

50

ways
forward

Europe's
best
successes



European
Union



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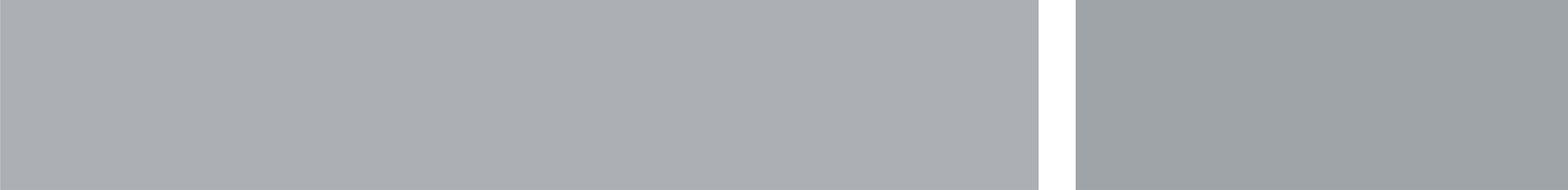
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50 ways forward

Europe's best successes

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50 Ways forward Europe's Best Successes

It may not have escaped your attention that 2007 marks the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome. To celebrate, the European Commission is publishing this new booklet, '50 ways forward – Europe's Best Successes', to highlight the importance of the European Union for you and I.

This booklet aims to show you – in an attractive and entertaining way – how people in Europe, and beyond, have benefited, and will continue to benefit, from European co-operation.

The European Union (EU) is a family of 27 countries and 490 million citizens, working together for peace and prosperity. The 1957 Treaty of Rome is one of the founding acts of the EU. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary, this booklet offers you 50 stories about what the EU has achieved.

Each of the stories is written in a lively, friendly style, which assumes no prior knowledge about a particular subject on your part. Every one has at least one web link for you to follow, if you want to find out more about a subject next time you on-line. Some even have a link you can use to watch a short video about the subject.

Once you start browsing through the booklet, you may well be surprised at the range of success stories. And, let's not forget, these are only a small sample. You can find out, for example, how millions of young people now study abroad, how '.eu' is building a new European identity on the internet, or what Europe has done to help bring down the cost of air travel. There is a story about how European police catch more criminals by co-operating better, how we are producing cleaner cars and even why travelling with your pets is easier now. Recent successes share the booklet with enduring successes spanning Europe's first half century. Overall, the emphasis is on celebrating Europe's past achievements while looking forward to the next 50 years.

The 50 ways forward booklet is a 'sister' publication to the website of the same name, which features a full virtual gallery tour and can be found here: <http://europa.eu/success50>.

Getting mobile – working in Europe today

Did you know that being a citizen of an EU country entitles you to live and work in any other EU country under the same terms and conditions as that country's own nationals? Although over 53% of you consider this right one of the most important things about the EU, only around 1.5% of you actually do it, a figure which has not really changed for 30 years.

Working in a country other than your own is usually a great experience. It gives you the chance to learn a new language, discover a new culture and develop new skills. I have been helping for many years now to make it easier for you to take up a job abroad and to break down some of the barriers – both real and psychological – to living and working in a ‘foreign’ country.

The European Year of Workers Mobility in 2006 put the spotlight on the need for greater worker mobility and supported activities aimed at encouraging more Europeans to move around for work. It also paved the way for a wider ranging European policy on worker mobility, due to be adopted in 2007, which will aim to develop a real ‘mobility culture’ in Europe.

The free movement of workers in Europe is already supported by the EURES network and job search portal, the coordination of social security systems, and a Europe-wide on-line social security information system (EULisses). So you can stay informed of your social security rights as you move around the continent. The mutual recognition of diplomas and professional qualifications under the ‘Bologna Process’ has also eased the way for many of you.

Leading the way

Of course, certain sectors, like tourism and agriculture, are more ‘mobile’ than others. One that is leading the way in worker mobility, however, is science and research – in large part thanks to the European Union. Since 1984, researchers wanting to expand their experience by working abroad have been supported by European schemes, such as the Marie Curie fellowships and Research Training Networks.



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Pack up your pens and get mobile

More information:

Links:

- European Year of Workers Mobility 2006
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/workersmobility_2006/index.cfm?id_page=160
- EULisses
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_security_schemes/eulisses/jetspeed
- EURES
<http://europa.eu.int/eures/home.jsp?lang=en>
- Marie Curie Actions
http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp6/mariecurie-actions/researchers/objectives_en.html

It's an emergency – call 112!

Imagine you are on holiday in another EU country and witness an accident. You are the only person around and need to call an ambulance or the police. What can you do? Call 112, of course.

Number 112 is the 'single European emergency number'. Dial 112, free of charge, in any of the EU Member States, as well as in a number of non-EU countries – such as Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway – to get help from the emergency services. You only have to remember one single emergency number wherever you are – and that's 112.

In some countries, 112 has become the only emergency call number. In other countries, it exists alongside national emergency numbers. In both cases, if you call 112, you will be connected to the emergency service you need.

Help is at hand

With European citizens increasingly travelling to other countries for business or pleasure, there is a need for a single European emergency number across the Union. That's why 112 was established in 1991. Since then, the EU countries have created the infrastructure to make 112 work and are now obliged to make sure that you can call 112 from a fixed or a mobile phone.

Work is still being done to improve the system. In particular, to make sure that the emergency services of all EU countries are able to locate precisely where a caller is situated. This is really important in making sure help arrives as quickly as possible. Member States also need to ensure that emergency services are able to answer calls in foreign languages, as well as inform their citizens about the existence of 112.



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112: one number to call for any emergency

More information:

Links:

- European Commission - Information Society - 112 single European emergency number
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/policy/ecom/implementation_enforcement/112/index_en.htm
- European Commission - Civil Protection
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/civil/prote/112/112_en.htm

Global solidarity – aid from Europe

The European Commission provides emergency assistance to millions of the world's poorest people. And we don't stop there: we also help countries to develop. Just take a look at what we are achieving in war-torn Afghanistan.

The European Union is one of the world's biggest donors of development and humanitarian aid. The European Commission has made sure that funds are spent effectively, and that help arrives where it is most needed. Take Afghanistan, for example. We've been providing humanitarian aid there since 1992 and, since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, we have also started providing development assistance.

First aid

Since 2001, Afghanistan has received more than 260 million euros in humanitarian aid. And how the country needed it – millions were displaced by civil war, which raged for 23 years. People are returning from neighbouring countries like Iran and Pakistan, and the Commission is helping them by supplying basic humanitarian assistance in the form of food, water, shelter and protection.

As if the Afghan people didn't have enough to deal with, their country is prone to a host of natural disasters, such as flooding, earthquakes, landslides and droughts. Millions have been provided to help victims get over these problems. And, in October 2006, the European Commission released 2.5 million euro in emergency aid to help people affected by the latest drought. Special focus was given to helping disabled people and households.

Reconstruct, then develop

In 2002, the EU promised to make 1 billion euro available in reconstruction aid for Afghanistan over a five-year period. Among the results of this support are; new health clinics, road improvements, the successful elections in 2004 and 2005, and improved policing as well as customs and border management. And, Europe's support will continue, with a focus on public health, administrative reform and rural development.

Of course, we could not have done this alone. Over the years, a range of partner organisations have helped us deliver vital services to Afghanistan, including the United Nations, international non-government organisations, the Red Cross and the Red Crescent.



© ECHO

Humanitarian help is at hand... from Europe

More information:

Links:

- European Commission, Humanitarian Aid (ECHO)
<http://ec.europa.eu/echo>
- EuropeAid – Programmes and Projects – Asia
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/projects/asia/afghanistan_en.htm
- EU in the world
http://ec.europa.eu/world/index_en.htm

Charter of Fundamental Rights

The European Charter of Fundamental Rights is one of the most important European documents ever published; yet most of what it says has been written down many times before. So why does it exist, and why is it one of Europe's greatest success stories?

The European Charter of Fundamental Rights brings together all the separate documents about the rights of European citizens, which exist elsewhere in the European Union, as well as all the judgements made by the official European courts.

Before it existed, it was as though everything was written down on many different pieces of paper, and stored in lots of different places. Now everything is clearly put down in one charter, so everybody knows exactly where to find out what his or her rights are.

What's more, for the first time ever, the Charter sets down certain fundamental economic and social rights. For example, it states that everyone has the right to employment, and also the right to strike.

Six headings

It lists all the fundamental rights under six major headings: dignity, freedoms, equality, solidarity, citizens' rights and justice. These rights are universal, meaning that they should be given to everyone, regardless of nationality or place of residence, for example.

It is totally up to date, includes rights like the protection of personal data and bio-ethical standards, and also attempts to address more challenging modern issues, like those arising from the latest information technology and genetic discoveries. The same applies to rights relating to conservation of the environment and consumer protection, which are also set down clearly.

So, while the Charter doesn't expand the powers of the European Union, or give European citizens any new rights, it does make these rights more visible and that, in turn, means Europeans are better placed than they have ever been to get the most out of the European Union.



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Your fundamental rights, made clearer

More information:

Links:

- DG Justice, Freedom and Security:
The Charter of Fundamental Rights
http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/unit/charte/en/charter-preamble.html

Bathe safely in the EU

Europeans want to know that the quality of water in their seas, lakes and rivers is guaranteed. It's important for leisure, for health and for the tourism industry. So it's good to know that, since the 1970s, maintaining and improving the quality of European bathing water has been one of the European Union's priorities.

The quality of the water we swim and play in when we visit Europe's beaches and inland waters is a concern for all of us. After all, water can carry a lot of harmful bacteria and pollutants that make us sick, and also damage the environment.

And it's not just tourists who care about safe water. The tourism industry depends on clean and safe water to attract people to resorts and make sure they keep coming back year after year.

Safe beaches just a click away

That is why it's good to know that improving and monitoring the quality of our bathing water is a priority in the European Union. Now, by simply going to a website, you can find a complete water quality history for any country in the Union. You can also go to an on-line atlas and find out about a specific beach to check whether the water has passed the strict quality standards, which include monitoring for E. Coli and Intestinal Enterococci contamination, the main health threat to bathers. This certainly encourages a better feeling of safety, especially when it's usually children swimming or playing in the water.

Carry on monitoring

Monitoring bathing water quality is not a new thing in the EU. In 1976, the European Union passed the first piece of law aimed directly at improving the quality of bathing water; two others followed this, in 2002 and 2006. These Directives ensure that the most sophisticated science is used to monitor the quality of bathing water. It also means that where the quality of the water falls below acceptable standards, Europeans can find out about it quickly.



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Clean bathing water helps local development

More information:

Links:

- DG Environment: bathing water quality
http://ec.europa.eu/water/water-bathing/index_en.html
- EU Bathing Water Atlas
<http://ec.europa.eu/water/cgi-bin/bw.pl>

Europe united against threats to health

The European Union is uniquely placed to provide a united response to diseases and epidemics. The EU's expertise in areas such as food safety, public health and research allows it to tackle threats posed to both human and animal health.

European scientists and health professionals have years of experience handling public health scares, like foot-and-mouth disease and BSE (better known as mad cow disease). It's the ability to draw all the relevant expertise together to deal with a problem that makes Europe such an effective and successful operator when fighting disease. How Europe is dealing with the threat of avian flu, is one example.

Humane and effective

In December 2005, new European laws were put in place to help stop the spread of avian flu. It is important to stress that these rules are effective across the whole of the continent – a united response that gives all Europeans the same level of protection, wherever they live. The laws say that all infected birds must be humanely killed, and gives vets the power to stop people and goods moving in and out of restricted areas, near the site of any infection. The European Commission has also told European countries to increase their surveillance and monitoring of avian flu.

The EU is also responsible for keeping an eye on the disease as a threat to human health. The European Commission is coordinating an early-warning and response system, and a web portal called the 'Health Emergency & Diseases Information System' (HEDIS) has been developed to help deal with any further outbreaks.

This range of measures is a real bonus for European citizens: the European Food Standards Agency can advise on how the disease impacts on food safety; specific European scientific committees can offer advice in areas such as consumer safety, public health and environmental impact; and money has been made available for research into avian and pandemic influenza.



