

# Studying histories of ideas to learn about continuity and change



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Juan Carlos' strategy – *Studying the history of ideas to learn about continuity and change* – requires students to use key skills involved in historical thinking – chronological and geographic placement of important events – to contextualise the evolution of influential ideas that have shaped history. Chronologically and geographically locating events related and/or integral to the evolution of an idea could help students understand influences, relations, and exchanges that determined, and continue to determine, the complex construction of ideas that currently prevail on the continent.

This lesson plan is part of a five-part teaching strategy series designed and tested by teachers for teachers. The overall aim of Sharing European Histories is to help young people understand the complexity, multiplicity, and transnational character of European history and recognise how history can engage everyone in understanding Europe. For more information, go to [sharingeuropeanhistories.eu](http://sharingeuropeanhistories.eu).



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# **Studying histories of ideas to learn about continuity and change**

JUAN CARLOS OCAÑA

The 'histories of idea' encourages students to contextualize ideas that have influenced European history and challenges them to discuss complex and divisive issues surrounding these ideas.

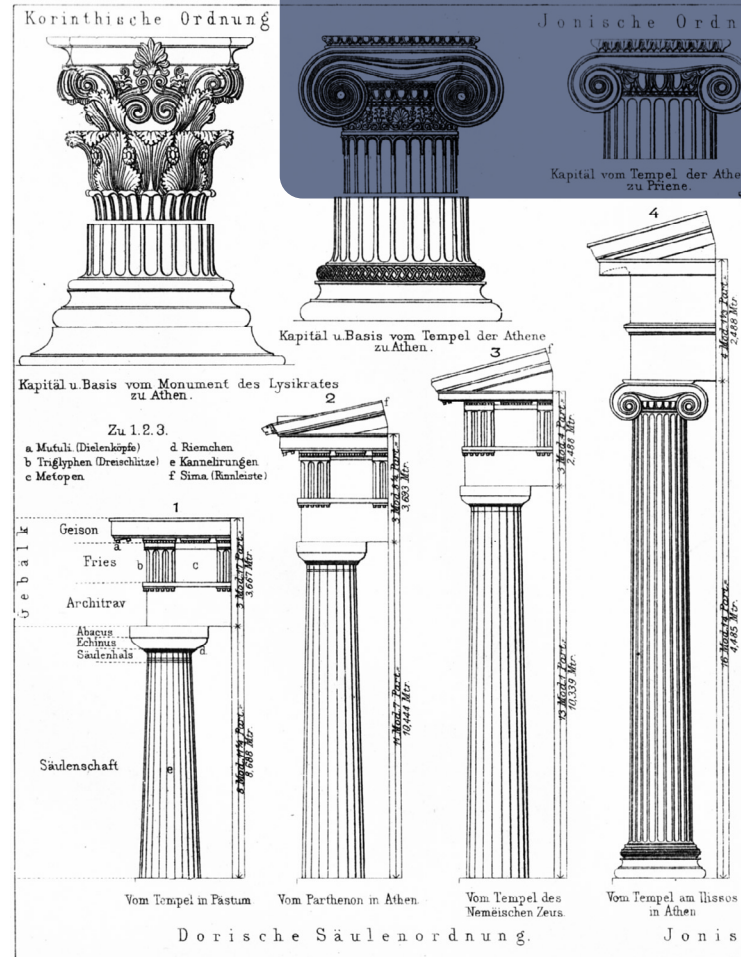


## OVERVIEW OF THE STRATEGY

The strategy requires students to use key skills involved in historical thinking – chronological and geographic placement of important events – to contextualise the evolution of influential ideas that have shaped history.

Chronologically and geographically locating events related and/or integral to the evolution of an idea could help students understand the influences, relations, and exchanges that determined, and continue to determine, the construction of ideas that currently prevail on the continent.

