

**From Hereditary Enmity to Hereditary
Prosperity:
European Economic Integration as a
Continental-Scale
Test of Prevention vs. Defence**

OMXUS Research Initiative

research@omxus.com

April 2026

Preprint – Not peer reviewed

Abstract

Background: A companion study (OMXUS, 2026b) established that global security expenditure constitutes behavioural proof of systemic human interconnection, and that prevention of adverse conditions is consistently cheaper than defence against their consequences. The present study tests this principle at the largest scale available: the transformation of European interstate relations from centuries of cyclical warfare to sustained peace through economic integration.

Methods: We compiled historical conflict data for Europe from 1000 CE to 2026, using established conflict catalogues (Brecke, 2001; Correlates of War Project). We then compared conflict frequency and severity across two periods: pre-integration (1000–1945) and post-integration (1951–2026), focusing on EU/EEC founding member states. Economic integration metrics were drawn from Eurostat, the World Bank, and the OECD.

Results: Between France and Germany alone, nine bilateral wars occurred from 1701 to 1945, producing an estimated 12+ million military deaths. Since the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, the number of wars between EU member states is **zero**. This 80-year period of peace among integrated member states is the longest since the Pax Romana (27 BCE–180 CE). Intra-EU trade grew from negligible levels to EUR 4.1 trillion annually by 2024. The EU’s combined GDP reached approximately USD \$22.5 trillion.

Conclusions: The European experiment constitutes the largest and longest-running empirical demonstration that changing the conditions which produce conflict (economic isolation, resource competition, zero-sum incentive structures) is more effective than defending against conflict’s consequences (military build-up, alliances, deterrence). When nations invested in each other’s prosperity rather than in their own defence, war became structurally irrational. The implications for the prevention-vs-defence framework are discussed.

Keywords: European integration; Pax Europaea; conflict prevention; economic interdependence; incentive structures; systemic interconnection

Key Points

- France and Germany fought 9 wars in 244 years (1701–1945), then 0 wars in 80 years (1945–2026)
- No war has ever been fought between EU member states since the founding of the European Communities
- This is the longest period of peace in Western Europe since the Pax Romana, approximately 2,000 years ago
- The mechanism of change was not military deterrence but economic integration: making each nation's prosperity dependent on cooperation
- Intra-EU trade reached EUR 4.1 trillion by 2024; the six founding members now constitute an economy exceeding USD \$13 trillion
- The European experiment is a continental-scale, 80-year, multi-nation empirical test of the principle that prevention is cheaper than defence

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

A companion study (OMXUS, 2026b) demonstrated that every nation on Earth allocates substantial resources to security—locks, insurance, police, prisons—constituting implicit behavioural proof that human lives are systemically interconnected. That study further showed that prevention of adverse conditions is consistently cheaper than defence against their consequences: early childhood intervention returns \$7–13 per dollar invested, primarily through reduced crime; Housing First programmes cost less than the emergency services consumed by homeless individuals.

A natural question follows: does this principle scale? Does prevention outperform defence not merely at the level of individuals and families, but at the level of nations?

History provides an answer. Europe—the continent that produced two world wars, the Napoleonic Wars, the Thirty Years' War, the Hundred Years' War, and centuries of interstate conflict costing hundreds of millions of lives—undertook, in 1951, a radical experiment. Rather than continuing to invest in defence against each other, six nations chose to invest in each other. They integrated their economies so deeply that war between them would become structurally irrational.

The result is the longest period of peace in Western European history since the Roman Empire.

1.2 Research Question

Does the European integration experiment constitute empirical evidence that investing in mutual prosperity (prevention) is more effective at eliminating interstate conflict than investing in military capability (defence)?

1.3 Hypotheses

H₀ (Null—Defence Hypothesis): Military deterrence, not economic integration, accounts for the absence of war between EU member states. If this is true, we would expect: (a) comparable periods of peace sustained by deterrence alone in European history; and (b) no relationship between the depth of economic integration and the durability of peace.

H₁ (Alternative—Prevention Hypothesis): Economic integration changed the incentive structure such that interstate war became irrational. If this is true, we would expect: (a) wars to cease among economically integrated states but continue among non-integrated states in the same region; and (b) increasing economic integration to correlate

with increasing durability of peace.

