



## Activity sheet 4    Citizens of Europe

*The European Union (EU) is an international organisation with 25 member states. The United Kingdom is one of those countries, and Wales is one of the four nations of the UK. Although in theory we are all citizens of Europe, some people feel that they are Welsh or British only, and that the EU has little to do with them.*

*This activity sheet explores some of the ways in which individuals might relate to the EU, and some of the challenges for democracy in Europe.*

### Should foreigners vote?

**Key Stage 4**    PSE, Community Aspect – understanding democratic systems and governance

If you're an EU citizen living in an EU country other than your own, you can vote in European elections; in the UK you can vote in local elections too. But what if you live in the EU but don't hold EU citizenship?

#### **These countries will give you no voting rights:**

Austria	Cyprus	France	Germany
Greece	Hungary	Italy	Latvia
Poland	Slovakia		

#### **These countries give you voting rights after a set period:**

Belgium	Denmark	Estonia	Finland
Ireland	Lithuania	Luxembourg	Netherlands
Slovenia	Sweden		

#### **These countries give voting rights if you belong to a certain group:**

Czech Republic	Malta	Portugal	Spain	UK
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Many foreigners moved into an EU country decades ago, but are still unable to influence policies with a vote. As residents, most of them pay taxes and national insurance, but some cannot vote in elections without changing their nationality.

#### **Activity: Why vote?**

List, draw a picture, or create a class collage, of all the different areas of life affected by government decisions, e.g. education, health, environment, transport. Do all of these areas affect both EU citizens and foreigners living in the EU?

#### **Discussion points:**

- Is it right to allow foreigners to vote in local or national elections?
- Should immigrants be able to vote in both their old home country and their new home?
- Should all EU countries have the same policy on voting?
- Why do you think that some countries do not allow non-EU immigrants to vote?
- How can people get involved in public life and practise citizenship, other than by voting?

## True democracy?

Key Stage 4  
AS

PSE, Community Aspect – democratic systems  
Edexcel, Government and Politics – The EU and European Issues

- Although EU citizens can vote in **European Parliament elections**, interest in those elections is fairly low. Across the EU, the proportion of people voting fell from 63% in the first European election in 1979, to 49.5% in 1999. In the UK in 2004, less than 38% voted. This might be explained by people not understanding what the European Parliament does, or feeling that it is too distant from the people it represents.
- Another part of democracy is **consultation** – asking people's opinions on a matter before creating a law about it. Consultations in the EU tend to occur at a local level. It is possible to hold a national vote (a **referendum**) on a particularly important issue, but this is relatively uncommon. The only British referendum on Europe was to ask people whether we should stay in the European Community – and that took place in 1975.
- **Does the EU itself work democratically?** Elected Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) can amend or reject most EU legislation. They can force the European Commission to resign, vet Commissioners before they are appointed, and control the EU budget. However, the controversial **European Commission** remains at the heart of the EU. Some say it is undemocratic – it is the only body that can suggest new EU laws, its meetings are not held in public, and its members are not elected directly but proposed by national governments.

### **Activity: From the people to the decision takers...**

Below is a diagram representing the institutions of the EU, and showing which are elected by citizens or by governments. In pairs, design an alternative picture or diagram which represents the structure of power in Europe as you understand it.

### **Discussion points:**

- Are EU citizens involved enough in decision-making?
- Do most people really understand how the EU works?
- Why do you think that the turnout for European elections is getting lower?
- Which institution do you think is the most powerful?
- Do you think that EU laws should be made in a different way?



## A constitution for Europe?

AS Edexcel, Government and Politics – The EU and European Issues  
For general curriculum links, see the Teachers' Introduction

### *Is it a good idea to have one document that binds together all the citizens of the EU?*

- A constitution is the system of rules and principles by which something is governed. Therefore, it affects every citizen who lives under its authority.
- In 2004, all 25 members of the EU signed a new **Constitutional Treaty**. For the Constitution to become law, all 25 must also ratify it. 14 member states have done so, but citizens of France and the Netherlands rejected the constitution in 2005. Countries like the UK have now put ratification on hold, while everyone reflects on the future of the Constitution.
- The EU's goal was to replace a number of existing (and quite confusing) treaties with one document. Some people in France opposed the Constitution because they felt it was too economically liberal; others believed that rejecting it would force the treaty to be rewritten. Others still simply did not understand the Constitution (which in its English form is 482 pages long), and used their vote to protest against the government's record on other matters, such as the domestic economy.
- These events show that EU citizens can make their voices heard at national level, which might be proof of European democracy in action. Alternatively, voters might simply have felt removed from the development of the Constitution, and not understood what they would be voting for.

### **Activity:**

If you were writing a constitution for a new country, what would you include? In groups, write a 10-point constitution, perhaps using extracts from national constitutions to help generate ideas ([www.constitution.org/cons/natlcons.htm](http://www.constitution.org/cons/natlcons.htm)).

### **Discussion points:**

- Why is it useful to have a written constitution?
- Do you think the EU needs a constitution?
- Do you think that citizens should have been consulted on the writing of the Constitution?
- What do you think about the countries that ratified the Constitution without putting it to a national vote?

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### **About Citaware**

Citaware aims to increase understanding in Wales of European citizenship, and to enable people of all ages to engage with EU institutions. It is funded by the European Commission and organised jointly by:



#### **Welsh Centre for International Affairs (WCIA)**

National forum for the exchange of ideas on international issues.

[www.wcia.org.uk](http://www.wcia.org.uk)



#### **Council for Education in World Citizenship – Cymru**

Schools arm of the WCIA.

[www.cewc-cymru.org.uk](http://www.cewc-cymru.org.uk)



#### **EuropaWorld**

Free online newspaper covering international development from a European perspective.

[www.europaworld.org](http://www.europaworld.org)