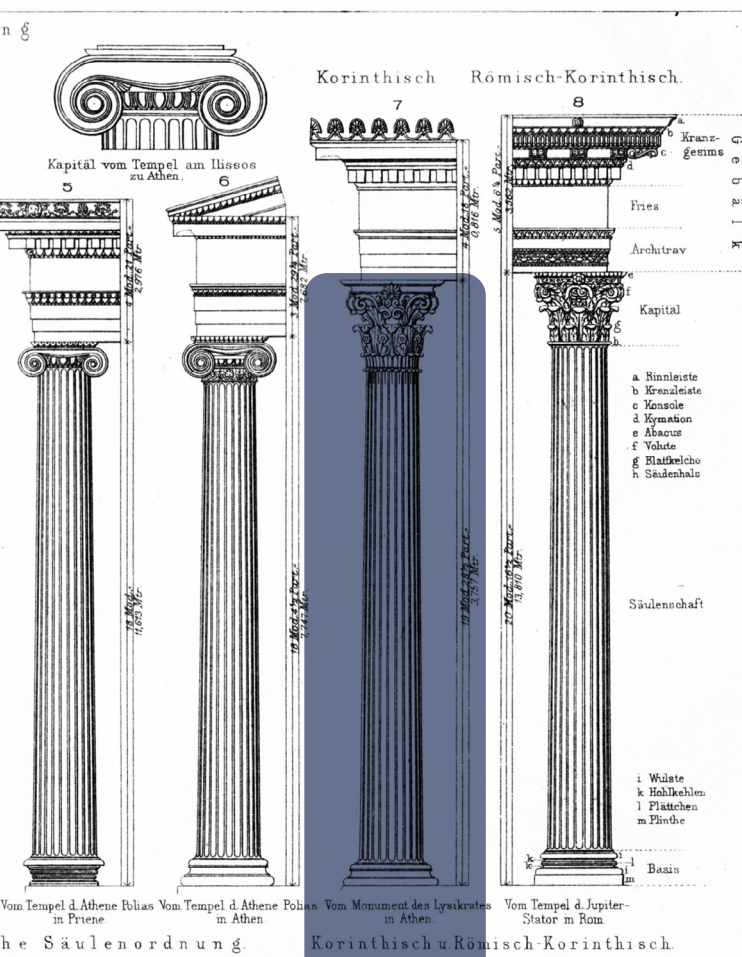
The study of these ideas' evolution, quite often characterized by conflict and controversy, offers a great opportunity to engage students with history from the perspective of difference and diversity. The proposed strategy also allows students to discuss complex and divisive issues that have informed the evolution of ideas on the continent.




## WHAT IS THE AIM OF THE STRATEGY?

The strategy is primarily aimed at teaching the evolution of widely-shared ideas. Chronological thinking and geographic placing will help students to contextualize contemporary prevailing ideas.

The strategy also allows the students to discuss some controversial issues that have marked the development of the main ideas that are prevalent in Europe nowadays.







**What do you  
need to do  
to use this  
strategy  
in your  
classroom?**



## STEP 1: CHOOSE AN IDEA

We cannot understand the present-day without considering the influential ideas that have shaped it. An idea can relate to an economic and/or political system – capitalism, communism, authoritarianism, autocracy, democracy, meritocracy, federalism, unitarianism, populism, liberalism, etc. – or belief system – pacifism, militarism, humanism, theism, etc.

An idea can be presented as aforementioned – a political, economic, or other belief system – or it can be something more specific that falls under the larger umbrella of a system or serves as one of its core tenets. For example, ‘European unity’ falls under the umbrella of federalism. Examples of core tenets/underlying ideas are ‘property is privately owned’ (capitalism) or ‘use of violence is never justified’ (pacifism).

An idea should be:

- Influential – play a role in the shaping of the present-day.
- Widely-held – of relevance to many countries, not just your own.
- Easy to define – not rely on extensive prior knowledge of political or economic theory.
- Traceable by events across time – able to point to distinct moments when the idea might have evolved.

Choosing an appropriate idea is essential to the strategy. Select an idea that is of interest and engaging to your students and adaptable to your curriculum.

## STEP 2: CHOOSE EVENTS AND DATES

To carry out this activity, you must first understand for yourself how the idea evolved, for whom it evolved, and what factors influenced or triggered changes in thinking. Following this, you need to carefully select key events that students will arrange chronologically and place geographically.

To compile an effective collection of events or influences (publications, inventions, etc.), consider the following criteria:

- They must relate to the development of the idea.
- When possible, they should have an international reach.
- Where possible, they should affect a diverse range of actors (socio-economic, ethnic, gender/sex, etc.).

