

Summary: The European Union

Western Europe Today

Many countries in Western Europe belong to the European Union (EU). These countries joined together to encourage trade. The EU is also becoming a loose political union.

Many Eastern European countries want to join the EU. They cannot join automatically. Many countries must first work to make their legal and economic systems better. They must also try to improve their environment. Eventually, these countries will belong to the EU.

Each European nation had its own system of currency. The EU wants to simplify international trade by creating a common currency. Europeans using the euro, the EU currency, will not have to exchange money when they cross borders. Member nations will no longer have to pay tariffs on goods they trade with each other. Border controls between member nations have also been removed. Goods, services, and people will flow freely among these nations.

EU members are sharing their wealth with each other. They hope to make all member nations economically equal. For example, poorer countries, such as Ireland, receive help for their businesses.

A higher standard of living is also an important goal of the EU. A person's standard of living is based on how easy it is to get goods and services. An increase in trade and wealth means citizens will have a higher standard of living.

Cultural Diversity

EU member nations have their own cultures and traditions. Many of these have developed over hundreds of years. They may include different languages, foods, ways of doing business, and special games and celebrations.

Some nations are a blend of several cultures. Belgium is one example. Flemings live in the north of Belgium. They speak Dutch. The Walloons live in southern Belgium. They speak French. A third group lives in the eastern part of Belgium. They speak German. Many Belgian cities include people from all three groups.

Western Europe has some of the world's most fascinating cities. London, Madrid, Paris, Amsterdam, and Rome are major centers for the arts, business, and education.



Before You Read

Find and highlight each vocabulary word.

European Union *noun*, a group of countries in Western Europe

currency *noun*, a system of money

euro *noun*, money used by many countries in Western Europe

tariff *noun*, a fee that a government places on imported or exported goods

standard of living *noun*, a measure of the quality of life based on having enough goods and services



After You Read

REVIEW How would improved trade raise the standard of living?

Underline how improved trade would raise the standard of living.

REVIEW Why do European nations who have decided to join the EU still choose to preserve their own cultures and traditions? Circle the sentence that describes cultures and traditions.