

## The Commonwealth of Nations

After the Second World War some British colonies started to demand independence, and gradually Britain lost its empire.

India became independent in 1947, followed by some African, Asian and Caribbean countries. In the 1950s and 1960s most of the remaining countries of the British Empire became independent, but joined the British Commonwealth which had been set up in 1931. Britain lost much of its power and influence, but it kept special trading agreements with the Commonwealth countries.

Today, there are 54 members of the Commonwealth of Nations (however Fiji Islands was suspended from membership on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2009). It consists of 33 republics, 5 countries with national monarchies of their own, and 16 constitutional monarchies that recognise Elizabeth II as their Head of State. A few small countries which are called dependent territories (such as Gibraltar and the Falklands) have a governor who is appointed by the Queen.

The Declaration of Commonwealth Principles (1971) defines the Commonwealth as 'a voluntary association of independent states, each responsible for its own policies, consulting and co-operating in the common interest of their peoples and in the promotion of international and world peace'.

The heads of government of all Commonwealth countries meet every two years at the **Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)** and take decisions on major strategic issues.

The Queen has an important unifying and symbolic function. The second Monday in March is Queen Elizabeth II's official birthday and also **Commonwealth Day**, when she delivers a message which is broadcast on TV and on the radio and posted on the Internet.



1. A British recruiting poster addressing the Commonwealth people (1940). (Imperial War Museum, London)

### 1. READING

Read the text above and find out which paragraphs contain the following information.

1. When Britain lost its empire. par.
2. When the British Commonwealth was set up. par.
3. Britain's relationship with the Commonwealth countries. par.
4. What the Commonwealth of Nation is. par.
5. How many countries are members of the Commonwealth of Nations today. par.
6. How the members countries are governed. par.
7. What the Queen does on Commonwealth Day. par.
8. What the CHOGM is. par.

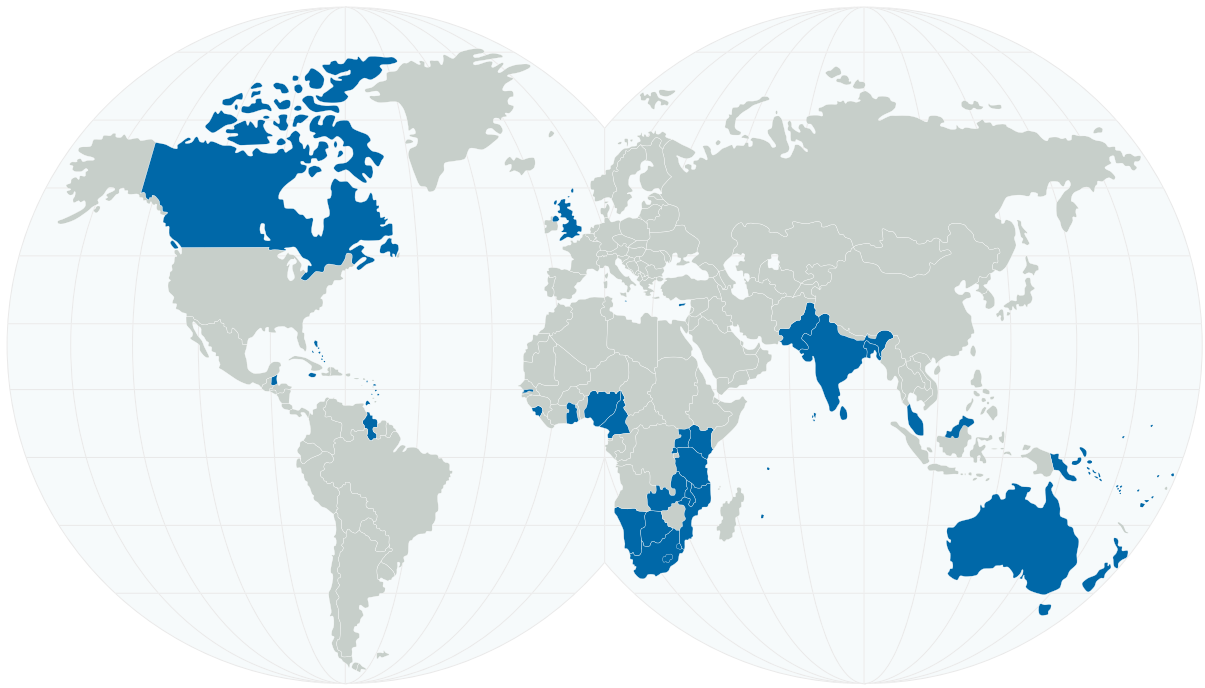
### 2. VOCABULARY

For each word underlined in the text on the left write the verb, noun or adjective it comes from. Point out prefixes and suffixes.

Example: gradually (adv): from gradual (adj) + ly



2. The Commonwealth Games are held every four years in a different city, with the aim of developing sport for the benefit of the people, the nations and the territories of the Commonwealth. (Getty Images/Adam Pretty)



3. Maps of the present Commonwealth of Nations.

## Between the Commonwealth and Europe

The attitude of British people towards Europe varies a lot. Some people and MPs (the **pro-Europeans**) are in favour of closer political, economic and social relations with other European countries, while others (the **euro-sceptics**) would like to withdraw from the EU as they are suspicious of Europe and afraid that Britain will lose its independence and national identity.

After the 1957 Treaty of Rome, the **European Economic Community (EEC)** was set up, with the aim of allowing more economic co-operation and movement of people between the countries of Europe. From the beginning Britain showed little enthusiasm for membership of the EEC. It would mean among other things ending its special trading agreements with the Commonwealth countries. In some ways it could mean losing its status as a world power to become a European power like other European states.

However, after long negotiations and various preparatory steps (of which the introduction of decimal currency in 1971 was a major one), Britain joined the EEC, better known as the 'Common Market', in 1973. Despite being members of the EC, however, British people and their politicians were not keen to follow a path which was leading towards a federal union. Labour and the Conservatives both found themselves divided on the issue, but a referendum held in 1975 confirmed the UK's membership. In the 1980s Prime Minister Mrs Thatcher and most Conservatives were strongly against political integration with Europe.

In 1992 the Treaty of Maastricht established the **European Union (EU)**, marking a further step towards the creation of 'an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe'. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1993 the **single market** was set up. It provided for the free circulation of people, goods, services and capital within the European Union. Customs barriers were removed and professional qualifications were mutually recognised. Britain was part of this but did not accept the concepts of European citizenship and a single European currency.

Whatever the public thought of Europe and the single currency, they rejected the Tories in the 1997 elections and chose the

Labour Party which was now broadly united in favour of both the European Union and the single currency.

In 1999 the **euro** began to be used in business transactions in the eleven countries which had supported monetary union, while euro banknotes and coins were introduced into European countries on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2002. Britain has not yet adopted the euro currency and debate continues over if and when it will do so. The government said that a series of economic criteria must be met before the issues can be put to a referendum, but public opinion and the media are very reluctant to give up the pound.

### 3. READING

Read the text on this page and find out

1. the difference between the EEC and the EU
2. when Britain joined the EEC
3. when European people began to use the euro
4. whether Britain is using the euro now
5. who the euro-sceptics are
6. which EU provisions Britain is still reluctant to accept



4. The European Parliament building in Strasbourg, France. (Shutterstock)