The EU has grown from 6 countries in 1957 to 28 since it was formed in 1957 as a result of successive rounds of enlargement. Spreading prosperity and promoting peace, the EU is an economic and political entity that aims to create a single market and protect the environment. Today, the EU is the world’s largest economy, with a population of 506.7 million people and a GDP of $15.86 trillion. Its members work closely together to secure peace, promote prosperity, and defend human rights and democracy. The Treaty on the European Union is committed to promoting respect for and protection of minorities, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and stable institutions guaranteeing democratic values of the Union.

**Membership Conditions**

Countries wishing to join the EU need to:

- respect the democratic values of the union;
- implement effectively the obligations of membership,
- be able to take on and comply with all the EU’s standard rules - political, social and economic. The rule of law is at the heart of the enlargement process.

Who can join?

Countries wishing to join the EU have:

- to meet the key criteria for accession. These were mainly defined at the European Council in Copenhagen in 1993 and are hence referred to as ‘Copenhagen criteria’.

The 6 founding members of the Community of European Nations (European Community or EC) in 1957 were Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. 9 other European countries became EU members in 1973, 1981, 1986 and 1995. 8 central and east European countries joined in 1986 and 1995. 8 central and east European countries joined in 1986 and 1995. In 2004, 10 central and east European countries joined the Union. In 2007, Bulgaria and Romania joined. In 2013, Croatia became the 28th country to join the EU.

**Enlargement Process**

The 28 member states of the EU are:

- Austria
- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Iceland
- Ireland
- Italy
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Malta
- Netherlands
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden
- United Kingdom
- Republic of Macedonia
- Former Yugoslav Republic of Slovenia
- Serbia
- Montenegro
- Turkey

**Number of Member States and Population Growth**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Member States</th>
<th>Population (In millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>169.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>177.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>206.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>256.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>314.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>366.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>372.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>456.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>494.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>506.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GDP Growth**

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the EU (In trillion US$)