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## Wales: 40 Years of EU Membership

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**KEY DATES**

A timeline of Wales in the EU.

1 Jan 1973	UK joins the European Economic Community
Dec 1974	The European Regional Development Fund is created
5 Jun 1975	UK votes 'Yes' in a referendum on EEC membership
1977	Roy Jenkins appointed President of the European Commission
1979	European Monetary System established
Jun 1979	First direct elections to the European Parliament. Beata Brookes, Ann Clwyd, Win Griffiths and Allan Rogers take the Welsh seats
Jun 1984	European Elections. Beata Brookes and Win Griffiths are joined by David Morriss and Llewellyn Smith
1984	Margaret Thatcher negotiates UK rebate
1984	Milk quotas are introduced in the EU as part of the CAP
1985	Jaques Delors becomes President of the EU
1986	The EU Flag is unveiled
1986	The Single European Act enters into force
1987	The Erasmus programme is launched
1988	Regional aid is doubled, and the regulations governing Structural Funds are significantly revised.
Jun 1989	European Elections. Wayne David and Joe Wilson join David Morriss and Llewellyn Smith. It is the first time Wales is without a female representative.
Oct 1990	UK enters European Exchange Rate Mechanism.
7 Feb 1992	Treaty of Maastricht is signed
16 Sep 1992	Black Wednesday UK market crash. The UK is forced to withdraw from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism
1993	The Treaty of the European Union comes into effect
1994	The Committee of the Regions is established and requests clarification on the definition of 'subsidiarity'
Jun 1994	European elections. Eluned Morgan becomes youngest ever MEP representing Mid and West Wales
26 Mar 1995	The Schengen pact enters into force
1 May 1997	Labour sweep to victory in the UK and immediately announce plans for a referendum on devolution in Scotland and Wales
18 Sep 1997	Wales votes 'Yes' by a narrow margin for devolution

13 Dec 1997	Agreement is made to open accession negotiations with 10 eastern and central European countries
31 Jul 1998	The Government of Wales Act 1998 receives Royal Assent and established the National Assembly for Wales
1998	The Jones Report urges Wales to take a proactive approach to engaging with European affairs
Mar 1999	Resignation of the European Commission. Financial regulation would now become more stringent
6 May 1999	First National Assembly for Wales elections. Labour win 28 seats and form a minority government
Jun 1999	European elections experience one of the lowest turnouts in Wales.
2000	The 2000-2006 Objective 1 programmes begin to be managed and administered in Wales for the first time.
9 Feb 2000	Alun Michael resigns as First Secretary for Wales. Poor leadership concerning the Structural Funds and negotiations with the UK Treasury over match-funding for them is a key cause.
1 Jan 2002	The Euro arrives in the 12 participating countries
1 May 2004	The EU welcomes 8 new nations. Large numbers of Polish migrants settle in Wales
Jun 2004	Turnout for European elections is 41% in Wales
Oct 2004	Wales disappears from the map of Europe on Eurostats annual publication
2005	Wales is awarded Objective 1 level funding for 2007-2013
25 Jul 2006	Government of Wales Act 2006 receives Royal Assent
1 Jan 2007	Romania and Bulgaria join the EU but the UK imposes travel restrictions until 2013
2007	Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru make 'One Wales' agreement
13 Dec 2007	Lisbon Treaty signed strengthening principle of subsidiarity
Nov 2008	Welsh is used in the European Council of Ministers for the first time.
2009	EC & UK sign an agreement on use of the Welsh language in the EC
Mar 2010	Key elements of Europe 2020 agreed
3 Mar 2011	Wales votes 'Yes' on a referendum for full law-making powers for the National Assembly for Wales
2011	National Assembly for Wales abolishes European Affairs Committee
Mar 2012	First Minister Carwyn Jones poses the 'Bridgend question' on why UK representatives speak for Wales in Europe on devolved matters

Nov 2012	Carwyn Jones warns of the risks of a UK referendum on EU membership
Jan 2013	Wales celebrates 40 years as part of the European Community

## THE NARRATIVE

Historically the Welsh believed themselves to have a special affinity with Europe. Wales, it was claimed, had retained the benefits of Roman civilization even as our less fortunate neighbours had succumbed to the ravages of the so-called 'Dark Ages'. With the country playing a full part in the worldwide British Empire this feeling of affinity may have waned. Still Europe loomed large in Welsh life, even it was the austere Geneva of John Calvin that inspired the country's fervent nonconformist Protestantism rather than Rome or the Romans. By the time the UK finally joined what was then called the Common Market – or in Welsh the *Farchnad Gyffredin* – nonconformism was in retreat and there was little by the way of a specifically Welsh debate about membership. Indeed, if anything the Welsh electorate were marginally less enthusiastic about the Union than voters in the rest of the state. In the 1975 referendum 64% voted to remain in the EEC as compared to 67.2% in favour across the UK as a whole.