© European Commission

Dealing with avian flu in the EU

More information:

Links:

- Avian and Human Pandemic Influenza - The EC External Response
http://ec.europa.eu/world/avian_influenza/index.htm

Votes of confidence for democracy

Most European citizens cast their vote every couple of years. But European observers regularly visit polling stations in corners of the world where democracy is not as stable, to make sure the elections are being held democratically.

In Europe, today, democracy is taken so much for granted that many Europeans sometimes forget to exercise their democratic rights at the ballot box. Some other parts of the world are not so lucky. Millions of people around the world dream of living in a democracy and, when they get the chance to vote, they will queue up for hours outside polling stations and even walk for days to the nearest town.

To help the democratisation process along, the European Union sends observers to monitor several elections each year. In 2006 alone, the Union observed more than a dozen such votes.

Eyes wide open

In 2006, the EU's election observation mission went to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Some 30 teams arrived a month before the vote and stayed in the country for 18 weeks to keep an eye on proceedings. Another 75 teams arrived to monitor the election on the day.

Although the ballot owed its success to the growing democratic maturity of the Congolese people and its politicians, European vigilance helped to boost confidence in the electoral process and legitimise it in local people's eyes.

The 'miracle' of democracy

These were the first multiparty elections in more than four decades and many Congolese were holding out the hope that they would help finally to bring peace and stability to this troubled, war-ravaged country, which is the size of Western Europe.



Polling station (Sierra Leone)

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More information:

Links:

- DG External Relations: EU Election Assistance & Observation
http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_ass_observ/index.htm

Beauty without brutality

Millions of EU citizens use cosmetic and personal care products, such as soap, toothpaste and other toiletries. Thanks to the European ban on cosmetic testing on animals, these products are safe to use and have not been tested painfully on animals.

The European ban on cosmetic testing on animals means that cosmetics, personal care items and other toiletry products can make humans look, smell and feel good without causing pain and suffering to innocent animals.

Since November 2004, the European Union has banned animal testing of finished cosmetic products entirely and this ban will end any remaining animal testing that is a safety requirement for many of the ingredients in these products. Of course, the safety of these widespread consumer goods is essential for human health, so new methods are being proposed which will replace animal testing.

Refine, reduce, replace

Many groups are working to improve animal welfare and reduce animal testing in all sectors including medicine, chemicals, as well as cosmetics. European industry bodies, research organisations, non-governmental organisations and European countries are collaborating to Refine, Reduce and Replace animal testing wherever possible and without compromising human safety. This is known as the '3Rs' approach.

The European Partnership for Alternative Approaches to Animal Testing has been established. This is working to ensure that some of Europe's best scientific brains are using the 3Rs approach to animal testing. By using new computer methods and being more intelligent about the processes, it is hoped that this will make a huge difference to animal testing in Europe.

No one likes the idea of animal testing, but it is often the only way to prove that medicines and other vital products are safe. That ban will show that innovative alternative methods are as safe and as effective. This will be good news for animals and also good news for European business.



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No longer tested on animals

More information:

Links:

- Cosmetics and animal tests
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/cosmetics/html/cosm_animal_test.htm
- European Partnership for Alternative Approaches to Animal Testing
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/epaa/index_en.htm

Helping air passengers whose journeys are disrupted

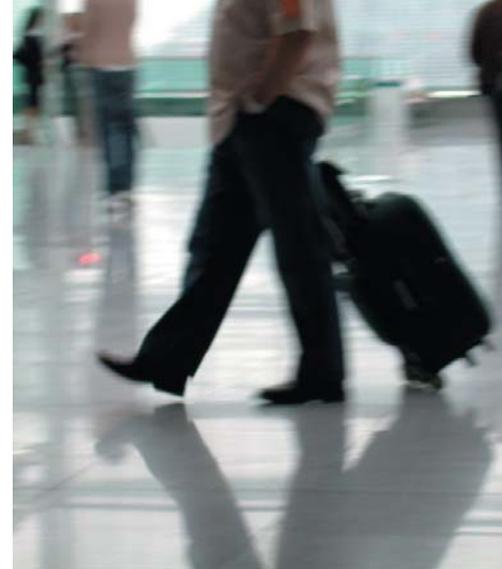
Travelling by plane can be stressful for many people, especially when their journey is disrupted. But airlines now have to look after passengers and arrange alternative means of transport for them when their journeys are disrupted, thanks to EU rules, and when the airline is at fault they may also have to pay compensation to affected passengers.

For most people, air travel is far from their everyday routine. When their flight is delayed or cancelled – perhaps leaving them in a foreign country where they don't speak the language, with few alternative routes home – they need assistance to minimise inconvenience and to rearrange their travel plans to continue their journey, with as little disruption as possible. To ensure they get the help they need, European countries have agreed rules on air passengers' rights. These rules apply to all airlines – scheduled, charter, full-service or no-frills – and to all flights departing from airports in the EU, and to those arriving within the EU, operated by airlines registered in the Union.

Automatic help

Passengers who find their flight has been delayed by more than a few hours, cancelled completely without prior notice, or who have been denied boarding because the airline has too many passengers for the seats available must be given immediate assistance by the airline. It is the airline's responsibility to organise alternative travel arrangements to get the passenger to their final destination (or back to where they started when there is no point in continuing the journey), unless the passenger chooses not to travel and to have their full fare reimbursed. And depending on the length of delay, the airline has to provide food and refreshments, communication facilities and – if the delay is overnight – accommodation.

Immediate assistance must be provided to passengers whatever the cause of the delay, whether the problem is within the airline's control or not. In certain circumstances where the airline is responsible for the journey being disrupted – in particular when a passenger is denied boarding – the airline must also pay compensation to the passenger.



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Know your rights – before you fly

More information:

Links:

- Passengers rights in the European Union
http://ec.europa.eu/transport/air_portal/passenger_rights/information_en.htm

A date to remember – 9 May is Europe Day

What does 9 May mean to you? It's Europe Day, and it is as much a symbol of European success as the European flag, the anthem, or even the euro. Europe Day is a time to celebrate peace, stability and citizenship.

Not many people know the origin of Europe Day. On 9 May 1950, Robert Schuman, the person credited as the 'father' of the European Union, started the ball rolling with a declaration to the press in Paris. This declaration, made against the backdrop of the end of the Second World War, called France, Germany and other European countries to get together and 'pool' their coal and steel production through a fledgling European organisation. This was the first step towards what we now call the European Union.

Together and citizenship

The reason Schuman chose the coal and steel industries was simple: coal and steel were the basis of military power. If these could be regulated within a peaceful structure of European countries – that were only a few years earlier intent on destroying each other – then greater stability and peace could be achieved in Europe. Some 35 years later, in 1985, EU leaders decided to create 'Europe Day' to celebrate European togetherness and citizenship on 9 May each year.

One perfect day

Europe Day is more than just a whole host of parties. For example, the '9 May Initiative', started in 2004, aims to raise awareness of external aid and development co-operation among European youth, by dedicating 9 May to discussions in schools around Europe. In 2006, some 52 000 students in 33 European regions took part in discussions sponsored under the 9 May Initiative.



© European Commission

Robert Schuman (right) started the whole thing

More information:

Links:

- The Schuman Declaration
http://ec.europa.eu/publications/booklets/eu_documentation/04/txt01_en.htm
- 9 May: a symbol of Europe
http://europa.eu/abc/symbols/9-may/euday_en.htm
- 9 May Initiative
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/9-may-initiative/about_initiative_en.htm

European identity on the internet

Since April 2006, more than 2.5 million of you have chosen 'eu' to be at the end of your internet addresses. Through 'eu', Europe is now present and visible on the web.

What does your internet address say about you? Are you a '.com' or a '.org'? Are you '.de', '.es' or '.uk'? You may even be a '.biz'. But have you ever heard about '.eu'? It was created with a special purpose: to promote Europe on the internet. And what a success it's become!

A European brand – for citizens and businesses

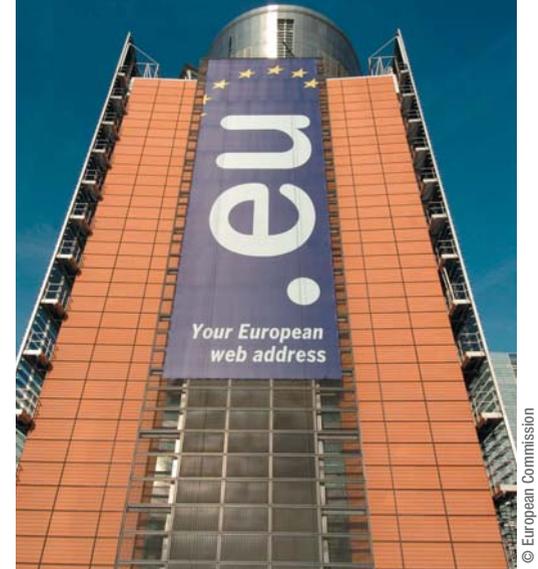
With '.eu', you can show that you are a European, too! You can register your personal website or that of your school, club or organisation. Another big advantage: you also get the protection provided by European laws for your rights as consumers and individuals – in particular as regards privacy and personal data protection.

It is also a real boost to European companies. With '.eu', they can expand their horizons and grow their market share. It is particularly useful for organisations operating at European level, such as companies taking advantage of the EU single market. Until now, such companies either based their internet presence in one country or created websites in each of the EU countries they operated in – with the need to create websites ending in '.uk', '.es', '.de' and many others. With '.eu', they can have a single 'top level' web domain ending, which is truly a European label. This is really useful in a time when more and more web addresses are seen and promoted as brands, just as much as logos.

More .eu than ever

If you want, you can still register a new '.eu' domain name by going to a specialist who can organise it for you. You can find a list of these accredited registrars on the web. There is a short set-up period, but assuming you are based in the European Union, and the name you want is available (you can check on-line), you simply pay a small fee and it's yours!

If you want to know more about '.eu', extra details are available from the organisation responsible for managing and registering '.eu' domain names, the European Registry of Internet Domain Names (EURid), or from the European Commission (see links).



'eu' has been a big, big success

More information:

Links:

- Information Society factsheet on '.eu'
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/doc/factsheets/055-doteu-april06-en.pdf
- .eu: Open for all
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/policy/doteu/index_en.htm
- EURid Website
<http://www.eurid.org/>

Europe's answer to biodiversity loss

Some people have called it overly ambitious. Others have said that protecting plant and animal species is a losing battle. But with over 20 000 sites Europe-wide now in the Natura 2000 Network, and notable species returning from the brink of extinction, the results are beginning to speak for themselves.

A common myth about Natura 2000 is that, once within its remit, land is totally off-limits to traditional activities like hunting and farming. This is not true. Nor does the network make any claims to own the land.

It works on the principle of 'sustainable development'. This recognises that humans are an integral part of natural heritage. And with around one-fifth of EU territory covered by the network, it is clearly an integral part of the European landscape.

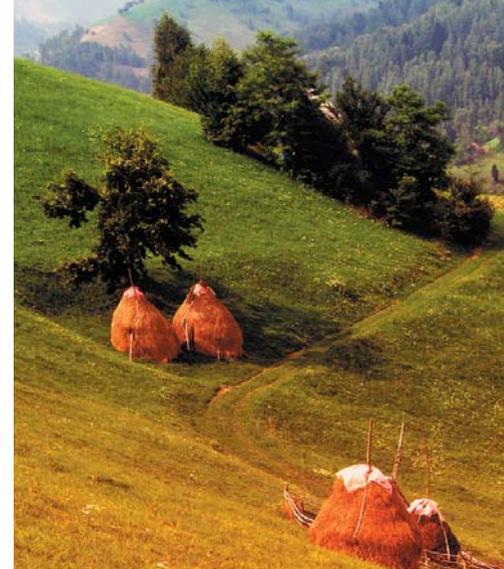
This means the honour of being in the top 50 European success stories should be shared with citizen stakeholders across the EU – the private landowners and users, concerned citizens, conservation groups and policy-makers – because, together, Europe's biodiversity is on the mend.

True success

The network is made up of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated for one or more of the nearly 200 threatened habitat types and 800 species listed in the European Union's Habitats Directive. It also includes Special Protection Areas (SPAs) classified under the Birds Directive for around 200 endangered birds and wetlands.

