
TRADE AND ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

France is part of the European Economic Community (EEC or EC), now called the European Union (EU). The EU comprises twelve countries: France, Great Britain, Germany (including the former East Germany), Italy, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, Ireland and Greece. It should be noted that while Switzerland, Norway, Austria, Sweden, Finland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland do not belong to the EU, they have entered into a number of economic agreements with the Union and enjoy preferential customs treatment on their exports to it.

The economic integration of the EU has reached an advanced stage. There are no customs duties within the EU; member countries apply the same duties on all imports from countries outside the Union, and preferential treatment of such countries is applied uniformly by all members. All imported products are classified in accordance with the Harmonized Description and Tariff System. Reduced-rate import quotas are also managed by the EU.

Harmonization is under way in the areas of labelling requirements and inspection procedures designed to ensure that food products offered for sale are fit for human consumption. It should be understood that 1 January 1993 was not in itself a date on which everything changed in the EU. Many common rules were already in effect, others were applied on January 1, 1993, while still others, in all likelihood, will not yet have been harmonized by 1995.

France plays an important role in determining food product standards. Most regulations adopted by the EU in this area are derived from French regulations. None of the European rules are more stringent than the current French ones.

INFRASTRUCTURE FACILITIES

France has a very strong and balanced transportation system comprising a far-reaching network of modern roads, a national rail system, highly developed storage and distribution systems, international and domestic air carriers, airports, a merchant shipping fleet, and seaports.

Goods can clear customs at the French border or at their destination, or else in their port of arrival, which may be in Belgium or the Netherlands, for subsequent trans-shipment to France, where they are not subject to duty.

The largest of the airports that serve Paris is Roissy-Charles de Gaulle, located approximately 30 km north of the city. The main French port for food products is Le Havre, which lies some 150 km west of Paris.