



Democracy in action #ep2024

# The European Elections: how does the system work?



**Democracy in action**

Name \_\_\_\_\_





# Introduction

If you are a European citizen, you will be able to vote in the European elections between 6 June and 9 June 2024 in Europe. That is when the Members of the European Parliament will be elected by the citizens of the European Union. By voting, you can directly influence the decisions of the European Parliament; if you do so, you will be called upon to vote for a candidate from one of the parties from your own country standing in the European elections. French nationals vote for a candidate from a French party, and Spanish nationals for a Spanish candidate.



The European Union has an impact on all of us and is closer to us than you may imagine. You will already notice one aspect of what the EU does if you wander through a supermarket and buy products which have been approved by the EU. If there is a CE logo on a product, it means that it has not been tested on animals. What is more, products with a CE logo often comply with high standards with regard to safety, health and environmental protection. EU rules enable products from other countries to be imported freely within Europe, so that, for example, the fruit you eat may come from Spain. This is called the internal market, which makes it possible for people, goods, services and capital to move freely. The EU also makes it possible for you to buy a cheap flight and go on holiday to another European country without having to show your passport. It is also thanks to Europe that you can enjoy clean water and air, as the European Union is constantly working to achieve a cleaner environment.

The decisions of the European Union are important to us all. Generally speaking, you can vote in the European elections if you are aged 18 or over. However, in Austria, Malta, Belgium and Germany you can already vote at the age of 16! And in Greece you can vote at the age of 17.

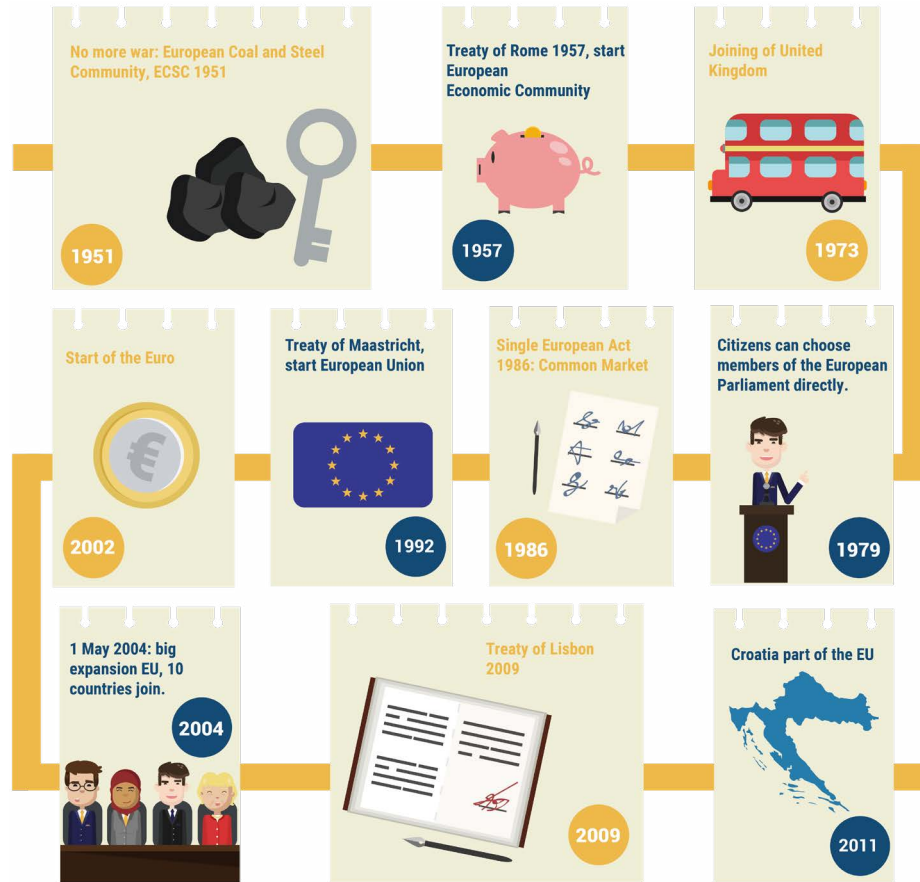
The European elections will be held from 6 to 9 June 2024 in Europe. For example, the Netherlands will vote on 6 June 2024 while Germany will vote on 9 June 2024. In this module, we shall also look at the functioning of the European Union and how European law affects your daily life. *How do you think the European Union should develop in future?*

## Taking decisions in Europe is similar to organising a street party?



# Chapter 1: The origins of the European Union

Dit nooit meer! Plus jamais! Nie wieder! Never again!



