

The Community was the first to introduce a comprehensive system of generalized preferences to help developing countries export their manufactured goods.

Through the aid and free trade provisions of the Lomé Convention, which includes the "Stabex" system of stabilizing developing countries' export revenues, the EC promotes the development of 57 countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP). A new improved accord will replace the Lomé Convention after it expires in March 1980.

The Community and its member states are the largest source of official aid to the developing countries, contributing 43 per cent of the world total in 1976.

The EC is part of a 16-nation free trade zone benefiting 300 million Western European consumers. In July 1977, the last industrial tariffs were abolished between the "Nine" and the members of the European Free Trade Association — Austria, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland — enabling manufactured goods to be traded duty-free among them.

Though not bound to do so by the EC Treaties, member states are gradually aligning their external policies and speaking with "one political voice" in international organizations and conferences, such as the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), the North-South Conference on International Economic Cooperation (CIEC), and the Law of the Sea Conference.

The Community as such has observer status at the United Nations, and takes part in Western economic summits.