2 Methods

2.1 Historical Conflict Data

Conflict data were compiled from the Correlates of War (COW) Project, Peter Brecke’s Conflict Catalog (3,708 conflicts from 1400 CE), Wikipedia’s list of European conflicts, and the Statista analysis of Brecke’s data on violent war-related deaths in Europe. We focused on:

1. Bilateral wars between France and Germany/Prussia (as the paradigmatic case of “hereditary enmity”)
2. All interstate wars within Western Europe
3. All interstate wars between EU member states after accession

2.2 Economic Integration Data

Integration metrics were drawn from Eurostat (intra-EU trade flows), the World Bank (trade as % of GDP), and published academic analyses. Key metrics include:

1. Intra-EU goods exports (EUR billions, annually)
2. Trade as % of GDP for EU member states
3. Number of EU/EEC member states over time

2.3 Time Periods

- **Pre-integration:** 1000–1945 CE (approximately 945 years)

- **Integration:** 1951–2026 (75 years since ECSC; 80 years since end of WWII)

3 Results

3.1 The Before: European Conflict, 1000–1945

Table 1 presents a summary of major European conflicts from 1000 CE to 1945.

Table 1: Selected Major European Conflicts, 1000–1945

Conflict	Approx. Deaths	Period
The Crusades (European theatre)	1–3 million	1095–1291
Hundred Years’ War	2.3–3.3 million	1337–1453
Wars of Religion (inc. 30 Years’)	8–12 million	1524–1648
War of Spanish Succession	400,000–700,000	1701–1714
Seven Years’ War	900,000–1.4 million	1756–1763
French Revolutionary Wars	600,000+	1792–1802
Napoleonic Wars	3.5–6.5 million	1803–1815
Franco-Prussian War	180,000–250,000	1870–1871
World War I	20 million	1914–1918
World War II (European theatre)	35–40 million	1939–1945
Estimated total	70–90 million	—

Note: Death estimates include military and civilian casualties. Figures are approximate and drawn from multiple sources. This table is illustrative, not exhaustive; hundreds of smaller conflicts are omitted.

3.2 The France–Germany Case Study

France and Germany represent the paradigmatic case of what historians call “hereditary enmity” (*Erbfeindschaft*). Table 2 lists all bilateral wars between these two nations.

Average interval between wars: **27 years**. In the 244-year period from 1701 to 1945, France and Germany were at war for approximately 37 of those years—roughly one year in every seven.

Table 2: Wars Between France and Germany/Prussia, 1701–1945

War	Period	Approx. Deaths
War of the Spanish Succession	1701–1714	400,000
Seven Years' War	1756–1763	500,000
War of the First Coalition	1792–1797	200,000+
War of the Fourth Coalition	1806–1807	100,000+
War of the Sixth Coalition	1813–1814	300,000+
War of the Seventh Coalition	1815	50,000+
Franco-Prussian War	1870–1871	180,000+
World War I	1914–1918	3,000,000+
World War II	1939–1945	8,000,000+
Total: 9 wars	244 years	12+ million

Note: Death figures for WWI and WWII include combined French and German military and civilian casualties. Figures for coalition wars include only French-German/Prussian components where estimable.

3.3 The Intervention: Economic Integration

In 1950, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposed placing French and German coal and steel production under a common authority. The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was established in 1951 by six founding members: France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg.

The explicit purpose was preventive. Schuman declared:

“The pooling of coal and steel production should immediately provide for the setting up of common foundations for economic development as a first step in the federation of Europe, and will change the destinies of those regions which have long been devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war, of which they have been the most constant victims.”

The logic was precisely the prevention-vs-defence argument: rather than building better locks (military alliances, deterrence), change the conditions that make locks necessary (economic isolation, resource competition, zero-sum incentive structures).

Table 3: Timeline of European Economic Integration

Year	Event	Members
1951	ECSC founded	6
1957	Treaty of Rome (EEC)	6
1968	Customs union completed	6
1973	First enlargement	9
1981	Greece joins	10
1986	Spain, Portugal join	12
1993	Single Market enacted	12
1995	Austria, Finland, Sweden join	15
1999	Euro currency introduced	11 (eurozone)
2004	Major Eastern enlargement	25
2007	Romania, Bulgaria join	27
2013	Croatia joins	28
2020	UK withdraws (Brexit)	27
2024	Intra-EU trade: EUR 4.1 trillion	27

3.4 The After: Conflict Between EU Member States, 1951–2026

Number of wars between EU member states since 1951: **0**.

Number of wars between EU member states since any point in their membership: **0**.

This is not merely a reduction. It is a complete elimination of interstate war among integrated members, sustained over 75 years across 28 nations (at peak membership).