The First and Second World Wars had reduced large parts of Europe to rubble, and 80 million people had died in them. The arch-enemies France and Germany needed to find a way to start trusting each other, so as to make yet another war less likely. In 1952, six countries pooled their coal and steel industries, so that no weapons could be made any longer. This cooperation led to peace in Europe.

## Fathers of Europe

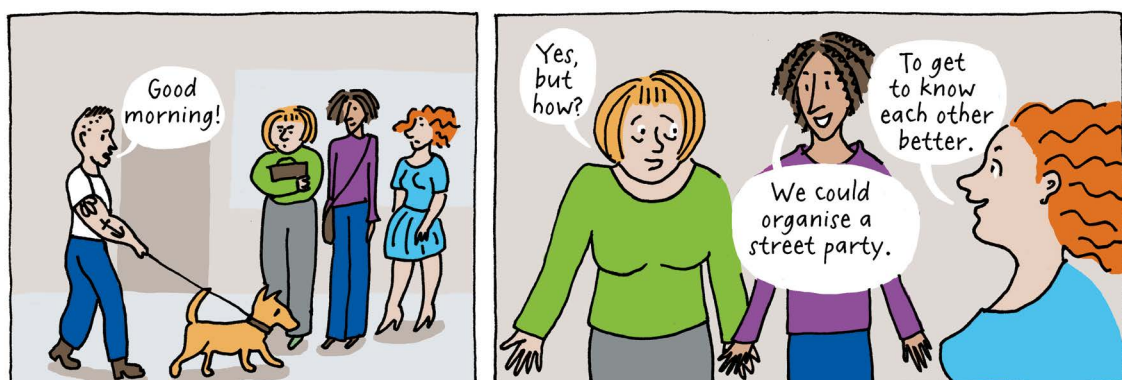


Watch the videos:  
which six countries worked together and what is the name of the treaty they signed?

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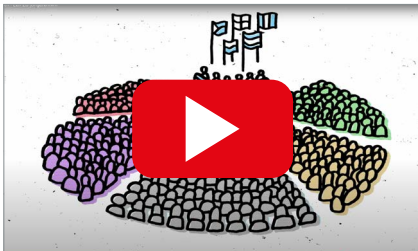


Gradually, this cooperation was expanded, and more and more countries joined. The agreements reached among the EU countries are recorded in treaties.

For example, there is a customs union which ensures that no duties (taxes) have to be paid on imports and exports of goods between EU countries. There are also common rates of import duty on goods from countries that do not belong to the EU. It therefore no longer makes any difference whether bananas arrive in the EU from South America via Rotterdam, Frankfurt or Marseille. The cost of importing these bananas remains the same, and they can be transported to other EU countries without any further taxation.

This system is known as the 'free movement of goods'. In addition to the free movement of goods, we now also have free movement of persons, services and capital (money). A Dutch carpenter, for example, can live, work and earn money in another EU country. We have also reached agreements on the quality requirements that should apply to various products. All of this is known as the 'internal market'.

The Lisbon Treaty is the most recent European agreement, which brought together changes agreed in previous European treaties. For example, it included arrangements to allow a country to leave the European Union. In 2016, the UK decided to leave the EU, following an advisory referendum. Eventually, the UK left the EU on 31 January 2020.



How many people live in the European Union?

Look up: When did the Treaty of Lisbon enter into force?

How many people live in the United States?





# Chapter 2: How does the European Union work?



## EUROPEAN COUNCIL

- Government leaders of the member states.
- Decides EU strategy



## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

- Daily governance
- Propose laws
- 27 European Commissioners



## EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

- Elected
- Adjust, reject and approve laws
- Monitors EU budget



## COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

- 10 different configurations
- Adjust, reject and approve laws
- Monitors EU budget

When the European elections are held in June 2024, the people of the European Union will have the opportunity to elect the Members of the European Parliament. European citizens will be able to vote for a candidate from their own country. This means that the European Parliament represents the people of the European Union. Voting gives every citizen a say in the political complexion of the European Parliament. But how much power does the European Parliament really have? And how does the European Parliament work together with the other European institutions to reach decisions?

Each European institution has its own tasks and powers. This structure makes it easier to take decisions or adopt laws together. Here is a quick overview of the main EU institutions and their tasks:



### The European Council at the top!

The European Council consists of the heads of state or government of all the Member States. They decide the broad outlines of European policies. They meet in Brussels at least four times a year. When they do so, the meeting is called a 'European Summit'. Sometimes there are also additional 'summits': these have, for example, been held to discuss environmental problems or the situation with regard to refugees crossing the Mediterranean by boat. The European Council decides the EU's strategy, the broad outlines of European policy.

