

The Treaty of Maastricht (1992)

The Treaty of the European Union

The Treaty of the European Union (TEU), also known as Treaty of Maastricht for having been signed in that Dutch town, constitutes a turning point in the European integration process. By Modifying the previous treaties -Paris, Rome and Single European Act-, the initial economic objective of the Community, building a common market, was outstripped and, for the first time, a distinctive vocation of political union was claimed.

The Treaty of Maastricht changed the official denomination of the EEC. Henceforth, it will be known as European Union.

The term Union is used from the very beginning of the Treaty to clearly convey the advancement in a historical project. This way, the article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union affirms:

"This Treaty marks a new stage in the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe..."

The Treaty will have a structure based on [three pillars](#), according to the artificial parlance created by those who devised and edited it. The metaphor used refers to a TEU made up as an Greek temple sustained by three pillars:

- the first pillar, the central one, alludes to the Community dimension and comprises the arrangements set out in the EC, ECSC and Euratom Treaties, i.e. Union citizenship, Community policies, Economic and Monetary Union, etc.
- the new pillars, the lateral ones, are not based on supranational competences as the previous one, but in the cooperation among the governments: the second pillar is the [Common foreign and security policy \(CFSP\)](#) and the third one refers to [Police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters](#).

Which is the great difference between the so called community pillar and the new ones, based on intergovernmental cooperation? Basically it has to do with the procedure of taking decisions and with the competences of the community institutions. Meanwhile in the [community pillar](#) decisions passed on a majority will be more and more a general rule, and the role of community institutions is essential; in the so called [intergovernmental cooperation pillars](#) decisions must be taken take by common consent and the [Commission](#), the [European Parliament](#) or the [Court of Justice](#) have scarcely competences.

With regard to the first pillar, the community one, the TEU introduces important changes:

- The institution of a [Citizenship of the Union](#).
- The great step ahead: the [Economic and Monetary Union](#) (EMU). The introduction of an European currency, the Euro, was decided. It would take place following a three phase scheme:
 - From 1990 to 31 December 1993. Its objective would be a completely free circulation of capitals.
 - From 1 January 1994 to 1 January 1999. The member countries must coordinate their economic policies in order to achieve some objectives, fixed quantitatively and known as [convergence criteria](#): reduction of inflation and interest rates, control of government deficit and debt and respect of normal fluctuation margins provided for by the exchange-rate mechanism on the European Monetary system. The countries that reached those objectives could pass on to the third phase. During this phase, in the [European Council](#) held in December 1995 in Madrid, a definitive name was given to the new European unique currency, the *euro*.
 - From 1 January 1999 to 1 January 2002. Establishment of a [European Central Bank \(ECB\)](#), fixing of exchange rates and introduction of a single currency. The so called *Euroland*, countries that went through to the third

phase in 1999, consisted of eleven countries: Spain, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, Germany, Austria, Ireland and Finland. Four countries: Greece, United Kingdom, Denmark and Sweden remained for different reasons out of Euro area.

- The Treaty of the Union instituted as one of the objectives of the Union the search of social and economic cohesion among the diverse regions and countries of the community. To achieve it, it was agreed that a denominated [Cohesion Fund](#), created in 1994, would provide less developed regions and countries with financial aid focused on sectors as environment or transport infrastructures. The member States eligible to receive this aid were those whose GDP per capita was inferior to 90% of the Union average and comply with [convergence criteria](#). The *Cohesion countries* were Spain, the most benefited state, Greece, Portugal and Ireland.
- The TEU has also meant a noticeable advancement in the EU competences in fields as economic and monetary policy, industrial policy, Transeuropean networks and transport policy, educational networks, etc. In spite of this reforms, the common agricultural policy (CAP) still absorbed more than a half of the whole Union budget.
- As regards educational affairs, the TEU limited the Union role to promote intergovernmental cooperation. The European Union launched different programmes (Socrates, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci) to facilitate contacts and combined work among European students and teachers.
- Regarding the European Union institutions, the TEU introduced important changes: the [Parliament](#) increased its competences, the Ministers Council was denominated henceforth [Council of the European Union](#), the [Commission](#) received the official name of Commission of the European Communities, the [Court of Justice](#), the [Court of Auditors](#) and the [Economic and Social Committee](#) reinforce their competences, a [Committee of the Regions](#) was established, and, the

founding of the [European Central Bank](#) was foreseen at the beginning of the third phase of the economic and monetary union.

