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A timeline of the EU

1948

Plans for a peaceful Europe

In the wake of World War II nationalism is out of favour in large parts of continental Europe and support for federalism is high. The European Union of Federalists organises a Congress at The Hague in 1948 in the hope of drawing up a European constitution. But the UK rejects the federal approach and the result is the Council of Europe a loose grouping that becomes a guardian of Europe's human rights.

1949

Nato is born

The Washington Treaty is signed by the USA Canada and 10 Western European states Britain France the Benelux countries Iceland Italy Norway and Portugal. The key feature of the pact is a mutual defence clause if one country is attacked the others will come to its defence. The US is supportive of European integration but it is another year before real progress is made in this field.

1950

The Schuman Declaration

French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman announces a plan for France and Germany to pool coal and steel production and invites other states to join them. His plan is based on the idea that European unity is the key to peace. Solidarity in production he said would make war between France and Germany "not merely unthinkable but materially impossible."

1951

Treaty of Paris establishes European Coal and Steel Community ECSC

Six countries sign the treaty France Germany the Benelux states and Italy. It sets up a High Authority to manage the coal and steel industries and a Common Assembly a precursor of the European parliament. The Dutch supported by the Germans also insist on the creation of a Council of Ministers made up of ministers from member states to counterbalance the supranational High Authority.

1952

The ECSC begins work with Jean Monnet at its head

The first president of the High Authority is Jean Monnet the inspiration behind the

Schuman Declaration. The ECSC guarantees German coal to the French steel industry. It also provides funds to upgrade Belgian and Italian coal mines. Germany agrees to this and to the dismantling of its steel cartels in order to gain international respectability.

1954

The rise and fall of the European Defence Community

In response to the Korean War the USA insists that Europe must contribute more to its own defence and that Germany must rearm. In 1952 the six ECSC members agree to create a European Defence Community which envisages German soldiers joining a European army. But the French parliament delays ratification and ultimately rejects the idea in 1954.

1957

The Treaty of Rome a first step towards the common market

The six members of the ECSC sign the Treaty of Rome setting up the European Economic Community EEC and the European Atomic Energy Community Euratom. The EEC aims to create a common market a customs union plus free movement of capital and labour. To please France it also promises subsidies to farmers. Euratom's goal is the joint development of nuclear energy.

1958

The EEC takes off dominating the other European communities

The EEC starts work and quickly establishes itself as the most important of the European communities. It has a commission a council of ministers and an advisory parliamentary assembly whose members are drawn from national parliaments. At the same time the European Court of Justice comes into existence to interpret the Treaty of Rome and rule in disputes over Community decisions.

1960

EFTA is launched another kind of Europe

An alternative to the EEC emerges when Austria Denmark Norway Portugal Sweden Switzerland and the UK set up EFTA the European Free Trade Association. Like the EEC EFTA aims to establish free trade but it opposes uniform external tariffs and sees no need for supranational institutions.

1961

Britain Denmark and Ireland apply to join the EEC

The UK's decision to apply for membership of the EEC was taken by the government

of Harold Macmillan a Conservative. It was not welcomed by French President Charles de Gaulle who saw it as a threat to his goal of using the EEC to amplify France's voice in world affairs. He was also concerned about the UK's close ties with the US.

1963

French President Charles de Gaulle vetoes British membership

France's nationalist leader Charles de Gaulle refuses to back the UK's application to join the EEC saying that the British government lacks commitment to European integration.

1967

Treaty creating a single Council and a Commission for the three communities comes into effect

1968

The European Community customs union is completed

1973

Britain Denmark and Ireland join the European Community

The three countries and Norway had failed to join 10 years earlier because of General de Gaulle's veto on British membership. This time all sign an accession treaty in 1972 but Norwegians reject it in a referendum later in the year. Denmark and Ireland hold successful referendums. The UK does not hold a referendum until 1975 after renegotiating its entry terms the result is two to one in favour.

1979

The road to the euro begins with the EMS

The European Monetary System EMS introduces the European currency unit Ecu and the exchange rate mechanism ERM. The Ecu a unit for the community's internal budget also takes on some of the features of a real currency it is used for travellers cheques and bank deposits. The ERM gives national currencies an exchange rate band denominated in Ecus. All EC members join except the UK.

1981

Greece becomes the EC's 10th member

1984

The UK wins its budget rebate

1985

Jacques Delors becomes president of the European Commission

Jacques Delors proposes that the European Community should by the end of 1992 remove a series of barriers to free trade and free movement of capital and labour creating a "single market". Delors believes the single market programme will revive European integration by spilling over from the economic into the political arena. It is widely seen as a necessity if Europe is to compete with the United States.

