

In Defense of Europe

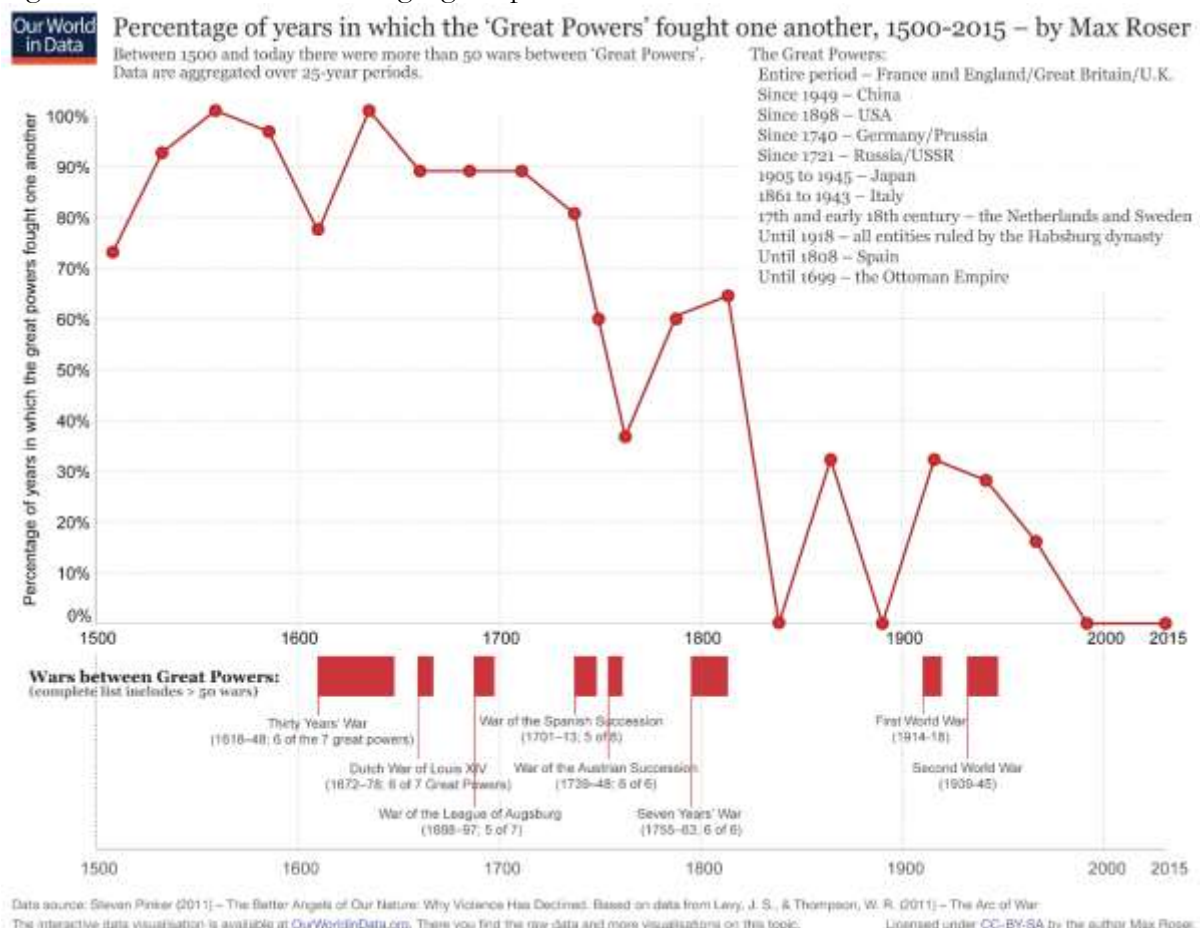
By Dr. A.C. Beyer

It is very important that the European Union stays together. The history of Europe has illustrated that a united Europe, hence the EU, is the best safeguard against war in Europe that we have. If the EU would fall apart, then the peace in Europe would be in danger; maybe not today or tomorrow, but in the long term. The history of Europe is speckled with a lot of bloody and long wars. They were the result of the absence of a supranational authority in Europe. Thus, we need the EU, and we need all the member states together. An EU without Britain would be like a truck with one wheel missing. It would simply not be very safe, even if it worked for a while.

