

11. Reforming Europe



Your aim

The overall aim of this lesson is to introduce the students to the debate on the future development of the European Union and invite them to reflect upon what kind of EU they want.



Learning Outcome

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to explain the concept of a treaty and debate some of the advantages/disadvantages of the new Reform Treaty for the EU.



Time

Double class period



Materials or Sources required

- » 'Treaties of the EU' and 'The Reform Treaty' Resource Sheets
- » Debate Cards



Preparation

- » Photocopy Resource Sheet 'The Reform Treaty' and the Debate Cards to be handed out in class.
- » Create an OH copy of the 'Treaties of the EU' resource sheet



Potential Partner Activity

Ideas for partner activities given below

Introduction

The teacher starts the class by explaining to the student that during this lesson they are going to take a look at the debate on the future of the European Union. Different opinions about in what direction the EU should develop will be introduced by focusing on the debate concerning the Reform Treaty.

Some students might have heard about the 'European Constitution'. This was the previous working title for the new treaty but it was rejected by referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005. The Reform Treaty is a new draft treaty and it will be subject to a national referendum in Ireland.

The teacher then explains to the class how the EU has been created through treaties that acts as frameworks, setting out rules for how the EU should function and what areas it should work with. (The comparison could be made between a treaty and the rules of a sport, like football. The rules set out what can and can not be done on the field, how many players there should be in each team etc.)

Teachers Notes

There have been many treaties of the EU which can be seen in detail in the resource sheet. So why another Treaty? Well, now that the EU has expanded to 27 member states, the Reform Treaty is necessary to streamline the rules by which the 27 member states will work. It also aims to modernise the EU's institutions and streamline its decision-making so that it can act more effectively on important issues like employment, the environment and immigration. Please see the resource sheet 'The Reform Treaty' for more details.

Whole Class Work

An overview of the previous treaties and how they shaped the EU can be given by the teacher with the help of the 'Treaties of the EU' resource sheet.

The teacher introduces the topic of the new Reform Treaty for the EU by asking the students if they have heard or read anything about it.

The teacher explains that the purpose of the treaty is to adapt the EU to its large number of member states, making it more efficient and democratic in its decision-making. The treaty also aims to give the EU a more unified voice internationally so that it can better promote European interests and values worldwide.

The main features of the Treaty should be introduced to the students using 'The Reform Treaty' resource sheet, giving time for the teacher to explain more complicated concepts and answer questions.

Group Work

The teacher explains that the students are now going to look at the new treaty through the eyes of someone with a specific view of the EU, using three debate cards. The teacher should explain that each card represents a stereotypical view of the EU and that, although more nuanced in reality, arguments stemming from these standpoints appear frequently in the debate about the future of the EU.

The teacher gives a short presentation of the three characters for the whole class and then divides the students into three groups, handing out one of the debate cards and a copy of 'The Reform Treaty' resource sheet to each group.

The teacher gives each group the task of preparing a number of points for or against the Reform Treaty according to the position of the character on the debate card they have been dealt. The students should evaluate each of the proposed changes in the treaty and try to assess if their character would approve or disapprove of the change and why they would do so.

After appropriate time has been given for the group discussions the teacher asks the different groups to make their argument for or against the treaty, according to the character they are role playing. This could be done in the form of a debate where one or two spokespersons from each group sits on a panel and defends their position against the others.

Alternatively, the teacher collects the arguments from each group and lists them on the board, under two columns, for and against.

Conclusion

The teacher ends the class by offering students the opportunity to identify what they believe were the strongest points in each set of arguments.

The Reform Treaty

The main points of the reform treaty are:

A MORE EFFICIENT EU:

- » The EU improves its ability to act in areas of major priority for today's Europe, such as energy policy, public health and civil protection, climate change, research and technological development, commercial policy, space, humanitarian aid, sport, tourism, and administrative cooperation.
- » A new job of the President of the European Council is created. She/He will ensure a smoother running of the EU's business.
- » The European Union becomes a single legal personality, which means the EU is able to sign international agreements that the member states will have to adhere to.
- » A 'High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy' is introduced to conduct the Union's common foreign and security policy.
- » The number of commissioners is reduced from 27 to 15. This is due to come into effect in 2014 and every country will have a Commissioner for 10 out of every 15 years.
- » The maximum number of representatives in the European Parliament is reduced from 785 to 754.
- » More decisions are made by using qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers instead of unanimity, especially in areas such as migration, asylum, police and judicial cooperation. The Qualified Majority means that at least 55% of the member states or 65% of the EU's population need to support a proposed legislation for it to pass.

A MORE DEMOCRATIC UNION:

- » The influence and power of the Parliament increases as more areas will be covered by the co-decision procedure, especially in areas like agricultural policy, immigration and asylum. Co-decision means that the Parliament and the Council need to agree on a proposal before it becomes law. Since its members are elected directly by the citizens more power to the Parliament is effectively seen as increasing democracy in the EU.
- » A move towards participatory democracy is introduced by the right of 'citizens initiative', which means that the citizens of Europe are able to ask the Commission to propose a law, if they can provide a petition with one million signatures from a substantial number of different Member States.
- » The role of the National Parliaments is strengthened by the right to object to proposed EU legislation. If a majority of the Member States national parliaments is backing the objection, and if it is handed over within eight weeks, the commission must review its proposal.

Debate Cards

THE ENTHUSIAST

You would like to see the European integration continue further, towards a kind of United States of Europe. As Winston Churchill suggested, you believe that surrendering power to the EU is the only way for member states to tackle future challenges like globalisation, global warming and terrorism. The EU needs to be a strong, unified actor on the world stage to be able to make a change. The biggest danger is for the EU to be dragged down by unnecessarily complicated decision-making procedures and petty quarrels between member states.

THE SCEPTIC

You think that decisions are best made on a national level and would like the EU to be strictly an organisation for cooperation between independent states and that no country should be forced to obey a law that they do not agree to. The biggest danger is that by surrendering power to the EU your government might not be able to do what is best for your country, and might be forced to make compromises that benefit other countries more than your own.

THE CITIZEN

Your priority is to make the voice of the citizen heard in the EU. You worry that the EU is becoming too bureaucratic and distant for the ordinary European to understand what is happening in Brussels and Strasbourg. You want to see an EU where issues are debated in the open and where the general public can shape the decision-making process, either directly or through their elected representatives. For the citizen to be able to become more involved the division of power between the EU institutions must be clear, and a genuine effort must be made to educate the public of their rights and responsibilities regarding the EU. The biggest concern is for the EU to become a project driven by elites, over the heads of the European people

Treaties of the EU

1951 The Treaty of Paris

Also called the European Coal and Steel Agreement. It created a common market for coal and steel; raw materials that were crucial for the industries of the member states.

1957 The Treaty of Rome

Established the European Economic Community (EEC) that created a European customs union that removed barriers to trade between member countries. Laid the foundations for deeper economic integration. Also established the European Atomic Energy Community for the creation of a common market in nuclear materials.

1986 The Single European Act

Added new policies to the EEC such as environment, economic and social cohesion, and research and development. It laid the foundations for the single market as we know it today.

1992 The Maastricht Treaty

The Treaty on the European Union, created the European Union as a three pillar structure. Also laid out a timetable for the Economic and Monetary Union (the euro) Added new policy areas such as development, health and consumer protection.

1997 Treaty of Amsterdam

Adding more policy areas including anti-discrimination and promoting employment.

2001 Treaty of Nice

Prepared the EU institutions for enlargement by changing national representation in the EU institutions.