

# FROM MARKET INTEGRATION TO LAW ENFORCEMENT INTEGRATION: THE ECONOMIC FOUNDATIONS OF EUROPEAN POLICE CO-OPERATION

Hashmatulla Behruz<sup>1</sup>, Dmytro Hrebeniuk<sup>2</sup>, Ruslan Biriukov<sup>3</sup>

**Abstract.** The article analyses the development of police co-operation in Europe as a structural response to the intensification of economic integration within the European Union. It argues that the creation of the internal market – characterised by the removal of internal borders, the liberalisation of capital and goods, regulatory harmonisation and digitalisation – not only increased efficiency and reduced transaction costs for legitimate economic participants, but also produced enforcement externalities and collective action dilemmas in the area of transnational crime. The growth in cross-border financial flows and mobility was driven by economic interdependence. This created opportunities for regulatory arbitrage, money laundering, fraud and cyber-enabled economic crime. Consequently, internal security gradually became embedded within the Union's economic governance framework. Drawing on concepts from European integration, particularly liberal intergovernmentalism, the article demonstrates how exposure to economic risks at different levels affected countries' desire to utilise collective enforcement mechanisms. The transition from the TREVI Group's informal coordination to the establishment of Europol was a logical response by Member States to the increasing costs of independently enforcing laws in an increasingly integrated market. Europol's expanding remit, which now encompasses financial crime, counterfeiting, cybercrime and fraud, highlights the importance of countries collaborating to ensure a fair market, maintain financial stability and promote fair competition. The establishment of specialised organisations such as the European Cybercrime Centre demonstrates that law enforcement is adapting to the digital transformation of the European economy. The article concludes that police co-operation has become essential to the EU's economic resilience and strategic autonomy.

**Keywords:** economic integration, economic system, European economic integration, economic policies, economy of policing, police co-operation, combatting economic crime, police integration in Europe, European integration.

**JEL Classification:** F01, K33

## 1. Introduction

The theoretical premise to which this study adheres asserts that, throughout its history, European integration has primarily focused on economics. This focus constitutes the primary rationale for collaboration among European governments across various policy domains. The pursuit of economic interdependence has been a primary objective and a pivotal driving force behind the endeavours to promote enhanced political, legal, and institutional integration. The

subject of the economy is pivotal to comprehending the process of European integration, commencing with the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community and continuing through the formation of the European Economic Community and ultimately leading to the formation of the European Union. The gradual lowering of trade barriers, the improvement of the internal market, and the rise in mobility have all changed the way European countries interact with each other in every domain. Conversely, this has resulted

<sup>1</sup> National University "Odesa Law Academy", Ukraine (*corresponding author*)

E-mail: [hbekhruz@gmail.com](mailto:hbekhruz@gmail.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3218-8955>

<sup>2</sup> National University "Odesa Law Academy", Ukraine

E-mail: [grebeniuk\\_dmytro@onua.edu.ua](mailto:grebeniuk_dmytro@onua.edu.ua)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9682-3017>

<sup>3</sup> Candidate of Legal Sciences, Ukraine

E-mail: [Dobrauda4i@gmail.com](mailto:Dobrauda4i@gmail.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-9550-6383>



in the emergence of previously unobserved security concerns.

It became clear that reducing trade barriers was not just about economic rules. The policies advanced by major European nations created new security issues and consequently new solutions to these issues. A key point to understand is that it was not only legal businesses that sensed opportunity due to facilitated trade, but illegal ones too. Open markets provided organised crime with a whole new environment in which to flourish. This in turn led to new methods of combatting organised crime that necessarily had a transboundary character.

The rationale and methodology of this research are dictated by these two prerequisites. It is argued that the evolution of police co-operation in Europe following the Second World War should be understood by scholars and practitioners through the lens of the foundational aspect of European integration – the economy. In this context, structured police collaboration did not emerge solely as a reaction to vague security concerns, but rather as a necessity for a progressively interconnected economic environment. As commerce, capital, and labour moved more freely across borders, so too did the hazards of regulatory arbitrage, illegal money transfers, and market inefficiencies produced by organised crime. It is evident that police co-operation thus became a structural complement to economic unity. This, in turn, contributed to the defence of the integrity of the internal market and the reduction of the negative externalities of integration. The trajectory of police co-operation serves to illustrate the transformation in the Union's economic structure, which has evolved from predominantly intergovernmental coordination to the adoption of more institutionalised and supranational forms. This phenomenon can be attributed to the increasing interdependence of global economies, which has led to a collective responsibility to manage risk.