For context: in the 75 years *before* the ECSC (1876–1951), Europe experienced the Franco-Prussian War, World War I, the Russian Civil War, the Greco-Turkish War, the Spanish Civil War, World War II, and numerous smaller conflicts, producing a combined estimated death toll exceeding 80 million.

3.5 Control Condition: Non-Integrated European States

Critically, wars *did* continue in Europe after 1951—but only among states that were *not* members of the EU or its predecessor institutions at the time of conflict:

- Yugoslav Wars (1991–2001): None of the belligerents were EU members
- Russo-Georgian War (2008): Neither party was an EU member
- Russia–Ukraine War (2014–present): Neither party was an EU member
- Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts (1988–2023): Neither party was an EU member

This pattern is consistent with H_1 (Prevention Hypothesis): war ceased among economically integrated states but continued among non-integrated states in the same geographic region. Integration, not geography, predicts peace.

3.6 The Economic Dividend

Table 4: Before and After: France–Germany Economic Relationship

Metric	1870–1945	1963–2026
Bilateral wars	3	0
Military deaths (bilateral)	11+ million	0
Relationship status	“Hereditary enmity”	“Special relationship”
Annual bilateral trade	Minimal/adversarial	EUR 150+ billion
Joint institutions	0	100+
Youth exchanges (annual)	0	200,000+

Note: Youth exchange figure refers to the Franco-German Youth Office (OFAJ/DFJW), which has facilitated over 9 million exchanges since 1963.

The six founding ECSC members now constitute a combined economy exceeding USD \$13 trillion. Intra-EU goods exports reached EUR 4.1 trillion in 2024, up from EUR 1.3 trillion in 1999. The EU as a whole represents the second-largest economy in the world at approximately USD \$22.5 trillion.

4 Discussion

4.1 The Lock or the Conditions

The history of Europe before 1951 is the history of locks. Military alliances, balance-of-power diplomacy, fortification lines (the Maginot Line being the most literal example), arms races, and deterrence. Every generation invested in better defence against the consequences of the previous generation's conflicts. And every generation went to war anyway.

The average interval between Franco-German wars was 27 years—roughly one generation. Enough time for the children of one war to grow up and fight the next. The defence expenditure between wars was enormous. The Maginot Line alone cost approximately 3 billion French francs (equivalent to billions of modern euros). It failed in six weeks.

What succeeded was not a better lock. It was a change in conditions. The ECSC, the EEC, and eventually the EU did not make war impossible through force. They made war irrational through incentive. When Germany's steel goes into French cars, and French agricultural products feed German cities, and Belgian banks finance Italian infrastructure, the cost of war between any two members becomes a cost borne by all members. The incentive to fight is replaced by an incentive to cooperate.

This is the lock-to-prevention argument applied at continental scale.

4.2 The Incentive Structure

The critical mechanism is not sentiment. France and Germany did not stop fighting because they learned to like each other. They stopped fighting because the structure of their economic relationship made fighting self-destructive.

The Elyée Treaty of 1963 institutionalised this with mandatory regular consultation be-

tween heads of state (at least twice yearly), foreign ministers (quarterly), and defence chiefs (bimonthly). It also established massive people-to-people programmes, including the Franco-German Youth Office, which has facilitated over 9 million youth exchanges since its founding.

This is the companion language study's insight applied to nations: environment determines behaviour. Change the environment—from one of economic isolation and zero-sum competition to one of economic interdependence and mutual benefit—and the behaviour changes. Not through persuasion. Through structural incentive.

4.3 Addressing the Deterrence Objection

Critics may argue that NATO, not the EU, prevented war in Europe through military deterrence. Two observations weaken this claim:

First, NATO's primary function was deterrence of the Soviet Union, not prevention of intra-European conflict. NATO did not prevent the Yugoslav Wars, which occurred among non-EU states within Europe itself.

Second, military alliances without economic integration have a poor historical track record. Pre-WWI Europe had an elaborate system of military alliances (the Triple Alliance, the Triple Entente). These alliances did not prevent war; they accelerated and expanded it. Alliances without interdependence merely determine sides, not outcomes.

The EU provides both alliance *and* interdependence. The interdependence is the novel element, and the one that correlates with the unprecedented peace.

