

'Towards a Community of peoples and of nations' from the Communauté européenne (June–July 1968)

Caption: On 1 July 1968, the Customs Union of the Six is completed. Raymond Barre, Vice-President of the European Commission with special responsibility for economic and financial affairs, comments on the event in the editorial of the monthly publication Communauté européenne.

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Towards a Community of peoples and of nations

by Raymond Barre
Vice-President of the European Commission

On 25 March 1957, the Signatory States of the Treaty of Rome founded the Economic Community which they had decided to create on the basis of a customs union, and they expressed their resolve progressively to establish the common market over a 12-year transitional period.

On 1 July 1968, 18 months before the deadline, the customs union has been created, intra-Community customs duties completely abolished and the common customs tariff implemented.

Considering the starting point, a great deal has been achieved. Despite crises and difficulties, the European Economic Community has developed and become stronger, occasionally through spectacular events, but more often by inconspicuous yet continuous progress. The Community has become a familiar reality, maybe even a habit for the peoples of our six countries. To the rest of the world, it appears to be a coherent group, with growing importance in international relations.

However, when we consider the broad range of economic, political and social problems which affect our countries and the rest of the world, there remains a great deal to do. Who would believe that a customs union, together with an agricultural policy and somewhat perfunctory cooperation on economic policies would allow the countries of the Community to provide effective responses to these problems? We have witnessed only the first phase in the creation of a Community. The goals of tomorrow are clearly defined.

We need a Community for peace: the ever closer union between our countries, countries which, throughout history, so often fought against each other, is and must remain for the world an example of solidarity and a factor in reaching understanding.

We need a Community for progress: the common actions of our countries must not simply ensure economic expansion and improved living conditions for our peoples or contribute to world prosperity and the development of nations, it must also allow individual fulfilment.

These objectives will be achieved if ours is not just a Community of States, of institutions and of technicians to build it, but also a Community of the nations and the peoples of Europe, prepared to take on responsibility and aware of where their efforts will lead.

In an anxious and troubled world, 1 July 1968 must be more than a key date for Europe in terms of economics, it must herald the confirmation by our six countries of their determination to see the building of a Community through to its conclusion for the benefit of a more human and a more fraternal world.

Raymond Barre