The political system of the European Union

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Introduction

1.Origin and historical development of the European Union

1.1 The beginnings: the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)

The creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) marks the first step towards today's European Union. The political and economic goals of this foundation laid the foundation for the later integration and cooperation of the European states.

1.1.1 History reference

After the Second World War, Europe lay in ruins. The wars had highlighted the need for deep cooperation and integration of European countries to prevent future conflicts. It was in this context that the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, developed the Schuman Plan in 1950.

1.1.2 The creation of the ECSC

The Schuman Plan envisaged placing the production of coal and steel, the key resources for warfare, under a common sovereignty. This was intended to increase the interdependence of member countries, which should reduce the chances of a new war. On 9 May 1950, Schuman presented his plan, which became known as the Schuman Declaration. This date is celebrated today as Europe Day.

1.1.3 The founding Treaties and objectives of the ECSC

The founding treaties were signed in the form of the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community and entered into force in 1951. The ECSC consisted of six founding members: France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

The objectives of the ECSC were:

- The promotion of peace and stability through close economic integration.
- The creation of a common market for coal and steel.
- The establishment of a supranational authority to manage coal and steel production.

1.1.4 The institutions of the ECSC

The ECSC had its own organs:

- The High Authority: It was the executive body of the ECSC and was responsible for monitoring compliance with the Treaties and making policy recommendations.

- The Common Assembly: It was composed of representatives of the national parliaments of the member countries and had a consultative function.
- The Court of Justice of the ECSC: it had jurisdiction to interpret the Treaties and settle disputes.

1.1.5 Significance and heritage of the ECSC

The ECSC was an important step in European integration. It created the basis for cooperation between European states in economic affairs and helped to build trust between the former wartime opponents. The successful functioning of the ECSC laid the foundations for the creation of other European Communities, which eventually led to the formation of the European Union.

The experience and achievements of the ECSC are still relevant today and serve as a historical example of the possibility of political and economic integration of sovereign states.

1.2 The Treaties of Rome and the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) and Euratom

The Treaty of Rome of 1957 marked another significant step in the development of European integration. They led to the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), which, along with the already existing European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), laid the foundations for today's European Union.

1.2.1 Background and context

Following the success of the ECSC, the desire for deeper economic and political integration in Europe grew ever stronger. The Treaty of Rome was developed to further promote cooperation between European countries in the fields of economy and energy.

1.2.2 The creation of the European Economic Community (EEC)

The EEC was established by the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (EEC Treaty). The aim of the EEC was to create a common market in which the free movement of goods, services, capital and people was guaranteed. This should increase prosperity and promote economic growth.

1.2.3 The creation of the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom)

Euratom was created in parallel with the EEC to promote the peaceful use of atomic energy. Member States should jointly conduct nuclear research, establish nuclear safety standards and ensure the free movement of nuclear materials.

1.2.4 The institutions of the EEC and Euratom

The EEC and Euratom shared some institutions with the ECSC, while others were newly created:

- The Commission of the European Communities: responsible for executive tasks and legislative initiatives.

- The Council of Ministers: Composed of representatives of the Member States, responsible for political decisions and legislation.
- The European Assembly: A consultative body that later became the European Parliament.
- The Court of Justice of the European Communities: Responsible for the interpretation and enforcement of the Treaties.

1.2.5 Significance of the Treaties of Rome

The Treaty of Rome marked a decisive step towards the political integration of Europe. The creation of the EEC and Euratom laid the foundations for the European single market and allowed for deeper economic cooperation between the Member States. This led to increased prosperity and economic growth. In addition, the Treaty of Rome established the basic principles of "ever closer union" and supranational integration, which continue to shape European integration today.

The successes and achievements of the EEC and Euratom paved the way for further integration steps in the coming decades, which eventually led to the formation of the European Union.

1.3 The development of the European Union (EU) and the various rounds of enlargement

The development from the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) to the European Union (EU) as well as the enlargement rounds have made the EU one of the most important political and economic organisations in the world.

1.3.1 Towards the European Union (EU)

In the decades that followed, after the founding of the EEC and Euratom, there was a gradual deepening of European integration. This led to the creation of the European Union (EU) by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992.

The Maastricht Treaty established the EU as an overarching political and economic organization that pursued not only economic but also political goals. The EU was given its own institutions, such as the European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission, to strengthen political integration.

1.3.2 The EU's enlargement rounds

The EU has experienced a number of rounds of enlargement over time, with the admission of new Member States. These enlargements helped to increase the EU's influence and reach and extend the ideals of peace, stability and prosperity to more countries.

Examples of enlargement rounds include:

- The first round of enlargement in 1973: Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom joined the EU.
- The eastward enlargement in 2004: Ten countries, mainly from Eastern Europe, joined the EU, including Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and the Baltic States.
- The 2007 enlargement round: Bulgaria and Romania became members of the EU.
- The most recent round of enlargement in 2013: Croatia joined the EU.

1.3.3 Importance of the development towards the EU and enlargements

The development from the EEC to the EU and the enlargement rounds have made the EU a politically, economically and socially integrated community. The EU not only pursues economic goals, but is also committed to common values such as peace, democracy, human rights and social justice.

Enlargements have made the EU a diverse community that unites countries with different backgrounds and interests. They have also helped to promote stability in Europe and strengthen cooperation at international level.

The development towards the EU and the enlargements are a testimony to the success of European integration and show how countries are able to create a strong and influential political entity through joint efforts and compromises.

1.4 The challenges and changes since the foundation

The European Union (EU) has undergone an impressive development since its inception, but has also faced numerous challenges and changes. These have shaped the EU and meant that it has had to continuously adapt and evolve.

1.4.1 Economic challenges

Since its inception, the EU has faced economic challenges, including:

- The euro crisis: Especially during and after the global financial crisis of 2008, the economic differences between EU Member States became apparent. Some countries, such as Greece, Portugal and Ireland, ran into serious economic difficulties, causing tensions within the eurozone.
- Unemployment and inequality: High unemployment in some regions, as well as social inequality within the EU, posed long-term challenges.

1.4.2 Policy challenges

The EU also faced policy challenges, including:

- Brexit: The UK's exit from the EU was a significant event that brought political uncertainty and economic implications.
- Migration and refugee crisis: The high number of refugees and migrants arriving in the EU led to political tensions and questions about the common migration policy.

1.4.3 Democratic legitimacy and closeness to the citizen

A recurring theme in the EU was the question of democratic legitimacy and proximity to the citizens. Critics argued that the EU's decision-making structures were too opaque and too far removed from citizens. This led to debates on strengthening the role of the European Parliament and promoting citizen participation.

1.4.4 Technological and social changes

The rapid development of technology and changes in the world of work also influenced the EU. Issues related to data protection, digital trade and securing labour rights in a changing economy were topics of high relevance.

1.4.5 Environmental and climate challenges

The EU also faced challenges in the area of environment and climate. The need to take sustainable measures to combat climate change and promote environmental protection has led to new policy initiatives and legislation.

1.4.6 Adaptations and reforms

Despite these challenges, the EU has continuously adapted and reformed to respond to the changing political, economic and social landscape. This is reflected in the Treaty changes, new policy areas and the efforts to make the EU closer to its citizens and more democratic.

The challenges and changes since the founding of the EU underline the need for a flexible and adaptable organisation that is ready to respond to the needs and concerns of its Member States and citizens.

2.The institutions of the European Union

2.1 European Parliament

2.1.1 Duties and Responsibilities

The European Parliament (EP) is one of the most important institutions of the European Union (EU) and represents the citizens of the EU. It has a wide range of tasks and responsibilities that reflect Parliament's legislative, scrutinisive and representative role.

Legislative tasks:

- **Co-decision procedure:** The EP exercises legislative power together with the Council of the European Union. In many policy areas, such as the internal market, environmental protection and consumer protection, the EP is equally involved in the legislative process. It can make amendments to legislative proposals and must approve them before they become law.

Haushaltsbefugnisse:

- **Budgetary control:** The EP has the right to approve or reject the EU budget. It examines EU spending and ensures that it is in line with political priorities and citizens' needs.

Control function:

- **Parliamentary questions and inquiries:** The EP has the right to ask questions to the European Commission and the Council for information or political responsibility. It can also set up committees of inquiry to investigate specific matters more closely, such as cases of corruption or mismanagement.

Representative function:

- **Citizen representation: Members of the** EP, also known as MEPs, are elected by direct elections from the citizens of EU Member States. The EP thus represents the interests and opinions of the people at European level.

International relations:

- **Cooperation with other parliaments:** The EP maintains relations with parliaments around the world and is active in international affairs. It can also ratify agreements and treaties negotiated by the EU.

Democratic legitimacy:

- **Strengthening democracy:** The EP strengthens the democratic legitimacy of the EU, as it represents the interests of citizens and is involved in the decision-making process.

The roles and responsibilities of the European Parliament illustrate its important role as a democratically elected institution that influences EU legislation, monitors political responsibility and represents citizens' interests at European level.

2.1.2 Elections to the European Parliament

The election of the European Parliament (EP) is a key process that ensures the democratic legitimacy of the European Union (EU) and gives citizens the opportunity to elect their representatives at European level. The elections take place every five years and have a direct impact on the composition and political orientation of the EP.