Ideas – such as economic and political systems like capitalism and communism – will have geographically diverse roots from the very beginning as they took hold in a wide range of countries at similar points in time. Other ideas might not offer as great a variance at the beginning of their evolution, rather diverse interpretations will be seen and geographically dispersed across the continent later on.

## STEP 3: PREPARE FOR DISCUSSION

After chronologically and geographically locating key events related to the evolution of the idea, consider the phases or shifts in thinking involved in the idea’s evolution.

For example, what was the interpretation of ‘inalienable human rights’ in the 16th century versus the 18th versus the 20th? Which groups qualified as ‘human’ in these different interpretations? White elite males, all white males, all white people regardless of sex, all people regardless of religion, all people regardless of race, all people regardless of sexual orientation?

This part of the strategy allows students to deepen their comprehension of the idea and its evolution through discussion. If it makes it easier, consider creating a guide for yourself, like the one seen at the end of this strategy (Figure 1), to assist with unpacking the idea’s evolution. Tie these changes back to events that have been arranged in the timeline and discussed.

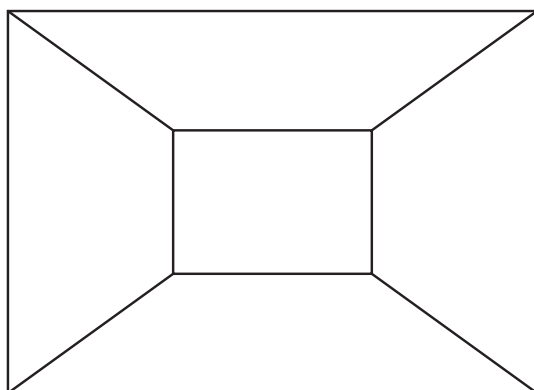
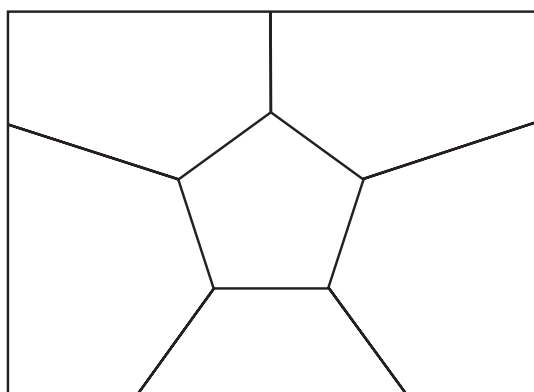


## STEP 4: USE THE MATERIALS IN THE CLASSROOM

### Activity 1

*This activity gets students to familiarise themselves with the basics of the idea and understand how others might interpret it.*

Divide the class into groups of four or five and provide each group with one large worksheet and a marker each. Each area radiating from the centre (below) is a space for each group member to write down their responses.



Ask the students what comes to mind when the idea is mentioned. Provide time for each student to share their recorded responses with their group without discussion or debate from the other students. Ask groups to collectively decide on the five most important/significant responses and record them in the centre of the worksheet. All group members must agree on the top five items.

Repeat the exercise on a class-scale. Each group's representative will record their group's top five responses in an area radiating from the center of the master sheet and share their reasoning. Ask for the class to come up with a final top-five and develop a definition of the idea collectively.

### Activity 2

*This activity gets students to familiarise themselves with specific events related to the idea in-depth.*

Pairs or small groups of students are each given a different event from the past. The pairs/groups are asked to research the event they have been given and prepare five-minute presentations to be given in front of the class.

### Activity 3

*This activity gets students to arrange events on a timeline and create a visual contextualisation aid.*

Pairs/groups draft on a piece of paper basic information on their respective key event (including the date and location) and arrange themselves chronologically to construct a "human timeline" that allows the class to visualize the idea's evolution. This timeline should then be transferred and written down in timetables on a worksheet.

Following this, students will locate where these key events affecting the evolution of the idea took place on a blank map on their worksheets. In this way, students will create a visual aide that they can use to contextualise the idea's evolution across time and space throughout the remainder of the teaching strategy.