In the course of conducting this research, it is assumed that the topic is of significant importance for Ukraine's ongoing integration into the European economic and legal sphere. In the context of Ukraine's efforts to align its legal framework with those of the EU, and its aspiration to enhance its participation in the single security framework and internal market, the capacity to combat transnational economic crime emerges as both a legal obligation and an economic imperative. Effective police co-operation contributes directly to the protection of market stability, the assurance of fair competition, and the prevention of illicit financial flows that undermine economic development. Therefore, participating in European law enforcement systems, ensuring consistent investigative standards and joining common information-sharing systems should all be considered important aspects of economic convergence with the European Union. Investigating

the relationship between economic integration and the development of police co-operation sheds light on the historical rationale behind European integration, as well as the current institutional prerequisites for states seeking to integrate into the Union's economic governance framework.

## 2. The Beginnings: Original Forms of European Economic Integration and the TREVI Group

Bullock et al. (2025) recently argued that greater economic integration between European countries led to increased co-operation in policing and criminal justice matters. Indeed, it is impossible to understand how police co-operation began and became part of European institutions without considering the economic reasons for European integration. While the creation of the common market made the economy more prosperous and efficient, it also made it more vulnerable to regulatory arbitrage, illegal money transfers and organised crime, which took advantage of open borders. In this situation, police collaboration increased in order to protect the integrity of an increasingly intertwined economy. Consequently, the rationale for economic integration generated functional requirements for coordinated collective law enforcement, thereby making internal security a vital element of market governance.

The starting point of international police co-operation in Europe, which began in the 1970s with the formation of the TREVI Group – the first informal structure in which the Ministers of Internal Affairs of the European Economic Community Member States interacted – is an appropriate point at which to open the discussion in this paper. Although the group was rather informal, it should be considered as the beginning of formalised co-operation. This explains the Group's almost complete absence of legal regulation and its closed nature, which prevents one from judging the specific consequences of its activities. At the same time, it should be emphasised that the TREVI Group was the first example of international police co-operation in Europe. This paved the way for other formats, particularly Europol, and demonstrated the effectiveness of informal co-operation. This in turn led to other forms of co-operation between internal affairs bodies.

The development of police co-operation in Europe, from the creation of the TREVI Group to its evolution within the European Union, should be analysed in the context of the dominant European integration theories of that period. These theories must be regarded as part of economic rational choice theories. This will help to identify commonalities and build bridges between different approaches, providing the best explanation of the theory of police co-operation. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to consider

theories of liberal intergovernmentalism and new intergovernmentalism, as well as theories from the opposite end of the spectrum, such as neofunctionalism and social constructivism. These theories can be used to reveal the complex dynamics of police co-operation. A comprehensive survey of the theoretical literature on police co-operation in the EU reveals three key explanatory factors: interdependence, politicisation and political entrepreneurship at both the interstate and supranational levels.

A number of theoretical studies have highlighted the influence of increasing interconnectedness on certain issues as a key driver of the behaviour of EU Member States and their integration preferences. Explanatory theories include the theories of liberal intergovernmentalism and new intergovernmentalism. The theory of liberal intergovernmentalism assumes that European integration is a series of rational choices. However, the theory of liberal intergovernmentalism differs from the theory of rational choice in that it recognises the importance of the individuals who make the relevant choices. It assumes that the leaders of states and governments play a key role in the process of European integration through state governance. Consequently, national state preferences (particularly economic interests) underpin EU policies, yet are themselves influenced by particular interdependencies resulting from globalisation. Accordingly, national state preferences and specific interdependencies – such as issues of profit distribution and collective action – serve as explanatory variables.