Electoral procedure:

- **Proportionality:** Most EU Member States use a proportional representation system for EP elections. This means that seats in the EP will be distributed in proportion to the vote shares of the political parties.

List voting and personal voting:

- **List voting:** The parties draw up lists of candidates who can be elected in the respective Member States. Voters vote for a specific party list.
- **In-person voting:** In some countries, voters can also express a personal preference for a candidate on the list by individualizing their vote.

Constituencies:

- **National constituencies:** Some countries divide the country into constituencies where MEPs are elected. The seats in each constituency are then distributed proportionally.

Supra-regional lists:

- **Transnational lists:** In some countries, parties can draw up transnational lists that apply across national borders. This allows voters to choose candidates from different countries.

Election date and voter turnout:

- **Election date:** EP elections take place every five years from the end of May to the beginning of June. The exact dates may vary depending on the country.
- **Voter turnout:** Voter turnout in EP elections varies widely between Member States. Some countries have a high voter turnout, while others have a relatively low turnout.

Results and distribution of seats:

- **Distribution of** seats: The number of seats in the EP per country is proportional to the size of the country's population. The exact distribution is determined individually in each country.

- **Political groups:** Elected MEPs join together in the EP to form political groups that hold similar political beliefs. These groups influence the work and decisions in Parliament.

The election of the European Parliament is a fundamental act of democratic participation of EU citizens. It enables voters to help shape the political direction of the EU and to represent their interests at the European level.

2.1.3 The functioning and structure of the European Parliament

The European Parliament (EP) is the directly elected legislature of the European Union (EU). Its working methods and structure are designed to represent citizens' interests, shape EU legislation and exercise political control.

Plenary sessions:

- **Location:** The plenary sessions take place in the European Parliament building in Strasbourg, while the committee meetings and other activities take place in Brussels.
- **MEPs:** MEPs gather for regular plenary sessions to debate and vote on legislative proposals, resolutions and political issues.

Committees:

- **Committees:** The EP has a large number of committees dealing with specific policy areas. These committees examine legislative proposals, prepare reports and recommendations, and conduct hearings.
- **Rapporteurs:** Each committee has rapporteurs who are responsible for preparing reports on specific topics.

Groups:

- **Political groups:** MEPs join together in political groups that hold similar political beliefs. The political groups play an important role in the drafting of laws and political positions.
- **Group leaders:** Each group has a leader who leads the group and coordinates its political agenda.

Debates and votes:

- **Debates:** During plenary sessions, issues are discussed in debates. Members of parliament can make speeches and present their points of view.
- **Voting:** The EP votes on legislative proposals, resolutions and other matters. Votes may be taken by show of hands, electronically or by roll-call.

Cooperation with other EU institutions:

- **Co-decision procedure:** The EP cooperates with the Council of the European Union on legislation. In many legislative procedures, both institutions have an equal say.

- **Trilogue negotiations:** In order to find compromises, representatives of the EP, the Council and the European Commission take part in trilogue negotiations to reach agreement on legislative proposals.

Citizen participation and petitions:

- **Citizen participation:** The EP offers citizens the opportunity to submit petitions and participate in hearings to voice their concerns and concerns.
- **Committee on Petitions:** The EP has a Committee on Petitions, which examines petitions and makes recommendations.

The functioning and structure of the European Parliament are designed to ensure democratic, transparent and efficient representation of citizens' interests at European level. Through debates, committees, political groups and votes, the EP contributes significantly to EU legislation and policy-making.

2.2 European Council

2.2.1 Duties and responsibilities

The European Council is one of the most important institutions of the European Union (EU) and plays a crucial role in setting the EU's political guidelines and strategic objectives. The tasks and responsibilities of the European Council are focused on the formulation of EU policies and the political leadership of the Union.

Setting the political guidelines:

- The European Council sets the overall policy objectives and guidelines for the EU. These are long-term strategic decisions that influence the EU's political agenda.

Determination of the general political direction:

- The European Council provides a platform for discussions on current policy issues and challenges. It helps to determine the overall political direction of the EU.

Foreign and Security Policy:

- The European Council lays down the broad guidelines of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). It can formulate common positions on international affairs and respond to security policy issues.

Bilateral relations with third countries:

- The European Council may define and agree on specific relations with third countries or international organisations.

Institutional issues:

- The European Council can discuss institutional issues and take decisions that affect the EU institutions. This includes the appointment of the President of the European Commission.

Amendments:

- The European Council has an important role to play in treaty changes affecting the EU treaties. It can take decisions on the opening of an Intergovernmental Conference that prepares amendments to the Treaty.

Crisis management and strategic orientation:

- The European Council can adapt and coordinate the strategic direction of the Union in times of crisis and significant change in the EU.

Cooperation with other institutions:

- The European Council works closely with other EU institutions, in particular the European Commission. It influences the political agenda and the Commission's proposals.

Decision-making process and chairmanship:

- The European Council meets at least four times a year. It is headed by a permanent president, who is usually elected every two and a half years. The presidency rotates regularly between the EU Member States.

The European Council is central to the political leadership and direction of the EU. Its tasks and responsibilities include setting policy objectives, responding to challenges and coordinating Member States' policy activities at European level.

2.2.2 Composition and decision-making processes

The European Council is an institution of the European Union (EU) consisting of the heads of state and government of the EU member states. It plays a crucial role in setting the EU's political guidelines and strategic objectives. The composition and decision-making processes of the European Council are geared towards achieving a common political orientation of the EU.

Composition:

- **Heads of State and Government: The European Council** is composed of the Heads of State or Government of the EU Member States, as well as the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission.

Presidency of the European Council:

- **Permanent President: The European Council** has a permanent President who chairs the meetings and coordinates the work of the European Council. The permanent president is appointed for a term of two and a half years.

Decision making:

- **Consensus principle:** The European Council usually takes its decisions by consensus. This means that all members must agree for a decision to be made.

Summits and meetings:

- **Regular meetings:** The European Council usually meets four times a year for regular summits. Additional meetings may be convened if necessary.

Political guidelines and strategic objectives:

- **Political agenda:** The European Council sets the political agenda of the EU. It sets out the overall policy objectives and guidelines for EU Member States.

Adoption of conclusions:

- **Conclusions:** After the summits, the European Council publishes conclusions reflecting the decisions taken and political guidelines. These conclusions are not legally binding, but they carry political weight.

Foreign Policy and International Relations:

- **Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP):** The European Council lays down the broad guidelines of the CFSP and can formulate common positions on international affairs.
- **International relations:** The European Council can define relations with third countries and international organisations.

Crisis management and strategic orientation:

- **Crisis management:** The European Council can adjust and coordinate the strategic direction of the Union in times of crisis and significant change in the EU.

The composition and decision-making processes of the European Council reflect its role as the EU's highest political body. Cooperation between the Heads of State and Government of the Member States sets policy objectives and guidelines that influence the EU's direction in various policy areas.

2.2.3 The role of the European Council in setting the political agenda

The European Council plays a crucial role in setting the political agenda of the European Union (EU). As the EU's highest political body, it is tasked with defining the Union's overarching policy objectives and guidelines. The role of the European Council in setting the political agenda is of great importance for the EU's political orientation and priorities.

Strategic orientation and policy objectives:

- The European Council sets the EU's strategic direction by defining policy objectives and guidelines for the Member States and the EU institutions. These objectives may relate to long-term political, economic or social aspects.

Setting priorities:

- The European Council identifies the EU's main political priorities. This can extend to various policy areas, such as the economy, environmental protection, social justice, foreign policy, and more.

Responding to current challenges:

- In times of crisis or significant change in the EU, the European Council has the task of responding to these challenges and adapting the political agenda accordingly. This may include the reorientation of policy approaches.

International Relations and Foreign Policy:

- The European Council can formulate common positions on international affairs and define relations with third countries and international organisations. This helps shape the EU's foreign policy.

Cooperation with other EU institutions:

- The European Council works closely with other EU institutions, in particular the European Commission, to ensure that the EU's political agenda is implemented in a coherent and effective manner.

Consensus principle and political leadership:

- The decisions of the European Council are generally taken by consensus. This means that all members must agree. The European Council thus provides a platform for political leadership and compromise.

Conclusions and policy orientation:

- After the summits, the European Council publishes conclusions reflecting the decisions taken and political guidelines. These conclusions carry political weight and influence the political direction of the EU.

The role of the European Council in setting the political agenda underlines its role as the EU's political steering body. The objectives and guidelines it sets shape the political direction of the Union and influence policy in a wide range of areas.

2.3 European Commission

2.3.1 Duties and Responsibilities

The European Commission is one of the central institutions of the European Union (EU) and plays a crucial role in the implementation of EU policies and legislation. Its tasks and responsibilities are wide-ranging, including political, legislative, executive and administrative functions.

Legislative initiative:

- The European Commission has the sole right to initiate legislation. It can make proposals for new laws and legislative amendments, which can then be discussed and adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union.

Drafting legislative proposals:

- The Commission prepares detailed legislative proposals in close cooperation with experts and taking into account the EU's political priorities.

