

Celebrating 60 years of peace

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and Agencies

On March 25, the European Union (EU) celebrated its 60th anniversary since the Treaty of Rome was signed, which laid the foundations for what the EU is today.

Since then, the citizens of Europe have enjoyed six decades of peace, prosperity and security, unprecedented in modern history.

The contrast to the first half of the 20th century could not be greater. Two catastrophic world wars in Europe between 1914 and 1945 left millions dead, and a continent devastated, divided and prostrate.

For countries that had long been at war, European integration has been the most successful peace project in our history.

The Treaty of Rome cemented an economic agreement between six European countries that ultimately paved the way to today's EU.

On that spring day, France, Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and what was then West Germany agreed to a customs union, aiming to create a single market for goods, labour, services and capital across all member states.

They formed the European Economic Community (EEC), rooted in the idea that open, tariff-free trade would make every member better off.

Sixty years on from Rome, the EEC is the EU, a bloc of 28 member states who cooperate on everything, from trade to counter-terrorism to tourism.

While there is no way of knowing how Europe would have fared without the EU in place, the last six decades have been a time of unprecedented peace and prosperity for a continent with a long history of bloodshed.

At a time when Brexit and a wave of Euroscepticism pose serious challenges to the EU, here is a look back at some of the major achievements of the past 60 years.

Freedom to live, work anywhere

Freedom of movement is one of the major principles of the EU's common market — and one of the more contentious, with fears over immigration feeding into a populist backlash.

However, it is worth remembering that in the EU today, over 500 million people enjoy the right to live, study or work in any of the EU's 28 member states.

Around 14 million EU citizens live in a different country, according to statistics



European Heads of State meet during a EU summit in Brussels, Belgium on April 29, 2017. To join the EU, a country first joins the broader Council of Europe, a human rights organisation. No country can join the Council of Europe, unless it ends the death penalty first

from 2014.

The EU also created the Schengen Area, a zone of passport-free, border-less travel that covers over 400 million people.

Most EU members are part of Schengen, along with some non-EU countries — namely, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

Schengen means you can theoretically get on a train in Vilnius and get off in Valencia without having to show your passport.

Although some border controls have been reinstated in the wake of the refugee crisis and terrorist attacks, the agreement is still in place.

Biggest single markets

Along with labour market mobility, the free movement of goods, services and capital has made the EU one of the biggest single markets in the world.

Major waves of expansion in 2004 and 2007 brought 12 new countries, mostly from central and eastern Europe, into the fold.

The gross domestic product (GDP) of EU last year was \$16.5 trillion, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), representing 22.8% of the world's total.

On an individual level, if a consumer in France wants to order a pram from Poland or

Signing the Rome Declaration

EU heads of state or government met in Rome, Italy, on 25 March, for the 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaties.

This was an occasion to reflect on the state of the European Union and look at the future of the integration process.

"Today, in Rome, we are renewing the unique alliance of free nations that was initiated 60 years ago by our great predecessors", said President Donald Tusk at the ceremony in Campidoglio.

"At that time they did not discuss multiple speeds, they did not devise exits, but despite all the tragic circumstances of the recent history, they placed all their faith in the unity of Europe."

President Tusk highlighted the fact that on the day of the anniversary, millions of people across Europe were

demonstrating their support for the EU.

"The European Union is not about slogans, it is not about procedures, it is not about regulations. Our Union is a guarantee that freedom, dignity, democracy and independence are no longer only our dreams, but our everyday reality," he said

At the end of the celebrations, the leaders adopted and signed the Rome Declaration setting out a joint vision for the years to come.

In the Declaration, they stressed that the European Union is a unique Union with common institutions and strong values, a community of peace, freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, a major economic power with unparalleled levels of social protection and welfare.

a coffee machine from Italy, she doesn't need to worry about import tax.

On a broader level, ease of doing business provides a major economic boost. It is impossible to quantify precisely because European integration took place alongside broader trends in globalisation, but economists agree that removing barriers to trade creates wealth.

"Of course this is profitable for the private sector as they seek to increase their

operations across the EU, which in turn offers a wide array of choice to EU consumers at competitive prices.

However there are still some standards, rules and practices which remain at the national level and are still not harmonised. There are good hopes for progress though, in particular with the digital space," said Francesca Bianchi, a specialist in Trade and Investment at the World Economic Forum.

Winning Nobel Peace Prize

The Nobel committee honoured the EU because it had "for over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe".

For a country to join the EU, it needs to meet three criteria: political, with stable institutions underpinning democracy; economic, with a functioning market

economy; and legal, with the acceptance of EU law and practice.

Under this process, a number of former dictatorships and ailing ex-communist economies made peaceful transitions.

By acting together with one voice on the global stage, the EU has built strong relations with partners around the world — for peace and security, action against poverty and for economic growth, solidarity in times of crisis and joint engagement against climate change.

On the global stage, over half of all development aid comes from the EU and its members.

Banished death penalty

In 1983, the European Convention on Human Rights was updated with a new protocol to abolish the death penalty.

Although this was not directly the EU's work, the lure of joining the bloc played a key role in ending capital punishment in Europe.

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in Europe

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Butter mountain

Even the most ardent of Europhiles will agree that the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been a contentious and complicated affair.

To support struggling farmers in the eighties, the EU provided guaranteed prices for agricultural products, creating notorious mountains of butter and lakes of wine and milk.

The EU's sugar policy also led to criticism, notably from Oxfam in 2002, for providing export subsidies to European refiners that meant farmers in poor countries couldn't

compete. The EU is currently phasing out export subsidies.

Ratified Paris Agreement

The EU has the biggest programme of environmental legislation in the world, including setting standards for swimming water that forced many beach resorts to tackle sewage.

Last year, it ratified the Paris Agreement to limit global CO2 emissions. As Emily Farnworth, the head of climate change at the World Economic Forum, explained: “The European Union was a powerful driving force in securing international



European commissioner Johannes Hahn, Jordan minister of industry Yarub Qudah and European commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom give a joint news conference at the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium on May 3

agreement on climate change. Being able to speak as one united voice, rather than 28 single voices, helped cut through during climate negotiations – big markets are hard to ignore,” she said.

She noted that EU had established the first major carbon market and agreed ambitious emission reduction, energy efficiency, and renewable energy targets through its climate-

energy packages, first for 2020 and now for 2030. “The Habitat Directive is another good example – for 25 years, it has been protecting Europe's biodiversity across the

region. It recognises that effective approaches to conservation need to take account of the natural environment, rather than political boundaries,” she said.