4.4 Implications

4.4.1 For the Prevention Framework

The European experiment provides the strongest available evidence for the proposition that investing in the conditions that produce conflict is more effective than investing in defence against conflict's consequences. The “return on investment” is staggering:

- Cost of European wars, 1914–1945: Hundreds of millions of lives, incalculable economic destruction
- Cost of European integration, 1951–2026: Administrative expenditure, trade negotiation, institutional maintenance
- Return: 80 years of peace among member states, EUR 4.1 trillion in annual intra-EU trade, a combined GDP of USD \$22.5 trillion

4.4.2 For Interconnection Theory

The European case confirms that the interconnection described in our companion studies is not merely an observation—it is a design principle. When interconnection is deliberately deepened through trade, institutional cooperation, and people-to-people exchange, the system's behaviour changes. Violence decreases. Prosperity increases. The “cost of separation” documented in the companion security study (OMXUS, 2026b) is replaced by the dividend of integration.

4.4.3 For Global Policy

If economic integration can transform the France–Germany relationship—from 9 wars in 244 years to 80 years of peace and EUR 150+ billion in annual bilateral trade—then the argument that some conflicts are intractable deserves re-examination. The question is

not whether people or nations *want* to cooperate. The question is whether the incentive structure makes cooperation rational.

When it does, cooperation follows. When it does not, conflict follows. Regardless of sentiment, culture, or history.

5 Limitations

1. The European peace has multiple contributing causes, including nuclear deterrence, NATO, democratic governance, and post-WWII exhaustion. This study does not claim economic integration is the *sole* cause, but argues it is the *novel* cause that distinguishes the post-1951 period from prior periods of temporary peace.
2. The EU has not been tested by the full range of stresses that historically produced wars (severe famine, complete economic collapse, existential resource scarcity). Its resilience under extreme conditions remains unproven.
3. The post-2016 period (Brexit, rise of nationalism, COVID-19, war in Ukraine) suggests the integration framework is under strain. Whether the peace holds under sustained pressure will be a critical test.
4. Conflict data for earlier periods are less reliable than modern data. Death toll estimates, particularly for medieval and early modern wars, carry wide confidence intervals.
5. This study examines EU member states only. The continuation of conflict among non-integrated European states is consistent with the hypothesis but does not constitute proof of it.

6 Conclusions

For approximately one thousand years, the nations of Europe invested in defence. They built castles, fortifications, alliances, armies, and weapons of increasing sophistication. The result was cyclical warfare, producing an estimated 70–90 million deaths in major conflicts alone.

In 1951, six of those nations tried something different. They invested in each other. They pooled resources. They made each other’s prosperity a condition of their own. They changed the incentive structure.

The result: zero wars between integrated member states in 75 years. The longest period of peace in Western Europe since the Roman Empire. A combined economy of USD \$22.5 trillion. EUR 4.1 trillion in annual trade between members. Over 9 million youth exchanges between former “hereditary enemies.”

The European experiment is the Perry Preschool Project at continental scale. It demonstrates that the principle documented in the companion studies—environment determines behaviour; prevention is cheaper than defence; changing conditions is more effective than building locks—operates at every scale, from the individual household to the nation-state.

The Maginot Line cost billions. It lasted six weeks. The European Coal and Steel Community cost a fraction of that. It has lasted 75 years and counting.

The lock always fails eventually. The conditions endure.

References

Brecke, P. (2001). *The Conflict Catalog: 3,708 conflicts from 1400 to the present*. Georgia Institute of Technology.

Correlates of War Project. (2010). *State System Membership, v2016*.

- Eurostat. (2024). Intra-EU trade in goods—main features. *Statistics Explained*.
- Heckman, J. J., Moon, S. H., Pinto, R., Savelyev, P. A., & Yavitz, A. (2010). The rate of return to the HighScope Perry Preschool Program. *Journal of Public Economics*, 94(1–2), 114–128.
- Krotz, U. (2014). Three eras of Franco-German relations. In *Oxford Handbook of the European Union*. Oxford University Press.
- Lopinet, Q. (2013). The Elysée Treaty and Franco-German reconciliation. *Beyond Intractability Case Studies*.
- OMXUS Research Initiative. (2026a). Geographic birthplace as a predictor of primary language: A cross-national observational study. *Preprint*.
- OMXUS Research Initiative. (2026b). The cost of separation: Universal security expenditure as evidence of systemic human interconnection. *Preprint*.
- Schuman, R. (1950). The Schuman Declaration. 9 May 1950. Paris.
- Schweinhart, L. J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W. S., Belfield, C. R., & Nores, M. (2005). *Lifetime effects: The HighScope Perry Preschool Study through age 40*. HighScope Press.
- Statista. (2021). The estimated number of violent war-related deaths in Europe. Analysis of Brecke Conflict Catalog.
- World Bank. (2024). Trade (% of GDP)—European Union. *World Development Indicators*.