Negotiations and representation:

- The European Commission represents the EU in international negotiations and diplomatic affairs to ensure that the interests of EU Member States are safeguarded.

Monitoring and implementation:

- The Commission monitors the implementation of EU laws and policies in the Member States. It can take legal action if Member States fail to fulfil their obligations.

Administration and execution:

- The European Commission is responsible for the management of EU programmes and funds, including financial management and control.

Competition policy and antitrust law:

- The Commission monitors and regulates competition in the internal market in order to ensure fair competition and prevent monopolies or anti-competitive practices.

Foreign trade and trade policy:

- The Commission is responsible for negotiating trade agreements and shaping EU trade policy.

Research and innovation:

- The European Commission promotes research and innovation in the EU to support scientific progress and economic development.

Environmental and consumer protection:

- The Commission develops policies to protect the environment and consumer interests in the EU.

Humanitarian aid and development cooperation:

- The European Commission leads humanitarian aid and development cooperation to provide assistance to countries in crisis and developing.

Citizens' advice and dissemination of information:

- The Commission advises and informs citizens about their rights, opportunities and the EU's political agenda.

The European Commission is a multifaceted body that plays a key role in the implementation and shaping of EU policies. Its responsibilities cover a wide range of policy areas and contribute to the implementation of the European Union's common objectives and values.

2.3.2 The appointment and structure of the European Commission

The European Commission is one of the central institutions of the European Union (EU) and consists of commissioners who are responsible for different policy areas. The appointment and structure of the European Commission are designed to ensure an effective and balanced implementation of EU policies.

Appointment of Commissioners:

- **Proposal by the Member States:** Each EU Member State proposes a candidate for the post of Commissioner.
- **Confirmation by the European Parliament:** The candidates proposed by the Member States are reviewed and confirmed by the European Parliament. The European Parliament may object to certain candidates.
- **College of Commissioners:** Once confirmed by the European Parliament, the College of Commissioners is formed to lead and administer the European Commission.

President of the European Commission:

- **Proposal by the European Council:** The European Council proposes a candidate for President of the European Commission. This proposal must be approved by the European Parliament.
- **Governance of the Commission:** The President directs the work of the Commission, coordinates the political agenda and represents the Commission externally.

Commissioners:

- **Responsibilities for policy areas:** Each Commissioner is responsible for a specific policy area, such as the economy, the environment, external relations, etc.
- **Collegial decision-making:** Commissioners make their decisions in a collegial manner, with the President playing a coordinating role.

General Secretariat and services:

- **General** Secretariat: The General Secretariat assists the President and Commissioners in administrative and organisational matters.
- **Services:** The European Commission has a number of services that deal with specific policy areas and support the implementation of EU policies.

Independence and conflicts of interest:

- **Independence: Members of the** European Commission have an obligation to act independently in the interests of the EU and its citizens.
- **Conflicts of interest:** Commissioners must disclose potential conflicts of interest and ensure that their decisions are free of personal benefit or bias.

The structure of the European Commission reflects its role as the EU's executive branch, responsible for implementing EU policies and legislation. The appointment of the Commissioners and the President is made through a combination of proposals, reviews and confirmations to ensure that the Commission is able to address the EU's political and administrative challenges.

2.3.3 The Commission's role in legislation and implementation

The European Commission plays a central role in the legislative and implementation of EU policies and legislation. Its tasks range from drafting legislative proposals to monitoring the implementation of EU law in the Member States.

Legislative initiative:

- The European Commission has the sole right to initiate legislation. It can make proposals for new laws and legislative changes in various policy areas.

Drafting legislative proposals:

- The Commission prepares detailed legislative proposals in close cooperation with experts and taking into account the EU's political priorities.

Debate and discussion:

- The Commission presents its legislative proposals to the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. These proposals are discussed, amended, and ultimately accepted or rejected.

Negotiations and compromises:

- The Commission often plays a role in the negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council in order to find compromises and reach common solutions.

Monitoring of implementation:

- The European Commission monitors the implementation of EU laws and policies in the Member States. It ensures that national laws and measures are in line with EU rules.

Verletzungsverfahren:

- If Member States fail to transpose EU law correctly or fail to comply with their obligations, the Commission may initiate infringement proceedings to ensure compliance.

Administration and financial management:

- The European Commission is responsible for the management of EU programmes and funds. It manages the EU's financial resources and ensures that they are used in line with political priorities.

External representation and diplomacy:

- The Commission represents the EU in international negotiations and diplomatic affairs, in particular in trade and foreign policy.

Research and innovation:

- The Commission promotes research and innovation in the EU by providing funding and support for projects.

Consulting and expertise:

- The Commission provides expertise and advice in various policy areas to support decision-makers and stakeholders.

The role of the European Commission in legislation and implementation is crucial to ensure that the EU's policy objectives are translated into action. From drafting legislative proposals to monitoring implementation and representing the EU internationally, the Commission plays a key role in shaping and implementing EU policies.

2.4 European Court of Justice

2.4.1 Duties and responsibilities

The Council of the European Union, often referred to simply as the "Council", is one of the most important institutions of the European Union (EU). It plays a crucial role in legislation, policy coordination and cooperation between EU Member States. The tasks and responsibilities of the Council are multifaceted and include political, legislative and coordinating functions.

Legislation and decision-making:

- The Council, together with the European Parliament, is responsible for EU legislation. Both institutions have to discuss, amend and vote on legislative proposals before they become EU law.

Policy coordination:

- The Council coordinates the policies of EU member states in various policy areas, including the economy, the environment, education, justice and more.

Foreign Policy and International Relations:

- The Council develops the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). It can formulate common positions on international affairs and define relations with third countries and international organisations.

Economic and financial policy:

- The Council adopts economic and fiscal measures to promote stability and growth in the euro area and the EU as a whole.

Coordination in times of crisis:

- In times of crisis, whether economic, political or security, the Council plays an important role in coordinating the response of EU Member States.

Negotiations and compromises:

- The Council is negotiating with the European Parliament and the European Commission to find compromises and reach political agreement on various policy areas.

Council meetings and working groups:

- The Council meets in different configurations, depending on the policy area being discussed. There is, for example, the General Affairs Council, the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN), the Environment Council, etc.

Ratsvorsitzes rotation:

- The Presidency of the Council rotates between the EU Member States every six months. During this period, the Member State chairs the meetings and coordinates the political work of the Council.

Implementation of EU law:

- The Council works with EU member states to ensure that EU law is properly transposed into national law.

The tasks and responsibilities of the Council of the European Union reflect its role as representing the interests of EU Member States and as co-legislators of the EU. Cooperation and coordination between Member States in different policy areas are crucial for the implementation of EU policies and legislation.

2.4.2 The structure and functioning of the European Court of Justice

The European Court of Justice (CJEU) is one of the most important institutions of the European Union (EU) and is tasked with interpreting EU law and ensuring that it is applied uniformly across EU member states. The structure and functioning of the CJEU are designed to safeguard the rights and obligations of the EU and its Member States.

Structure of the European Court of Justice:

1. **Court of Justice (ECJ):**
   - The Court of Justice is the highest court in the EU and is based in Luxembourg.
   - It consists of judges appointed by the EU Member States for a six-year term. Each Member State shall appoint a judge.
   - The CJEU is presided over by a president, who is also elected by the judges.
2. **Court of First Instance (CJEU):**
   - In addition to the CJEU, there is the General Court, which has jurisdiction over actions brought by individuals, companies and organisations against decisions and actions of the EU institutions.
   - It consists of judges appointed by the EU Member States.
3. **European Union Civil Service Tribunal (EPSU):**
   - This court is responsible for complaints brought by employees of the EU institutions and has the task of resolving disputes relating to their employment relationships.

Functioning of the European Court of Justice:

1. **Vorabentscheidungsverfahren:**
   - A key feature of the CJEU is its role as the supreme interpreter of EU law. National courts can refer questions to the CJEU on the interpretation or validity of EU law to ensure that EU law is applied uniformly in all Member States.
2. **Challenging EU files:**
   - Individuals, companies and Member States can bring an action before the CJEU against decisions, acts or omissions of EU institutions that affect their rights or obligations.

3. **Nichtigkeitsklagen:**
   - The CJEU can rule on actions for annulment relating to the legality of EU acts adopted by the EU institutions.
4. **Infringement procedure:**
   - The CJEU can initiate infringement proceedings against Member States if they fail to comply with their obligations under EU law.
5. **Claims for damages:**
   - Persons who have suffered damage as a result of unlawful actions by the EU institutions can bring claims for damages before the CJEU.

The European Court of Justice plays a crucial role in safeguarding the rule of law and the uniform application of EU law. Through its interpretations and decisions, it contributes to the clarity and stability of the EU's legal framework.

2.4.3 The importance of case law for EU Member States

The jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice (CJEU) is of immense importance for EU Member States, as it influences the interpretation and application of EU law at national level and supports the functioning of the European Union as a common area of justice. The CJEU rulings have far-reaching implications for various aspects of Member States and their relationship with the EU.

