The European Community in Brief

The EC is today made up of nine countries: the original six members — Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands; plus the three countries that joined them in 1973 — Britain, Denmark, Ireland. Greece will join in 1981, and Portugal and Spain are expected to become EC members a few years later.

Aims

The EC is an ambitious attempt to create a "European Union" organization that will, by means of "strength through solidarity":
-lessen age-old rivalries among European peoples and so establish an economic community of interests;
-remove by common action the age-old barriers that have divided Europe and so ensure progress of the member countries;
-enable European nations to play a bigger role acting together than they could individually in helping to maintain peace and promote prosperity in the world.

Historical Background

The EC is the product of three separate treaties all originally negotiated by the six founder states: The Paris Treaty of April 1951 created the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). It placed national coal and steel industries in a single "common market" under the control of an independent High Authority. The ECSC was so successful that trade in these products between the six member states increased by 129 per cent in the first five years.

The "Six" decided to apply the same approach to the entire European economy and negotiated the Rome Treaty of March 1957, which created the European Economic Community (EEC), or "Common Market". On 1 January 1958, the EEC began to remove trade and economic barriers between its member countries and to establish a broader common market.

The "Six" also sought to combine their resources in the peaceful development of atomic energy. They therefore negotiated, at the same time, a second Rome Treaty, setting up the European Atomic Energy Community, or "Euratom".

These three EC Treaties set as their goal the gradual integration of the economies of the member states and "an even closer union" of their peoples. The Community operates according to the rules and procedures set out in the three Treaties, which all member states have signed.

Institutional Framework

In signing the Paris and Rome Treaties, the EC's founding states agreed to establish European institutions that would have legislative, executive and judicial powers in areas defined by those Treaties. They conferred on the institutions some of the political powers they had traditionally exercised as nation-states. The fact that the Community's institutions have a legal status and extensive powers in fields specified by the Treaties distinguishes the EC from traditional international organizations.