*The European Council is chaired by Charles Michel*



Who represents the Netherlands in the European Council?



### The European Commission drafts laws!

The European Commission makes proposals for European laws. Only the Commission has the power to do this. The Commission also checks whether all EU countries introduce the laws that they are required to. The Commission is managed by European Commissioners, one from each Member State. At present, there are 27. Each Commissioner is responsible for a particular field of policy. In drafting legislative proposals, the Commission always takes account of the wishes of the European Council and the opinions of the European Parliament. Therefore, Commission officials do not just dream up proposals at random. They regularly hold meetings with other groups which have an interest in a particular proposal. These may include lobby groups, businesses, consumer organisations and other stakeholders.



The President of the European Commission is Ursula von der Leyen.

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What is the name of the Dutch Commissioner and what is his/her policy area, what are his/her responsibilities?



### The Council of Ministers (the Council): the interests of the Member States

The Council of Ministers of the EU, known simply as 'the Council', likewise has 27 members. Exactly who it consists of varies, depending on the subject to be debated. If the topic is education, for example, the Education Ministers of all the EU countries meet. If it is agriculture, the Council consists of ministers responsible for agriculture. The ministers represent their countries' interests in the EU. Every six months a different Member State chairs the Council of Ministers. By and large, the country that does so can decide the Council's agenda.

Which country is currently chairing the Council of Ministers ('holding the Presidency')?







## The European Parliament: the interests of the people whom it represents

The European Parliament is the only institution whose members you can choose directly to represent you. Once every five years, European elections are held for this purpose; in the Netherlands, the next one will be held on 6 June 2024. The people elected are called 'Members of the European Parliament', or 'MEPs', and there are now a total of 705. In 2024, after the European elections, there will be 720 members of the European Parliament and the Netherlands will have 2 seats more, so 31 MEPs instead of 29. Seats are distributed according to size of population. Small countries, like Malta with 450.000 citizens, have at least 6 MEPs. Meanwhile, bigger countries have fewer MEPs relative to their population size: Germany, with a population of 84 million citizens, currently has 96 MEPs.

The European Parliament assembles.



### What does the European Parliament do?

The European Parliament considers the Commission's legislative proposals jointly with the Council of Ministers and may reject, amend or accept them. MEPs vote on legislative proposals. In order for a law to be adopted, half of all the votes cast, plus one, must be in favour. The Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force in 2009, increased the range of subjects on which the European Parliament can legislate, thus giving it more power. The European Parliament also decides, together with the Council of Ministers, how much money the European Union can spend and what it should be spent on. This is on the basis of its 'budgetary powers'. The European Parliament also appoints the President of the European Commission and the European Commissioners.

### Political groups and parties

The European Parliament has 705 Members, but which of them can you vote for? As a Dutch national, you vote for a candidate put forward by a Dutch party, just as French nationals vote for candidates from French parties. In 2019, 705 MEPs were elected in the EU. Each one of whom is a member of a national party. However, each MEP will join a European political group as well, next to its national party!



## WHO OR WHAT WILL YOU BE CASTING YOUR VOTE FOR?

- A candidate from your own Member State
- A party from your own Member State
- Indirectly, the President of the European Commission
- The issues that you believe the European Union should be dealing with

Most MEPs choose a group based on ideology. They choose a political group that corresponds with their (national party) ideology. Interestingly, different national parties are able to join the same European political group!

### What does the President of the European Parliament do?



### Message from the President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola



*The President of the European Parliament is Roberta Metsola.*

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If you could introduce a European law, what would you suggest? What advantages and disadvantages would your law have for all citizens of the European Union? See also <https://bit.ly/2OMOE4F> for information about the European Union's powers.