Uniform interpretation of EU law:

- The CJEU ensures a uniform interpretation and application of EU law in all Member States. This is crucial to avoid legal uncertainty and ensure a level playing field for citizens, businesses and organisations across the EU.

Primacy of EU law:

- The CJEU rulings have confirmed that EU law takes precedence over national law. When there is a conflict between EU law and national law, EU law usually takes precedence.

Enforcement of EU rights:

- The CJEU rulings allow individuals, companies and organisations to claim their rights under EU law before national courts.

Monitoring of implementation:

- The CJEU monitors the correct implementation of EU law in the Member States. If a Member State fails to transpose EU law correctly, the CJEU can initiate infringement proceedings.

Equality and non-discrimination:

- The CJEU rulings help to prevent discrimination on grounds of nationality and to guarantee the principle of free movement of goods, services, persons and capital.

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Relevance for Member States:

- The CJEU rulings influence national jurisprudence and legislation, as they can serve as precedents. National courts are obliged to take into account the ECJ rulings.

Balancing of interests:

- The CJEU often takes into account not only the rights and obligations of the Member States, but also the interests of the European Union as a whole.

Development of EU law:

- The case law of the CJEU contributes to the development of EU law by creating new interpretations and applications and helping to adapt to changing circumstances.

Overall, the case law of the European Court of Justice plays a fundamental role in ensuring the coherence, uniformity and effectiveness of EU law and has a direct impact on the national legal systems of the Member States. It promotes the implementation of and compliance with common European standards and strengthens confidence in the EU-wide legal framework.

3.Legislation in the European Union

3.1 The various legal acts of the EU

3.1.1 Regulations

Regulations are a type of legal act in the European Union (EU) that are directly applicable in all Member States. They are an important mechanism for harmonising legal norms and creating a single legal framework in the EU. Regulations are issued by the EU institutions and have direct effect in the Member States, without the need for national transposition measures.

Features of regulations:

1. **Direct applicability: Regulations are** directly applicable as soon as they are adopted. They apply in every Member State without the need for national implementation.
2. **Legal binding:** Regulations are binding on all Member States and their citizens. Member States must ensure that they fully comply with the regulations.
3. **Primacy of EU law:** Regulations take precedence over national law. If there is a conflict between a regulation and national law, the regulation takes precedence.
4. **Single legal framework:** Regulations are designed to ensure uniform legal norms and standards across the EU in order to promote the single market and remove barriers to trade.

Examples of regulations:

1. **Regulations in the field of economy:** For example, there are EU regulations that set the competition rules for companies to ensure fair competition in the internal market.
2. **Environmental regulations:** There are regulations in the environmental field that, for example, set emission standards for certain industries in order to reduce environmental impacts.
3. **Food regulations:** The EU issues regulations to regulate food standards and labelling to ensure the health and protection of consumers.
4. **General Data Protection Regulation:** The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a well-known regulation that sets EU-wide standards for the protection of personal data.

Procedure for issuing regulations:

1. **Initiative:** The European Commission has the right of initiative to adopt regulations. It can submit legislative proposals, which are then discussed by the European Parliament and the Council.
2. **Co-decision procedure:** Many regulations are subject to the ordinary legislative procedure, in which the European Parliament and the Council vote jointly on the Commission's proposal.
3. **Assumption:** When the European Parliament and the Council adopt a regulation, it becomes legally binding and directly applicable in all Member States.

Regulations are a key tool for creating a single legal framework in the EU. They contribute to the harmonisation of standards, the removal of barriers to trade and the achievement of common objectives in different policy areas.

3.1.2 Guidelines

Directives are another instrument of European law used by the EU institutions to promote common goals and standards in the Member States. Unlike regulations, directives do not have direct legal effect in the Member States. Rather, they set objectives that must be transposed into national law by the Member States.

Features of policies:

1. **Targets:** Directives set common objectives or standards to be achieved in the Member States. They offer flexibility in implementation and take into account the different legal and institutional structures of the Member States.
2. **Obligation to transpose:** Member States are obliged to transpose the objectives of the Directives into national law. However, they have some freedom in choosing the appropriate means of achieving these goals.
3. **Adaptation to national circumstances:** As directives require transposition into national law, Member States can adapt the precise measures and regulations to their own legal, economic and social conditions.
4. **Timeframe:** Directives often provide a timeframe within which Member States must adopt the necessary national legislation.

Examples of policies:

1. **Workers' rights:** There could be a directive setting minimum standards for workers' rights in the Member States, such as working hours, occupational health and safety and equal treatment.
2. **Environmental protection:** A directive could set common objectives for environmental protection, such as reducing emissions or promoting renewable energy.
3. **Consumer protection:** Directives could set standards for consumer protection, such as rules on product safety or food labelling.
4. **Healthcare:** A directive could set harmonised standards for healthcare to improve the quality of healthcare across the EU.

Procedures for issuing directives:

1. **Initiative:** As with regulations, the European Commission has the right of initiative to issue directives. It proposes legislation, which is then discussed by the European Parliament and the Council.
2. **Co-decision procedure:** As a general rule, the ordinary legislative procedure is used, in which the European Parliament and the Council vote jointly on the Commission's proposal.
3. **Assumption:** When the European Parliament and the Council adopt a directive, Member States are obliged to transpose the objectives of the directive into national law.

Directives provide a way to promote common standards and objectives across the EU, while at the same time giving Member States the flexibility to adapt these objectives to their specific circumstances. They help to achieve a certain degree of consistency in different policy areas, while at the same time taking into account national differences.

3.1.3 Decisions

Decisions are another instrument of European law that is used by the EU institutions to settle specific individual issues or to resolve specific situations. Compared to regulations and directives, decisions have a limited scope and are often tailored to specific recipients or cases.

Characteristics of resolutions:

1. **Specific individual questions:** Decisions deal with specific facts, individual questions or individual cases. They can be aimed at specific institutions, organizations or individuals.
2. **Binding:** Resolutions are binding on those to whom they are addressed. They must be followed by the recipients.
3. **Targeted impact:** Decisions can target specific Member States, institutions or individuals and target their needs or requirements.
4. **Limited scope:** As decisions are tailored to specific cases or issues, they often have a limited scope and do not automatically apply to all Member States.

Examples of resolutions:

1. **Grants:** A decision could award grants or funding to a specific Member State for a specific project.
2. **Permits:** A decision could grant authorisation for the construction of a specific infrastructure or installation in a Member State.
3. **Sanctions:** A decision could impose sanctions on a Member State or an individual who has breached EU law.
4. **Concluding contracts:** Decisions can be taken by the EU institutions to approve international treaties or agreements.

Procedure for the adoption of decisions:

1. **Initiative:** Decisions can be taken by different EU institutions, depending on the context and legal basis.
2. **Consent procedure:** In some cases, the adoption of decisions requires the consent of certain institutions or bodies, such as the European Parliament.
3. **Adoption:** Once a decision has been adopted by the competent institutions or bodies, it becomes final and applies to the recipients concerned.

Decisions are a flexible tool to create targeted measures and solutions to specific cases or issues. They allow EU institutions to respond flexibly to specific needs or challenges without having the full impact of regulations or directives.

3.1.4 Recommendations and opinions

In addition to regulations, directives and decisions, recommendations and opinions are important instruments in the European Union (EU) to provide political guidelines, advice and expert opinions on

specific issues or topics. Unlike the previous instruments, recommendations and opinions are not legally binding, but serve to provide guidance and support.

Recommendations:

1. **Guidelines and guidelines:** Recommendations provide advice or guidance on specific policy or practical issues. They are often addressed to Member States or other stakeholders involved.
2. **Promoting best practices:** Recommendations can highlight best practices or approaches and encourage Member States to adopt them.
3. **Harmonisation of practices:** Recommendations can help to harmonise practices in the Member States in order to improve cooperation and coordination.

Opinions:

1. **Expert opinions:** Opinions often come from experts who have been consulted on specific topics. They can be based on technical or scientific information.
2. **Impact assessment:** Opinions can analyse and evaluate the impact of measures or policies.
3. **Advising institutions:** Opinions can be prepared by scientific committees, panels or experts to assist EU institutions in decision-making.

Importance of recommendations and opinions:

1. **Data Source Provider:** Recommendations and opinions provide expertise, scientific evidence and best practices to the EU institutions and Member States.
2. **Guidance:** They can serve as a guide when it comes to the development of policies, legislation or practices.
3. **Decision-making support:** Recommendations and opinions support the EU institutions in decision-making processes by providing a comprehensive assessment of options.
4. **Transparency:** The publication of recommendations and opinions contributes to transparency and allows for an informed public debate.
5. **Contributing to coherence:** Recommendations and opinions contribute to the coherence of EU policies and actions by creating a common knowledge base.

Recommendations and opinions are important tools for bringing expertise and advice to EU policy. They help to make informed decisions based on expertise and scientific evidence and promote the harmonisation of practices and approaches across the EU.

3.2.1 The Commission, the European Parliament and the Council's rights of initiative

In the European Union (EU), various institutions have the right to introduce legislative proposals. These rights of initiative are fundamental mechanisms for shaping EU legislation. The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council each have their own rights of initiative, with different competences and procedures.