## Discussion

*This discussion gets students to deepen their comprehension of the idea and its evolution through debate.*

Class discussion will follow the evolution of the idea. The aim of the discussion is to enable students to understand what influenced the evolution of the idea. It is also an opportunity to identify the different phases of the idea's evolution. Some topics to discuss:

- Key events and turning points;
- Phases of the ideas evolution;
- Pace of change – Gradual or expedient?;
- Various actors involved – Who gained? Who lost?;
- Various philosophies or movements that might have influenced the idea; etc.

Throughout this exercise, ask students to explain what might have accounted for the different phases or shifts in thinking and encourage them to tie these changes back to events that have been arranged in their timelines. Teachers should help students using question prompts. For example:

- If you had to choose just one event as the most important for this idea's evolution, which one would you select?
- Which of these events could be deemed not significant enough and non-essential to understanding the spread of the idea?
- How popular is the idea in the present-day? What might account for its popularity or lack thereof?



## WHAT OBSTACLES COULD A TEACHER USING THIS STRATEGY FACE?

### **Reading ability**

Students need to be reasonably confident readers to do the work as exemplified here. Alternatively, less confident readers could be paired with more confident peers and/or stories could be translated, reduced in length, read as a class, or turned into sound recordings.

### **Conceptual understanding**

Teachers will need to review events and sources bearing in mind the prior knowledge of their students. There may well be terms and concepts that need explaining or simplifying to make sources accessible to all.

### **Question prompting**

Some students will be able to analyse sources without prompt questions. Others will need prompt questions. Examples of these are given throughout the strategy and in the exemplar material. They should give teachers an idea about the detail required of question prompts and can be adapted to suit other ideas/topics.

### **Adapting this strategy to the national curriculum**

Depending on the national curriculum, it might be easier or more difficult for teachers to adapt this strategy totally or partially. Teachers should consider choosing ideas that overlap in whole or in part with the existing curriculum or that can be contained to a certain period or geographic area to incorporate into the existing curriculum.

## HOW COULD YOU MAKE THIS STRATEGY MORE INCLUSIVE?

### **Supporting lower attaining students**

Some students might struggle with the amount of reading involved in the research of an event related to the chosen idea. You could provide pre-written packets of information on the key events to substitute organic research to tackle this. Equally, pairing a lower attaining student with a higher attaining student could support them with the research and reading requirements.

### **Challenging higher attaining students**

For your higher attaining students, you can add an additional activity and discussion. Pair the groups and assign each pairing a tension related to the idea. The groups in the pairing will be given materials that support opposing views on the tension. For example, for the idea of 'European unity', a tension up for debate is the merit of a single currency. One of the groups in the pairing will be given materials that support the use of a single currency while the other will receive materials against the use of a single currency. You can either give each pair of groups different tensions and opposing positions to read about or give all pairings the same. Other examples of tensions related to 'European unity' could be the merits of a common army, common borders, and common healthcare.

After the pairings have received their respective materials, ask them to read them and outline their groups position. The groups can then either (a) debate amongst themselves or (b) present their positions and debate in front of the class. This activity and discussion set will require students to skim for information, think more critically, and develop persuasive arguments.







# Example of the strategy in action

**FEDERALISM: EUROPEAN UNITY**

timat Rock, die Dogge Irland im Rücken. König Oskar von Schweden sieht „gespannt“ auf Russland. Frankreich dem Nichtstun hingibt. Belgien — hat ihm schon! Deutschland und Oesterreich-Ungarn teilen gute deutsche H „Wille“ Italien ist treu bis zum Tod — dem Sieger. Sicilien vulkanischer Boden, sonst aber ganz ruhig. Montönig von Durazzo — Albanien — verlässt sein Volk. Griechenland und die Türkei haben sich zum Fressen gern. Carolus von Rumänien? Russland will das Ganze verschlingen, es wird ihm aber nicht gelingen!

This example uses a collection of events and sources from the last century. It covers a period from the 1920s up to today.

## WHY 'EUROPEAN UNITY'?

It is one of the core examples of the difference of political and economic ideas that characterize contemporary Europe. While it falls under the umbrella term 'federalism', it necessarily incorporates other ideas, such as liberalism and democracy. This idea is:

- Influential – it is a key issue in current Europe political and economic debate.
- Widely-held – a growing number of Europeans have opted for defending this idea instead of nationalist ideas that conformed Europe since the 19th century.
- Easy to define – the idea of economic and political integration is easy to be defined and understood.
- Traceable by events across time – there are distinct moments that can be selected to track the idea's development.