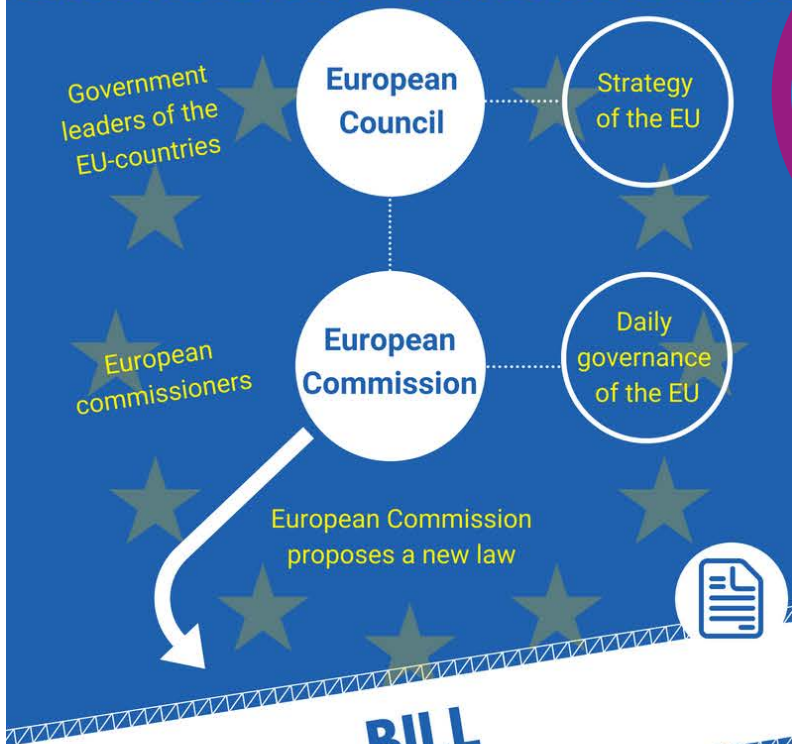






# EUROPEAN LEGISLATION

## HOW EU LAWS ARE MADE



Which country has the most Members in the European Parliament and how many do they have?

How many seats do the Netherlands have in the European Parliament?



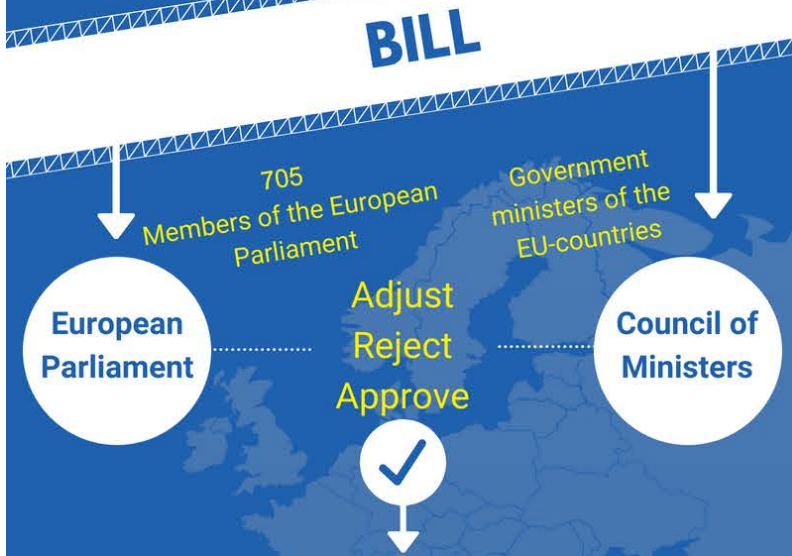
The EU decision-making process



How do MEPs represent me?



What do I get from the EU?



## IMPLEMENTING NEW LAW







**COMMISSION** official responsible for the internal market.



**COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

**AGREEMENT**

**EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**



Introduction in the Member States



# Chapter 3: The values of the European Union



The European Union is not just about trade, travel without obstacles, or study. There is far more that the EU countries aim to achieve by working together. The European Union aims to promote peace, its common values and the well-being of people in the EU. The values on which the EU is based are respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

These values are set out in the Treaty on European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

## Dignity

Dignity is the idea that everybody should be treated with respect. Human life is important. The death penalty is therefore prohibited in the European Union. Slavery and forced labour are prohibited.

## Freedom

This refers to the freedom to determine the course of your own life. For example, the right to start a family or to believe in a religion. Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU is very well known; it is about freedom of expression. It means that people in the European Union have the right to express their opinions. This right may be restricted in certain cases, for example because everyone needs to be treated in the same way or because one freedom comes into conflict with another freedom that must be respected.



Can you give an example of your own experience with freedom of speech?



