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Nobel Peace Prize awarded to European Union BBC website - Oct 12th 2012

The European Union has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for six decades of work in advancing peace in Europe.

The committee said the EU had helped to transform Europe "from a continent of war to a continent of peace". The award comes as the EU faces the biggest crisis of its history, with recession and social unrest rocking many of its member states. The last organisation to be given the prize outright was Medecins Sans Frontieres, which won in 1999. Announcing the award, the Nobel committee president acknowledged the EU's current financial problems and social unrest. But he said the committee wanted to concentrate on the EU's work over six decades of advancing "peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights".

The Nobel committee president highlighted the EU's work in sealing the reconciliation between France and Germany in the decades after World War II and praised the organisation for incorporating Spain, Portugal and Greece after their authoritarian regimes collapsed in the 1970s. The EU's reconciliation work had now moved to Balkan countries, he said, pointing out that Croatia is on the verge of membership. And he added that the possibility of EU membership for Turkey had also "advanced democracy and human rights in that country".

Senior EU figures were overjoyed with the award. EU Commission President Mr Barroso called it a "great honour", while the European Council President said it was recognition for the work of "the biggest peacemaker in history". In an interview with the BBC, Mr Barroso said that in awarding the prize to the EU, the Nobel Committee was saying that the European project should be cherished, both within and beyond Europe.

"I believe it is justified for the European Union to see its work for peace recognised, not only in the unification of the continent, but also outside our Europe," he said. "This started after the war - putting together former enemies. It started with six countries and we are now 27, another one is going to join us next year and more want to come. So the EU is the most important project for peace in terms of transnational, supranational co-operation."

Alongside the chorus of praise, several eurosceptic politicians were quick to deride the award. The Nobel committee has rarely shied away from controversy with its choice of winner. US President Barack Obama won the award in 2009 despite leading a country that was fighting two separate wars.

(403 words)