The idea of European unity can be traced back to the Middle Ages. During the Carolingian dynasty to Pödebrady, in 1464, a Hussite King of Bohemia proposed a union of European, Christian nations in opposition to the Turks who had taken Constantinople. The Abbot Charles de Saint-Pierre proposed the creation of a European league of eighteen sovereign states with a common treasury, an economic union, and no borders. Marquis de Lafayette (France) and Tadeusz Kościuszko (Polish-Lithuania), defended the idea of a United States of Europe, similar to the recently created United States of America. In the nineteenth century, intellectuals such as Mazzini, Saint-Simon, and Victor Hugo imagined variations of a United States of Europe. Napoleon's imperialistic ideas for Europe also bore notions of European Unity.

However, we will focus on events beginning with the First World War leading up until the present day. In this period, the idea of

European Unity developed in a way that is recognizable to us today.

Before the lesson, you must understand how the idea evolved and what factors influenced or triggered evolution or changes in the idea. To carry out this lesson, students will arrange events chronologically and place them geographically.

### Activity 1

Students will get to know about the idea of European unity. Most probably, different conceptions about this notion will turn up among the students. This will be a good occasion to clarify the main features of the idea. The teacher will gain a better understanding of students' knowledge of this issue, which will help in the adaptation of the strategy to their level of comprehension.

The class is divided into four or five groups. Each group is provided with a large worksheet and a marker.

Ask the students what comes to mind when they think of European unity. Provide time for each student in the group to share their recorded responses with the group without discussion or debate from the other students. Ask groups to collectively decide on the five most important/significant responses and record them in the center of the worksheet. All group members agree on the top five items.

Repeat the exercise on a class-scale. Each group's representative will record their group's top five responses in an area radiating from the center of the master sheet and share their reasoning. Ask for the class to come up with a final top five and develop a definition of the idea collectively.



### Activity 2

This activity aims to make the students familiar with the main events that marked this idea's evolution. The teacher shows the students a presentation with all the events they are going to work about. The students are assigned an event to research. They then give a short three-minute presentation to the class on their findings.

### Activity 3

*This activity gets students to arrange events related to the idea of European unity on a timeline and create a visual contextualization aid.*

Pairs/groups draft on a piece of paper basic information on their respective key event (including the date and location) and arrange themselves chronologically to construct a "human timeline" that allows the class to visualize the idea's evolution. This timeline should then be transferred and written down in time-tables on their respective worksheets. *See example worksheet used in the exemplar.* Following this, students will locate where these key events affecting the evolution of the idea took place on a blank map on their worksheets. In this way, students will create a visual aide that they can use to contextualize the idea's evolution across time and space throughout the remainder of the teaching strategy.

### Discussion

*This discussion gets students to deepen their comprehension of the idea and its evolution through debate.*

The teacher should organize the debate following the chronological evolution of the idea. This is a way to obtain a discussion that could be relevant for the students' historical thinking.

Once the students have achieved in the previous activities a chronological and geographical understanding of the evolution of the idea of the European unity, the debate will help them to understand what factors influenced the evolution of the idea. Once we know what, when and where, this strategy must deal with the why and what reasons explain the idea's evolution.

The discussion will help the students identify the historical circumstances that marked the evolution of the idea and identify the different stages of this evolution. Some points that could be discussed are:

- Which were the key events and turning points in the progression of the European unity idea? Which were the main setbacks?
- In which phases could we divide the evolution of the idea?
- In which historical moments did the progression accelerate? In which moments, did the idea spread over the continent? In which periods did the idea go into crisis?
- How did the great historical events affect the evolution of the idea of European Unity (World wars, economic crises, cold war, end of the Soviet bloc, pandemic, etc.)
- What social agents were supportive of the idea? Which ones were reluctant to dump all nationalisms?
- In which ideologies is the idea of European unity sustained? Which political ideas are enemies of the European integration?
- Who were the main personalities that promoted or opposed the idea?