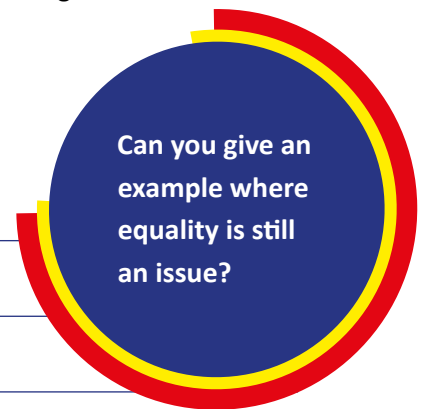


## Equality

Although each person is different, everyone must be treated equally. Discrimination based on any ground such as sex, colour, social origin, language, religion, political or other opinion, membership of a national minority, disability, age or sexual orientation is prohibited.

Equality between men and women is essential, particularly where work is concerned. Men and women are entitled to the same pay for the same job.

Children have the right to protection and care, and older people have the right to a dignified and independent life. People with disabilities should be able to participate in society.



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## Citizenship

In addition to being a Dutch national, you are also an EU citizen. As a European citizen, you can live, study and work in any EU country that you wish. If you are in a country in Asia where there is no Dutch embassy, an embassy representing another EU country has to help you instead. From age 18, you are (or will be) entitled to vote in European elections in the Netherlands, which means the elections to the European Parliament, which are held every five years.





### Democracy and the rule of law

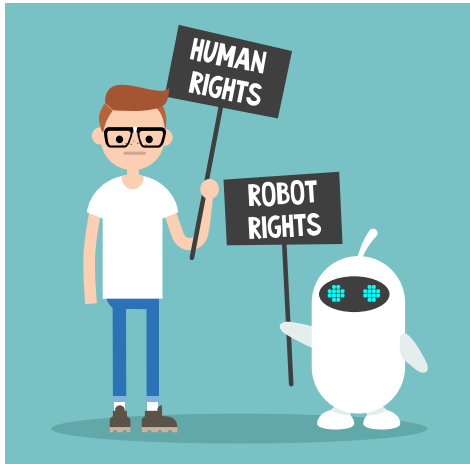
In countries where the rule of law prevails, the power of the authorities is limited by rules and laws. The principle of the 'separation of powers' requires government to be divided into three independent branches, exercising legislative, executive and judicial powers. In this way, citizens are protected against wrongful and arbitrary conduct by the public authorities. In a democracy, parliament is elected by the citizens. That is the case in all EU countries.



**Assignment:** Which EU institution(s) have  
1) executive power  
2) judicial power  
3) legislative power



Assignment: What European values do you consider to be most important and why?



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Bonus question

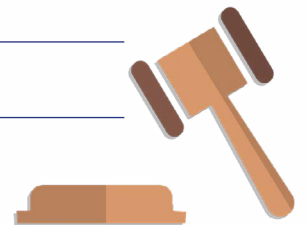
In Germany, a young man is accused of an act of vandalism but discharged a month later as he is found not to be guilty. Can this man be prosecuted again for the act of vandalism, according to the Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the EU?

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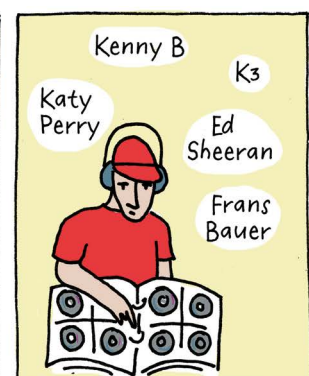
# Chapter 4: Which decisions are taken by the national government and which by the EU?

Many new laws passed in the EU countries are based on agreements that have been reached through the EU legislative procedure. The European Union is an important lawmaker for citizens living in the EU. This is logical, as some problems, such as clean drinking water, migration or climate, can be solved more effectively by working together with other countries. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions or other forms of air pollution do not stop at the national borders. Refugees come to Europe and travel to various different countries. There are no borders to the internet, either; that is obvious if you consider online shopping or watching films at home. It is therefore better to reach agreement on these subjects at the European level.

There is always a lot of debate to determine which aspects of life can be regulated by which public authority: the municipality, the province/region, the national authorities or the EU? Just as your town regulates certain things itself, because that is more practical than having the central government do it, there are also matters on which it is better for a national government to decide than the EU. National authorities decide on the level of pensions and taxes in a Member State and take decisions about the national army and police.



Take a look at [www.europa.eu](http://www.europa.eu) and look up the policy areas over which the EU exerts jurisdiction. What policy areas appeals to you?





Choose for each example whether the Netherlands or EU has primary decision-making power.

