

European Community

News Release

EEC CELEBRATES 30TH ANNIVERSARY

The Treaty of Rome: Foundation for European Unification

The Treaty of Rome, signed by six European countries on March 25, 1957, established the European Economic Community, popularly known as the European Common Market. The most important of the three treaties that created the European Community, it is in essence the Community's constitution.

The European Community was created in the wake of World War II, as a devastated Western Europe sought ways to rebuild its economy and prevent future wars. On May 9, 1950, Robert Schuman, then Foreign Minister of France, proposed to pool European coal and steel industries as a first step toward a centuries-old ideal that in the past had only been achieved by force - a united Europe.

Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands accepted the French proposal, signing the European Coal and Steel Community Treaty in Paris on April 18, 1951. Six years later, those countries moved further toward integration by signing treaties establishing the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) and the European Economic Community (EEC) in Rome.

The Euratom Treaty established a framework for coordinating the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The EEC Treaty, or Treaty of Rome, was much more visionary. Its signatories declared that they were «determined to lay the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe». The Treaty's immediate objectives were establishment of a customs union, the dismantling of quotas and other trade barriers between the Member States, and the free movement of persons, services and capital.

But going beyond this, it specified that the Member States would apply common policies in such fields as agriculture, transport, antitrust law and external trade. Moreover, the preamble and general clauses called for the implementation of common policies in virtually all areas of economic and social life.

In 1973, the Community of Nine was born, as Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom became Member States. Greece joined in 1981, Spain and Portugal in 1986, making it the Community of Twelve.

The Member States have agreed to give up some of their sovereign powers for the sake of unity. Some critics complain that progress toward a truly united Europe has been slow, with the EC countries too quick to put national interests ahead of Community interests. Many barriers to the free movement of goods, labour, services and capital within the Community remain, but the Member States have vowed to remove them by 1992, creating one single Internal Market.

An important fact remains: Twelve countries of Europe, many of whom not so long ago were fighting one another with massive loss of life and physical destruction, have merged important sectors of their economies, created joint institutions, developed common policies on a wide range of issues, and thus formed the basis for an ever closer relationship among them.

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