signs include prices in euros and German marks.
Wage differences also encourage workers in poorer EU countries to move to richer ones in search of jobs. Workers in the wealthier countries often resent these immigrants. They also fear that too many newcomers from poor countries will decrease wages for everyone.

There are centrifugal forces at work in the use of the euro as well. When the euro was first used in 2002, three EU members retained their own currency and continued to make their own decisions about money. Members that have joined the EU since then must demonstrate that they have reached certain goals before being permitted to adopt the euro. These goals aim to support economic stability and responsibility. (See the map in the previous section, which shows which countries use the euro.)

As you can see, both centripetal and centrifugal economic forces are at work in the European Union. These centrifugal forces prompted voters in the United Kingdom to decide to leave the EU, and the government began the exit process in 2017. There have been movements to leave in other countries as well, but these nations have decided that the economic benefits of supranational cooperation currently outweigh the costs.

Brexit
On June 23, 2016, the United Kingdom held a referendum in which voters indicated whether they wanted to leave or remain in the EU. The British exit, or Brexit, vote won. The vote was controversial, with many protesting that the country should remain. This protest in September 2016 was in support of the government beginning the exit process, which it did in March 2017.
3. Political Cooperation in the EU

Before the EU was formed, there were many political divisions among European countries. Each nation was independent, setting its own individual policies. Nations could choose to work together, but they did not have to. As you have read, political conflict was often more common than cooperation.

The EU encourages political cooperation among its members, in part through its common EU government. This government does not replace the governments of individual member countries. Rather, the EU government is supranational—it operates above the governments of its members. All member countries participate in the EU government.

How the EU Government Unites Europe The EU government works in two ways to unite Europe. First, it brings its members together to address issues they all share. For example, it tries to take a common approach to environmental problems.

Second, the EU encourages Europeans to think of themselves as citizens of Europe. European citizenship operates on top of citizenship of a home country and gives individuals certain benefits. For example, citizens of member countries can live and work anywhere in the EU. They can also vote in EU elections. They have these rights no matter where they live in the EU.

The “Capital of Europe”

The EU government works on issues shared by member countries. Many of its institutions, including the Council and the Parliament (pictured), are located in Brussels, Belgium. By 2018, this was the center of government for more than 515 million people in 28 countries. Because of this, some call Brussels the “capital of Europe.”
The EU government has several important bodies. The Council of the European Union, the main legislative body for the EU, consists of national leaders from each member country. The Council establishes the overall goals for the EU and proposes new laws.

The European Parliament is the largest EU body, with 751 members directly elected by citizens of EU countries. Like the Council, Parliament is a legislative body that passes European laws. Parliament and Council also share the job of approving the EU budget and therefore determine how money should be spent on various EU projects.

The European Commission, the executive body of the EU government, is made up of commissioners appointed by member governments. The Commission proposes new laws to the Council and Parliament, and handles the day-to-day business of carrying out EU policies. It also ensures that members abide by EU treaties and laws, and takes those who violate the law to the EU’s judicial branch, the Court of Justice, if needed.

The EU government helps unite Europe by speaking with one voice for all of its members. Within Europe, the EU focuses on shared issues, such as transportation and the environment. Beyond Europe, the EU works to strengthen Europe’s role in the world. By working together, EU members have more power in world affairs than any single European country would have by itself. In these ways, the EU government acts as a centripetal force in Europe.

**How the EU Government Divides Europe** There are centrifugal forces at work as well in the EU government. When a country joins the European Union, it is expected to give up some power to the EU government. This means that the country must carry out EU decisions even if it does not agree with a given policy. This has been a problem for many EU members. Some want to continue to make independent decisions in areas like defense, foreign affairs, and immigration from outside the EU, especially when they disagree with EU decisions on these matters.

The growing size of the EU is also a centrifugal force. By 2018 the EU included more than 515 million people in 28 countries. As the size of the EU has increased, so have the differences among the EU’s nations and peoples. The increased number of countries and cultures has made cooperation more difficult. For example, in recent years, EU members have been divided over how to handle the increased number of migrants from regions affected by war, such as Syria and Iraq.

Finally, the idea of European citizenship has been hard for some Europeans to embrace. Some people fear that their national identity will become lost in the push for a more united Europe. For them, the advantages of political cooperation may not be worth the costs. A 2017 survey found that nearly 70 percent of people view themselves EU citizens, and more than half feel attached to the European Union.
4. Cultural Cooperation in the EU

In 2000, students across the European Union participated in a contest to create a motto for the EU. These students submitted more than 2,000 possible mottoes. After considering the entries, the EU announced its choice in 2003: “United in Diversity.”
Europe Day in the EU
Celebrations and symbols help create a cultural identity. Every year on May 9, people celebrate Europe Day, which honors Europe’s “birthday.” It was on this day in 1950 that Robert Schuman proposed creating a more united Europe. Symbols like the EU flag add to the feeling of a shared culture.

