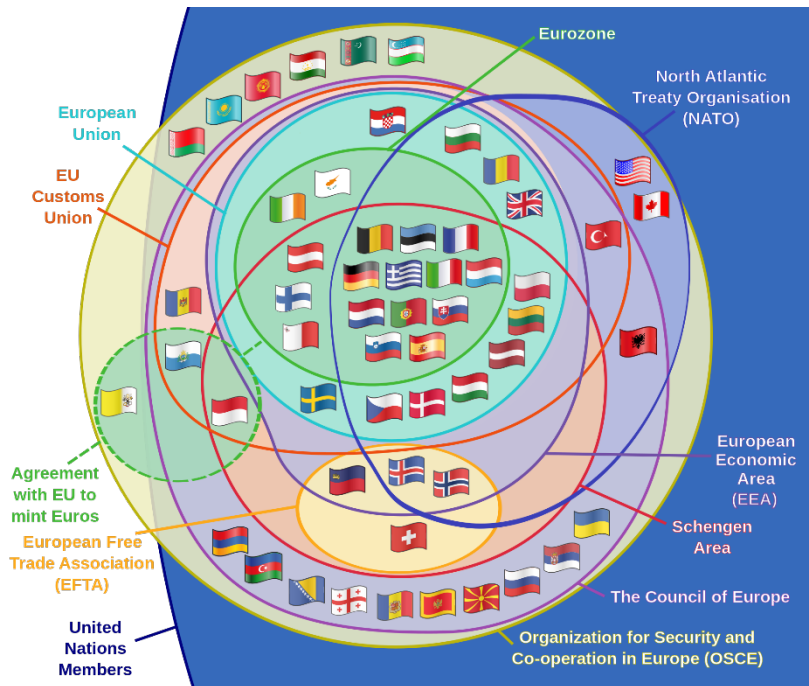**2. Introduction**

a) What is European integration?

European integration is any process by which states in Europe are brought together and work closer in terms of politics, culture, economics, social policy, or legal institutions. Historically, there have been efforts to integrate the whole of parts of Europe either economically (such as the Hanseatic League) or in terms of military security (such as the Concert of Europe). During the Age of Enlightenment, in the late 18th century, Immanuel Kant advocated for a peaceful federation of European states.

After the second World War, a number of international organizations were created that integrated the security community in Europe (such as NATO and the OSCE), or united European states in terms of their commitment to human rights and development (such as the Council of Europe). Yet the preeminent organization for European integration during the 20th and 21st century has been the European Union.

b) What is the European Union?

The European Union is an economic and political union of 28 countries across Europe. The EU shares some characteristics with federal states like Canada, such as freedom of movement and multiple levels of governance. However, the EU is unique in many ways. It is a political phenomenon unlike any in history, some calling it a *sui generis* international or supranational organization. In 1985, then European Commission President Jacques Delors, referred to the EU as an 'Unidentified Political Object' (UPO).

The EU is a voluntary association, and countries can apply to be Member States if they fulfill the Copenhagen Criteria. There are a number of countries who have applied to join (Turkey, Albania, Iceland, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia), with applications requiring years to evaluate, prepare and negotiate. All other EU member states must agree to allow a new country to join the Union. In March of 2017, the United Kingdom activated Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, triggering the secession of the United Kingdom from the EU within two years. This came after a referendum in June 2016, in which the popular vote was in favour of 'Brexit'. The process of seceding from the EU is likely to be as complex as the process of joining, requiring a number of years to work out the political and legal implications.