As far as the second pillar is concerned, the [Common foreign and security policy \(CFSP\)](#) allows to undertake common actions in foreign policy. The [European Council](#), where decisions must be adopted unanimously, agrees the principles and general orientations of the CFSP. The Treaty on European Union raised [Western European Union \(WEU\)](#) to the rank of an *integral part of the development of the Union* and commissioned it the mission of elaborating and implementing decisions and actions with defence implications.

The raw reality, in the form of the conflict in former Yugoslavia (Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo) has shown that, unfortunately, the construction of a UE Common Foreign and Security Policy was still a long term objective. USA and NATO went on being the main actors in defence affairs, and the European States have still a very weak political will and capacity to carry out their own policy.

The third pillar is based on [Police and judicial cooperation \(PJC\) in criminal matters](#) as terrorism, illegal immigration, asylum policy, drugs traffic, international crime, etc.

The foundation of the [Europol \(European Police Office\)](#), embryo of a future European police, was one of the most outstanding changes in this sphere. It is also necessary to point out that in 1990 the denominated [Schengen Convention](#), that developed the [Schengen Agreement](#), was signed so as to build an European Union without frontiers.

The difficult ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht

The ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht by the national parliaments was brimmed with difficulties. The symbolic year of 1992 was gloomed by three crisis that braked the pro-Europe impulse brought about by the signing in Maastricht of the TUE on 7 February 1992:

- Firstly, Europe went through a serious and deep economic crisis that caused governments and public opinion to focus on economic problems, setting aside the European construction;
- Secondly, there were serious monetary tensions that challenged the European Monetary System and the objective of the [economic and monetary union](#) (EMU);
- Thirdly, the EU appeared unable to implement a [common foreign and security policy](#) in the crisis of Yugoslavia, and kept powerless observing how war came back to our continent after many years of peace.

In these conditions, the first ratification process took place in Denmark. The NO to the Treaty of Maastricht won in a referendum for a scarce difference of 50.000 votes. A *euroscptical* wave extended to the other member countries. However, the ratifications of the Treaty were gradually taking place in the rest of the countries. In France, the YES won with a scarce 51.4% of the votes in favour of the TEU.

Negotiation with Denmark started and the Copenhagen government was granted with a special protocol, known, in the EU parlance, as *opting out* clause, that is to say, the possibility of not following the other members when the third phase of the EMU began -a similar clause got United Kingdom when TEU was signed- and in all defence matters. On 20 May 1993, Danish people approved in a referendum this agreement with 53.8% of YES votes.

The Treaty of Maastricht came into force on 2 November 1993. The Treaty foresaw their own future revision in view of the successive [enlargements](#) of the Union.

The development of the European Union (1993-1996) and the new enlargement to the "Europe of the Fifteen" (1995)

In December 1994, the mandate of [Jacques Delors](#), as [president of the European Commission](#) concluded. His substitute was the former Luxembourg prime minister, [Jacques Santer](#).

In spite of the difficulties that the Union was going through and the dramatic transformation of the world in those years, the candidatures to accession to the EU continued being submitted to Brussels: Austria in 1989, Malta and Cyprus in 1991, Finland, Norway and Switzerland in 1992. This last country retired its candidature a few months later after a referendum.

Negotiations with Austria, Sweden, Finland and Norway began in 1993 and were quite easy due to the high economic development of those countries. The ratification of the Treaties was accomplished in 1994. However, Norwegian people rejected again the accession to the EU. The NO to the European Union won in a referendum with 52.2% of the votes. It was the second time that Norway refused to join the community.

On 1 January 1995, the fourth [enlargement](#) of the EU took place with the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden. The *Europe of the Fifteen* was born.

In early 1996, in the [European Council](#) of Turin, an [Intergovernmental Conference \(IGC\)](#) commenced with the purpose of elaborating a new treaty that reformed the Treaty of Maastricht. The objectives were focused on developing the Europe of citizens, fomenting the EU role in international politics, reforming the institutions and tackling a new [enlargement](#) to the the applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe. After a long and intricate negotiation, the member States governments reach an agreement in the [European Council](#) held in Amsterdam on 16-17 June 1997. The [Treaty of Amsterdam](#) was born.