

Hi there,

My name is Lisa and I come from France. During the last two exchanges in Romania and Poland, I presented testimonies from my grandmothers who lived through the war and a testimony from a Polish woman who left Poland against her will to live in my village. Today, I am going to talk to you about European integration.

I was not familiar with the procedures and the functioning of integration, so I decided to do a lot of research to share the result with you.

European integration is the process of progressive constitution, in stages, of an economic space (then monetary with the euro) bringing together several distinct economies which voluntarily transfer certain elements of their national sovereignty to supranational institutions.

The origin of Europe we know today goes back a long way.

After the Second World War, in 1945, Europe is a heap of ruins.

This horrible war that lasted five years left 20 million orphans, roads destroyed, and people starving and fleeing their country, it was utter devastation. Everything had to be rebuilt.

After 1945, peace settled in Europe, but it was divided into two blocks: Eastern Europe and Western Europe. The dividing line passes through Germany.

Germany is then separated into two: East Germany and West Germany.

People's lives are very different from side to side.

On May 9, 1950, a French statesman, Robert Schuman, had an idea: West Germany and France would work together in the fields of coal and steel. In this way, they will no longer think of going to war.

Thus, Western Europe begins to rebuild itself peacefully.

Very quickly, other countries took part in the coal and steel project: Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands.

In 1989, a very important event took place in the heart of the European continent. Eastern Europeans are joining Western Europeans.

The Berlin Wall that separated them both physically and politically ceases to exist. Thousands of Berliners break through the wall and reunite with their compatriots: Germany is reunited. It is a big popular holiday in Europe.

This event marks the end of communism in Germany, and, over the years, many Eastern European countries will gradually join the European Union.

In 1992, by the Treaty of Maastricht, the European Economic Community became the European Union.

But in the whole of Europe, the more of us there are, the more complicated it is to reach an agreement. And everyone wants to defend their own ideas.

We must therefore discuss to find solutions. They are collected in the "treaties".

A treaty is an agreement concluded and signed by the Heads of State or Governments of the countries of the Union. It is, in a way, the user manual of the European Union.

Until today, seven major treaties have followed one another. In general, treaties are given the name of the city in which they were signed. The latest is the Lisbon Treaty.

From now on, to avoid the problems that Europe has had to face, there are criteria for entering the European Union:

Already, the country must be a democracy, the country must respect human rights, freedom of the press and freedom of expression, the country must not be in crisis and must have a stable economy and finally, the country must respect all European decisions and laws.

The EU has grown steadily since its inception.

If Europe was created around 6 Member States (France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg), a whole series of successive enlargements followed, and these had beneficial effects:

- From a political point of view: the EU has been able to create an area of peace and stability between countries that have experienced centuries of war and authoritarian regimes for decades.

- From an economic point of view: the GDP of the EU represented 23% of the world GDP in 2014 and constitutes one of the largest economic powers in the world, to which the enlargements have contributed to increasing the economic weight.

Next, the prospect of enlargement constitutes an instrument of "soft power" for the EU.

To enter the EU, candidate countries must adopt numerous reforms in order to meet the membership criteria as defined at the European Council in Copenhagen:

- in political matters: the presence of stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for minorities and their protection.

- in economic matters: the existence of a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with market forces and competitive pressure within the Union.

- the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*: the ability to assume the obligations arising from membership, and to subscribe to the objectives of political, economic, and monetary union.

However, there are problems with the latest enlargements.

The entry of 12 new states into the EU between 2004 and 2007 generated several challenges that the EU was not fully able to meet:

- a financial challenge: the principle of financial solidarity of the EU, through its regional policy, implies a greater transfer of funds for the less economically advanced countries. The 12 new Member States have thus become net beneficiaries of European funds, to the detriment of the least favored regions of the "old" Member States. Isn't the question of the distribution to 28 countries of amounts like what they were to 15 also a sign of less efficiency in the allocation of funds?

- an economic challenge: the entry of these new countries has accentuated the gap between the richest and the poorest countries, making it difficult to harmonize and standardize the territories of the EU.

- a tax and social challenge: The "old" Member States fear, because of the significant wage gaps and the absence of standard social systems, a "social and tax dumping", a source of relocation.

- a geographical challenge: in 2004, the geographical enlargement of the EU was unprecedented. Any new enlargement will involve the question of the "natural" borders of Europe and each candidate (apart perhaps from the Balkan countries) will be asked the question of its "Europeanness."

For all these reasons, a Eurosceptic trend in public opinion has developed in the 15 "old" Member States, forcing the EU to review its enlargement policy.

But how far should the EU be enlarged?

- A pause in enlargement is proclaimed by European leaders, at least for the next 5 to 10 years. The EU emphasizes the deepening of reforms, whether for the Member States, but also for the candidate or potential candidate countries.

- The new enlargement strategy for the period 2014-2020 clearly emphasizes the pursuit of deep reforms in all areas (economic, political, and social) for the candidate countries with which the EU has started negotiations.

- For neighbouring countries of Europe, but not having a priori the prospect of entering the EU, a specific approach has been developed within the framework of the European neighbourhood policy in which privileged partnerships are carried out for countries undertaking reforms to bring them closer to the values and acquis of the EU (e.g.: the advanced status granted by the EU with the Kingdom of Morocco)

To conclude, as this is the last event, I would like to take stock of all that these events have brought me, I have already learned a lot on themes that I did not know, for example, it is by doing my presentations that I learned that I lived in the old house which was used to accommodate Poles who fled their country during a difficult period, I acquired a lot of historical and geographical knowledge. I am very grateful to have been able to travel to Romania, Poland, and Albania, it is thanks to these projects that I feel more European. And above all, I made a lot of friends, and wonderful people that I would never have been able to meet if I hadn't participated in these exchanges, so thank you for everything!