These areas help maintain or, where necessary, restore vulnerable habitats and species across their natural range, which could be inter-regional and even cross-border. Hence the beauty of a pan-European scheme, like Natura 2000.

Granted, there are 16 119 known threatened species worldwide, according to the World Conservation Union, including familiar species like the polar bear, sharks and Mediterranean flowers. But it is also true that European efforts – legislation and protection – have succeeded in recovering such species as the white-tailed eagle.



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European biodiversity on the mend

More information:

Links:

- DG Environment: Biodiversity
<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/home.htm>
- The World Conservation Union
<http://www.iucn.org/>

The coast is clear

From monitoring fishing catches and safeguarding fragile coastlines, to tackling criminal activity at sea, the European Union is a major player in what can be a vast field – marine safety and protection.

Sea birds, marine mammals, various fish species and the coastline itself face many a threat from marine-related activities, including pollution from ships due to accidents, deliberate dumping and other criminal activity.

The EU is already supporting co-operative action to improve maritime safety and protect the marine environment – action that could not be done by any one country alone. The 'POP&C' project (Pollution Prevention and Control) is just one example of advanced research supported by the European Commission, aimed at helping tanker owners to understand and deal with spill risks.

Only through Union

A lot is being done in this area. European Union legislation, measures and controls have been reinforced since the *Erika* and *Prestige* disasters. The withdrawal of single-hull oil tankers and more inspections in ports are all examples of efforts to improve maritime safety in the EU.

Our seas are also used for less obvious criminal activity; things like trafficking of illegal immigrants, smuggling and terrorism. Fighting these requires reliable and efficient traffic management and surveillance. Surface, air and satellite-based tracking systems are all supported by EU funding.

A new and comprehensive approach

The Union is also consulting on a wider 'European Maritime Policy', gathering views from everyone, from commercial organisations to governments, individual citizens and environmental groups.

What is at stake? The sea is a key resource, to be protected and exploited wisely. The European Union recognises the importance of its coastal zones and waters and is working together for a healthier, safer marine environment.



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Real protection for the marine environment

More information:

Links:

- European Commission – Maritime affairs – consultation on maritime policy
http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy_en.html
- European Maritime Safety Agency
<http://emsa.europa.eu/>

Borderless Europe

If you are lucky enough to be a citizen of the EU, then you have the right to travel, live and work anywhere in Europe. With 27 Member States, that means a lot of opportunity to learn more and explore new cultures.

The European Union's founders dreamed that the continent would one day become a place where people, goods, services and money could move around freely. Fifty years on and that dream is being realised in many aspects of life – not least in the way Europe's nearly 500 million citizens can move around the continent so easily.

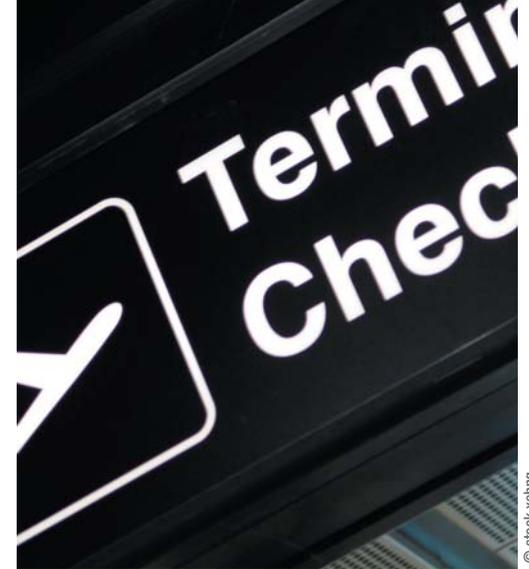
More than holidays

Of course, we have got used to going on holiday in the EU without the need to get visas and other bureaucratic necessities. However, tearing down borders means so much more than that! Thousands of Europeans have moved countries to sample working life abroad – again, in most cases no special visas are required, regardless of how long you want to stay. What's more, if you do move countries and get a job, you are normally entitled by European law to be treated in the same way as the locals.

Opening minds

Young people have really benefited from the development of a borderless Europe – with the help of various EU programmes, about 2 million students have sampled study abroad. The increased flow of people, and the mutual understanding that travel provides, can only help foster a sense of European identity.

A number of EU countries have taken a step further in cutting back the red tape. Under the Schengen agreement, a group of EU Member States have decided to do away completely with their shared frontier controls, which means passport-free travel for millions of Europeans!



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Boarding now for a borderless Europe

More information:

Links:

- When leaving a country and on arrival, formalities to be completed (European Union)
<http://ec.europa.eu/youreurope/nav/en/citizens/travelling/before-departure/index.html>
- Schengen area (European Union)
<http://ec.europa.eu/youreurope/nav/en/citizens/travelling/schengen-area/index.html>

Your mobile phone – a world leader

What's that ringing? It's your mobile phone, so you had better answer. Over 2 billion people across 217 countries and territories now use mobile phones based on the GSM standard. It was developed by EU-funded research and spread by accompanying EU regulation and standardisation efforts. This has helped it to become a globally dominant worldwide standard.

About 82% of the world's mobile users have phones based on the GSM standard. In 2005, this standard acquired more customers than there are users of all other mobile technologies in the world put together. The GSM standard allows users in different networks and with different handsets to communicate with each other. This has created a European home market of hundreds of millions of people with European companies in the lead. GSM is also a true European super success, since competition drove further development, driving hardware and call prices down in a virtuous circle.

Even more in your hand than before

Today, Europe is building on this success to extend its leadership in future generations of mobile communications. The second-generation (2G) GSM-based services are being complemented by the third generation (3G). 3G offers new and advanced services, such as the capability to surf the internet, shop and pay, as well as to watch movies and listen to music on their mobile phones.

Pay less when you use your mobile phone abroad

While the costs of using mobile phones have dropped enormously, the cost when using a mobile phone abroad has remained excessively high. These "mobile roaming charges" currently affect more than 147 million EU citizens.

For years, the Commission has been working hard to decrease these charges and very soon travellers will be able to call their loved ones back home without worrying about the high costs. With all that money left in your pocket, there might not be room for a phone anymore.



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She could be talking to any one of a billion people

More information:

Links:

- European Commission, Information Society – mobile and wireless communications
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/industry/comms/mobile/index_en.htm
- European Commission – Information Society – International roaming tariffs
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/roaming/index_en.htm

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Plenty of food – safe and healthy to eat. Care for rural areas

After World War II, parts of Europe were hungry, due to serious food shortages. The European Union's founding fathers tackled the problem by subsidising the production of basic foodstuffs through the common agricultural policy (CAP).

Since then, the situation in Europe has changed, as has the CAP. Today, environmental concerns and the safeguarding of our countryside play a vital role in the CAP. A lot of emphasis is put on sustainable production, respecting our natural environment, animal welfare and food safety.

As a European citizen it is hard to imagine limits to our food supply. Our shops are groaning with a huge range of fresh and processed goods. But it wasn't always like this: back in 1958, the CAP was devised to support farmers as they tried to feed a hungry continent.

The policy has proved to be a huge success, as modern Europe enjoys a secure food supply. In fact, the CAP has been reformed to reflect this abundance. Today's CAP is now geared towards the production of high-quality food and other agricultural products whilst caring for the environment and the development of rural areas. Within the CAP, rural development initiatives not only help farmers, but also rural communities as a whole, in terms of their sustainable development and maintaining our cultural heritage.

From farm to fork

The European Union is now concentrating its efforts on making the whole food chain as safe as possible through what it calls the "farm to fork" approach.

Producers, processors and importers must ensure their foodstuffs and ingredients can be traced throughout the food chain. And they must be able to identify all their suppliers, including those from abroad.

Integrated approach

It makes sense that the EU has an integrated approach to food safety, which also takes account of issues such as the use of genetically modified organisms, animal welfare, pesticides, and health and nutrition.

And there is now a European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) which will make the scientific assessment of food safety more transparent.



© European Commission

Food in abundance, but now with a sustainable flavour

More information:

Links:

- Food Safety – From the Farm to the Fork
http://ec.europa.eu/food/index_en.htm
- Agriculture and Rural Development
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/index_en.htm

European Voluntary Service

Students like Ella who are keen to broaden their horizons, learning about new cultures and helping out when they can, thank the European Voluntary Service (EVS) for the opportunity.

Ella first heard about the EVS scheme at school. The idea is quite simple. It's a way of encouraging young people, between the ages of 18-25, to spend between six to 12 months in another country.

But as Ella soon learned, it is by no means a holiday. EVS projects do invaluable work helping people in different fields like the environment, arts and culture, and even sports and leisure (so, rest assured, it is not all work, no play). Volunteers also take part in activities aimed at children, young people, the elderly.

Rules, regulations... and fun

Of course, there are a few rules and regulations to observe, even with something as fun and rewarding as this. There have to be three partners involved in every EVS project. That means Ella, the volunteer, the host organisation, which finds her the work, and the organisation sending her in the first place. And one of the countries involved has to be European. Plus, Ella is a volunteer, so she does not get paid for the work she does. But she does have all her travel, insurance, accommodation and food paid for, and she even gets an allowance.

Young people like Ella, who are 12 years and over, have been contributing to their host communities for more than decade. But the relationship is certainly win-win. Volunteers get to find out more about another country, learn new languages and gain insight into the Europe they left behind through the eyes of their host community.



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Volunteering can change lives

More information:

Links:

- What is the European Voluntary Service? FAQ
http://ec.europa.eu/youth/program/guide/action2_en.html

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Have you found your vocation yet?

You may have heard the name Leonardo da Vinci, in connection with a film about codes, but his best work in centuries has been done on innovation. Nowadays, his name is used for a European vocational training programme. The Leonardo da Vinci programme helps people from all over Europe to get access to vocational training and find a way to a better future.

The Leonardo da Vinci programme has been a large success. It's been running for 20 years now and, in the last six years alone, it has given away around 1.150 billion euro to fund projects in 33 countries. He was a great European visionary in his day and even nearly 500 years after Leonardo's death, he is spreading his influence outside Europe and making training available to people in places as far away as Iceland, Turkey and Eastern Europe.

Training for work

Leonardo is all about vocational training, that is to say, training people to give them the skills to work in a specific trade or industry. The projects focus on practical experience, which helps people to go on to find work in areas that interest them most. Take, for example, an animal husbandry scheme in Hungary and a project to support map makers in Lithuania. The scheme is part of the European Commission's new Lifelong Learning Programme and is designed to build a better skilled workforce.

Building networks, learning languages

When deciding which projects to fund, the programme looks for the simple qualities which could build a better Europe: things which could help European citizens to move around to find work; interesting ventures to inspire the participants or encourage the learning of new languages. Even the building of new vocational training networks, to help training organisations work together more effectively in Europe and build better vocational training opportunities for its citizens.



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Clearly dreaming about his vocation

More information:

Links:

- What is the Leonardo da Vinci programme?
http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/leonardo/leonardo_en.html

Patented process

If you come up with a new invention it could make your fortune. But you must be able to protect your innovation so that everyone knows it was your bright idea. This is where the European Patent Convention (EPC) comes in.

The idea of protecting an idea may sound strange to some, but if you invent something or have a unique idea, it makes sense to stop someone else stealing or using your 'intellectual property' as if it were theirs.

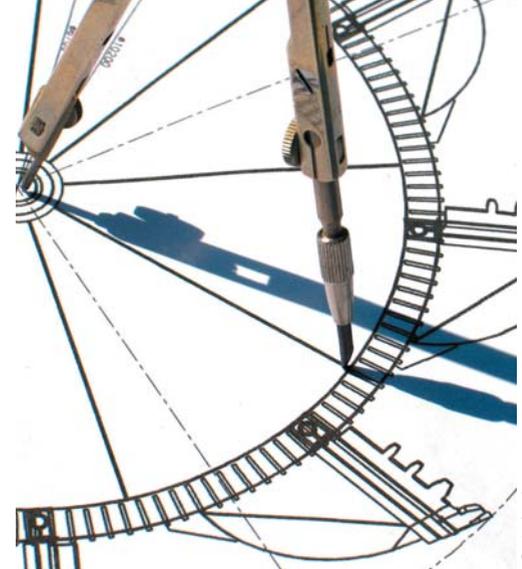
Patents are traditionally the way to do this. But before the EPC existed, protecting your intellectual property through a patent in Europe was not so easy. You would need to make separate patent applications in each country. And, as different countries had different procedures and different languages, this meant a long and very costly process.