The European Commission's right of initiative:

1. **Monopoly on certain policy areas:** The European Commission has a monopoly on legislative proposals in certain policy areas, particularly those relating to the internal market, competition issues, agriculture, trade, the environment and more.
2. **Independent right of initiative:** The Commission can draw up and submit legislative proposals on its own, without being dependent on other institutions.
3. **Cooperation with other institutions:** The Commission often consults the European Parliament and the Council before presenting a legislative proposal to ensure that the interests and perspectives of the various institutions are taken into account.

The European Parliament's right of initiative:

1. **Initiative by the majority:** The European Parliament can ask the European Commission to come forward with a specific proposal. This requires a majority of MPs and at least one third of the votes.
2. **Political leverage:** The European Parliament can use the right of initiative to exert political pressure and put certain issues on the agenda.
3. **Areas with shared right of initiative:** In some policy areas, such as economic and social policy, the European Parliament and the Council share the right of initiative.

The Council's right of initiative:

1. **Areas of shared initiative:** As mentioned above, the Council and the European Parliament share the right of initiative in some policy areas, which means that both the Council and Parliament can put forward proposals.
2. **Initiative by the majority: In the Council, a** Member State or the European Commission can table a legislative proposal. A Member State may do so with the support of a majority of Member States.

The rights of initiative of the various institutions are designed in such a way as to ensure balanced legislation. They enable the EU institutions to bring their respective perspectives, competences and political priorities to the legislative process. This contributes to democracy, to taking into account the diversity of EU Member States and to achieving common goals.

3.2.2 Codecision procedures and the ordinary legislative procedure

The co-decision procedure, also known as the ordinary legislative procedure, is an important part of the legislative process in the European Union (EU). They concern cooperation between the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union in the adoption of EU legal acts, such as regulations and directives. These procedures ensure that both institutions are equally involved in legislation.

Characteristics of the codecision procedures:

1. **Equal participation:** Both the European Parliament and the Council have the same importance in the co-decision procedures. Both institutions must agree on the final text of the act.
2. **Two readings:** The legislative process usually involves two readings, one in the European Parliament and one in the Council. In some cases, a third reading may be necessary to resolve disagreements.

3. **Compromise negotiations: If the** European Parliament and the Council have different positions, they must agree on a common text in negotiations.
4. **Deadlines:** There are clear deadlines for each reading and for negotiations between the institutions to ensure that the legislative process is not unnecessarily delayed.

Procedure of the co-decision procedure:

1. **First reading:** The European Commission presents its proposal. The European Parliament examines the proposal, makes amendments and adopts its position.
2. **Council opinion:** The Council will review the proposal and make possible amendments. The Council adopts a common position and forwards it to the European Parliament.
3. **Second reading:** The European Parliament examines the Council's position and may propose further amendments. If the Parliament and the Council cannot reach an agreement, the so-called "delay solution" comes into force, in which the legislative process is temporarily halted to allow compromise negotiations.
4. **Compromise negotiations: Representatives of the** European Parliament and the Council meet to reach a compromise and finalise the text of the act.
5. Adoption: If an agreement is reached between the European Parliament and the Council, the text of the act will be formally adopted.

The co-decision procedures strengthen the democratic legitimacy of EU legislation, as they involve the European Parliament and the Council on an equal footing in the process. This helps to ensure that the interests of EU citizens are properly taken into account and that EU legislation is endorsed by both institutions.

3.2.3 The role of national parliaments in the EU legislative process

The national parliaments of the EU Member States play an important role in the EU legislative process. Although decision-making takes place at European level, national parliaments have the task of bringing the interests and points of view of their countries into the EU legislative process and monitoring compliance with the principle of subsidiarity.

Role of national parliaments:

1. **Subsidiarity control:** Subsidiarity control is a central element of the role of national parliaments. This means that national parliaments will consider whether a proposed EU act is necessary at EU level or whether it would be better to deal with it at national or regional level.
2. **Early warning system:** The European Commission is obliged to submit all legislative proposals to national parliaments. National parliaments have a deadline to give their opinion on compliance with the principle of subsidiarity.
3. **Exchange of information:** National parliaments have the right to receive information on EU legislative proposals and to participate in discussions on them. This allows national parliaments to assess the impact of EU legislation on their countries.
4. **Right to political dialogue:** National parliaments can express their views, concerns and recommendations on the EU legislative process. They can also participate in political dialogues with the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council.

Conditions for subsidiarity control:

1. **Subsidiarity Protocol:** The Subsidiarity Protocol is part of the EU Treaties and sets out how subsidiarity control is to be carried out by national parliaments.
2. **Detailed scrutiny:** National parliaments will assess whether the proposed EU legislation can be better dealt with at national, regional or local level and whether the EU level offers added value.
3. **Formal opinion:** If a third or more of national parliaments consider that a proposal violates the principle of subsidiarity, a "yellow card" can be issued. This will lead to a re-examination of the proposal by the European Commission.

The role of national parliaments in the EU legislative process contributes to democracy, transparency and consideration of national interests. It helps to ensure that EU legislation complies with the principle of subsidiarity and respects the competences of Member States. This promotes effective cooperation between the EU and its Member States.

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4.The policies of the European Union

4.1 The internal market and economic policy

4.1.1 The four fundamental freedoms of the internal market

The four fundamental freedoms of the internal market are fundamental principles of the European Union (EU) aimed at creating a common economic area in which the free movement of goods, services, people and capital is guaranteed. These fundamental freedoms are essential for the creation of an integrated and competitive internal market.

1. Free movement of goods:

The free movement of goods means that goods and products can be traded between EU member states without tariffs, restrictions or discrimination. This freedom aims to remove barriers to trade and create a common market for goods.

2. Freedom to provide services:

The free movement of services allows service providers to offer their services in other Member States without overcoming unnecessary hurdles. This promotes the cross-border mobility of service providers and expands access to various services across the EU.

3. Free movement of persons:

The free movement of persons gives EU citizens the right to settle, work, study or live in another EU Member State. This freedom promotes labour mobility, cultural exchange and integration.

4. Free movement of capital:

The free movement of capital allows capital, payments and investments to move freely between Member States. This helps to boost investment, finance businesses and strengthen the EU's financial market.

The four fundamental freedoms are closely linked and complement each other to create an integrated internal market. They are an essential part of European integration and have helped to promote economic dynamism, growth and competitiveness in the EU. Nevertheless, challenges such as social protection, labour standards and the protection of consumers and the environment can arise in this context and need to be taken into account in a balanced framework.

4.1.2 The euro area and the Economic and Monetary Union

The Eurozone is a group of EU member states that use the euro as their common currency. The introduction of the euro and the creation of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) were important steps towards deepening economic integration in the European Union (EU).

Characteristics of the Eurozone:

1. **Common currency:** Eurozone member states have adopted the euro as their official currency. This facilitates trade, investment and freedom of travel within these countries.
2. **Common monetary policy:** The European Central Bank (ECB) is responsible for the monetary policy of the eurozone. It makes decisions on interest rate policy, the money supply and other monetary matters.
3. **Stability and Growth Pact:** Eurozone Member States have agreed on the Stability and Growth Pact, which aims to ensure fiscal discipline and sustainable fiscal policies.
4. **Economic policy coordination:** Eurozone Member States work closely together to coordinate economic policies such as fiscal discipline, structural reforms and growth promotion.

Challenges facing the Eurozone:

1. **Economic divergence:** The economic conditions and performance of eurozone member states can vary, which can lead to imbalances.
2. **Budgetary discipline:** Compliance with fiscal rules can be challenging in times of economic difficulty.
3. **Fiscal union:** While the eurozone has a common currency, it does not have a full fiscal union, which can make it difficult to respond to crises in a coordinated manner.
4. **Social inclusion:** While the eurozone has fostered economic integration, social differences and inequalities between Member States remain relevant.

The Economic and Monetary Union and the eurozone aim to promote economic integration and stability in the EU. However, the eurozone also poses challenges that require continuous adjustment of economic governance and close cooperation between Member States in order to reap the full benefits of the single currency while increasing economic resilience.

4.2 Foreign and security policy

4.2.1 The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)

The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is an area of the European Union (EU) that focuses on the joint design of foreign policy and security policies and strategies. The aim is to strengthen the EU's international presence, promote peacekeeping and represent the EU's values and interests at global level.

Characteristics of the CFSP:

1. **Cooperation and coordination:** EU Member States work together in the CFSP to develop and defend a common position on international issues. This includes diplomatic action, crisis management and conflict resolution.
2. **External policy instruments:** The EU uses a wide range of foreign policy instruments, including political dialogue, economic cooperation, humanitarian aid, development cooperation and sanctions.
3. **Security and defence policy:** The CFSP also includes the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which provides the opportunity for military operations and peacekeeping operations.
4. **Strategic autonomy:** The EU seeks greater strategic autonomy in order to be able to respond independently to international challenges and defend its interests.