Throughout this exercise, ask students to explain what might have accounted for the different phases or shifts in thinking and encourage them to tie these changes back to events that have been arranged in their timelines. Teachers should help students using question prompts. For example:

- If you had to choose just one event as the most important for the European unity idea's evolution, which one would you select?
- If you had to select a period (interwar period, Cold War, etc.) as the most relevant for this idea's progression, which one would you choose?
- If you had to select a setback (De Gaulle's rejection to British access, Brexit, economic crisis, etc.) as the most harmful to this idea's progression, which one would you choose?
- Which of these events could be deemed not significant enough and non-essential to understanding the spread of the idea?
- How popular is the idea in the present-day? What might account for its popularity or lack thereof? Which are the main points that might be behind the idea of European unity nowadays?

## ADDITIONAL SUITABLE TOPICS FOR THIS STRATEGY

- Inalienable human rights
- Property is privately owned
- Use of violence is never justified
- Separation of Church and State
- Equality
- European unity
- Corporate social responsibility
- Suffrage





**EXAMPLE WORKSHEET**  
**- TIMELINE**

Seventeen events that show the evolution of European unity as an idea.

EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT	EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT	EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT
> <b>YEAR</b>	> <b>YEAR</b>	> <b>YEAR</b>

EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT	EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT	EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT
> <b>YEAR</b>	> <b>YEAR</b>	> <b>YEAR</b>

EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT	EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT	EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT
> <b>YEAR</b>	> <b>YEAR</b>	> <b>YEAR</b>



EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT	EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT	EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT
> <b>YEAR</b>	> <b>YEAR</b>	> <b>YEAR</b>

EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT	EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT	EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT
> <b>YEAR</b>	> <b>YEAR</b>	> <b>YEAR</b>

EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT
> <b>YEAR</b>

EVENT HISTORICAL CONTEXT
> <b>YEAR</b>



## **EXAMPLE WORKSHEET**

### **- BLANK MAP**

Locate these eleven events on the map of Europe

This can be done in two ways:

- Students use a single contemporary map of Europe
- Students use three maps of Europe that correspond to the three great historical period this example covers:
  - The Interwar Period (1919-1939)
  - Cold War (1945-1991)
  - Europe after the Cold War (1991-present day)

## THE INTERWAR PERIOD (1919-1939)



## COLD WAR (1945-1991)



## EUROPE AFTER THE COLD WAR (1991-PRESENT DAY)





# Idea

TIME PERIOD	DID THE IDEA CHANGE? HOW?	ACTORS	INFLUENCES (PHILOSOPHIES, EVENTS, MOVEMENTS)	WHO GAINS AS A RESULT OF THE CHANGE?	WHO LOSES AS A RESULT OF THE CHANGE?

## EXAMPLE TIMELINE – EUROPEAN UNITY

### Pan-Europa movement

#### Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi – 1923

Coudenhove-Kalergi's thought was conceived after WWI. The possibility of European Unity sprung from an urgent need to forestall war. His first book, *Pan-Europa* (1923), contained a form to join the Pan-Europa Movement, which held its first Congress in 1926 in Vienna. In 1927, Aristide Briand was chosen as the honorary leader of the Pan-Europa movement. Public figures, such as Albert Einstein, Thomas Mann, and Sigmund Freud, took part in Pan-Europa congresses.

Coudenhove-Kalergi was the founder of the first movement who fought for a united Europe. Even though he appreciated socially democratic principles, his ambition was to set up a conservative society that overruled democracy with “the social aristocracy of the spirit.”

The only hope for a Europe frequently plagued by war was to become a federation. Coudenhove-Kalergi thought that Pan-Europe would be a more flexible and competitive Austria-Hungary, with English spoken by all in addition to their native tongues.

### Memorandum on the organization of a regime of European federal Union

#### Briand, Aristide – 1930

Aristide Briand was a French politician who played an outstanding role in international relations after World War I. In 1926, he and Gustav Stresemann received the Nobel Peace Prize for their work facilitating Franco-German reconciliation. In 1928, Briand signed the Briand-Kellogg Pact intended to prevent war.

In his well-known address to the Assembly of the League of Nations (1929), Briand defended the creation of a ‘federal link’ between the European countries. This ‘European Union’, open

only to European members of the League of Nations, would act in a harmonized way under the auspices of the League of Nations. It would involve establishing a ‘Common Market’ through a ‘Customs Union’. The conference of European States which was supposed to be organised to debate these proposals was never held.

