

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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This essay will seek to evaluate the most significant achievement of the European Union (EU). In order to evaluate the EU's most significant achievement this paper will examine several key areas. First, Europe's propensity for warfare prior to the EU. Second, it will examine the role of international trade on the likelihood of conflict. Finally, it will discuss the economic integration brought about by the EU. These will invariably lead to the conclusion that the European Union's most significant achievement has been creating long-term peace in Europe.

World War II, the bloodiest conflict in human history, concluded seven years prior to the founding of what would become the EU.¹² This war was only the latest of what had been thousands of years of uninterrupted conflict on a continent that had not known peace since the *Pax Romana* of the Roman Empire in 180 CE. Winston Churchill described the process begun by this treaty quite well, “We are asking the nations of Europe between whom rivers of blood have flowed to forget the feuds of a thousand years.”³

One method for reducing violent conflict between countries is to increase economic ties and the volume of trade. The argument is simple and has been confirmed through several studies examining the relationship between trade and war. Trade brings greater wealth to countries whereas conflict reduces the amount of trade and wealth. Therefore “commerce promotes peace because violence has substantial costs, whether those are paid prospectively or contemporaneously.”⁴ The goal of creating a greater European economic community, like the EU, is to bring about greater levels of trade by decreasing trade barriers in the hopes that it will reduce the likelihood of conflict.

The EU has instituted several measures specifically to decrease trade barriers between its member. One of the earliest and most obvious was to create a “Single Market” by eliminating tariffs

¹“Treaty Establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, ECSC Treaty,” 1951.

²“World War II Facts and Figures,” *wwiifoundation.org*, last modified 2008. http://www.wwiifoundation.org/students/wwii-facts-figures/?gclid=COfs_PacsskCFdcegQod_9cM7w

³Francesco Bongiovanni, *The Decline and Fall of Europe* (London, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), p. 26

⁴Havard Hegre, John R Oneal, Bruce Russett. “Trade does promote peace: New simultaneous estimates of the reciprocal effects of trade and conflict,” *Journal of Peace Research* Vol 47 no. 6 (2010) : 763

within the EU.⁵ However, barriers to trade are often more than simply tariffs. Any traveler to Europe will likely have noticed this next feature. Within the “Schengen Area”, as it is called, passport checks do not occur with the goal of increasing the flow of people across borders.⁶ Finally, perhaps the most well-known has been the creation of a single currency, the Euro. This single currency eliminates the need for exchanging currency when traveling within most EU member states and further decreases trade barriers.⁷ The combined effect of these features, along with many others, is the increase of trade within the EU.

The significant reduction of violence brought about by the European Union is undoubtedly its greatest accomplishment. As we have seen, the EU works to significantly decrease the possibility of war by increasing the amount of trade. Prior to the establishment of the EU, Europe was plagued by thousands of years of violence. The EU is an institution unlike any other in human history and its effects are such that many regional institutions are striving to become the next European Union.

⁵“The European Single Market,” ec.europa.eu, last modified November 26, 2015. http://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market/index_en.htm

⁶“The Schengen Area,” ec.europa.eu, last modified November 2010. http://biblio.ucv.ro/bib_web/bib_pdf/EU_books/0056.pdf

⁷“The euro,” ec.europa.eu, last modified August 7, 2011. http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/euro/index_en.htm

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