Why doesn't the EU become one country?

Because every big step requires all 27 governments to agree, and several are elected on promises to refuse. The blocker is machinery and politics, not the idea.

The top answer on this question's Quora thread is eight years old. Here is the 2026 version, with the honest parts left in.

The unanimity trap

The EU's founding treaties can only change if every member state agrees and every member state ratifies – parliaments at minimum, referendums in several countries. That is 27 chances to say no, and the no has form: French and Dutch voters killed the EU Constitution in 2005, and no government has risked a big treaty referendum since. The result is a structural absurdity – the union's rules make it easier to admit a new member than to fix the rules themselves.

Sovereignty is good politics

No national politician builds a career by handing power upward. Governing parties win elections on schools, taxes and pensions; opposition parties win them, increasingly, on "Brussels took your sovereignty." Even leaders who privately favor deeper integration ration their political capital. This is not European hypocrisy, it is democracy working locally – which is precisely the problem, because the costs of division (defense, energy, tech scale) land on the continent as a whole, where nobody campaigns.

The strongest objection deserves a straight answer

Skeptics say there is no European demos – no shared language, media or public square – and democracy without a demos becomes bureaucracy. Take that seriously; it is the best argument in the field. Two honest replies. Switzerland runs a four-language democracy on layered identity, and nobody calls it fake. And identity follows common projects more than it precedes them: few Bavarians felt "German" in 1860, few Sicilians "Italian." Meanwhile the demand signal is real – 81 % of Europeans back a common defence policy and 90 % want member states more united, the highest Eurobarometer has ever measured.

And yet it keeps moving

The paradox of the EU is that it deepens anyway, crisis by crisis, without anyone announcing a federation. The euro survived its near-death and added its 21st member, Bulgaria, this January. Covid produced the first large-scale joint borrowing – a federal instrument by any other name. Russia's war produced common weapons funding, a rearmament agenda and the fastest enlargement push in twenty years: Ukraine opened its first negotiating cluster in June 2026, Montenegro may finish this year. Each new member makes unanimity more absurd – which is why treaty reform keeps returning to the agenda no one wants to touch.

So will it happen?

Not by one grand leap; the machinery forbids it and the politics punish it. If it happens, it will happen the way everything European happens: a crisis, a workaround that quietly becomes permanent, and a treaty that eventually writes down what reality already did. The interesting question is whether the current crisis – war on the continent, allies hedging, giants setting the terms – is the one that makes acting as one country cheaper than the alternative. That answer belongs to voters, which is to say: to you.

All questions →

FREQUENTLY ASKED

What is the unanimity rule?

The EU's biggest decisions – treaty change, enlargement, foreign policy, taxation – require every member government to agree. One veto from one capital stops all 27. It is the single largest brake on deeper integration.

Did Europeans ever vote against more integration?

Yes, memorably: French and Dutch voters rejected the proposed EU Constitution in 2005 referendums. The scars shape strategy to this day – governments avoid putting treaty change to a vote.

Is the EU still growing?

Yes. Bulgaria adopted the euro in January 2026, Montenegro may close accession talks this year, Albania next, and Ukraine opened its first negotiating cluster in June 2026, aiming to finish by 2028.

Could the EU deepen without changing the treaties?

Partly. Joint borrowing (as in the post-Covid recovery fund), defense cooperation and capital-markets integration can grow within current rules. A real federation – one army, one foreign policy – could not.

What would it actually take?

A treaty rewrite ratified by all members, several of them by referendum. Realistically it takes what built the EU each time before: a crisis big enough to make the cost of staying divided larger than the cost of uniting.

SOURCES

- EU treaties: Art. 48 TEU (treaty revision, unanimity + ratification)
- 2005 French and Dutch referendums on the EU Constitution
- European Council conclusions, March 2026 (Ukraine); accession cluster opening, June 2026
- ECB: Bulgaria joins the euro area, January 2026
- Standard Eurobarometer Spring 2025 (81 % common defence; 90 % more united)