What can be done? One argument is that given that we are in Europe, other Europeans, such as foreign Europeans living in the UK and in other foreign countries, British and non-British, should also get a say in the matter. This could open up the room for more referenda on a wider scale. EU citizens in Britain were not allowed to vote in the referendum, which in a European sense means a lack of participatory rights. That right, at least, should have been exercised. Similarly, maybe one should not allow a referendum so that it threatens the peace in Europe. Prevention of war, in my view, is a more important topic than democracy in form of referenda. If Mars attacked Earth, for example, would there be a referendum if to defend Earth? Did the US have a referendum if to respond to the 9/11 attacks or what to do? No! Would the US have a referendum if New Jersey, Florida or Texas wanted to leave the US if they wished to do so? No! The matter is simply too serious to leave it to a referendum, in particular one that could end in such a close result. That's like making life and death decisions based on the outcome of a coin toss. It's not advisable, in my view.

According to Steven Pinker in *The Better Angels of Our Nature*¹, the world, at least among the great powers, is becoming ever more peaceful. The first period of peace, which heralded the Long Peace after the Second World War until recently, was a period roughly from 1871 to 1914 before the First World War. In this period, which is called the *Forty Years Peace*, the great powers did not engage in any significant wars amongst each other. There were some wars, however, such as the Russo-Turkish war from 1877-1878, and some minor conflicts². But generally speaking this period was one of unprecedented stability in Europe and amongst the European great powers since 1500.

Figure 1: The level of war amongst great powers since 1500



¹ Pinker 2012.

² Midlarsky (1975, p. 56) mentions a couple of wars in the Forty Years Peace, such as Russia-Turkey 1877-1878; Pacific 1879-1883, Central American 1885, Sino Japanese 1894-1895, Greco-Turkish 1897, Spanish American 1898, Boxer 1900, Russo-Japanese 1904-1905, Central American 1906, Central American 1907, Moroccan 1909-1910, Italo-Turkish 1911-12, First Balkan 1912-13, Second Balkan 1913.

This section investigates what brought about this period of unprecedented peace amongst the great powers and why it ended. It will be argued here that the processes that brought about the Forty Years Peace are similar to 1) those that brought about peace in Western Europe and amongst the Western world after the Second World War, and 2) those that brought about peace after the end of the Cold War.

There were some developments in various areas of politics, economy and security that seemed to have substantially contributed to bringing about the Forty Years Peace in 1871.

First, in the economic sphere, the era of industrialisation had spread through Europe by this time which seemed to have brought unprecedented wealth to the European countries. As Eric Hobsbawm argues: “By 1880 ... the *per capita* income in the ‘developed’ world was about double that in the ‘Third World’”³. Apparently, the increase in wealth pacified the European nations. It is known from the literature on war causation and on civil war causation in general that economic growth can have a pacifying effect. However, as he continues to argue, an increase in wealth did not help to maintain the peace as he continues: “... by 1913, it was to be over three times as high, and widening”.

However, economic growth also stalled in Europe, particularly in the UK, and the US experienced a period of economic depression (which Hobsbawm doesn't mention). This was marked by a decline in prices, which harmed the producers, while being beneficial to the consumers. In the UK, this period, which by some is referred to either as the *Great Depression* (this term was later adopted to refer to the economic difficulties in the 1930s) or by the *Long Depression*. Even though, this period did not avoid industrial growth, in particular in the production of steel and weapons. Hobsbawm refers to this as the iron-age⁴. This allowed for the

³Hobsbawm 1987, p. 15.

⁴ Ibid.

beginning of an arms race in Europe, especially when Germany attempted to challenge British superiority with the building of a naval battle fleet. This armament process, which is known to later have contributed substantially to the outbreak of the First World War, was substantially fuelled and made possible by industrialisation.

An additional negative factor with economic growth in this period was that the "periphery" nations were increasingly left behind. This means that nations, such as the Balkans, who were not substantially included in the progressive industrial movement, found themselves increasingly in a new position of inequality. Previous research indicates that inequality can contribute to political violence⁵. While this argument is not to be found in literature, it is possible that the terrorist attack of the Black Hand of Serbia on Archduke Franz Ferdinand was in part inspired by the growing industrialization-wealth gap between central Europe and the periphery nations.