The words in this motto are important because the goal of the EU is to unite Europeans in an “ever closer union.” Since the EU began, it has worked toward a common European cultural identity. At the same time, the EU recognizes the diversity of its members and sees diversity as a strength. The word diversity refers to all the ways in which people are different from one another. Areas of diversity may include language, religion, ethnicity, beliefs, traditions, and values. These aspects of culture are what make each member country of the EU unique.

How the EU Promotes a European Cultural Identity A common cultural identity is a centripetal force. To help make EU countries “United in Diversity,” the EU has made it a goal to encourage a common European cultural identity.

One way the EU encourages a European cultural identity is through the use of common cultural symbols. The European flag, which shows a circle of 12 yellow stars on a blue background, symbolizes unity. It was originally created by the Council of Europe, which
encouraged all European institutions to adopt the symbol. When the EU formed, it also used the flag as the official emblem of European unity.

Another symbol that the EU has adopted is the European anthem, which takes its melody from Ludwig van Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. When used as the anthem, it is always played without words, in the “universal language of music.”

Europe Day is another symbol of European unity. Europeans celebrate Europe Day on May 9, the anniversary of when Robert Schuman first proposed a supranational European organization in 1950. Europe Day is a time for Europeans to come together to share and celebrate their common culture.

The EU also supports cultural programs. One example is the European Union Youth Wind Orchestra, which brings together young musicians from across Europe. Also, each year the EU chooses two or three cities to be European Capitals of Culture. The EU sponsors special shows and events that highlight that city and its culture.

As you have read, open borders and the euro make travel easy within the EU. As Europeans freely move between EU countries, they come to view Europe as a united region. The EU also encourages people, especially youth, to learn multiple European languages. Its goal is for all Europeans to learn two languages in addition to their home language.

Cultural Clashes in the EU
Cultural traditions can divide EU members. For example, bullfighting is a cultural tradition in Spain. Every year, matadors kill thousands of bulls in bullfights. In other EU countries, people view bullfighting as cruel and think that it should be banned.
**Forces Working Against a European Cultural Identity** Sometimes cultural diversity can become a centrifugal force that the EU must work to overcome. The EU celebrates the diversity of languages in Europe, yet those many languages can sometimes make communication difficult. To overcome the communication barrier, the EU must translate all of its speeches and documents into 24 languages. In 2016 alone, the EU had to translate more than 2.2 million pages.

Other centrifugal forces work against a shared cultural identity. National pride is one of them, as countries have a hard time putting the interests of all of Europe above their national interests. Competition and rivalries between countries can make cooperation a challenge.

Cultural traditions sometimes clash even at EU headquarters. For example, traditional Czech foods are often cooked slowly, tasting even better the next day. However, EU rules for its cafeteria state that cooked food cannot be served if it is more than two hours old. One Czech citizen complained, “This will make many of our best dishes illegal!”

**Summary**

In this lesson, you learned about the European Union. The EU is built on supranational cooperation. You read about centripetal forces that work toward such cooperation. You also read about centrifugal forces that work against unity.

The EU is the best example of supranational cooperation in the world today. It works because its member countries have been willing to give up some power, but just how much power remains an issue. Some Europeans want the EU to become a “United States of Europe,” whereas others fear giving up any more power to the EU.

Cooperation among nations is not limited to Europe. Other countries also work together on problems they share. In the next section, you will examine several examples of international cooperation around the world.

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**The UN Flag**
The UN flag shows a world map centered on the North Pole. Two olive branches frame the map. The world map represents all the people of the world, while the olive branch is a symbol for peace.
Global Connections

The map shows international organizations in the world today. The member nations of these organizations work together on common issues. The most truly international organization is the United Nations (UN). The UN’s members include almost every country in the world.

What kinds of international organizations do countries join? Countries form many kinds of organizations. Some organizations, such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), work to promote the economic well-being of their members. Others bring nations together to defend themselves. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is an example of a defense organization.

The UN Headquarters

The United Nations was founded in 1945. Its goal is to promote peace and cooperation among the countries of the world. Member countries meet at the UN headquarters in New York City to discuss world issues.

Are all international organizations like the EU? The EU is the best example of a supranational organization. Other organizations have more limited goals and powers. For example, NATO commits its members to defend one another. They promise to view an attack on one member as an attack on all, but NATO countries do not give up as much control of their individual affairs as EU nations do. The goal of NATO is defense more than unity.
What forces might work against supranational cooperation in the United Nations? The United Nations is the world’s largest international organization. Its 193 member countries range in size from a few thousand to more than a billion people, and each has its own interests. For such diverse countries to cooperate, they must agree to put the world’s interests above their own, but this is often difficult or impossible for UN members to do. Moreover, sometimes their national interests conflict with the interests of other countries.