**Examples:**

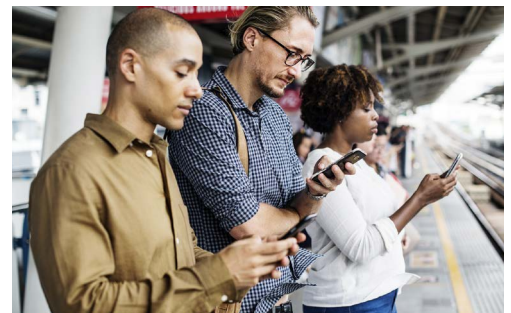
**National government    European Union**

1. Farmers in the EU have to take account of the living environment, consisting of wild plants and animals.
2. What subjects you learn at school.
3. Agreements about roaming and charges for calls within Europe.
4. The colour of the car number plates
5. Fishermen can only catch certain quantities of fish in European waters.
6. Army buying jet aircraft (JSFs) from the USA.
7. The date of retirement for citizens.
8. Products in the supermarket must be labelled so as to provide information about the ingredients, their nutritional value and any additives that they contain.

	National government	European Union
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		

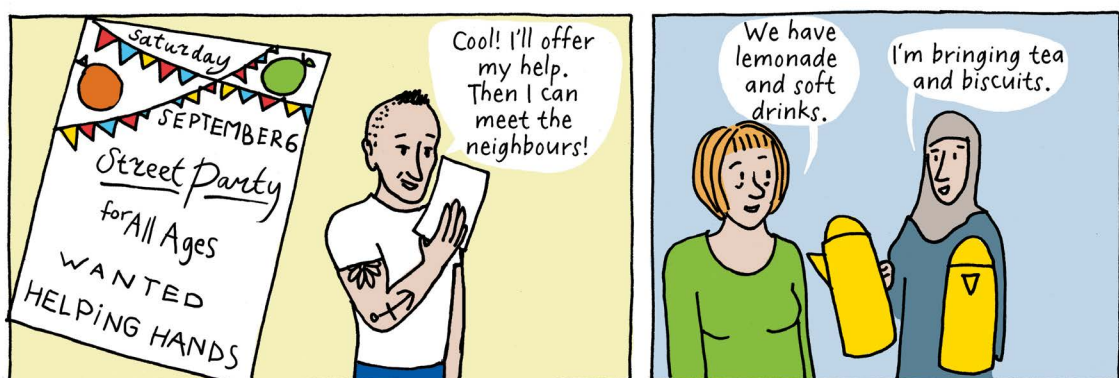
**What does the EU do for you?**

The EU does not, for example, concern itself with what items you buy or do not buy, or exactly what form these products should take. However, the EU does make sure that products are not dangerous to your health. Many products in supermarkets contain additives with E numbers. These are substances contained in food which the EU has approved.



The EU is also taking measures to ensure that everyone in Europe has access to the same services online. At present, if you use Netflix or YouTube abroad, it is possible that you may no longer be able to view your favourite films or videos. Some films and series shown on Netflix are not shown in every European country. Any restriction imposed by online shops or streaming services such as Netflix on the basis of nationality, place of residence or the location of the internet connection is called 'geo-blocking'.

The EU has adopted a law to counter geo-blocking. On 8 December 2018, this law officially entered into force, and you were able to continue watching your favourite Netflix series outside the Netherlands.





Erasmus+ is the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport in Europe. Within this programme, young people can attend a training or do an internship elsewhere in Europe. As an Erasmus student, you can apply for an Erasmus grant to make your studies abroad a reality.



Another issue with which the European Union concerns itself is clean drinking and bathing water. One of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights is the right to clean water. People in Europe have the right to a clean water supply, and the European Union ensures that water stays clean and its quality is improved. The European Union also monitors the quality of bathing waters in Europe every year. Each year, the European Environment Agency (EEA) announces where the best water for swimming in can be found.



The EU also supports many local projects. At [europaomdehoek.nl](https://www.europaomdehoek.nl) you can see what the EU is doing in the Dutch regions. Have a look yourself: <https://www.europaomdehoek.nl/projecten>.





# Chapter 5: How can you make your voice heard within the European Union?

Your vote counts. By voting, you can influence decision-making in the European Union. People have the right to vote.

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

- You do not need to register in order to vote
- You will receive your polling card at least 14 days before the elections; it will be sent to your home address.
- No later than 4 days before the elections, you will receive at home: the list of candidates and the addresses and opening hours of polling stations, including mobile polling stations.
- You will be able to cast your vote at a polling station near your home. You will need to take your polling card and an identity document with you.
- Job done!