CFSP instruments and measures:

1. **Political dialogue:** The EU conducts political dialogues with third countries, international organisations and regional actors to develop common positions on issues such as human rights, democracy, security and the economy.
2. **Diplomacy and mediation:** The EU can use diplomatic means to mediate in international conflicts and promote peace.
3. **Economic cooperation:** The EU uses economic and trade levers to exert influence and achieve policy objectives.
4. **Development cooperation and humanitarian aid:** The EU uses its financial resources to support development projects and provide humanitarian aid in crisis areas.
5. **Common Security and Defence Policy:** The CSDP enables the EU to conduct civilian and military operations for crisis management, conflict prevention and peacekeeping.

The CFSP faces challenges such as unity among Member States on foreign policy issues, consistency of action and respect for the EU's strategic autonomy. Nevertheless, the CFSP is an important step towards promoting peace, stability and international cooperation among EU Member States and their partners worldwide.

4.2.2 The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)

The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) is an integral part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union (EU). The ESDP aims to increase the EU's capacity to act in crises and conflicts outside its territory and to contribute to peacekeeping.

Characteristics of the ESDP:

1. **Civilian and military measures:** The ESDP includes both civilian and military instruments and measures. This allows the EU to respond flexibly to a wide range of security threats and crises.
2. **Crisis management and peacekeeping:** The ESDP aims to intervene in crises and conflicts in order to preserve peace, prevent conflicts and promote sustainable solutions.
3. **International cooperation:** The EU works closely with international organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and NATO to plan and conduct security and peacekeeping missions.
4. **Civil-military coordination:** The ESDP promotes close cooperation between civilian and military actors to ensure an integrated approach to complex crisis situations.

ESDP instruments and measures:

1. **Civilian missions:** The EU can deploy civilian missions to support the police, the rule of law, human rights and institution-building in crisis regions.
2. **Military operations:** The EU can conduct military operations to manage crises and secure peace. This may include humanitarian aid, evacuation of citizens, or peace enforcement.
3. **Peacebuilding and capacity building:** The ESDP can also support capacity building in partner countries to promote sustainable peace solutions.
4. **Crisis management and conflict prevention:** The EU can intervene at an early stage to prevent or limit conflicts, using diplomatic means, political dialogues and preventive measures.

The ESDP contributes to strengthening Europe's security and defence capabilities and enables the EU to respond to global security threats. It also supports the promotion of stability, peace and democratic development in conflict zones around the world. However, the implementation of the ESDP requires close coordination between EU Member States and a willingness to take responsibility for common security.

4.3 Environmental policy and sustainability

4.3.1 Promoting the environment and climate change mitigation in the EU

The promotion of the environment and climate protection are central goals of the European Union (EU). The EU is committed to protecting the environment, using natural resources sustainably and tackling climate change. This is done through a combination of legislation, policies and international cooperation.

Characteristics of the EU's environment and climate policy:

1. **Environmental legislation:** The EU has enacted a wide range of laws to protect the environment. This includes areas such as air and water pollution, waste management, nature conservation, chemicals regulation, and more.
2. **Climate policy:** The EU's goal is to become climate neutral by 2050 and to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Measures to promote renewable energies, energy efficiency and sustainable mobility play an important role in this.
3. **Sustainable development:** The EU adopts a sustainable development approach that combines economic, social and environmental aspects to ensure long-term prosperity and quality of life.

Instruments and measures:

1. **Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS):** The EU ETS is the largest emissions trading scheme in the world and aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in industry by trading emission allowances.
2. **Renewable energy:** The EU promotes the expansion of renewable energies such as wind, solar and biomass in order to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.
3. **Energy efficiency:** The EU is implementing measures to improve energy efficiency in buildings, transport and industry in order to reduce energy consumption.
4. **Environmental protection directives:** The EU has issued extensive environmental directives covering aspects such as air and water quality, waste management, species protection and environmental impact assessments.
5. **Climate finance:** The EU supports developing countries in adapting to climate change and implementing climate action through financial support.

Promoting the environment and climate change mitigation in the EU is crucial to limit the negative impacts of climate change and ensure environmental sustainability. The EU is also committed internationally to the implementation of the Paris Agreement and to work with other countries to achieve global climate goals. Achieving these goals requires continuous policy adaptation and the mobilization of resources.

4.3.2 The implementation of sustainability goals and environmental protection guidelines

The implementation of sustainability goals and environmental directives in the European Union (EU) requires a coordinated effort at different levels, from the EU institutions to the Member States. These goals and guidelines aim to promote environmental protection, sustainable development and the fight against climate change.

Umsetzungsprozess:

1. **Legislation and standards:** The EU enacts a wide range of environmental directives and laws adopted by EU institutions such as the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council. These guidelines set minimum standards for environmental protection and sustainable practices.
2. **Transposition into national law:** Member States are obliged to transpose EU directives into national law. This includes adapting their national legislation to meet the requirements of EU directives.
3. **Monitoring and enforcement:** The EU and Member States monitor the implementation of directives and compliance with environmental legislation. Failure to comply may result in legal action and sanctions.
4. **Reporting and evaluation:** The EU conducts regular assessments to monitor progress in the implementation of environmental directives. Member States must submit reports on their implementation efforts.

Examples of environmental policies:

1. **Water Framework Directive:** This directive aims to improve the quality of water bodies in the EU and ensure the sustainable use of water resources.
2. **Air Quality** Directives: These directives set limit values for pollutants in the air in order to protect air quality and ensure the health of citizens.
3. **Waste Framework Directive:** This directive lays down principles for waste management, including waste prevention, recycling and disposal.
4. **Renewable Energy Directive:** This directive aims to increase the share of renewables in the EU's energy mix.

Implementation challenges:

1. **Coordination:** Implementation requires close cooperation between EU institutions, Member States, local authorities and other actors.
2. **Bureaucracy and lack of capacity:** The implementation of complex directives often requires significant resources and capacity, especially in smaller Member States.
3. **Resistance to change:** In some cases, economic interests or political concerns can hinder implementation.

The implementation of sustainability goals and environmental protection policies is crucial to protect the long-term health of the environment, the quality of life of citizens and the future of future generations. This requires continuous efforts at national and EU level to effectively implement the directives and achieve their objectives.

4.4 Social and employment policy

4.4.1 The promotion of social rights and labour market integration

The promotion of social rights and integration into the labour market are essential components of the social dimension of the European Union (EU). The EU strives to promote social justice, combat social exclusion and ensure that all citizens have access to adequate social services and opportunities.

Promotion of social rights:

1. **European Pillar of Social Rights:** The European Pillar of Social Rights is an initiative that includes 20 principles and rights in the areas of equal opportunities, working conditions, social protection and social inclusion. It serves as a guide for the social policies of the EU and the Member States.
2. **Social dialogue:** The EU promotes social dialogue between employers, workers and governments in order to find common solutions to social and labour market issues.
3. **Working conditions:** The EU sets standards for fair working conditions, including working time arrangements, health and safety at work and the protection of workers' rights.

Arbeitsmarktintegration:

1. **Employment policy:** The EU promotes job creation and employment opportunities through measures such as labour market reforms, skills development and support for the long-term unemployed.
2. **Youth employment:** The Youth Guarantee initiative aims to offer young people a job, apprenticeship, training or traineeship within four months of completing their education or unemployment.
3. **Labour mobility:** The EU promotes the free movement of workers within the EU to facilitate access to employment opportunities in other Member States.

Challenges:

1. **Unemployment:** Especially during economic crises, unemployment can lead to social problems. The EU implements job creation and vocational training programmes.
2. **Poverty and social exclusion:** The promotion of social rights aims to combat poverty and social exclusion and ensure that all citizens have a decent income and access to basic services.
3. **Inequality:** The EU is committed to reducing social inequality, both within and between Member States.

The promotion of social rights and integration into the labour market are crucial to ensure the social well-being of citizens, promote social cohesion and strengthen equal opportunities. This helps to build an inclusive and equitable society where people can develop their abilities and no one is left behind.

4.4.2 The EU's role in combating poverty and social exclusion

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The European Union (EU) plays an important role in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in its Member States. These challenges can arise from economic inequality, social injustice and structural problems. The EU has developed various instruments and programmes to address these challenges.

EU instruments and programmes to combat poverty and social exclusion:

1. **European Social Fund (ESF):** The ESF supports measures to improve employability, integrate disadvantaged groups into the labour market and promote social inclusion.
2. **Social Fund for the European Union:** This fund aims to strengthen social inclusion and social cohesion by providing financial support for poverty alleviation, education promotion and social services programmes.
3. **Youth Employment Initiative:** This initiative supports young people in their search for jobs, apprenticeships, traineeships or training measures to improve their employment opportunities.
4. **Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD):** The FEAD supports people in need through food aid, material support and social services.
5. **Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI):** EaSI promotes social innovation, job creation and social inclusion.

Strategies and goals:

1. **European Pillar of Social Rights:** The Pillar sets out fundamental social rights and principles that support social inclusion, fair working conditions and equitable opportunities for all citizens.
2. **European Strategy 2020:** This strategy aims to make growth more inclusive and sustainable by setting targets for employment, education and poverty reduction.
3. **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:** The EU pursues the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, including poverty eradication, education and gender equality.

Challenges:

1. **Economic and social inequality:** The EU has to deal with structural inequality and economic disparities between Member States and within societies.
2. **Migration and integration:** The integration of migrants into society and the labour market is an important social challenge.
3. **Demographic change:** Demographic change, especially the ageing population, requires measures to ensure social protection and pensions.

