

Free Access to Law of the European Union and its Member States

by Alexis Fetzer

While Europe may lie across the pond, there are many reasons why today's practitioner would need to research the law of the European Union or one of its member states. However, with a complex institutional structure and multiple bodies producing various forms of law, researching the law of the EU can seem like a daunting task.

As with any research in an area of unfamiliar law, a good place to begin is with a research guide. Prepared by subject experts, research guides will point to relevant sources for locating primary material and often contain helpful explanations that assist in understanding the type of material being researched. The following are a few examples of some excellent research guides covering law of the European Union:

European Union Legal Materials:

An Infrequent User's Guide by

Duncan E. Alford (Globalex)

http://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/European_Union1.html

— Geared specifically toward a researcher who is not familiar with the structure of the EU, this guide provides information about the principal institutions of the EU, the type of law produced, and where that law can be found in both print and electronic formats.

Electronic Resource Guide for International Law: European Union

by Marylin J. Raisch (ASIL)

https://www.asil.org/sites/default/files/ERG_EU.pdf— This guide specifically highlights up-to-date online resources for law of the EU, including links to founding treaties and Europa, the official website of the EU. Also included is a bibliography pointing to further commentary.

While understanding what to search for can be a challenge, locating EU material online is far simpler than you might

imagine. The EU is one of the largest publishers of online information in the world. The official website, Europa.eu, provides basic information about the EU as well as latest EU news and events. In addition to Europa.eu, each institution and agency within the EU has its own website with corresponding information and access to some documentation.

While these websites are good resources for general information, a better source for researching EU published law is the Eur-Lex portal (EUR-Lex.europa.eu). Eur-Lex is a robust database that provides access to EU treaties, directives, regulations, decisions, consolidated legislation, preparatory acts, international agreements, documents of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), as well as other documents. Documents are available in multiple languages. The database is free to access and individual user accounts are free to register. Registering for an individual account allows users to perform more sophisticated searching, save documents and queries, and add other customization features.

A sister database to Eur-Lex is N-Lex (N-Lex.europa.eu), a website that offers access to the national legislation of member countries of the EU. While these laws are published in various languages depending upon the country, N-Lex allows researchers to search in English or other European languages. When entering in search terms to the legislation search form of an individual country, selecting the "EuroVoc" icon allows you to translate your search terms into the country's official language. EuroVoc (<http://eurovoc.europa.eu>) is a multilingual dictionary and thesaurus that can translate terms in twenty-three EU languages. In addition to translating desired search terms, EuroVoc will propose other related terms to assist you in crafting a more targeted search.

When viewing N-Lex search results in a Google Chrome browser, you can automatically translate the text of the

webpage using the free Google Website Translator plugin (<http://translate.google.com/manager/website>). By installing this plugin into your Google Chrome browser, you can easily translate the text of almost any foreign language website into over ninety languages. As with any machine translation, however, keep in mind that translations are not official. Use this tool as a quick resource to determine a website's contents, but do not rely on any translations as legal authority.

In addition to N-Lex, another resource for locating national law is WorldLII (<http://www.worldlii.org/>). WorldLII, or World Legal Information Institute, provides a single search location for law made freely available through legal information institutes around the world. As of the date of this article, WorldLII searches 1,743 databases from 123 jurisdictions via fourteen Legal Information Institutes. Coverage varies depending upon the country and type of material being searched for; furthermore the availability for official English translations is limited.

Finally, one of the best resources for researching law of the EU or one of its member states is a law librarian who specializes in foreign and international legal research. There are many librarians throughout Virginia in both academic and private law firm settings with such expertise. Never hesitate to contact a librarian and request assistance.



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