A. Moravcsik divides the process of integration into three stages: the formation of national preferences, “bargaining” between states, and institutional choice. For the purposes of our work, the first component is of the greatest importance: the formation of national preferences, which is influenced by pressure from domestic actors and long-term fundamental goals. States determine their preferences based on these independent variables before entering into negotiations. This stage is usually best explained by rational choice theory. Taking specific national preferences into account, the second component consists of interstate ‘bargaining’, or formal negotiations. According to the theory of liberal intergovernmentalism, the comparative power of each state, influenced by asymmetric political interdependencies and trade-offs, is the best explanation for the outcome of negotiations. The third stage, which follows the results of the “bargaining”, involves institutional choices aimed at preserving the agreements reached. In this context, an explanatory factor is the structure of international institutions, and whether existing institutions are sufficient to support the agreements reached, or if states will be able to amend or create new institutions.

A. Moravcsik and K. Nicolaidis (1999) argue that specific economic interdependence is the main

explanatory factor that determines all stages of integration. According to them, such interdependence is manifested in individual issues in the form of acts that are decisive for national preferences. States act rationally, responding to relatively stable domestic and international pressures by seeking agreements that would most effectively satisfy these preferences. These preferences and strategically determined negotiating positions can be explained by asymmetric interdependence when it comes to the results of negotiations on specific issues.

Although the theory of liberal intergovernmentalism is subject to valid criticism, it remains applicable in the field of European studies for explaining EU integration in all areas, including police co-operation. It pays particular attention to analysing the intergovernmental sphere of police co-operation within the EU, with a focus on states as the main actors. The main focus here should be on the first stage: the formation of states’ preferences. In this context, the focus is on assessing the role of external interdependence and collective action, as well as how the distribution of problems influences states when forming their integration preferences.

A. Moravcsik (1998) assumes that ‘the pursuit of economic interests is the fundamental driving force behind integration’. However, this assumption is not applicable to the fields of internal security and police co-operation, where other considerations are equally, if not more, important. Regarding the problem of collective action, the theory of liberal intergovernmentalism views it as a manifestation of asymmetrical interdependence. This means that not all EU Member States may be equally exposed to common threats, and therefore they may not have equally strong incentives to co-operate and establish joint institutions to achieve their police co-operation goals. In other words, some states may be more interdependent than others, making them more determined to solve problems through collective action. Thus, asymmetrical interdependence in the form of the causes and consequences of security threats determines whether states prefer integration or differentiation. According to this logic, external interdependence consists of the interconnectedness of the causes and effects of security threats, creating negative externalities for states acting alone. Conversely, internal interdependence consists of the “spillover effects” resulting from previous integration decisions. This interconnectedness of co-operation structures and institutions makes unilateral action difficult, if not impossible, and can lead to coordination problems. Therefore, when the growth of external and internal interdependencies creates a demand for greater integration, Member States gain a preference for integration.

R. Rupperecht (1993) persuasively states that the economic interdependency which developed between

1950 and 1990 has resulted in Western Europe becoming "a denser criminal geographic area". For instance, in the realm of drug smuggling, criminal organisations capitalised on the economic liberalisation and increased openness of the single market. As R. Rupprecht and M. Hellenthal (1994) observe, "the fluctuation of offenders between Member States was noticeably higher than between EU and non-EU states", concluding that "offenders from non-EU states used the EU as a single operational base, sales market and repository". Concurrently, the expanding institutional connections with the Trevi Group resulted in a gradual escalation of the Union format's prominence in police collaboration within the EU. It is evident that other police co-operation systems extant outside the European Union have never attained this level of complexity. The absence of operational and political trust has been a primary factor in the prevention of the formalisation of police co-operation at the global level. Despite the challenges posed by bureaucratic resistance, which hindered effective information exchange and co-operation at both the national and European levels, these obstacles were comparatively less pronounced than those encountered in the international sphere. Concurrently, the expanding institutional connections with the TREVI Group resulted in a gradual escalation of the Union format's prominence in police collaboration within the EU. It is evident that other police co-operation systems extant outside the European Union have never attained this level of complexity. The absence of operational and political trust has been a primary factor in the failure to formalise police co-operation at the global level. Despite the challenges posed by bureaucratic resistance, which hindered effective information exchange and co-operation at national and European levels, these obstacles were comparatively less pronounced in the context of international co-operation.