The EU's role in the fight against poverty and social exclusion is to promote social justice, equal opportunities and social inclusion. Through its programmes, policies and actions, the EU aims to improve the well-being of all citizens and create an inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

5.The European Union's relations with the Member States

5.1 The principle of subsidiarity and the division of competences between the EU and the Member States

The principle of subsidiarity is a fundamental principle in the European Union (EU) that governs the distribution of competences between the EU and the Member States. It states that decisions should be taken at the level closest to the citizens concerned, unless there are clear reasons for common EU regulation.

Subsidiarity principle in detail:

1. **Decentralised decision-making:** The principle of subsidiarity emphasises that policy decisions should be taken at the lowest possible level in order to ensure greater proximity to the people concerned and greater efficiency.
2. **Areas with cross-border impacts:** The EU should focus on areas that have cross-border impacts and can therefore be better regulated at European level.
3. **Proportionality:** The principle of subsidiarity also emphasises the need for EU action to be proportionate to the objective pursued. This means that the EU should only act if the objectives cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States alone.

Distribution of responsibilities:

The EU has a limited number of competences, which are laid down in the EU Treaties. The division of competences between the EU and the Member States follows a principle of shared, exclusive and supportive competences.

1. **Exclusive competences:** The EU has exclusive competence in areas such as customs union, competition policy and trade policy. Only the EU institutions can take action here.
2. **Shared competences:** In most policy areas, such as environmental protection, consumer protection and transport, the EU and the Member States share competences. The EU sets minimum standards, while the Member States can make supplementary arrangements.
3. **Supporting competences:** In some areas, such as education and culture, Member States have the primary responsibility. However, the EU can take measures to support cooperation between Member States.

Subsidiaritätskontrolle:

The principle of subsidiarity is monitored by the "subsidiarity check". When an EU measure is proposed, national parliaments consider whether this measure could be better regulated at national or regional level. If enough national parliaments raise concerns, the proposal will be reviewed.

The principle of subsidiarity aims to ensure that decisions are taken at the right level and that the EU only acts when necessary and effective. It respects the diversity of Member States and promotes democratic participation at all levels.

5.2 The role of regions and cities in EU policy

Regions and cities play an important role in European Union (EU) policies. They are directly affected by the impact of EU legislation and programmes and contribute to the implementation and shaping of European policies. The EU recognises the importance of the regional and urban level for efficient and citizen-oriented policy-making.

The role of regions and cities:

1. **Implementation of EU legislation: Regions and** cities are often responsible for the implementation of EU laws and programmes at local and regional level. They implement European standards in the areas of environmental protection, transport, education and more.
2. **Involvement in the policy-making process:** The European Commission and other EU institutions often consult regions and cities when developing new policy proposals. This is done through consultations, dialogues and events.
3. **European Committee of the Regions (CoR):** The CoR is an advisory body made up of representatives of regional and local authorities. It brings the views of the regions and cities into the EU policy discussion.
4. **Town twinning and networking:** Many cities work together across borders to share best practices and address common challenges. These partnerships and networks strengthen regional exchange and cooperation.

Advantages of the regional and urban level:

1. **Proximity to citizens:** The regional and urban level is often closer to citizens and can better understand their needs and concerns.
2. **Diversity and flexibility:** Regions and cities have different needs and challenges. They can react more flexibly to local conditions and develop tailor-made solutions.
3. **Innovation:** Cities are often centres of innovation and can initiate pilot projects for new ideas and approaches that can later be extended to larger areas.

Challenges:

1. **Lack of capacity:** Not all regions and cities have the same resources to implement EU programmes or participate in policy discussions.
2. **Coordination:** EU policies require close cooperation between different levels of administration, which can sometimes be challenging.
3. **Principle of subsidiarity:** The interpretation of the principle of subsidiarity and the division of competences between the EU and Member States can be complex.

The role of regions and cities in EU policy underlines the importance of a multi-layered approach to policy-making. Close cooperation between the EU, Member States, regions and cities is crucial to find effective and citizen-oriented solutions to today's challenges.

5.3 The possibilities of citizen participation and the importance of civil society

The European Union (EU) strives to increase the involvement of citizens in political decision-making and recognises the importance of civil society in democratic and citizen-oriented policy-making. Citizen participation and cooperation with civil society are fundamental elements of the European principle of democracy.

Opportunities for citizen participation:

1. **European Citizens' Initiative (ECI):** The ECI allows a group of at least one million citizens from different EU Member States to ask the European Commission to consider a legislative proposal on a specific issue.
2. **Consultations and public consultations:** The European Commission often consults the public and interested stakeholders when drafting new legislative proposals. Online surveys and consultations provide citizens with the opportunity to express their opinions.
3. **Participation in political discussions:** Citizens can participate in public events, conferences and dialogues to share their views and contribute ideas.

Importance of civil society:

1. **Advocacy:** Civil society, consisting of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), citizens' initiatives, trade unions, associations and other groups, represents the interests of citizens and brings their concerns into the political discourse.
2. **Control and surveillance:** Civil society plays an important role in monitoring policy decisions and the implementation of laws. It contributes to the transparency and accountability of the EU institutions.
3. **Expertise and co-creation:** Civil society organisations bring knowledge and expertise to policy discussions and contribute to the development of solutions to complex challenges.

Challenges:

1. **Diversity of opinions:** The EU represents a wide range of interests and views. The challenge is to ensure that citizen participation is representative and covers a wide range of opinions.
2. **Transparency and access:** The EU must ensure that information and opportunities for participation are accessible to all, regardless of education, origin or social conditions.
3. **Effectiveness: It is** important to ensure that citizen participation is actually part of political decision-making and not just symbolic.

Citizen involvement and cooperation with civil society are crucial to strengthen the EU's democratic legitimacy, improve the quality of political decision-making and ensure that people's interests and needs are adequately taken into account. This promotes a vibrant and participatory democracy at European level.

6.The European Union's Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy

6.1 The criteria and process of EU enlargement

The enlargement of the European Union (EU) is a process in which new countries can become members of the EU. The EU has established clear criteria and a structured process for the admission of new Member States to ensure that they share the EU's values, norms and standards and are able to fulfil its obligations as a member.

Copenhagen criteria:

The Copenhagen Criteria are the basic requirements that countries must meet in order to become members of the EU. They were adopted in Copenhagen in 1993.

1. **Political criteria:** A country must have a stable democracy, guarantee the rule of law, respect human rights and the protection of minorities, and ensure fundamental freedoms.
2. **Economic criteria:** A country must have a functioning market economy and be able to withstand the EU's competitive pressure and market forces.
3. **Acquisition criterion:** A country must be able to adopt and implement EU legislation, the so-called "acquis communautaire".

The enlargement process:

1. **Application:** A country interested in EU membership submits an official application to the EU.
2. **Pre-accession phase:** Before the start of negotiations, the candidate countries must implement reforms in order to meet the Copenhagen criteria. This may include political, economic and legal reforms.
3. **Negotiation phase:** As soon as the EU Commission confirms that a candidate country has made sufficient progress, negotiations on the terms of membership begin. These negotiations can take years.
4. **Conclusion of negotiations:** If the negotiations are successfully concluded, both the candidate country and the EU Member States must agree to the accession treaty.
5. **Ratification and referendum:** The Accession Treaty must be ratified by all EU member states. In some countries, a referendum may also be required for the consent of citizens.
6. **Accession:** After ratification and fulfillment of all conditions, the country can officially become a member of the EU.

Challenges and assessment:

EU enlargement is a complex process that poses challenges in terms of policy reforms, economic adjustments, social inclusion and institutional capacity. Each accession process is assessed on an individual basis and the EU carefully monitors the progress of the candidate country to ensure that the required standards are met.

EU enlargement contributes to strengthening stability, prosperity and peace in Europe. It expands the internal market, promotes cooperation between countries and deepens European integration.

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6.2 The EU's relations with neighbouring countries

The European Union (EU) maintains close relations with its neighbouring countries to promote stability, prosperity and security in the region. These relations are aimed at supporting political and economic cooperation, avoiding conflicts and promoting common interests. There are various policy instruments and agreements to shape these relations.

Politikinstrumente:

1. **European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP):** The ENP aims to strengthen cooperation and partnership between the EU and its eastern and southern neighbours. It includes political, economic and sectoral cooperation, as well as support for reforms in neighbouring countries.
2. **Eastern Partnership:** The Eastern Partnership is a specific initiative for the countries of the Eastern part of Europe. It aims to promote political association and economic integration.
3. **Mediterranean policy:** The EU also has a comprehensive policy for Mediterranean countries to support political stability and economic development in the region.

Various cooperation formats:

1. **Association agreements** : These agreements, such as the EU's Association Agreement with Ukraine, allow for close economic, political and security cooperation.
2. **Free Trade Agreements:** The EU concludes free trade agreements to promote trade and economic integration with its neighbours.
3. **Stabilisation and Association Processes:** These processes focus on countries in the Western Balkans and aim to support political and economic reforms to promote EU rapprochement.

