14.4 Political Cooperation in the EU

Before the EU was formed, there were many political divisions among European countries. Each nation was independent. Each nation set its own policies. Nations could choose to work together, but they did not have to. As you have read, political conflict was often more common than cooperation.

The EU encourages political cooperation among its members. They all take part in a common EU government. The EU government does not replace the governments of its member nations. Instead, it is a supranational government. That is, it works above the governments of the EU countries.

How the EU Government Unites Europe The EU government works in two ways to unite Europe. First, it brings its members together to work on issues they all share. For example, it tries to take a common approach to environmental problems.

Second, the EU encourages Europeans to think of themselves as citizens of Europe. This is on top of their citizenship in their home countries. With European citizenship, citizens of member nations can live and work anywhere in the EU. They can also vote in EU elections. They have this right no matter where they live in the EU.

The EU government has several important bodies. The Council of the European Union is the main decision-making body. It is made up of national leaders from each member country. The council sets overall goals for the EU.

The European Commission is the executive body. It is made up of commissioners who are appointed by member governments. The commission’s main duty is to see that EU decisions are carried out.

The European Parliament is the largest EU body. Citizens of the EU countries directly elect its 700 members. The parliament’s role is to watch over the work of the European Union. It can approve or block the EU budget. This budget says how money should be spent on EU projects.

The EU government helps to unite Europe by speaking with one voice for all of its members. Within Europe, the EU focuses on shared issues, such as transportation and the environment. Outside of Europe, the EU works to strengthen Europe’s role in the world. By working together, EU members have more power in world affairs than any one European country would have by itself. In these ways, the EU government acts as a centripetal force in Europe.

How the EU Government Divides Europe There are centrifugal forces at work as well in the EU government. When a country joins the European Union, it is expected to give up some power to the EU government. This may mean carrying out decisions made by the EU that it does not agree with.

Giving up power has been a problem for many EU members. Some countries still want to make independent decisions in areas like
defense and foreign affairs. This is more often true when they don’t agree with EU decisions.

The growing size of the EU is also a centrifugal force. By 2004, the EU included more than 450 million people in 25 countries. As the size of the EU has increased, so have the differences among the EU’s nations and peoples. With more countries and cultures, cooperation has become more difficult.

Finally, the idea of European citizenship has been hard for some Europeans to adjust to. A recent poll of Europeans found that almost half would not mind if the EU simply disappeared. People who feel this way may fear that their national identity will get lost in the push for a more united Europe. For them, the advantages of political cooperation may never be worth the costs.

**Representation in the European Parliament, 2005**

The European Parliament is one of the main bodies of the EU government. The people of the EU elect its members. Elections are held every five years. Countries with more people have more representatives.