In most of Europe, the project faced a strong nationalist resistance. The 1930s economic crisis put an end to this project.

#### Churchill and the Council of Europe – 1949

The Council of Europe, founded in 1949, is an international organisation whose purpose is to defend human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in Europe. It has 47 member states.

On 19 September 1946, at the University of Zurich, Churchill gave a speech on European unity. Churchill was the first eminent politician to take sides in a debate so far held by a few activists. Churchill aimed his address specifically at the world leaders.

Churchill encouraged Franco-German reconciliation and proposed a sort of “United States of Europe”... but without the involvement of Great Britain. Churchill set the scene for a future federation of Western European nations and favoured a European third way, finding its niche between the USA and the USSR. He defended the creation of a Council of Europe as well.

#### Jean Monnet – The man who inspired the birth of the European Community.

In 1943, Monnet joined the French Committee of National Liberation, the French government in exile fighting against the Axis. At this time, he had already claimed the need for Europe's Union to regain and retain peace. During a meeting of this committee in 1943, Monnet stated:

*“There will be no peace in Europe if the states are reconstituted on the basis of national sovereignty...The countries of Europe are too small to guarantee their peoples the necessary prosperity and social development. The European states must constitute themselves into a federation...”*

During the international tensions of the first Cold War, Monnet recognised it was time to take real steps towards European unity. He began working on the idea of a European Community.

On 9 May **1950**, Robert Schuman, France’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, presented the Schuman Declaration. Urged and drafted by Monnet, it proposed that all German-French production of coal and steel be placed under one High Authority.

After the **1954** failure to set up a European Defence Community, Monnet created the Action Committee for the United States of Europe – established to rekindle the spirit of European integration. It became one of the leading driving organisations behind many developments in European integration.

### **Robert Schuman – Architect of the European integration project.**

Robert Schuman, the French foreign minister between 1948 and 1952, is considered one of the founding fathers of European unity.

In cooperation with Jean Monnet, he drafted the renowned Schuman Plan. Published on 9 May 1950, this day is now regarded as the birthdate of the European Union. Schuman proposed joint control of coal and steel production – essential materials for the arms industry. The basic idea was that an inability to singlehandedly control coal and steel production would reduce the likelihood of war.

### **Treaty of Rome**

#### **The birth of the European Community.**

The Treaty of Rome gave birth to the European Economic Community (EEC), the most well-known European Community (EC). It was signed on 25 March **1957** by Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and West Germany and came into force on 1 January 1958. Formally known as the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, it continues to be one of the two most important treaties in the modern-day European Union (EU).

#### **The intricate British accession.**

After initially rejecting the European Economic Community (EEC), the United Kingdom warmed to the idea of membership following the 1956 Suez Crisis – an international incident that cooled the relationship between the UK and the US. The UK became aware of the isolation that their initial refusal had caused.

#### **De Gaulle’s rejection.**

On 14 January **1963**, General de Gaulle declared his opposition to the United Kingdom’s application for accession to the EEC. He believed the United Kingdom to be a Trojan horse representing hidden US interests. According to the French leader, British accession would lead to the Americanisation of Europe. He had serious doubts about the UK’s commitment to Europe and believed it would be better for the Common Market to become more integrated rather than accept the UK.

When Charles de Gaulle’s tenure as President of the French Republic ended in **1969**, negotiations with the UK were relaunched. In **1973**, it joined the European Community alongside Ireland and Denmark.

### **The Maastricht Treaty**

#### **The birth of the European Union.**

The Maastricht Treaty founded the European Union, created the pillar structure that remained until the Lisbon Treaty (**2009**), greatly expanded the EEC/EU’s competences, and led to the creation of the single European currency – the euro (introduced on 1 January **2002**).

The two new pillars – bringing the total to three – created by the Maastricht Treaty were the Common Foreign and Security Policy and Cooperation in the Fields of Justice and Home Affairs.