Skilled patent examination

But, since 1978, the Convention has made everything much simpler. Now there is a central process that takes care of patent applications in all 27 Member States (and one or two European countries). There are still some costs for translating your patent ideas, but they come later and after your patent has been examined – rather than before!

There isn't a single European patent yet that covers the EU with one document. What is called a European patent is actually a 'bundle' of national patents but with a single reference number and only one initial application.

The main European Patent Offices (EPO) are in Munich and the Hague, where teams of highly skilled patent examiners inspect and safeguard your ideas. You can also view European patents on-line via the 'espacenet' website. There are over 50 million unique ideas! And if you register an application through this system, you might even get a nomination for European Inventor of the Year competition.



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European Patent Convention protects your projects

More information:

Links:

- European Patent Office
<http://www.european-patent-office.org/index.en.php>
- esp@cenet - Europe's network of patent databases
<http://www.espacenet.com/>
- European Inventor of the Year - European Patent Forum
<http://www.european-inventor.org/>

The card to carry for healthy travel

Everyone loves travelling but its better to stay healthy on your European trips. The free European Health Insurance Card gives peace of mind to over 50 million people, making sure they get the treatment they have a right to if they fall ill or have an accident when abroad.

The card was introduced in 2004 and can now be used in some 30 countries. It helps simplify procedures for getting medical care if disaster strikes when you are in another European country. It is totally free and replaces all the old forms that people used to have to arrange for and carry abroad (E111, E110, E128 and E119). Each country's card shares the same design, which means that medical staff will recognise it instantly even, if they don't speak the same language.

On the same level

Anyone who gets treatment at home under his or her national health system can carry the card. It can be used temporarily in another country, on holiday or for work. By showing it, European citizens can be sure that the medical services in the country they're visiting know that you're entitled to the same level of treatment as locals – this is their right. There were some concerns that the card might carry sensitive personal information – it doesn't, just basic details, like names, national identity numbers and date of birth.

Treatment costs

Depending on the rules of the country visited, citizens may have to pay for some of their treatment costs. However, by showing the card, it will most likely be easier for them to organise a refund when they get home.

Travelling broadens horizons and brings different nationalities closer together. The European Health Insurance Card makes sure that Europeans can do it with the confidence that they are well covered.



© European Parliament

Deborah Carella, living abroad, is happy to have her new European Health Card

More information:

Links:

- The European Health Insurance Card - FAQ
http://www.ec.europa.eu/employment_social/healthcard/citoyens_en.htm
- The European Health Insurance Card - Overview
http://www.ec.europa.eu/employment_social/healthcard/situation_en.htm

Consular protection for all EU citizens

Outside of the European Union, European consular offices are open to all EU passport holders, regardless of which Member State they come from. Unfortunately, most Europeans don't realise that, as EU citizens, they are entitled to protection available from any European country's consulate or embassy if their own government doesn't have a mission in the country they are visiting.

It's a legally established right that diplomatic protection must be offered to all European Union citizens by their embassies and consulates operating outside European Union borders.

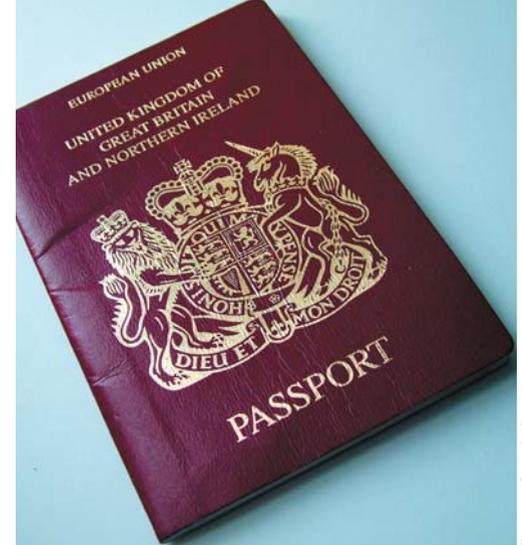
Equal treatment

Only a limited number of countries outside the European Union have consulates or embassies from all the European countries. For this reason, the EU ensures that the different countries work together in case Europeans need help when they're travelling. If a traveller needs help in a country which doesn't have a consulate from their country, all they have to do is go to any European Union country's consulate and prove their nationality by showing a passport or identity card. The consulate is then obliged to make sure they receive the same standard of treatment as one of their own nationals.

What is on offer

So what exactly is on offer to the distressed traveller? Well lots actually – help if someone has died while abroad; support in case of serious illness or accident; assistance in case someone falls victim to violent crime; and repatriation, if needed.

In November 2006, it was proposed that this service be strengthened with a new range of measures to improve protection for European Union citizens living and working in a country outside of Europe. The proposals also suggest extending protection to European citizens' family members who are not from one of the European countries.



© European Commission

Protection guaranteed from any EU consulate

More information:

Links:

- EU citizens are entitled to consular and diplomatic protection of 25 EU countries
http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/fsj/citizenship/diplomatic/fsj_citizenship_diplomatic_en.htm

A more transparent Europe

Have you got a query about a European Union policy or activity? Do you need advice on your rights as a European citizen? If the answer is yes, why not give us a call at Europe Direct – we are here to help you!

Europe Direct has been set up to help you get the most out of the EU and to help ordinary Europeans decipher what many find a confusing place. It handles thousands of queries a year by phone, email and across the web. Our service has more than 40 dedicated, multilingual staff to handle questions on a range of issues relating to the EU.

Unpicking the red tape

We can help you understand the opportunities and rights that come with being a European citizen. For example, we are often asked about how best to get qualifications recognised in other Member States, or how to obtain residence permits.

We are pretty efficient here at Europe Direct: surveys show we provide the answers people need at the first attempt for about 90 per cent of the telephone questions that we handle. But don't worry if your query is complex – we promise to find you an expert, or we will get extra support from other EU teams like the Citizen's Signpost Service.

Where to find us

So if you have a question, please give us a call from any of the 27 Member States, using this toll free number: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11. You can also call from outside the EU on +32 2 299 96 96.

Our website also shows you how to email us and use our real-time web assistance service, which is available using French or English.

The contact centre is open for telephone and email enquiries from Mon-Fri, 9 am to 6.30 pm, CET.

You can also contact the EUROPE DIRECT network of local information outlets, which act as an interface between EU and its citizens at local level. Their mission is to distribute information and advice about the European Union's policies, actively promote local and regional debate about the European Union, allow the European institutions to disseminate local and regional information, and give the public the opportunity to send feedback to the European Union institutions.



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Deciphering Europe directly

More information:

Links:

- Get in touch with Europe Direct
http://ec.europa.eu/europedirect/index_en.htm
- Europe Direct - Visit us!
http://ec.europa.eu/europedirect/visit_us/index_en.htm

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Want to work abroad?

Imagine a web portal that could help you look for a job in 31 European countries, and that could give you all the information you need about making a move abroad – well you don't have to imagine, as it already exists in the shape of EURES, short for EUROpean Employment Services.

EURES is a network whose aim is to help job mobility – the opportunity to work in different countries – in what we call the 'European Economic Area'; that's all the European countries plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein (Switzerland is covered too).

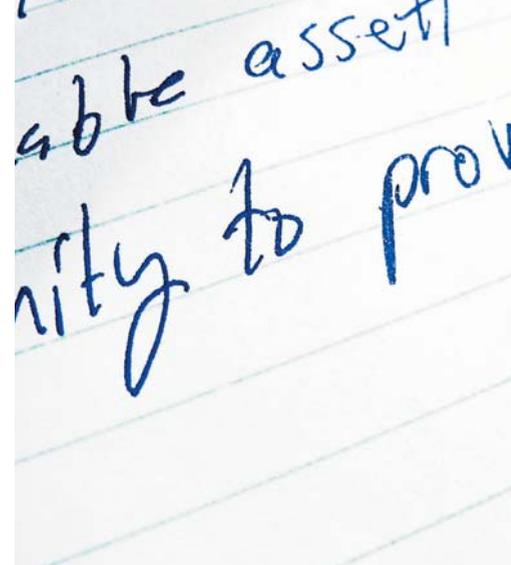
Making the move easier

As well as a massive job-search database, the EURES portal also provides advice and information about living and working conditions across Europe. It's so comprehensive and easy to use – you can find all the vital information you need: on social security issues, the cost of living, local health and education systems, recognition of qualifications, and much, much more. The service is also useful for employers looking to hire staff from abroad.

The human touch

You can register your CV and apply for email alerts for the jobs that suit you. But EURES also has a human face, thanks to its network of 700 advisers, who are available to counsel job seekers and employers on the ins-and-outs of international recruitment.

EURES was established in 1993, and is supported by a host of partners – including public employment services, trades unions and employers' organisations. The European Commission coordinates the service, which at any one time can carry more than 800 000 jobs. EURES also holds information on 200 000 registered jobseekers and more than 8 000 employers. Where better to start looking for the move of a lifetime!



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The database for all your job needs

More information:

Links:

- DG Employment & Social Affairs: EURES
<http://ec.europa.eu/eures/home.jsp?lang=en>

Happy 20th Birthday ERASMUS!

It would be hard to find a much better European success than ERASMUS. And what's more, it started in 1987 – making it 20 years old in 2007!

Did you know that, in the last 20 years, over 1.5 million students have received an ERASMUS grant and spent a part of their course studying in another country? In 2005, nearly 1% of the whole European student population did just that and the number is growing every year.

ERASMUS makes higher education

And don't be fooled into thinking that these are just statistics; ERASMUS is not an excuse for students to disappear abroad for a couple of months, go sightseeing and wander into a few lectures. ERASMUS course credits are fully recognised by the students' own institution.

Students have to submit a proper 'learning programme' before setting out, which has to be agreed by all the participants, including both the sending and receiving institutions. In fact, ERASMUS has also been responsible for changing the direction of European higher education policy through what's now called the 'Bologna Process'.

Changing peoples' lives

There's another reason why ERASMUS grants are so popular in the 31 participating countries. For many people, ERASMUS study has meant a real turning point in their lives, opening their eyes to new experiences, broadening their horizons and making them better rounded and better educated Europeans. And they're more likely to get a job. ERASMUS is a European phenomenon!



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1.5 million students can't be wrong

More information:

Links:

- What is Socrates/Erasmus?

http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/erasmus/what_en.html

Emissions trading

The European Union Emission Trading Scheme (ETS) is a new innovative scheme to help fight climate change. Global warming is a threat to us all, but through ETS, Europe can reduce the amount of greenhouse gases it emits.

Since 2005, all EU Member States have taken part in a new commercial approach to combating climate change. The ETS is the biggest multinational environmental trading scheme in the world. It is also a big part of European Union climate change policy.

The policy is all about taking more responsibility for what we put into the environment. ETS is a vital mechanism to implement Europe's commitments under the Kyoto agreement, the global climate change initiative sponsored by the United Nations.

Reducing emissions

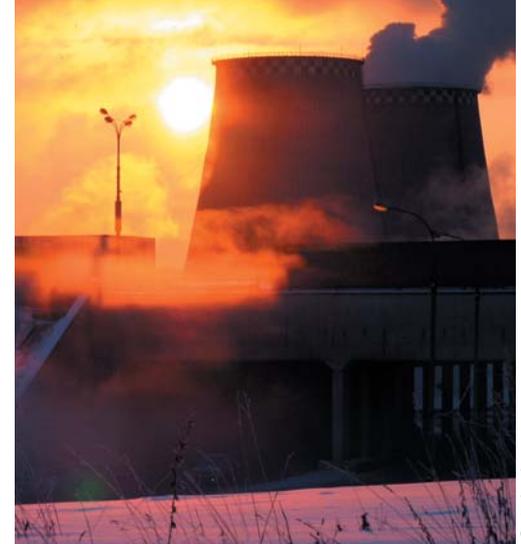
In its first phase, from 2005-2007, the ETS aims to reduce the vast levels of CO₂ emissions that come from some 12 000 industrial installations around Europe – mostly the energy and big industrial sectors. That means ETS covers almost 50% of CO₂ emissions in the EU.