1986

Portugal and Spain join the EC and the European flag is unveiled

1987

The Single European Act enters into force

The SEA modifies the Treaty of Rome aiming to eecomplete the formation of a common market which the earlier treaty had begun. It abolishes national vetoes in a host of areas relating to the single market increases the legislative powers of the European parliament and makes the first commitment by member states to create a "European Union".

1988

Regional aid is doubled

Market liberalisation is seen to work to the benefit of the more developed northern European member states so the poorer southern states demand compensation. This comes in the form of agreement to double the allocations for structural funds paid to poorer regions.

1990

Britain enters the ERM

1991

Maastricht turns the Community into a Union

The Maastricht treaty on European Union is signed in December. It paves the way for monetary union and includes a chapter on social policy. The UK negotiates an optout on both. The treaty also introduces European citizenship giving Europeans the right to live and vote in elections in any EU country and launches European cooperation in foreign affairs security asylum and immigration.

1992

The UK is forced out of the ERM

Volatile currency markets put the Exchange Rate Mechanism ERM under pressure. The ERM was intended to harmonise currency values ahead of creating a single currency. In an effort to bolster the £ which had been devalued by the unstable market the UK government raises base rates in an effort to prompt currency traders to buy £s. Traders keep selling however forcing the government to pull the £ out of the ERM.

1993

The Treaty on European Union comes into effect

The Maastricht Treaty had a rough ride in national referendums. Danes rejected it in June 1992 and only accepted it in a second vote in May 1993 after receiving an optout on monetary union like the UK. In France it squeaked home by just 50.4 to 49.7. There was also evidence of public discontent in other countries including Germany and the UK.

1995

Borders come down as a result of the Schengen pact

France Germany Portugal Spain and the Benelux countries are the first to drop border controls except on the EU's external borders followed later by Austria Italy Denmark Finland Sweden and Greece but not the UK or Ireland. Austria Finland and Sweden joined the EU at the start of 1995 taking membership to 15. Norway would have joined if voters had not rejected the move in a second referendum.

1997

The Amsterdam Treaty is signed

The treaty starts to get the EU ready for its eastward expansion. More national vetoes are abolished. Laws on employment and discrimination are strengthened and the social chapter of the Maastricht treaty becomes an official part of EU law. The Schengen agreement also becomes law though Ireland and the UK maintain their optouts. This gives the EU more say on immigration and asylum.

1998

First big steps towards enlargement

Accession negotiations open with Cyprus the Czech Republic Estonia Hungary Poland and Slovenia. A year later another group of countries gets its foot in the European door as the EU opens membership talks with Romania Slovakia Latvia Lithuania Bulgaria and Malta.

1999

Crisis at the commission fraud and resignation

The EU faces its darkest hour as revelations of fraud nepotism and mismanagement undermine the commission. All 20 commissioners including President Jacques Santer resign before the parliament sacks them. In September Romano Prodi becomes the new president of the commission promising radical change in the way it is run. Only a handful of the old commissioners are reappointed.

2002

National currencies replaced by euro notes and coins

The euro came into existence in 1999 as the official currency of 11 countries. Greece adopted the currency two years later though Sweden Denmark and the UK stayed out. On 1 January 2002 euro notes and coins were introduced in the 12 participating states and over the next few months their national currencies were phased out.

2003

Plans for a European constitution suffer a setback

A convention headed by former French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing has spent much of 2002 and 2003 drafting the EU's first constitution. Its goals are to simplify the EU treaties to make the EU more easily understood by its citizens and to help it work efficiently after enlargement. But an intergovernmental conference ends in disarray as heads of state and government fail to agree a final text.

2004

The EU enlarges and a new constitution is signed

Enlargement goes ahead on 1 May 2004. Elections to the European parliament in June 2004 the sixth since European polls began in 1979 are held in 25 countries from Ireland to Cyprus and Malta to Finland. On 29 October EU leaders sign a new constitution in the same room where the Treaty of Rome was signed to establish the EU.

2005

No votes plunge constitution into crisis

Voters in referendums in both France and the Netherlands reject their governments plans to ratify the EU constitution. As the constitution cannot come into effect unless it is ratified by all 25 member states many commentators declare it dead. The European Union continues to function on the basis of existing treaties but its future direction has been thrown dramatically into question.

2006

Turkeys EU bid stalls

Negotiations on Turkey's entry to the European Union run into problems in December 2006. EU foreign ministers decide to suspend accession talks with Turkey in eight of the 35 areas that candidates are required to complete. The decision follows Turkey's refusal to open its sea and air ports to ships and planes from EU member Cyprus.

2007

New candidates admitted

Romania and Bulgaria become member states on 1 January 2007. Privately many European politicians question whether they are ready. But harsh penalties are threatened if the countries fail to continue making progress in curbing organised crime and corruption and ensuring food safety and the proper use of EU funds.