### Via the European Parliament

After the 2024 European elections, the 720 Members who have been elected to the European Parliament by voters in the European Union will take their seats in that Parliament. They will be representatives of national political parties. Each national party can be affiliated to a European political group, which enables the party to organise itself more effectively. Each political group includes Members from different EU countries.



But luckily you do not need to remember all these European political groups. In the European elections you only need to choose a representative of a national party (which you can do on condition that you are old enough to vote in your country). In the EU, the next elections to the European Parliament will be held between 6 and 9 June 2024. By voting, you can make it clear what you think the European Union should do.

On the website [www.together.eu](http://www.together.eu) you can find more information about events regarding different European themes, such as migration, climate change, and the upcoming European elections.

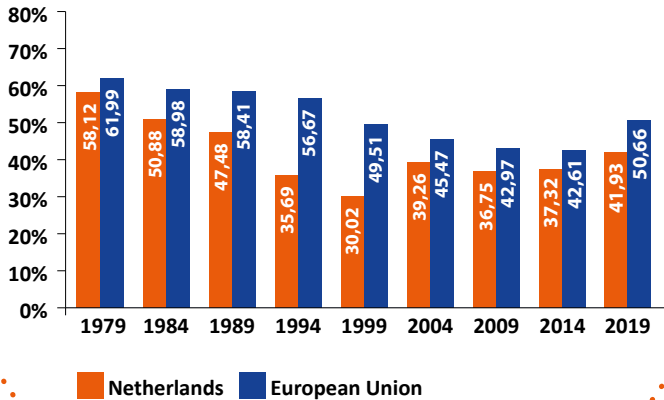




# European elections 2019: FACTS AND FIGURES

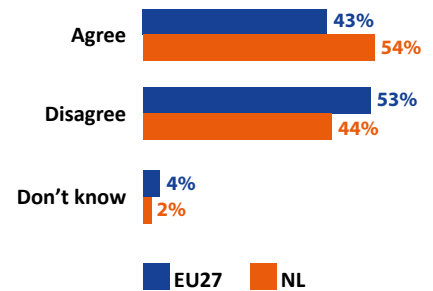
## Turn-out European elections over the years

Source: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/nl>



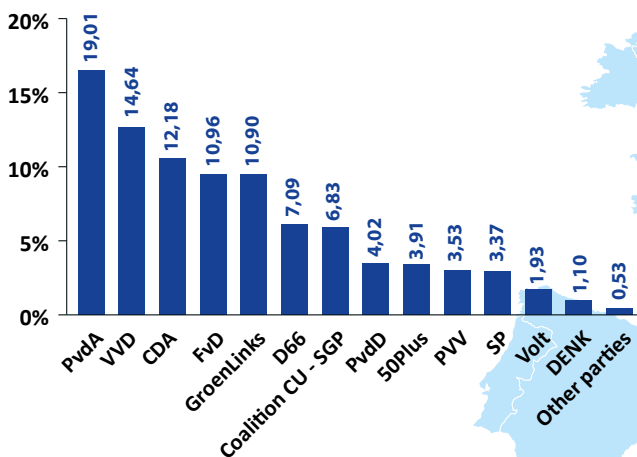
## My voice counts in the EU

Source: Eurobarometer 98 Winter 2022-2023 (Jan-Feb 2023)



## Results per national party

Source: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/nl>



**PvdA:** Partij van de Arbeid | **VVD:** Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie **CDA:** Christen-Democratisch Appèl  
**FvD:** Forum voor Democratie | **GroenLinks:** GroenLinks  
**D66:** Democraten 66 | **Coalition CU - SGP:** ChristenUnie - Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij  
**PvdD:** Partij voor de Dieren | **50Plus:** 50Plus  
**PVV:** Partij voor de Vrijheid | **SP:** Socialistische Partij  
**Volt:** Volt | **DENK:** DENK | **Other parties**

In a recent European Parliament survey of 1001 Dutch citizens, it was found that:

- 75% are interested in the European elections of 2024
- 72% feel the actions of the EU have an impact on their daily lives
- 59% are satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU
- 54% have a positive image of the EU

Source: Eurobarometer 99.1 Spring 2023 (March 2023)

### Via lobby groups for young people

The youth representatives on the Dutch National Youth Council (NJR) can give you the chance to let your voice be heard. They go around the country to listen to you and discover what you consider important, and then, at international conferences, they relay what you have told them. Together with a team of young, active volunteers, they organise campaigns and projects about the EU. They gather views from other young people and pass on their views in the debates they conduct with people who make the laws in the European Union. In this way, they ensure that the voice of young people is heard.