The approach is simple. Each company, as a source of emissions, is allocated an 'allowance' of CO₂ that it can emit. This amount is established under the national plans for each participating country and will, by the way, be reduced over time.

If a company is going to emit more than its allowance, it must buy extra 'carbon credits' from another enterprise, which has emitted less than its own allowance. So, companies investing in emissions reduction are free to sell their excess credit and make money. In the scheme's first year, 362 million tonnes of CO₂ credits were traded in a market worth 7.2 billion euro.

Increasing participation

In the next phase, from 2008-2012, it will include other greenhouse gases and industrial sectors, like civil aviation. The essential next step must be an ambitious global regime to fight climate change with participation by all major emitters.



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Taking a more responsible attitude to what goes into our environment

More information:

Links:

- DG Environment: Emission Trading Scheme (EU ETS)
<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/climat/emission.htm>

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Equal rights for both Mum and Dad

Europeans have many rights, many of which they may not be aware of. Did you know that both parents of newborn children are entitled to time off work following the arrival of their baby son or daughter?

Maternity and paternity leave

One of the most important things for any newborn child, whether they know it or not, is their parents' right to maternity and paternity leave. They need to know where their next feed is coming from, and so it's a great relief to know that both the mother and father are entitled to time off work to look after the newest member of the family.

Once upon a time, a new mother would have been able to take a few weeks off, if she was lucky, but she might even have had to give up her job in some European countries. New fathers may have missed the birth, and certainly wouldn't have been allowed to stay at home with their new son or daughter. It's fortunate then that equality between men and women is now one of the fundamental rights for citizens of the European Union. That means both Mum and Dad get a chance to change nappies!

The way it works

In the majority of European countries, both parents are entitled to three months' leave, and either the father or mother can take it, although they can't transfer the leave from one of them to the other. At the end of the parental leave, parents have the right to return to the same job, or to an equivalent or similar position. To get parental leave, they may need to give plenty of notice and to indicate the date on which it will begin and end. The details vary according to the country they are working in, but employers must comply with the minimum requirements agreed by all European countries.

It's all part of Europe's drive towards real equality of opportunity for men and women.



Now there's more opportunity for this

More information:

Links:

- **Sickness and maternity leave**
http://ec.europa.eu/youreurope/nav/en/citizens/working/cross-border/sickness-maternity-leave/index_en.html?print=true
- **MISSOC – Social Protection in the Member States in the EU Member States and the European Economic Area**
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/missoc/2003/index_en.htm

Win-win enlargement

Nothing succeeds like success. Over the years, more and more countries have asked to join the European Union. From a six-country common market in 1957, it has grown to a 27-country Union today. This enlargement is to everybody's benefit – as long as new members can fit in with the EU's well-being and stability.

Developing together

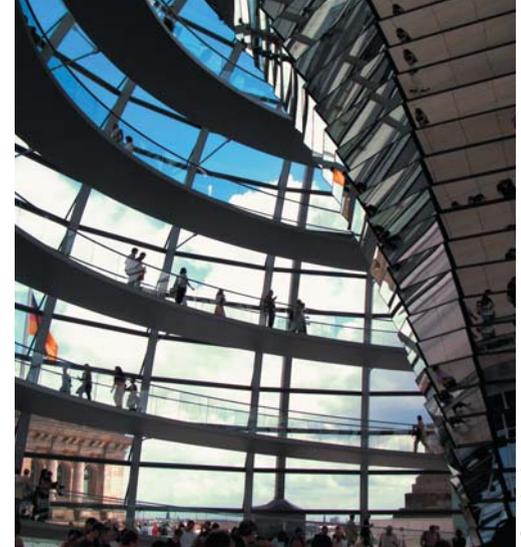
Being a good neighbour has always been a priority for the EU, both in trade and in politics. Europe's economy has to keep on growing. So, if the countries around the EU can develop successfully, that is in everybody's interests.

When a country wants to join the EU, it must be helped to prepare for its negotiations and membership. It must know how the EU works, and must realise that membership brings duties as well as rights.

Stability

Tailored, technical and financial aid is provided to those countries that want to join, as well as collaborative help to ensure stability. This is important because some of the most recent new members and candidates are still tackling the challenge of establishing democracy, functioning market economies and prosperity for all their citizens. Programmes for helping them include PHARE (set up in 1989 to help the former communist countries of central and eastern Europe), ISPA and Sapard (designed to support infrastructure, agriculture and rural development in the candidate countries), CARDS (specifically for the countries of the Western Balkans) and a specific programme for Turkey. In 2007, new assistance packages have been agreed for Turkey and the Western Balkan countries.

Countries are being helped to prepare for closer integration with the EU, too. In doing so, full account is taken of the "graduation" process from potential candidate country to candidate country, which results from an important political decision, following a strict and demanding procedure. That way, enlargement will be win-win for Europeans everywhere.



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Enlargement has contributed to European stability and well-being

More information:

Links:

- Activities of the European Union: Enlargement
http://europa.eu/pol/enlarg/index_en.htm
- DG Enlargement
http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/index_en.htm

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Banking on Europe

The European Union has spent billions, over the years, to secure the continent's economic well-being, and to support an army of business people who are striving to generate jobs and greater economic growth.

The European Investment Bank (EIB) is Europe's key financing institution. Primarily for the work it does to raise cash for the financing of major infrastructure projects and in supporting the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In 2004, for example, the EIB released 28 billion euro for projects to improve poorer areas in Europe. The money was spent on improving transport and telecommunications infrastructures, industrial development initiatives, developing urban areas and supporting health and education.

A sense of (ad)venture

And why is it so important to fund European entrepreneurs? Well, they actually provide 75 million jobs and make up 99 per cent of all Europe's enterprises. Much of the direct support for SMEs is provided through the European Investment Fund (EIF), founded in 1994. The EIB uses the fund to give SMEs – many of which work in the Information and Communication Technologies and life sciences sectors – access to venture capital, with the aim of boosting European policies for economic growth and job creation. The venture capital market is huge, currently worth more than 3 billion euro.

Guaranteeing Europe's future

The EIF also provides loan guarantees to financial institutions that provide money to SMEs. This complex, often hidden work is massively important to the likes of banks, as it helps them reduce investment risks and encourages them to lend even more to SMEs.



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Helping SMEs get access to funding

More information:

Links:

- European Investment Bank (EIB)
<http://www.eib.europa.eu/index.asp>

Technologies to improve your life

The information society – once a futuristic scenario – is now a reality. The i2010 initiative is making sure that all Europeans have easy, safe and affordable access to the latest information and communications technologies (ICTs) – and the many possibilities they offer to improve your quality of life.

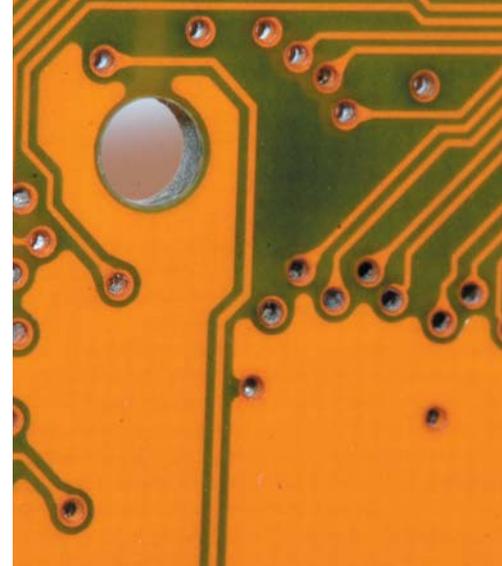
You may like listening to music on the move on your mp3 player. You may have already sent digital photos to your family and friends by email, or talked to them through the internet. Media is getting on-line with music, films and TV by becoming available on your PC and mobile phone. New technologies for information and communication offer you more attractive entertainment and useful services. Making the most of those opportunities is one of the priorities of the i2010 initiative.

Accessing information anywhere, anytime

You can now often organise your holiday or send in your tax return right from your sofa – on-line. Reducing paperwork and freeing up your time by encouraging governments to provide more and better public services on-line, is another example of the tasks taken on by i2010. It also supports the development and application of new information and communications technologies in areas such as health, education and safety. Did you know, for example, that an in-vehicle system, due to be introduced in Europe, will automatically alert emergency services in the event of a crash? This new 'eCall' technology is expected to save many lives – maybe yours...

Equal access is equal opportunity

One of the greatest challenges is making sure that everyone – regardless of age, physical ability or location – can have equal access to the opportunities offered by information and communications technologies. For that, you need a high-speed "broadband" connection to the internet. By encouraging Member States to bring broadband to under-served areas, also through European funding for disadvantaged regions, i2010 has been able to help improve the availability of broadband across the EU.



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This can improve the quality of your life

More information:

Links:

- i2010 - A European Information Society for growth and employment
http://europa.eu.int/information_society/europe/i2010/index_en.htm

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Working together – across the line

There are many national borders in and around Europe. They represent the lines between long centuries of laws, rules, habits – different ways of doing things. Regions need to develop or to stop pollution and they must work together to do it. Europe is making that easier.

The 'border effect'

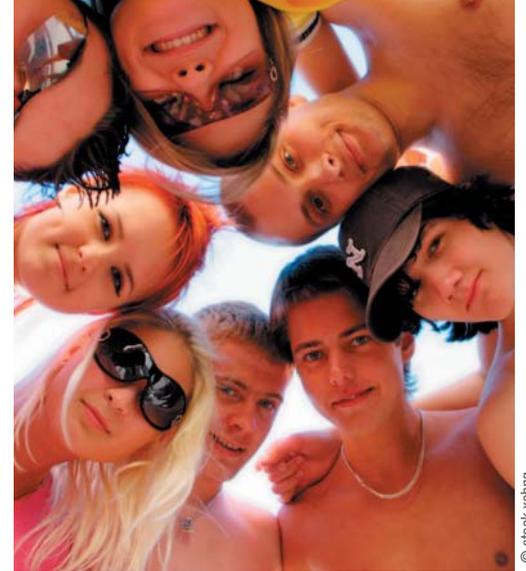
Like many national border regions in Europe, there are some big problems. Border regions used to feel a long way, both from their national capitals and from each other. They were lagging behind, and needed to catch up fast. Major advances in Europe are already helping – a single market, a common currency, fewer passport checks. All of that makes life simpler for people. And, as Europe's less well-off regions, they have received a lot of help from the EU Structural Funds.

But the EU is also helping us to get over that 'border effect'. Its 'INTERREG' initiative has been developing cross-border regions. As well as giving financial support, it encourages the best possible use of resources – financial, human or structural.

Practical benefits

The practical benefits are clear. Take buses, for instance. Neighbouring areas of Austria and Germany set up a Euroregion in 1995, and now you can use the same bus ticket on both sides of the border, with an unlimited number of transfers back and forth. As a result, the number of bus users has grown, and so has local tourism. It wasn't quite as easy as it sounds though; new ticket machines and coordinated routes had to be established and taxes and fare zones had to be harmonised. This needed a financial helping hand. The EU has also put a lot of money into improving cross-border rail links – between Dublin and Belfast, for instance, or between Helsinki and St. Petersburg.

The old borders did have a few advantages. Some of Europe's great unspoilt landscapes are in border areas. With the opening of the frontiers, those environments could soon become damaged unless action is taken to preserve them. INTERREG has been backing schemes that do just that – beautiful natural parks that straddle the borders.



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Breaking down those regional barriers

More information:

Links:

- INTERREG III /Neighbourhood: Programmes' websites
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/interreg3/abc/progweb_en.htm

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Cheaper flights for all

Not so long ago, air travel was an occasional, expensive event. But since the European Union has enabled airlines to compete against each other, the numbers of flights and routes offered has grown hugely and the prices charged have fallen dramatically. Flying around Europe is now easier than ever.