Consequently, the increasing interdependence among European states was a key factor influencing their inclination towards establishing a novel organisational structure that would eventually culminate in the formation of EUROPOL. Conversely, the asymmetry of internal interdependence (i.e., the observation that not all states had equally close ties) encouraged the Member States to act in favour of practical horizontal differentiation within the Communities and the formation of separate groups. The establishment of Europol can thus be considered a response to the internal differentiation and flexible integration that has characterised the European Union, as evidenced by the ratification of the Schengen Agreement. The Schengen Agreement, initiated by Germany as an intergovernmental agreement between five states, was intended to extend to all EU Member States. The dissolution of internal borders among the signatories has been demonstrated to engender

heightened interdependence, facilitating the exchange of information and practices within the ambit of the acquis of the aforementioned agreement. The high degree of interdependence between the signatories also created a functional need to co-operate more closely in police matters. Consequently, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and Europol were established, drawing upon the Schengen experience.

### 3. The Development: EUROPOL and Beyond

The establishment of the European Police Office (EUROPOL) as a new institutional framework for police co-operation can be regarded not merely as a standalone institutional advancement, but as a pragmatic response to the escalating economic integration initiated by the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992. As the internal market expanded and an increasing number of businesses engaged in cross-border commerce, transnational economic crime became more prevalent and intricate. This development gave rise to the necessity for more organised methods of enforcing the law. The original idea behind Europol was to enable different countries to collaborate on cross-border investigations. It was intended to assist Member States in addressing the enforcement issues that arise when markets become more integrated, despite lacking the necessary capacity to do so. From 1994 to 2000, Europol received at least 600 requests for operational assistance, primarily relating to drug trafficking and illegal immigration. These issues had clear economic consequences, such as the creation of illegal markets and the facilitation of cross-border movement. The establishment of a 24-hour information exchange channel for monitoring and regulated delivery demonstrated the importance of real-time coordination in an economically integrated region characterised by significant movement and rapid flows of goods and funds. By 1998, Europol's ability to do its job had been severely limited, demonstrating the significant additional work required to enforce legislation due to increased interconnectedness. Suggesting that some cross-border matters be handled bilaterally highlights the conflict between the need for greater economic integration and the fact that supranational law enforcement systems are still developing.

In its early years, Europol's remit was extended several times without any prior evaluation of its efforts and achievements. For instance, its initial remit to combat international drug trafficking was broadened in 1995 to include the illicit trafficking of radioactive materials, human trafficking and car theft. In 1999, Europol's remit was further expanded to include the fight against terrorism. The annex to the Europol Convention contains an extensive list of possible future competencies, and governments can decide whether

to grant Europol competence to work on any of them or to add new crimes to the list without any parliamentary involvement.

These crimes include the counterfeiting of money and payment cards, as well as all forms of money laundering. In 1999, human smuggling was added to the list of crimes, alongside the production of child pornography. In 2001, cybercrime, fraud and environmental crimes were added to the list.

#### 4. The Challenges of the New Century

The 21st century offered little respite in the fight against transboundary crimes in Europe. On the contrary, economic crimes have become truly global, posing a threat to the entire international system, and to European integration in particular. As high-tech crime evolved, it became more of an economic problem than a security one. In this sense, it can be compared to money laundering, which primarily threatens the economies of states and the global economy. This has led to a growing understanding that security management should become equally interconnected in order to prevent criminal trends. However, at that time, police co-operation was still quite limited and concentrated on "old" topics such as the fight against drug trafficking, mafia groups, car theft, etc. In this context, the proposal to expand Europol's mandate appears to be a logical progression.

In March 2001, a European Council proposal was adopted, which assigned Europol the responsibility of combating serious forms of international economic crime. The list of crimes, which formed part of the proposal's annex, included more than 20 new headings, providing descriptions of crimes such as counterfeiting of trade marks, counterfeiting of currency and other means of payment, kidnapping, smuggling of a wide range of goods and computer crime. Consequently, within two years of its inception, Europol's mandate was expanded in mid-2001. This represented an unprecedented development in Europol's functional scope, as it created the possibility of integrating a wide range of crime-fighting issues into the structure of the new body.