In the intervening 40 years, however, there is no doubt that European membership has had a profound effect on everyday life in Wales. It is often now claimed that the Welsh look upon the European Union more favourably than the English (European Commission, 2007). They have certainly remained more resistant to the siren calls of Euro-scepticism. Indeed Welsh First Minister Carwyn Jones has recently confidently claimed that, should a new referendum on UK membership of the Union eventually be held, Wales would vote to remain part of the European Union (Jones, 2012).

Even if, as has been claimed, the past is always a foreign country, the Wales of 1973 was profoundly different to the Wales of today. The legacy of Wales's pioneering role in the industrial revolution remained with significant coal and steel industries still dominating the country's economic and, indeed, social life. Harbingers of change were, however, certainly in evidence. Heavy industry was in decline, while the opening of the Sony plant in Bridgend represented the first major investment by a Japanese company in the country and the beginning of a period in which inward investment was regarded as central to the successful restructuring of the economy. Yet a Wales without a coal industry seemed almost unimaginable. Political self-government also appeared a distant prospect. After all, the Welsh Office – the UK government's administrative office for Wales – was less than a decade old when Wales became part of the Union. The prospect of Welsh Government Ministers representing the UK in European Council meetings would have seemed entirely fanciful.

It was in rural Wales that the effects of European membership first became apparent through the workings of the Common Agricultural Policy. While the support provided to farmers and the rural economy more generally was welcome, it was not a policy without its controversies. Attempts to discourage over-production – in particular the 'milk quotas' introduced in the mid 1980s – led to several memorable protests by angry dairy farmers.

In the rest of Wales it was the precipitate decline of heavy industry in the recession of the early 1980s, followed by the collapse of the coal industry after the defeat of the 1984-85 Miners Strike, that brought the potential significance of European membership to the fore. With the skills base of much of the workforce apparently obsolete and unemployment stubbornly high, the 1988 reform of European Regional Development Funds and the doubling of regional aid would eventually have a hugely significant effect in Wales.

Although Wales received comparatively little by way of regional development aid throughout the 1990's, it was in the 2000-2006 programming period that the impact of these developments would really be felt. Following the redrawing of the NUTS II regional boundaries in Wales in 1998, much of west Wales and the Valleys qualified for Objective 1 funding, with the rest of Wales being eligible for Objective 3 support.

The management of the Structural Funds in Wales was to provide the first great test for the devolved National Assembly for Wales, meeting for the first time in 1999 as a result of a narrow Yes vote in the 1997 referendum (Cole & Palmer, 2011). Successful delivery of the programmes not only had the potential to significantly improve the country's economic potential but could also serve to legitimate the new governmental structures themselves. In the event, Objective 1 would also furnish Wales with its first post-devolution constitutional crisis. Disagreements with the UK government on the question of match funding would eventually lead to the removal of Alun Michael from his role as Wales' First Secretary. He was replaced by Rhodri Morgan, who had been the Welsh Labour party's original choice as leader, but whom had been opposed by UK Prime Minister Tony Blair. Here was a case, then, of tensions with the UK government around an apparently arcane issue of European funding mechanisms leading to the installation in Wales of the leader that most of the Welsh electorate had wanted all along. Such are the sometimes serendipitous ways of multi-level politics.

It was not only the overthrow of Alun Michael that served to increase awareness of the importance of Wales' relationship with Europe among the wider population. European funding provided businesses, civil society organisations and individuals with new opportunities. New vistas were also opened up for those civil servants charged with implementing the programmes that were, for the first time, interpreted, structured and delivered in Wales by Welsh organisations. Plaques bearing the 'Funded by the European Union' logo became nigh on ubiquitous across the country with the relationship with the Union being widely promoted as being a key dimension in the regeneration of Wales's economy and society.

While the award of Objective 1 funding for 2000-2006 was widely described as a 'one-off' opportunity to receive such a high level of funding, it was announced in 2005 that the West Wales and the Valleys region had again failed to cross the threshold of 75% of average EU GDP. As a result, Convergence funding would provide a second bite of the cherry for Wales in the period 2007-13. Here was a chance to redeem some of the failures of the earlier period and build a more strategic and coherent programme than the one for 2000-2006, which was widely criticised for its incoherence and barriers in participation (Royles, 2006, Entwistle et al, 2007). The Welsh European Funding Office charged with management and distribution of the funds confidently asserted that the 2007-2013 programmes would be a great success for Wales. It will soon be time to assess whether such confidence was truly justified.

In the initial years of UK membership Wales was not directly represented in European institutions. Rather it was left to individuals of Welsh origins to make their mark. None more prominent than Roy Jenkins, hailing from Abersychan in south east Wales, who became the first British President of the Commission in the 1977.

The first four directly elected representatives from Wales to sit in the European Parliament were returned in 1979. Given the, until then, dire Welsh record of ensuring female representation, the fact that two of the four were women (Labour's Ann Clwyd and the Conservative's Beata Brookes) represented a major breakthrough. Meanwhile, inside the Commission, prominent Welsh individuals continued to make an impact, with Ivor Richard installed as Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs during the early 1980's, and fellow Welshman and acting Director General, Hywel Ceri Jones, playing a prominent role in the development of the flagship Erasmus programmes.

