

# Europe builds on foundations

**SINCE THE CREATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, NO MAJOR WAR HAS RAVAGED EUROPE FOR OVER 70 YEARS SINCE THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

By Taddeo Bwambale

**B**y the time the Second World War ended in the mid-1940s, Europe was plagued by poverty, unemployment and economic instability.

European countries came to realize that the effects of the internecine war transcended the battlefield to the economic realm across much of the continent.

Broken by the ravages of war, the major economies in Europe agreed to foster economic co-operation, culminating into the Treaty of Rome that established the European Economic Community (EEC).

The treaty was signed in 1957 to increase economic cooperation, create a single market of countries that trade with one another so that they are more likely to avoid conflict.

After years of successful cooperation, the name changed from (EEC to the European Union (EU) in 1993 to reflect the wider principles that had united Europeans.

The EU countries are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK.



Visitors attend the inauguration of the House of European History in Brussels, Belgium on May 4, 2017

Since its creation, no major war has ravaged Europe for over 70 years since the end of the Second World War, making it the longest period of peace and stability in Europe's written history.

In 2012, the EU was awarded

the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of its role in helping to transform most of Europe from 'being a continent of war to becoming a continent of peace.'

The EU is the largest contributor of contingents to

United Nations peacekeeping missions, guaranteeing peace in a world with more than 40 active armed conflicts.

The European Union is the largest trade block in the world with total exports of the 27 members exceeding 5.8

trillion Euro, representing more than one third of total global exports.

The EU is the top trading partner for 80 countries and is also the world's largest source and destination for foreign direct investment.



# of unity

The European Union and its Member States are the world's leading aid donor, providing more than half of total Official Development Assistance in 2015.

## Political, economic cooperation

While the EU began as an economic union, its sphere of influence has evolved into more areas from climate, environment and health to external relations and security, justice and migration.

By 1957, only twelve of the EU member states were democracies but today, there are 28. The EU is the largest union of democracies in the world.

The EU is also governed by the principle of representative democracy, with citizens directly represented in the European Parliament and Member States in the European Council and the Council of the EU.

The EU has delivered more than half a century of peace, stability and prosperity, helped raise living standards and launched a single European currency – the Euro.

The Euro is the second most important global reserve currency, with almost 1.5 trillion Euro held by central banks around the globe.

With the abolition of border controls between EU countries, people can travel freely throughout most of the continent, making it easier to live, work and travel abroad in Europe.

## Environment

Since 1972, when the first European environmental policy was launched, the EU has been a major player in efforts to combat environmental destruction.

In the fight against climate change, the EU has demonstrated that sustainable development and economic progress can go hand in hand.

It has cut CO2 emissions by 22 percent between 1990 and 2015, while growing its economy by 50%, according to the European Commission's European Political Strategy Centre.

European cities are rated to have some of the lowest air pollution levels worldwide, partly due to early bans on pollutants such as lead in petrol.

Between 2010 and 2015, the EU invested more in developing renewables than any other energy source. The EU accounts for three times more renewable power installed per person than the world average.

## Diversity

The EU is home to 24 official languages and over 60 indigenous regional or minority languages. The EU is based on the concept of 'unity in diversity'.

The EU has enshrined the

principle of 'subsidiarity', ensuring that action at European level addresses issues that cannot be resolved by member states on their own, such as air pollution.

Europe's cultural diversity makes it the world's top tourist destination. Citizens of the EU live more than eight years longer than the world average (life expectancy at birth is 79.6, against 71.4 worldwide).

Workers' rights and employment conditions in the EU are much better than most developed countries, owing to strict adherence to social security regulations.

## Democracy, human rights

EU Member States represent one third of all free countries in the world and it is rated the freest continent globally and tops international freedom of press rankings.

One of the EU's main goals is to promote human rights both internally and around the world as well as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

After years of interaction among diverse communities, the EU is one of the planet's most cosmopolitan regions where respect for private life, freedoms of thought, religion, assembly, expression are upheld.

The EU's institutions are legally bound to uphold them, as are EU governments whenever they apply EU law, with focus on making its governing institutions more transparent and democratic.

More powers have been given to the directly elected European Parliament, while national parliaments play a greater role, working alongside the European institutions.

In turn, European citizens have an ever-increasing number of channels for taking part in the political process. The bloc is a world leader in research and innovation, home to some of the world's leading scientists, economists, authors, doctors, artists and activists.

The region is responsible for one quarter of global expenditure on research and one third of global patent applications.

## EU future and threats to unity

Previously, no nation state had ever left the EU, until the UK voted in the 2016 referendum to leave the bloc. Only Greenland, one of Denmark's overseas territories, has left the EU after a referendum in 1982.

The withdrawal of the UK from the EU, known colloquially as 'Brexit' triggered discussion on the rising discontent expressed by other member countries considering an exit from the union.

Several countries around the continent are, however, keen to join the bloc, although the process to admit new members might not start until after 2020.



European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker meets with Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg at the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium on May 4, 2017

