

## 1980–1986 Enlargement to the south and the Single European Act

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The European Economic Community (EEC) underwent several major changes in the 1980s. Having been composed solely of the industrialised countries of Northern Europe for many years, it opened its doors to the emerging democracies of Southern Europe, with the accession of Greece in 1981 and Spain and Portugal in 1986. It was therefore a factor of political stability and economic development in Europe's Mediterranean region. But enlargement also led to increased regional imbalances among the Twelve, and this increased the need for a common regional policy. Considerable economic and social obstacles impeded the integration of these mainly agricultural countries into the highly industrialised Community. Protracted negotiations and lengthy transitional periods would prove to be necessary for the successful integration of the new Member States.

On 17 and 28 February 1986, the Europe of the Twelve adopted the Single European Act (SEA). In so doing, the Community — which continued working towards increased economic integration with the creation of a single market on 1 January 1993 and the establishment of a European area without internal borders — gradually discarded its purely economic character and moved towards a more closely-knit Community equipped with greater powers in the political and social spheres. The objective towards which the Community was tending therefore became a European Union (EU), as provided for in the treaty signed in Maastricht on 7 February 1992.