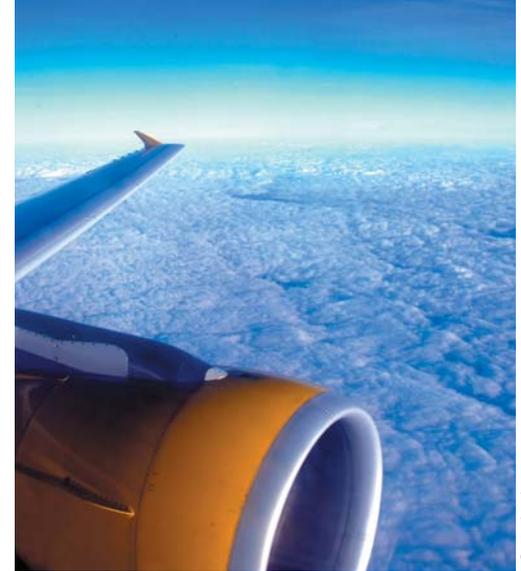
International air travel developed on the basis of restrictive agreements between governments and national airlines. Too often, those airlines, secure in monopoly positions, organised flights to suit themselves and charged their passengers fares far in excess of the costs of the journey concerned. In the 1980s, the European Union decided to end these cosy arrangements, and open up the market to free competition. In effect, since 1993, the European Union (together with several neighbouring countries) has become a huge single market for air travel.

Free competition

That means that any airline granted a licence in an EU country – meeting safety standards and other conditions – can operate air services anywhere in the EU, including domestic services within another country. Restrictions on fares, on scheduling and so on, have been swept away, and today the major restriction on new air services is the lack of capacity at Europe's biggest airports.

New opportunities

The result has been the launch of dozens of new airlines, the introduction of the new 'no-frills' or 'low-cost' airlines, and hundreds of new services linking huge numbers of airports across Europe. Prices have tumbled on all airlines, booking is easier – particularly via the internet – and passengers are now able to travel more often, more cheaply, and to more destinations.



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A better view – at a better price

More information:

Links:

■ DG Energy and Transport: Internal Market
http://ec.europa.eu/transport/air_portal/internal_market/index_en.htm

Catalyst for change

Over the past 15 years, one relatively small but ingenious invention has brought about a dramatic reduction in the toxic pollution generated by your car. It is a catalytic converter – a small chemical reactor turning harmful exhaust gases into more environmentally friendly substances – purring under your car.

Today, thanks mainly to catalytic converters, and together with advanced fuel regulations and engine technology, new cars in Europe emit up to 95% less toxic gas than they did 20 years ago.

Catalysers like this can change the molecules in your car's exhaust gases into something much less harmful to European citizens and the environment.

They first appeared in vehicles in Europe in 1985. But then, due to far-reaching new European laws, catalytic converters have been fitted to every new car sold in the European Union since 1991. The technology is also one of the reasons that petrol is now lead-free; lead is as harmful to the converter's systems, as it is to humans.

Three-way stretch

What's more, for petrol-engine cars, three-way catalysts have been developed that manage to transform simultaneously poisonous carbon monoxide and noxious unburnt hydrocarbons into carbon dioxide and water. At the same time, they turn harmful nitrogen oxide compounds into harmless nitrogen.

For diesel vehicles, catalytic oxidation does the same trick with carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons and, increasingly, filters and other devices are being used which remove small diesel particles that could be harmful if breathed deep into your lungs.

Of course, the catalytic story doesn't end here; this sort of technology is continually developing, trying to reduce exhaust gas emissions further and improving the quality of air for everyone.



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Catalytic converters mean cleaner air

More information:

Links:

- DG Environment: Clean Air and Transport
<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/air/index.htm>

Pet project

Holidays abroad used to mean leaving one important member of the family behind: the pet! But, thanks to the EU pet passport 'man's best friend' can now enjoy the whole of Europe.

Since 2004, the European pet passport has made it much easier for pets to travel with their owners throughout Europe. And it is not just cats and dogs that can get a passport – even a pet ferret can get one! The practicalities are simple: owners take their pet to the vet to get a passport before they set off on their holiday. The document gives details of important vaccinations and any other relevant medical treatments your pet has undergone.

Rabies

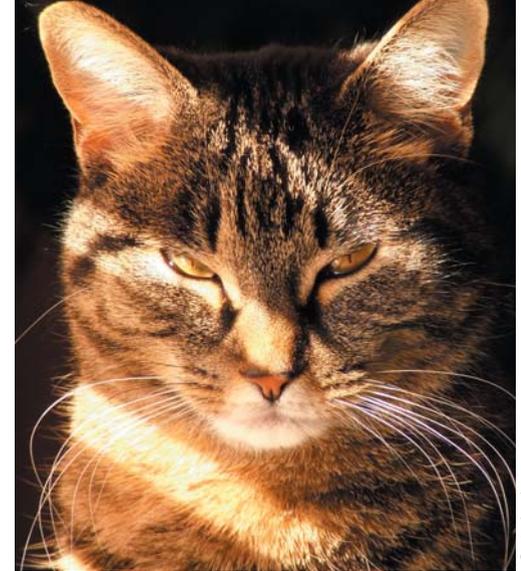
One of the things the passport shows is that each pet has a valid vaccination certificate for rabies. This is the main requirement for entry to all European countries and is an important step in helping to control this vicious disease which can affect both animals and humans. Some countries (Ireland, Malta, Sweden and the United Kingdom) also need to know that the rabies vaccination has been effective, which means an additional test, which any vet can arrange.

In addition, a few European countries like to see evidence of other treatments for ticks and tapeworms, so it is important that pet owners check the requirements before they set off.

Tattoo or 'chip'

As well as a passport, all well-travelled pets will need something more permanent to identify them wherever they go. This can either be in the form of a tattooed code on the pet's skin or a microchip (an electronic device which can be 'read' by a special machine) inserted under their skin. In future, it's likely that the microchip will be the only identifying option.

So, if Europeans want to take their pets for a walk on holiday, they can do it now, thanks to the pet passport!



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Take me with you!

More information:

Links:

- Travelling in Europe – Pets
http://europa.eu/abc/travel/pets/index_en.htm
- Movement of Pets (Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) – Non-Commercial Movement within the EU
http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/liveanimals/pets/nocomm_intra_en.htm

Providing choice – airline blacklist

We should all feel better knowing that passengers in the European Union can now make safe flying choices, simply by checking a website, before booking a seat on a dubious plane.

Flying is not without risks, but there are certain norms that we can expect of air carriers – both passenger and cargo. But before the airline blacklist was created, an airline could be banned in one EU country but still fly freely to another. What kind of message does that send?

So, the European Commission called on national authorities to send in their ‘lists’ and, after in-depth analysis by a committee of aviation safety experts, the EU Blacklist of Unsafe Airlines came out in 2006, naming and shaming those operators not meeting international standards.

Checks on the nearly 100 companies with the dubious honour of being on the inaugural list revealed many shortcomings: from poor maintenance and inspections, to obsolete aircraft.

Lessons learned

Europe learned a hard lesson from the 2004 Flash Airline’s crash in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. According to reports, this carrier had been banned from Swiss airspace, but passengers were not aware of this. Around half of the entries on the list are registered in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a dozen or so in Equatorial Guinea, and the same again in Sierra Leone. At least now, with the website, Europeans have an up-to-date register of unscrupulous airlines.

And rest assured, the blacklist is more than a slap on the wrist for dubious operators and countries issuing licences under flags of convenience. It has a real impact, especially when potential passengers vote with their feet and fly with safer airlines.

The EU also invests heavily in co-operation programmes to help countries trying to meet the safety standards. And from January 2007, the European Aviation Safety Agency has taken over the safety assessment of foreign aircraft (SAFA) programme previously run by the Joint Aviation Authorities. This means that there is now a more coherent approach to banning unsafe airlines.



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It's best to know who you're flying with

More information:

Links:

- European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA)
<http://www.easa.eu.int/>
- Joint Aviation Authorities
<http://www.jaa.nl/>
- List of airlines banned within the EU
http://ec.europa.eu/transport/air_portal/safety/black_list_en.htm

More than a label, it's an eco-statement

With droughts in half the world and floods in the rest, people are worrying more about the environment and especially climate change. What the European Union's Eco-label does is give manufacturers a chance to show their 'green' inner self and for consumers to support them by looking out for the distinctive flower symbol.

The Eco-label – with its distinctive flower emblem logo – was first introduced in 1993. It is Europe's flagship brand for products and services that represent a better choice for the environment.

The Eco-label helps manufacturers, retailers and service providers gain deserved recognition for respecting high standards throughout their products' life cycles. On seeing the symbol, consumers can make an informed choice knowing that an Eco-label must be earned. It is based on solid, up-to-date science and takes into account consumer health issues and the way that a product is developed.

Lighten your carbon footprint

The brand applies to diverse sectors, such as cleaning products, appliances, home and garden items, clothing and even tourism. It doesn't cover food and beverages, the medical or pharmaceutical sector, or any goods made by processes "likely to significantly harm human beings or the environment".

The Eco-label scheme aims to encourage more organisations to apply for the award and, if they succeed, to publicise the fact. This will help promote the availability of eco-labelled products and improve consumer awareness of our fragile environment.

In 2006, more than 300 products in the EU proudly wore the Eco-label – 92 of them in Italy alone. Textile products, indoor paints and tourist accommodation were the most common products to earn this green stamp of approval.

As Europeans look for new ways to lower their impact on the planet – by lightening their carbon footprint – it is likely that the Eco-label will become even more important.



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The Eco-label helps you find greener products

More information:

Links:

- The European Union Eco-label Homepage
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/index_en.htm
- The European Eco-Label catalogue
<http://www.eco-label.com/>

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Safe European consumers

Europe is a huge single market for consumer goods. But consumers want to be sure that the products they buy are high quality and, above all, safe. That is why European product safety rules are so important.

European product safety rules ensure the safety of all EU citizens by making sure that everyone benefits from the same high level of consumer protection and safety. High standards have been set and defective products must be withdrawn from the market. A rapid information exchange service (RAPEX) has been established that means consumers across Europe are swiftly notified of a product problem in one region and, if necessary, a product recall can be started.

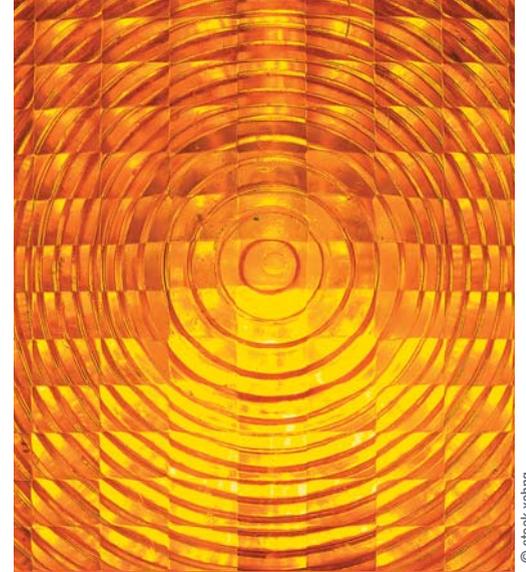
Freedom to shop

The main aim of the product safety rules is to enable European shoppers to buy where they wish with confidence, whether on-line, from a market stall or from a traditional shop. But besides setting general rules for all products, the rules also establish additional special safety regulations for items like toys, electrical and gas appliances, machinery and recreational vehicles.

The science of safety

These special rules are only made if they need to be, or if science brings new knowledge of a potential risk. A good example is the ban on the use of phthalates. Phthalates are chemicals which were used in toys and other childcare products to make plastics softer. But they were also associated with potential health-risks for children. Phthalates are now banned.

Naturally, these types of decisions are based on careful scientific assessment. After all, when it comes to consumer safety: it's better to be safe than sorry.



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Shining a light on product safety

More information:

Links:

- The EU product safety directive
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/cons_safe/prod_safe/gpsd/revisedGPSD_en.htm
- RAPEX – latest notifications
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/dyna/rapex/rapex_archives_en.cfm

Keeping hazardous substances out of REACH

Thanks to the European Union, new controls have been put in place that will help protect humans and the environment from dangerous chemical substances while maintaining Europe's competitive edge in the chemicals industry.

Up to now, there have been too many confusing safety laws on the use and handling of chemicals. With its new REACH policy (Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals), the European Union is simplifying things. Under REACH, European companies must assess and manage any risks arising from the chemicals they manufacture, import or use.