Challenges:

1. **Complex geopolitical situation:** The EU's neighbourhood is diverse and marked by geopolitical challenges and conflicts that can affect political stability and security.
2. **Economic disparities:** Differences in economic development and living standards between the EU and its neighbours can lead to tensions.
3. **Democratic reforms:** Promoting democracy and human rights in neighbouring countries can be complex due to different political and cultural contexts.

The EU's relations with its neighbours are an important part of its foreign policy. They contribute to the stabilisation of the regions, promote economic integration and contribute to the further development of peace, security and prosperity in Europe and beyond.

6.3 The policy of the Eastern Partnership and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

The Eastern Partnership policy and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership are two important initiatives of the European Union (EU) aimed at promoting relations and cooperation with the countries of the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood regions. These partnerships are intended to support political stability, economic cooperation and social development in the affected regions.

Eastern Partnership:

The Eastern Partnership was launched in 2009 and focuses on the EU's relations with six countries in the eastern part of Europe:

1. **Armenia**
2. **Azerbaijan**
3. **Belarus**
4. **Georgia**
5. **Moldova**
6. **Ukraine**

The objectives of the Eastern Partnership are manifold:

1. **Promoting political association and economic integration:** The partnership aims to strengthen political ties and promote economic cooperation, including free trade agreements and other economic arrangements.
2. **Promoting reforms:** The EU supports reforms in partner countries to strengthen democratic governance, the rule of law, human rights and economic development.
3. **Promoting mobility:** The Eastern Partnership promotes the exchange of people, education and knowledge through visa facilitation, academic exchange programmes and other initiatives.

Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Mediterranean Policy):

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, also known as the Barcelona Process, was launched in 1995 and covers the EU's relations with the countries of the Mediterranean region:

1. **Countries of the southern Mediterranean coast**
2. **European Mediterranean countries**

The objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership are similar to those of the Eastern Partnership:

1. **Promoting political stability:** The partnership aims to promote political stability and security in the region and to strengthen dialogue between countries.
2. **Fostering economic integration:** The EU aims to strengthen economic cooperation and trade in order to create economic opportunities for partner countries.
3. **Promotion of social and cultural cooperation:** The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership promotes dialogue between the cultures and people of the region in order to promote understanding and exchange.

Challenges:

1. **Policy challenges:** The geopolitical situation and political developments in partner countries may hamper the implementation of the partnership objectives.
2. **Economic disparities:** Economic disparities between the EU and partner countries can hamper economic integration and development.

3. **Security issues:** In both regions, conflict, terrorism and other security issues can affect stability and cooperation.

The Eastern Partnership and Euro-Mediterranean Partnership policies underline the importance of cooperation and cooperation with the EU's neighbouring countries. Through these partnerships, the EU seeks to promote political stability, economic development and social integration in the regions and to address common challenges.

7. The challenges and future prospects of the European Union

7.1 Brexit and its effects

The term "Brexit" refers to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union (EU) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM). Brexit was decided by the referendum of 23 June 2016 in Great Britain and had far-reaching political, economic and social implications.

Procedure of Brexit:

1. **Referendum:** In June 2016, 51.9% of voters in the UK voted to leave the EU.
2. **Article 50:** In March 2017, the UK government activated Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, which initiated the official withdrawal process.
3. **Negotiations:** The EU and the UK negotiated the withdrawal agreement, which regulated the terms of the withdrawal and a transition period.
4. **Withdrawal date:** The official withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU took place on 31 January 2020 at 23:00 (CET).
5. **Transition period:** A transition period lasted until 31 December 2020, during which the UK continued to follow EU rules and laws while the long-term relationship was negotiated.

Effects of Brexit:

1. **Economic impact:** Brexit has had an impact on trade between the UK and the EU, particularly due to new customs and trade regulations. Companies had to be prepared for bureaucratic hurdles and costs in the movement of goods.
2. **Labour migration and freedom of movement:** The free movement of EU citizens to the UK and vice versa ended. This had consequences for labour migration, the labour market and access to skilled workers.
3. **Political dynamics:** Brexit led to a reassessment of political relations within the UK and influenced the debate on the future of Scotland and Northern Ireland.
4. **International relations:** The UK had to negotiate new trade agreements with countries and regions outside the EU.
5. **Legal and regulatory adjustments:** The UK had to redesign its legislation and regulation in many areas, as it was no longer bound by EU law.
6. **Ireland: The issue of the** open border between Northern Ireland (part of the UK) and the Republic of Ireland (EU member) has been a central issue in the Brexit negotiations to protect the peace process in Northern Ireland.
7. **EU unity:** Brexit has prompted the EU itself to rethink its own challenges and reforms and to strengthen cooperation among the remaining member states.

Challenges and opportunities:

1. **Economic adjustments:** Businesses and sectors of the economy have had to adapt to new trade regimes, which brought both challenges and opportunities.

2. **Political realignment:** Brexit led to a redefinition of the UK's role in world politics and a review of political priorities.
3. **Future relations:** The UK and the EU must continue to shape their long-term relationship in areas such as trade, security, cooperation in research and education.

Brexit was a historic event with far-reaching implications for the United Kingdom, the European Union and international politics. The consequences of Brexit will be felt in various areas for many years to come.

7.2 The question of deepening and further integration

The issue of deepening and further integration within the European Union (EU) is an ongoing issue that is shaping the future of the EU. While some member states are in favour of closer integration, there are also others who prefer a greater emphasis on national sovereignty. This debate concerns various aspects of EU policy and structure.

Arguments in favor of further integration:

1. **Efficiency:** Closer integration could increase the efficiency of the EU's decision-making processes and improve the functioning of the institutions.
2. **Common challenges:** Issues such as climate change, migration, terrorism and economic crises often require common EU-wide solutions.
3. **Strengthening the EU's role on the world stage:** Close integration could enable the EU to act as a strong player at global level.
4. **Creating a more single market:** Deeper integration could facilitate the harmonization of regulations and standards and strengthen the single market.

Arguments against further integration:

1. **Subsidiarity principle:** Some Member States fear that further integration could undermine national sovereignty and violate the principle of subsidiarity.
2. **Democratic legitimacy:** Closer integration could be perceived as undemocratic, as some decisions may be removed from national parliaments.
3. **Diversity of Member States:** The EU is made up of countries with different cultures, traditions and economic conditions, which can make unification difficult.
4. **Fear of a "superstate":** Some critics see the danger of too much centralization of power in Brussels and a development towards a "superstate".

Current developments and challenges:

1. **Brexit:** The UK's withdrawal from the EU has intensified the debate on the future direction of the EU and triggered changes in EU dynamics.
2. **Democratic dialogue:** The EU has made efforts to strengthen democratic dialogue and citizen participation in political decision-making.
3. **Reform of the EU institutions:** Discussions are underway on reforming the EU institutions and strengthening the role of the European Parliament.

4. **More speeds:** Some member states have endorsed the idea that not all countries need to be at the same level in all areas of integration, which could lead to different "speeds".

The issue of deepening and further integration is complex and touches on the fundamental principles of the EU. The EU will continue to seek a balance between greater integration and respecting the sovereignty of member states in order to successfully meet the challenges of the 21st century.
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7.3 The role of the European Union in global politics

The European Union (EU) plays an important role in global politics and international affairs. Its position is based on its economic weight, political values and commitment to peace, stability and sustainable development. Here are some aspects of their role in the global arena:

1. Economic importance:

The EU is one of the largest economies in the world. Their domestic market offers a huge demand for goods and services and attracts trading partners. The EU is also a major investor and donor of development aid.

2. Promoting peace and stability:

The EU was founded after the experience of two world wars to ensure peace and stability in Europe. It has contributed to conflict resolution and peacebuilding in various parts of the world, including the Balkans, the Middle East and Africa.

3. Human rights and democracy:

The EU is committed to human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It supports the promotion of these values in its external relations and promotes respect for fundamental rights worldwide.

4. Trade relations and globalisation:

The EU is an important player in the international trading system. It negotiates trade agreements, promotes fair trade and tries to counteract global trade conflicts.

5. Climate change and environmental protection:

The EU is committed to climate action and is committed to international agreements to combat climate change, such as the Paris Agreement. It promotes sustainable development and environmental protection.

6. Development cooperation:

The EU is a major donor of development aid, supporting poverty reduction, education, health and sustainable development programmes in poorer countries.

7. International Security:

The EU promotes international security through diplomatic efforts, conflict prevention, disarmament and humanitarian aid in crisis regions.

8. Diplomatic Presence:

The EU represents its Member States in international forums such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the G20.

Challenges:

1. **Internal consolidation:** The EU must continue to focus on consolidating its internal cooperation in order to act as a strong and unified actor at global level.
2. **Multilateral cooperation:** The EU must promote multilateral cooperation and rules in a world marked by new challenges and rivalries.
3. **Balance of power:** The EU is in competition with other major players such as the US, China and Russia. It must maintain its position and strengthen its influence.

The EU remains committed to playing an active role in global politics to promote peace, stability and prosperity and to address international challenges. Its ability to use its values, resources and political power will be instrumental in determining how effectively it can operate on the world stage.

Appendix (tables, figures, documents)

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