



World War II Destruction

On May 14, 1940, German planes bombed the city of Rotterdam in the Netherlands. Much of the city was destroyed. Many other cities in Europe were also bombed during World War II. The EU was formed to make sure such horrors never happened again.

14.2 The Geographic Setting

Europe is a region made up of many peoples and countries. Throughout Europe's history, certain forces have brought its peoples together, while others have pulled them apart. The forces that bring things together, or unite them, are called **centripetal forces**. The forces that divide things, or move them away from one another, are called **centrifugal forces**. The European Union was formed to unite countries that had been torn apart by years of war.

A History of Bloody Conflict For much of its history, Europe has been a battleground. During the first half of the 20th century, European nations were torn apart by two devastating wars that also spread to other parts of the world. Both wars were so widespread that people now remember them as "world wars."

The First World War began in 1914. This bloody conflict lasted four long years and caused the deaths of over 21 million people. The Second World War broke out in 1939. On one side of the conflict were the Axis powers—Germany, Italy, Japan, and other countries. The Allies—Great Britain, the Soviet Union, the United States, and their allies—opposed the Axis.

World War II was even more deadly than World War I. It lasted six years and claimed the lives of 50 million people worldwide. The fighting left many European cities and farms in ruins. When the guns finally fell silent in 1945, Europeans wanted to make sure that such horrors never happened again.

Creating a Future of Peaceful Cooperation On May 9, 1950, a French leader named Robert Schuman made a famous speech. In his talk, he put forward ideas for bringing a lasting peace to Europe. These ideas led to what is now the European Union.

Schuman suggested that France, Germany, and other European countries work together to manage their coal and steel production. If these countries learned to cooperate, he said, they would not be so likely to make war on each other.

Six countries agreed with Schuman. By 1952, they had all ratified a treaty that formed the European Coal and Steel Community. This group created a **common market** for steel and coal products. In a common market, countries reduce or remove trade barriers, such as **tariffs**. Tariffs are taxes on goods that cross country borders. Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands all became members of the community.

By 1958, the same six countries created the European Economic Community (EEC), which then removed trade barriers for all kinds of goods. The EEC came to be known as the Common Market. Over the years, more European countries joined the Common Market.

In 1993, twelve Common Market countries formed the European Union. The main goal of the EU is to promote peace and prosperity, which means economic well-being. The EU works toward this goal by seeking to create jobs, protect citizens' rights, and preserve the environment. It also has programs to promote freedom, security, and justice for its members. In 2009, the EU had 27 member countries spread across Europe, with several other countries hoping to join.