Finding the right balance

The challenge has been to achieve the right balance between a number of potentially competing goals. These were set out in an important European document, the 'White Paper on Strategy for a Future Chemicals Policy'. They included protecting humans and the environment against dangerous chemicals, keeping the European chemical industry competitive, and promoting non-animal testing. With this new REACH policy, the Union has worked on finding the right formula.

Keeping tabs on dangerous chemicals

In line with this new strategy, REACH is meant to protect people against potentially hazardous chemicals. At the same time, European governments recognise that they need to allow businesses to be innovative and successful in the global chemical industry.

With REACH, the Union is working hard to make sure all manufacturers, importers and users of chemicals are prepared and fully aware of what is expected of them.



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Just how dangerous? Now you know

More information:

Links:

- European Commission – REACH
http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/chemicals_regulatory_framework_en.htm

Recognisable qualifications

Europe is working hard to make it easier for employers and educational bodies to recognise 'foreign' qualifications. This is particularly useful for recent graduates who want to do some further study and perhaps work in another part of Europe, but may be worried that their qualifications won't be valid outside of their home country.

European countries got together in 1999 to create what is known as the 'Bologna Process'. The aim is to create something impressive, a 'European Higher Education Area' to make it easier for people to move around Europe for study. In the long-term, this will help workers to move in Europe, too, and help make the European economy more competitive. The Bologna Process now covers 46 countries and is building on the experience of 1 million Erasmus students.

Mutual recognition

If this Bologna Process is going to work, it is vital that European countries find a way to recognise each other's educational and vocational qualifications – not easy considering how many different training and education systems there are! But, progress is being made. For example, a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is being established for EU and Bologna countries, which is great news. It will link up the different countries' qualifications systems – in all the different sectors – so that they can understand each other, making them more easily recognisable and transferable.

Have degree, will travel

In 1984, a network of centres was established in Europe to provide advice and information on the academic recognition of diplomas obtained abroad (ENIC-NARIC). And, in 1989, the European Commission introduced the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), now widely used to facilitate recognition of study abroad. The Diploma Supplement also helps foreign employers and universities to quickly understand different degrees.



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A study in better recognition

More information:

Links:

- Recognition and transparency of qualifications
http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/rec_qual/rec_qual_en.html
- The Bologna Process: Towards the European Higher Education Area
http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna_en.html

Policing Europe together

Thanks to Europol, the European Union law enforcement agency, different police forces across Europe are better able to work together and the EU is a much safer place for it.

Europol, which started in 1999, is nothing less than a full-scale European police force, supporting the different police forces in all the EU Member States. It assists police officers Europe-wide in their fight against drug trafficking, illicit immigration, terrorism, human trafficking, forgery and money laundering, to name but a few.

Threats, intelligence and language

Support means just that – direct help where the police forces in one country have identified an organised criminal structure and two or more other EU countries are affected. Europol helps them share information, generate ‘strategic reports’ (things like threat assessments) and other types of intelligence. It can even help with technical expertise and back-up. Europol officers work closely with member countries to maximise the potential for co-operation. Sometimes support can even mean just helping two police forces to get over language barriers and talk to each other.

Drugs and fake banknotes – all in a day’s work

There are plenty of examples where EU police forces have managed to break up some big criminal operations with Europol’s assistance. In 2005 and 2006, it worked with the Dutch and German police in an operation that eventually broke up a massive criminal drug-making operation. In 2006, Europol helped Spanish and Columbian police, working with the US Secret Service, in an operation that ended with the seizure of more than 5 million euro and 4.3 million US dollars worth of counterfeit banknotes.

Requests for help from Europol are growing every year – a clear sign that this young organisation is doing the right thing and helping law-abiding Europeans go about their daily lives unhindered by criminal activity.



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On the beat, Europe-wide

More information:

Links:

- The European Police Office
<http://www.europol.europa.eu/>

Supporting Europe's regions

Some critics claim that Europe is just one huge federal bureaucracy. This is a long way from the truth. Over the last 50 years the EU has provided massive financial and political support to Europe's regions, especially the poorer ones.

Europe's regional policies aim to improve the economic and social prospects of all citizens, partly by reducing the gap between rich and poor regions. Greater equality means greater cohesion for Europe as a whole – a point not lost on Europe's founders who called for action to reduce “the backwardness of the less-favoured regions”.

Money well spent

Nowadays, a third of the European budget is spent on boosting economic performance and competitiveness in the regions. This is done through ‘instruments’ (like investment tools), such as the ‘European Regional Development Fund’ which has provided poorer regions with billions of euros to improve job prospects and help local businesses. Another fund, the ‘Cohesion Fund’ is used to finance transport and environmental initiatives in Europe's less well-off regions. These are especially important in an enlarged Europe, where often it is the newest countries that need this kind of financial help.

Forging friendships

The European Union brings together people to work on projects that cement cultural, economic and social relationships across regional and national borders. Hundreds of projects funded jointly by the European Union and the countries within it prove this: for example, millions of euros are now being spent to improve transport links and infrastructure that will bring previously isolated places on the Iberian peninsula closer to the rest of Europe. Other examples include the ‘Alpeuregio initiative’ which has brought Alpine regions in Italy and Austria together to improve their economic performance; and the IRMA project to help deal with flood prevention along the Northern Rhône. These are but a few examples of Europe's success in the regions.



© European Commission

New motorway linking Porto to Valença do Minho on the Galician border, Portugal

More information:

Links:

- Regional Policy – Info regio
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.htm
- Success Stories: Profiles of projects in Europe
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/projects/stories/index_en.cfm?pay=AT®ion=AT33&the=10

Oscars and Palmes d'Or are also European

Without MEDIA funds, some of Europe's best-known films would still be just ideas. Its support for the film and audio-visual industry has been boosting European cultural identity for nearly 20 years.

Have you seen Lars von Trier's *Dogville*, the European Film Award-winning *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* by Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Michael Haneke's Palme d'Or *Caché (Hidden)* or the recent Oscar-winning film *Das Leben der Anderen* by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck? These are just some examples of many successful European films seen by audiences across Europe and beyond, thanks to the MEDIA programme.

Over the last 18 years, MEDIA has been able to stimulate the creative aspects of film development and training, while never losing sight of the business side of the audio-visual sector, including production and distribution.

The European Commission, which provides the funding, describes the film industry as "a vector for the expression of European citizenship, culture [and] identity", especially for young people. When some countries in Europe are too small to have their own flourishing film industry, MEDIA gives artists the opportunity to work together and inspire each other across European borders, so that everyone can benefit.

Let the results speak for themselves

In 2005 alone, MEDIA provided 9.5 million euro to promote films, events and festivals. Nearly 300 projects have received some 17.6 million euro to develop scripts. More than 60 million euro have been spent on the distribution of 1 554 film and TV projects which, thanks to this money, could also be seen in other countries than the one where they had been produced. This generates cross-cultural understanding and is good for shaping European identity, don't you think?

MEDIA has also given money for training and pilot projects and supports the Europa Cinemas' network of 670 independent theatres with more than 1 500 screens in some 340 cities and 50 countries worldwide. With all this, keep in mind that each euro from the EU budget generates about 6 euro from private investment in the industry.

The coming years look bright, too. The MEDIA 2007 programme has a budget of 755 million euro lasting until 2013. A clear priority remains the distribution and promotion of European films outside their originating country, across Europe and worldwide (almost 65% of the total budget). And it will also take special care that our film industry keeps pace with the new digital technologies. So, next time you are watching a film, look out for the MEDIA name – in the credits or on the film poster!



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A rare sight if a MEDIA film is showing...

More information:

Links:

- Media Programme
<http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/media>
- Information Society
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/information_society
- European Commission – Information Society – MEDIA 2007
http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/doc/factsheets/061-media-en.pdf

A bright energy future

The ITER nuclear fusion project is less than a year old, but people first started working on the ideas behind it over 50 years ago. And it might take another 50 years to become a reality. But it could be worth waiting for because it offers one of the greatest prizes of all: access to the unlimited power of the Sun through nuclear fusion.

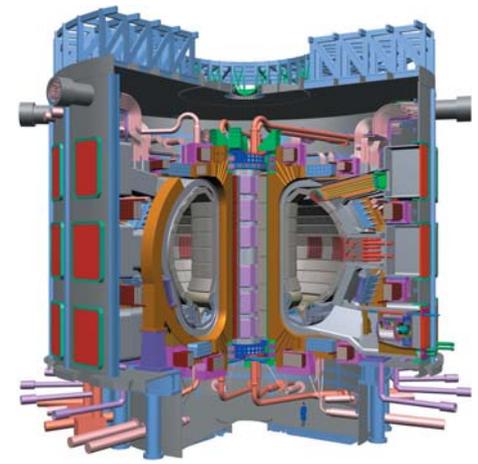
ITER means 'the way' in Latin and it is being built in the south of France by a team made up of the best scientists from Europe. It could be the future for world energy production using nuclear fusion. Before ITER, Europe was already showing the way forward in fusion energy research through JET – short for Joint European Torus, the largest nuclear fusion experimental reactor.

Fusion is the energy that drives the Sun – energy that makes all life on Earth possible. Fusion works by squeezing two light atoms of hydrogen together to form one atom of helium and energy. In the Sun, 600 million tonnes of hydrogen is 'burned' every second. ITER has to work on a smaller scale than the Sun – but this means it has to be even hotter!

To do this, it uses a doughnut-shaped machine, called a 'tokamak', to heat hydrogen gas to 100 million degrees and squeeze it with special magnets. This takes a lot of energy, but when the hydrogen fuses, it will generate ten times more. Imagine how important it could be for an increasingly energy-hungry world?

Big energy

ITER is the biggest energy research project in the world and a truly international project with China, India, Japan, Russia, South Korea and the United States joining Europe to make it happen. It will cost around 10 billion euros over its 35-year lifetime, with European countries contributing about half of that. But if it is successful, it will be the starting point for a practically limitless sustainable energy supply for the whole world.



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ITER: complex science with big ideas

More information:

Links:

- DG RTD: Fusion Energy
http://ec.europa.eu/research/energy/fu/article_1122_en.htm
- The European Joint Undertaking for ITER and the Development of Fusion Energy – 'Fusion for Energy'
http://ec.europa.eu/research/energy/fu/fu_rd/article_3329_en.htm
- JET – EFDA
<http://www.jet.efda.org/>
- ITER
<http://www.iter.org/>

Waste away!

The EU strategy on waste and recycling might be a strange success story for some, but it certainly makes a vital contribution to the quality of life of EU citizens, both today and for tomorrow.

Economic growth and the wealth it brings is one of the main objectives of the European Union. But economic growth often has a nasty side effect – it produces more waste. As factories produce more, and people consume more, so more waste is produced that must be disposed of somewhere. However, European Union waste prevention measures, such as taxes on non-recyclable packaging, are already helping decouple waste production from economic growth. Similarly, recycling is growing; in 2002, 58% of glass and 57% of metal waste was recovered and recycled, on average.

Inefficient consumers

In the EU we produce 2 billion tonnes of waste every year – that's around 3.5 tonnes of solid waste for each citizen. This waste is dumped in landfill sites or burned in incinerators, which creates environmental damage. Landfill causes air, water and soil pollution, discharging carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere and chemicals and pesticides into the earth and groundwater. This, in turn, is harmful to human health, as well as to plants and animals.

Breaking the wealth-waste link

As a top priority of the EU's Sixth Environment Action Programme, the primary objective is to decouple waste generation from economic activity, so that EU growth will no longer lead to more and more rubbish. This is being done in three ways, through waste prevention, more recycling and improved disposal.

Of course, Europe is working closely with national and regional authorities in each EU country which must implement these strategies 'on the ground'. When you see your local bottle banks and multicoloured waste bins again – remember how much has been achieved.



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These can make a vital contribution to the quality of your life

More information:

Links:

- European Commission – Environment – Overview of waste policies
<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/index.htm>

Keeping Europe in touch

Going places? Then the Trans-European Network, or TENs for short, can help. TENs moves goods and people right across Europe, as well as electricity, gas and communications. It also help Europeans to keep in touch and deliver the goods. – which is what Europe is all about.

Carrying

Rail, road, air, waterways – Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) have been improving them all. And then they link up all the different types of transport, making the best use of each. All of that takes quite some intelligence and, without wishing to boast, the TENs are pretty smart. Europe is at the forefront of intelligent transport management. It even has its own satellite radio navigation system, Galileo.