The Treaty established the European Union's citizenship, which was given to the citizens of member states in addition to their national citizenship. EU citizenship affords certain rights, freedoms, and legal protections to all of its citizens. European Union citizens are entitled to freedom of movement, settlement, and employment all over the EU. They are free to trade and transport goods, services, and capital across EU borders without restricting capital movements or fees. They have the right to vote in and run as candidates in local and European elections in the country of their residence. Lastly, the Treaty established an elected European Parliament and allowed citizens to bring cases directly to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in Luxembourg.

### **The enlargement to the Southern new democracies.**

The mid-1970s saw the end of dictatorial regimes in Greece, Portugal, and Spain. These new democracies intended to join a union based on democracy, human rights, and economic development.

Greece joined in **1981**. Spain and Portugal's accession to the EEC on 1 January **1986** made the Union the 'Europe of the Twelve.' Despite concerns about Spain and Portugal introducing economic problems – tied to agriculture and the free movement of workers – the Mediterranean's geopolitical importance and the previous enlargement successes left the two countries in a favorable position.

### **The end of the Cold War and the fourth enlargement.**

The fall of the Berlin Wall (**1989**) and the end of the Soviet Union (**1991**) caused a geopolitical earthquake in Europe and the world. For the first time since 1957, it was possible to aspire to an all-inclusive union of the European states. However, such success was far from

guaranteed, as the violent end of Communist Yugoslavia showed.

The enlargement of the EU to include parts of the former Eastern Bloc began with Germany's reunification in **1990**.

Austria, Finland, and Sweden – neutral countries during the Cold War – also decided to join the EU. As these countries had already established close economic ties with the European Community, this enlargement process took place quietly. Austria, Finland, and Sweden became EU members on 1 January **1995**.

### **Eastern enlargement**

Central and Eastern Europe's legacy was one of dictatorship. These countries wanted to consolidate their new democracies and gain access to the EU and NATO to prevent falling into the Russian sphere of influence once again.

In the end, eight Central and Eastern European countries – the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia – plus two Mediterranean countries – Malta and Cyprus – acceded to the EU on 1 May **2004**. This accession was the largest single EU enlargement in terms of people and countries. This enlargement was considered as "an historical opportunity" and "a moral imperative."

It was clear that the EU desired to admit these countries as members despite their being less developed than Western Europe. Not long after, Romania and Bulgaria acceded to the EU on 1 January **2007**. Healing the wounds of the Balkan war has been a long process. Croatia eventually joined the EU on 1 July **2013**. Albania and several successor states of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have adopted EU integration as a foreign policy aim.



## **Economic crisis and the surge of Euroscepticism**

The **2008** financial crisis spurred a surge in Euroscepticism in several EU countries.

### **Brexit**

After a **2016** referendum in which 51.9% of voters voted to leave the EU, the UK became the first country to voluntarily end its membership. The Brexit withdrawal agreement has played a significant role in relations between the two entities, especially during the transition period, which is expected to last until 31 December 2020, prior to the country's official departure from the Union on 31 January 2020.

The exit of the UK is the outcome of a long history of confrontation and distrust during its membership. However, Brexit was not a unanimous decision, and the decision to leave has dramatically divided British society.

### **Coronavirus crisis and European solidarity**


The COVID-19 pandemic has taken much of the EU by surprise. Many – including Italy, Spain, France, Belgium, and the soon-to-be-former member UK, have been badly hit. As French President Macron said to the Financial Times in an interview on 17 April 2020: “It is a moment of truth (for European Union).”

Unfortunately, the EU response to the pandemic has been characterized by division. The Netherlands, Germany, and other more fiscally conservative countries have rejected radical measures of solidarity, such as pooling the debt in the form of “Eurobonds.”

After lengthy negotiations, the EU reached a historical agreement in July **2020** – a €1.82 trillion budget and the creation of a coronavirus recovery package. The pandemic has laid bare both the triumphs and the shortcomings of the Union. Only time will tell what lasting effects this health crisis will have on the EU, its citizens, and its governance style.

## **ADDITIONAL SUITABLE TOPICS FOR THIS STRATEGY**

- Inalienable human rights
- Property is privately owned
- Use of violence is never justified
- Separation of Church and State
- Equality
- European unity
- Corporate social responsibility
- Suffrage



**Set in stone,  
history blinds.  
Set in motion,  
it opens minds.**

**HISTORY TEACHING MATTERS.**

Find out how you can make a difference:

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