Welsh representation at the European level provided a fascinating footnote in the history of the establishment of the Single European Market. Specifically, the difficult passage of the Maastricht Treaty through the UK House of Commons was aided by a deal between the nationalist Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales) and the Conservative government that saw the party's MPs support the treaty in return for enhanced Welsh representation on the Committee of the Regions.

With the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales following the 1997 referendum, ensuring that a Welsh voice would be heard at the European level became an important political priority. Wales, it was argued, should not only benefit from structural funding and other support programmes, but devolved Wales should also seek to contribute positively in shaping the future development of the Union (Jones, 1998). On occasion, however, it wasn't entirely clear that Welsh interest in Europe was reciprocated. The omission of Wales from the map of Europe displayed on the cover of Eurostat's 2004 yearbook certainly raised a few eyebrows! Welsh politicians, however, were quick to laugh this off as a genuine mistake.

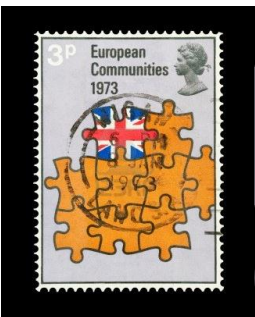
In 2008 it was not only a Welsh voice that was heard at a European Union Council of Ministers meeting, but for the first time a voice speaking in the Welsh language. The following year Welsh was recognised as a co-official language of the European Commission, ensuring translation of certain official publications, and providing for communication in Welsh to the Union through designated bodies. The governing Labour-Plaid Cymru coalition in Cardiff hailed this as a milestone for the language, and indicated their hope that other European institutions would follow suit.

The way that the National Assembly itself deals with European matters became the subject of controversy following a reorganisation of the Assembly's committee structures as a result of the granting of more expansive legislative powers to Welsh legislature after a further referendum in March 2011. This reorganisation saw the disappearance of the Assembly's Committee for European and External Affairs. Whilst some commentators argued this would lead to the downgrading of European affairs within the National Assembly (Dickson, 2011), the Presiding Officer was quick to defend the move on the grounds that this now placed responsibility on all Committees to keep abreast of European level developments and their ramifications for Wales. It is perhaps too soon to say whether or not this has proven to be the case. But what cannot be doubted is that most Welsh politicians, and certainly three of the four main parties in Wales, remain enthusiastically pro-European. But what of the broader population as a whole?

Wales enters its 40th year in the European Union with a stark warning from First Minister, Carwyn Jones, to those Euro-sceptics demanding another referendum on UK membership. Holding such a referendum, he argues, could serve to hasten the break-up of the UK given that the different component nations of the UK might well vote differently. His assumption is that the Celtic nations are more likely to adopt a positive attitude than their English neighbours. It is clearly the case that Euro-scepticism is not a prominent feature of Welsh political culture. Yet neither can it realistically be claimed that the Welsh have begun to think of themselves as the confident 'Welsh Europeans' imagined by thinkers such as Raymond Williams. What is beyond doubt, however, is that European membership has had – and continues to have – a profound effect on everyday life in every part of Wales. Whether or not we identify as Welsh Europeans, ours is very clearly, a European Wales.

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# The UK 40 Years in the Union – Wales Timeline



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**1984:** Margaret Thatcher negotiates UK rebate

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1975

1977

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**7<sup>th</sup> February 1992:** Treaty of Maastricht is signed

**October 1990:** UK enters European Exchange Rate Mechanism.

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**1988:** Regional aid is doubled, and the regulations governing Structural Funds are significantly revised.

**1987:** The Erasmus programme is launched

**1986:** The Single European Act enters into force

**1986:** The EU Flag is unveiled

**1985:** Jacques Delors becomes President of the EU

**1984:** Milk quotas are introduced in the EU as part of the CAP

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**16<sup>th</sup> September 1992:** Black Wednesday UK market crash. The UK is forced to withdraw from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism

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**1994:** The Committee of the Regions is established and requests clarification on the definition of 'subsidiarity'

**June 1994:** European elections. Eluned Morgan becomes youngest ever MEP representing Mid and West Wales

**26<sup>th</sup> March 1995:** The Schengen pact enters into force

**1<sup>st</sup> May 1997:** Labour sweep to victory in the UK and immediately announce plans for a referendum on devolution in Scotland and Wales

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**13<sup>th</sup> December 1997:** Agreement is made to open accession negotiations with 10 eastern and central European countries

**31<sup>st</sup> July 1998:** The Government of Wales Act 1998 receives Royal Assent and established the National Assembly for Wales

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**1<sup>st</sup> May 2004:** The EU welcomes 8 new nations. Large numbers of Polish migrants settle in Wales

**1<sup>st</sup> January 2002:** The Euro arrives in the 12 participating countries

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**6<sup>th</sup> May 1999:** First National Assembly for Wales elections. Labour win 28 seats and form a minority government

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2006

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2013



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