By 2010, the conditions for the establishment of the European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) had been established, in particular in the activities of the Commission, which was able to influence the preferences of the Member States. The conditions under discussion arose, in particular, due to a series of cyberattacks that took place in early 2011, thereby demonstrating the vulnerability of the cyber infrastructure of a number of countries. The European Commission has communicated to Member States that the threat is not merely hypothetical. Recent studies have indicated a global increase in the number of cyberattacks, with concomitant rises in

the consequences of cybercrime. The Commission collaborated closely with Europol in the dissemination of information regarding this issue, with a particular focus on alerting the governments of EU Member States to the emergence of novel cybercrime trends. By emphasising the economic and financial losses associated with cybercrime, supranational political entrepreneurs directed the attention of Member States towards the physical consequences of cybercrime and the interconnection between cyberspace and the real world. This ultimately resulted in European governments taking collective action.

Europol has thus established itself as a leading agency, raising awareness of cyber threats in Europe and setting new standards for police co-operation in the fight against cybercrime. This is evident from the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Cybercrime Strategy, which was adopted in April 2010. In accordance with this plan, the Council of the EU requested that Europol carry out a strategic analysis of cybercrime, and invited both Europol and the Commission to support Member States in consolidating, revising and improving the functions entrusted to the European Cybercrime Centre where necessary.

In order to comprehend the broader evolution of the European Union's economic model in the twenty-first century, it is necessary to consider this in relation to Europol's expanding institutional role in combating economic and cybercrime. The potential for economic growth and the exposure of European economies to intricate criminal risks have grown dramatically as a result of the development of cross-border financial services, the strengthening of the Digital Single Market, and the growing reliance on data-driven economic activity. In the contemporary era, economic crime exerts a direct influence on market competitiveness, investment security, and innovation capacity, thereby subverting sustainable economic development, a fundamental objective of European integration. In this regard, Europol's coordination and analytical efforts support internal security as well as the preservation of internal market trust and economic stability.

In order to preserve fair competition, safeguard intellectual property, and guarantee the resilience of the financial and technological infrastructures necessary for European economic advancement, effective law enforcement co-operation is becoming increasingly necessary. Moreover, the strategic importance of coordinated action against transnational economic crime within the EU has been reinforced by prevailing geopolitical and economic pressures. The domains of economic security and law enforcement co-operation have become increasingly intertwined, as evidenced by the implementation of sanctions regimes, the protection of supply chains, and the prevention of large-scale financial fraud associated with organised

crime networks or hybrid threats. Member States can respond collectively to threats that no national authority can successfully handle on its own, thanks to Europol's operational assistance, intelligence-sharing procedures, and specialised centres. The agency's role is expanding beyond traditional policing duties in order to support the integrity of the Union's economic governance framework, as the EU seeks to maintain market openness while strengthening economic autonomy. To prevent transboundary criminal activity from undermining the benefits of an interconnected European economy, Europol's development reflects a broader shift in which police co-operation becomes an integral part of economic integration.

## 5. Conclusions

The growth of police co-operation in Europe demonstrates that economic integration and internal security are processes that reinforce each other within the broader context of European integration. The gradual development of economic interdependence among EU Member States – through the strengthening of the internal market, financial integration and digitalisation – has created many opportunities for growth, made it easier for people to move around and increased cross-border transactions. At the same time, however, it weakened the system by creating regulatory disparities and enforcement loopholes that provided new opportunities for transnational economic and cybercriminal networks. Against this backdrop,

institutions such as Europol emerged not only as security players, but also as tools that could mitigate the negative consequences of economic integration. The shift from informal collaboration, exemplified by the TREVI Group, to highly structured operational and analytical processes demonstrates that a closely integrated economic space requires supranational enforcement capabilities to ensure fair, stable, and competitive markets.

These factors are directly related to Ukraine's ongoing integration into Europe. As the EU's laws and rules in areas such as justice, home affairs and economic governance continue to expand, full participation in the internal market requires each country to be able to combat cross-border economic crime, including financial fraud, cybercrime, illegal money flows and crimes that harm the Union's financial interests. Therefore, Ukraine should collaborate more closely with Europol and participate in joint analytical and investigative initiatives. It is also crucial that its data protection, information exchange, financial monitoring and asset recovery laws align with EU standards. It is also vital to update institutional structures and investigative tools to ensure they are compatible with European security and economic governance systems. In this context, Ukraine's involvement in European police co-operation should be regarded not merely as a security necessity, but also as a crucial step in its assimilation into the Union's economic, regulatory and institutional framework.

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