TENs also helps Europe's seafarers. There are vessel-positioning systems, reporting systems for ships transporting dangerous goods, and communication systems for safety at sea. And they make sure that air travel is safe and efficient, through airspace planning and air traffic control.

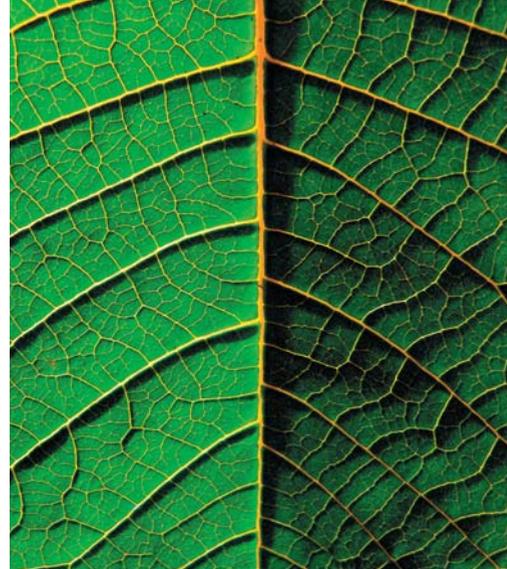
There are still some gaps in Europe's transport system, but TENs are helping national governments to fill them. That's all the more important now that the EU has expanded. There has been major investment in high-speed rail links. Where needed, help has been provided to build roads that link up the existing ones. In short, all the different pieces are being fitted together into a high-quality European transport network. And the environment is being taken care of in the process.

Energising

The Trans-European Energy Networks (TEN-E) cover the electricity and natural gas sectors. They help to create a single energy market within Europe – and to make sure that Europeans will always have the energy supplies they need.

Communicating

The Trans-European Telecommunications Networks (eTEN) link up Europe's telecommunications-based services. They are at the very heart of the initiative 'eEurope – an Information Society for All'.



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TENS - a network of interconnections

More information:

Links:

- Europa Glossary – Trans-European Networks
http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/ten_en.htm

More choice for consumers

A Slovak engineer with a Spanish university degree working for a German car company in a factory based in the United Kingdom that was funded by an Italian Bank and runs on electricity generated in France – welcome to the Single Market!

The free movement of goods, services, capital and people is what the Single Market is about and, as such, it is one of the greatest achievements of the European Union. The Single Market is about more choice – more choice for consumers about what and where they buy and for how much; more choice for students and workers about where they study and work; and more choice for investors and businesses about where they invest, purchase and sell.

More choice?

Why is more choice important? The answer: because it makes life, work and play more effective and more efficient – which helps growth and employment and well-being for all. More effective because, for example, a student can choose exactly the course they want to study in another country when it is not available in their own, or a bank can invest abroad in projects that are more suited to the needs of its customers.

And more efficient because, for example, consumer electronics, or energy, or construction services, can be purchased in a country that can provide them at the lowest price, and consumed in the country that needs them – just as if they had been purchased at home. And they all conform to the same health and safety standards. This improved efficiency arises because there are fewer barriers to competition in the larger single market.

And there is more

The size of the EU Single Market makes it very attractive for third countries from around the world to do business with the EU – so the Single Market supports trade with the rest of the world. And last but not least, the ease of shopping and doing business in the Single Market helps us all expand our horizons as we talk into our Finnish mobile phones, wear our Italian suits, drive our Czech cars, eat in Athenian restaurants, and invest in the Irish stock market.



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More choice all round; and not only in the supermarket

More information:

Links:

- The EU Single Market – Fewer barriers, more opportunities
http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/index_en.htm

A Union for stability and growth

What has Economic and Monetary Union, or EMU for short – ever done for Europeans? How about cheaper mortgages, better pensions and cheaper loans, for starters!

To many, EMU just appears as a bunch of rules and regulations for economists, and there is an element of truth in that. But much more important are the impacts of EMU on the European economy, businesses and citizens. Its main purpose is helping to bring stability and sustainable economic growth to Europe and Europeans – economic stability provides the best framework for creating jobs and wealth.

So how does it achieve this? Well, in three ways. First, the euro area has an independent central bank that manages price inflation. Second, through the single currency, the euro promotes integration and efficiencies in the single market. For example, by making prices transparent, which encourages cross-border trade and purchases and also brings more competition and lower prices. And finally, through the Stability and Growth Pact which ensures that Member States do not spend more than they earn overall, as this would affect all euro-area countries in the long run.

Multiple benefits

A key feature of EMU is the clear commitment to sustainable national budgets and the fight against price inflation. Since EMU was launched, interest rates and inflation have been reduced to historically low levels. This, in turn, offers benefits at all levels of society.

Interest repayments on national debt are lower, releasing more taxpayers' money for investment in hospitals, pensions, infrastructure and/or lower taxes. With low stable inflation, businesses can make longer-term plans and invest more with lower risks – encouraging trade, growth and more jobs. And borrowing is cheaper and less risky – so more citizens can afford to borrow, for their own home for instance.

Economic instability and high inflation caused much misery in the past. However, within Economic and Monetary Union, Europe and Europeans can look forward to more stable and prosperous times.



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A stable outlook with the euro

More information:

Links:

- EMU: A Historical Documentation
http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/emu_history/index_en.htm

Have euro, will travel

Everyone has probably heard of the euro – the single currency for the euro area – by now. But perhaps the advantages, such as easier travelling and lower prices, are less well known.

Before the euro was launched, the countries that are now in the 'euro area' had 12 different national currencies – an exotic touch that made travelling between countries a bit more interesting, but also quite a bit more expensive.

Every time a traveller changed currency there was a cost. In fact, an individual with 1 000 German Deutschmarks in his or her pocket who travelled through 15 Member States changing money in each one would have less than 500 left on returning home – without spending anything!

Those days are gone for the euro area. Citizens who travel, for holiday, study or work, no longer have to pay these 'transaction' costs of changing money. They can just pay in euro everywhere.

Cross-border business

For businesses that traded with the EU, these transaction costs were also high before the euro came on the scene. With the disappearance of these costs, this money is released for more productive investments in growth and jobs across the euro area.

In addition, euros allow much easier price comparisons across borders. So someone in Belgium can easily compare prices, for say a camera or a car, between several countries, and purchase it at the best price. This cross-border shopping brings more competition between companies and brings down consumer prices overall – a real advantage for shoppers.

It also stimulates greater efficiency in companies – making them better able to compete globally. So, overall, everyone wins.



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This kind of thing will soon be a thing of the past

More information:

Links:

- The Euro: Our Currency
http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/euro/our_currency_en.htm

Quality TV – across European borders

The free movement of workers, ideas and products are well-known concepts in Europe, but what about TV programmes? The EU set up Television without Frontiers to help the industry remain competitive while protecting consumers from harmful images or advertising overload, whether being watched on traditional TV sets, on demand, over the internet or via mobile phones.

‘Television Without Frontiers’ is the cornerstone of European television policy – aimed at safeguarding competitiveness and cultural diversity while protecting young people from overly violent or pornographic imagery and preventing us all from an overload of advertising. Television is a successful industry in Europe, creating jobs, innovation and growth, and this is recognised within those EU rules. The application of the internal market principle to television services ensures that they all comply with minimum standards and can be freely received and distributed throughout the Community. This creates a typical win-win situation: broadcasters can attract greater audiences and viewers can profit from a bigger choice of channels while enjoying protection in some key areas.

We care for the content

The rules want to make sure that European public interest is maintained on television and that you, as a European citizen, have a right to reply to what is reported on television. Programmes which might “seriously impair” the development of minors are prohibited.

The rules also require television channels to reserve over half of their broadcasting time for European programmes, and they allow Member States to draw up a national list of major events which must be shown on free TV (like the Football World Cup final).

Keeping an eye on adverts

And it’s not just the content of television programmes themselves that are under the gaze of Television Without Frontiers: rules on the content and frequency of television advertising have also been introduced. As a consequence, no TV channel is allowed to broadcast more than 12 minutes of advertisement an hour, and this differentiates European television from many US channels, for instance.



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You watch TV while we watch
the programme-makers

More information:

Links:

- European Commission – Audiovisual and Media Policies – TVWF
http://ec.europa.eu/comm/avpolicy/reg/tvwf/index_en.htm

Harnessing renewable energy sources

The sun, the wind and the waves; these are the elemental forces providing renewable energy to future generations of Europeans.

With climate change now threatening to transform our planet, people and governments are increasingly looking to the ever-present elements, for new sources of clean energy. These have, potentially, more energy than the world could ever need.

But promoting the sun, wind and water as energy sources is not just about harnessing their virtually limitless power. It is also about making responsible behaviour pay off for European businesses; renewable energy technologies form a dynamic high-tech sector and also provide economic growth and jobs.

Thanks to the European Union, Europe now stands at the leading edge of the renewable energy trend, promising sustainable health, wealth and prosperity.

Europe adds a new dimension

The development of alternative and renewable energy sources is being speeded up through co-operation, legislation, investment and dissemination, in Europe. The European Commission's 'White Paper for a Community Strategy' sets the goal of doubling the share of renewable energy used in Europe by 2010, and the European Parliament has called for even more ambitious targets for 2020.

Already moving forward with biomass

Here's a great example of a renewable energy source with real potential: biomass. This is the collection of organic non-fossil material, including all biological organisms. In a way, biomass represents a form of solar energy, captured by plants through photosynthesis. Underused biomass, like chaff and animal waste, can be burned to produce electricity and heat. It can also be transformed into biofuels.

Thanks to EU support, biomass and biofuels are already being used to power buses and trains in countries like Sweden and Germany, once again demonstrating the real benefits of the Union.



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New sources of clean energy are now a reality

More information:

Links:

- European Commission – policy overview, new and renewable energies
http://ec.europa.eu/energy/res/index_en.htm
- European Commission – energy research
http://ec.europa.eu/research/energy/index_en.htm

A force for good

Today, some 60 000 soldiers belong to the European Union's Rapid Reaction Force. The force was formally set up in 2007, although combined European military forces have already been deployed in some of the world's conflict hot spots. The Rapid Reaction Force, at the heart of Europe's emerging Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), will continue this work through its humanitarian, rescue and peacekeeping missions.

The Rapid Reaction Force's tasks, as part of the European Security and Defence Policy (which is part of the CFSP), include a range of possible missions, from humanitarian and rescue tasks to helping victims of conflict, to peacekeeping duties, crisis management and peacemaking. It will be continuing the work of the EU military forces who have already been deployed on three significant missions: in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2003 and 2004 where it took over peacekeeping and training actions from UN and NATO-led forces; and in 2003 in Macedonia, where it replaced another small NATO force.

The force is the result of seven years of negotiations and a tangible expression of the grander aim for Europe to speak with one voice in world affairs. It isn't a conventional permanent army, sitting around in a barracks in one European country, nor will it replace individual European countries' existing armies. It's more like a 'battle group' of coordinated European Union forces who can be called upon to act together, when needed.

Keeping the peace

The Rapid Reaction Force has been created as part of a peaceful mission. The idea of all the European countries banding together in the first place was to make sure there would never be another major war here, and its role is part of a vital system of checks and balances which will ensure things don't get out of hand again, here or outside Europe. Of course, these days, one of the greatest threats facing us – global terrorism – is more unpredictable than any other.



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The EU's Rapid Reaction Force: a peaceful mission

More information:

Links:

- European Security and Defence Policy
<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.asp?id=261&lang=en>
- Foreign and Security Policy
http://europa.eu/pol/cfsp/overview_en.htm

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If you are European, you are part of a family of 27 countries and 490 million citizens. Have you ever stopped to wonder what the European Union has done for you? Now is your chance to find out.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome – the birth of the EU – the European Commission is publishing this new booklet, '50 ways forward – Europe's Best Successes', to highlight the importance of the European Union for you and I. This attractive and entertaining booklet is packed with 50 real examples, showing how people in Europe, and beyond, have benefited, and will continue to benefit, from the European Union. You will find a wide range of stories, from 'dot eu' to the euro, to how you can now travel easier with your family pet.

The 50 ways forward booklet is also available on-line at: <http://europa.eu/success50>.



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