However, other factors also contributed both to period of peace and then to the outbreak of the First World War. As Knapton and Derry⁶ wrote, a number of such factors were present at this time. Among them were increasing democratisation, the adoption of near universal suffrage, increasing rights for women, better education, a freer and more prolific press and media. an increase in democratisation, an adoption of near-universal suffrage, an increase in women's rights, a dissemination of quality education, and a freer and more prolific media and press.

A factor that worked against these processes, which are generally thought to be peace-inducing, was an increasing sense of nationalism in Europe. Nationalism as an ideology became prominent both in central Europe and in the periphery nations. So, it is known also to have contributed significantly to the outbreak of the First World War. Also, Germany grew very powerful in this

⁵ Beyer 2014.

⁶Knapton and Derry 1965.

period. This created a sense of fear amongst the European powers⁷. The principle of *Weltpolitik* contributed to this perception.

An important political factor that maintained the peace from 1815 onwards was the Concert of Europe. It was installed as the first international peace conference system in Europe in 1815 after the end of the Napoleonic Wars by Metternich. While it did not help maintain the peace in the mid-19th century, it did help to manage the relations in Europe after 1871. However, the Concert was not strong enough to cope with the additional crises in the early 20th century, such as two Balkan wars and a crisis over Morocco. In essence, it worked as an informal system of management by diplomacy and negotiation between nations, as the first forerunner for the ECSC (European Coal & Steel Community), EEC (European Economic Community) and the EU (European Union). Previously, states, princes, popes, etc. managed their affairs in an even less organized way, more often bilaterally and with less cohesion in authority, such as the sovereign authority in 1815 (meaning that now the governments of states were responsible for their foreign and common affairs).

One factor for the breakup of the Concert of Europe was the politics of the Prussian leader Otto Von Bismarck, who on the one hand was regarded a skilled and talented politician who unified Germany and kept it in secure relations with its surrounding neighbours, but on the other hand undermined the Concert with his intense focus on alliances. According to Mowat, Bismarck was more interested in his alliance system than in the workings of the European Concert, which made the Concert increasingly weak⁸.

⁷ Seaman 2002.

⁸Mowat 1930, p. 210.

Germany's growth in power, presumably economic and military, and her alliances, as well as the politics after Bismarck, who was dismissed in 1890, contributed to the splitting up of Europe into two alliances; a bipolar alliance system. The allies were increasingly connected with secret treaties. This *polarisation* of Europe and the unravelling of the Concert presented the structural factors allowing for the outbreak of the First World War.

In the interwar period, no new attempts at creating a unified Europe were made. However, democracy spread across Europe. For example, Germany created the Weimar Republic. The lack of wider integration along with the effects of the Great Depression, the emotions of shame, and the need for grandeur and revenge stemming from the resolution (Wilson's 14 Points) of the First World War led to the Second World War. It was only after this major war that another deeper attempt at European integration was taken with the creation of the European Communities. These slowly grew into the European Union, which managed to keep the peace in Europe until today, even though at the time of this writing it is under severe challenge from populist parties. The breakup of the European Union, hence, poses a severe danger of renewed major war in Europe, similar to the First and Second World Wars.

Hence, this section attempts to illustrate how the first forms of international integration contributed to world peace, for as far as they were successful. They failed in maintaining peace in Europe, especially with the outbreak of the First World War. The more successful entity, the European Union, was later created after the end of the Second World War. With the current discussion about the disintegration of Europe now, it has to be mentioned that the referendum vote in Britain was relatively close. Only 52% (versus 48%) voted "leave". This could indicate that there may be some room for saving the membership in the EU if the political will is present. One idea would be to run a widespread survey with the British population to find out what conditions must be met or developed for the voters to want to remain in the EU. This could be

practically organized, for example, similar to the surveys that are often distributed by service providers or local authorities in England. The results of such surveys could be used in the negotiations with the EU. The leadership could then return from these negotiations with a list of achievements versus these concerns of the population.

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References

APA style references should be included here. Examples are listed below.

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