The Dutch National Youth Council also visits schools to give lessons

about the EU. If you are interested, please contact: [eucoordinator@njr.nl](mailto:eucoordinator@njr.nl)



Also follow the EU youth representatives on Twitter/X, Instagram or Facebook.

### Via the youth section of a political party

In the Netherlands, many political parties have youth sections which you can also join.

#### European political groups



*Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats*



*European People's Party*



*European Conservatives and Reformists*



*European United Left–Nordic Green Left*



*Greens–European Free Alliance*

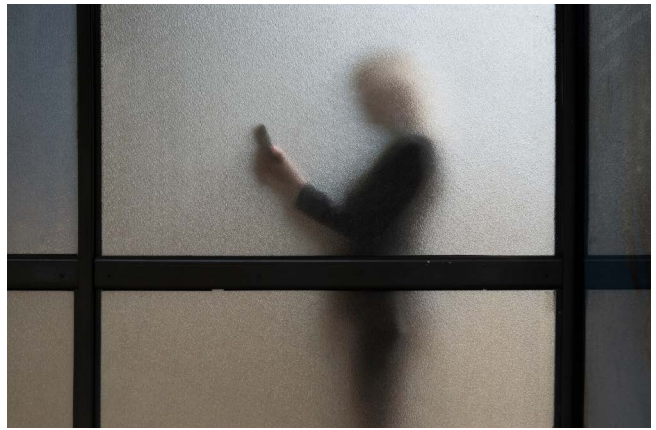
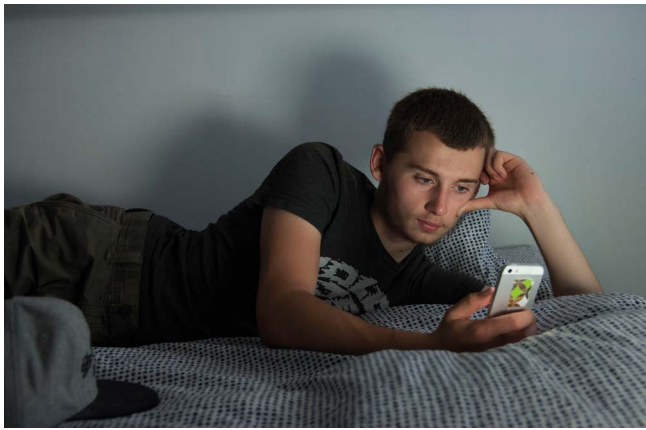


*Renew Europe*



*Identity and Democracy*





### Via social media

Many politicians, civil servants and organisations which are involved with the European Union are active on social media. You can follow them, for example, on Facebook, Twitter/X and Instagram and can even contact them through those same channels. Possible ways of doing so include Facebook via [@EPinNL](#). In addition, follow the European Parliament Liaison Office on Instagram via [@EPinNL](#). You can also let your voice be heard by going to [www.ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say\\_en](http://www.ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say_en) and giving your views on current and new EU legislation!

### By means of a European citizens' initiative

Another option is to propose an idea for a European law by means of a European citizens' initiative. A citizens' initiative must be supported by at least 1 million EU citizens from a minimum of seven of the 27 EU countries. A minimum number of signatures is also required from each of those seven countries. Members of the citizens' committee must be EU citizens who are eligible to vote for the European elections in their Member State! Citizens' initiatives cannot be run by organisations. However, organisations may promote or support a citizens' initiative. For further information, visit: <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/welcome?lg=en>

Which European political group would you vote for and why?

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## Publication details

This publication is intended for secondary school pupils who want to know more about the European Union and the 2024 European elections.

This publication has been prepared as part of the European Parliament Ambassador School programme.

The European Parliament Ambassador School (EPAS) programme is a programme aimed at secondary school students. It contributes greatly to European citizenship. The goal of the programme is to introduce students to the EU and the workings of European democracy. A large part of Dutch legislation comes from Brussels; the EU has a great influence on our daily lives. The EPAS programme is designed to teach young people, but above all, to let them experience what the EU is; how it originated and why; how the EU influences their daily lives, and how young people can influence EU policy. After all, they determine the future of Europe.

More than ten years ago, the EPAS programme was developed in the Netherlands. It was quickly embraced, not only in the Netherlands, but also in other Member States. In fact, the programme proved to be in such high demand that it was successfully implemented in all EU Member States, thereby creating a European network of schools. The EPAS teaching materials are available in the 24 languages of the EU.

Answers to the question in this module can be found inside the book cover!

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