

# Letter from Charles de Gaulle to Harold Macmillan (Paris, 15 November 1958)


**Caption:** On 15 November 1958, the French President, Charles de Gaulle, explains to the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, why he considers the existence of the Common Market and the obligations that it entails for its Member States to be incompatible with plans for a single industrial free-trade area in Europe.

**Source:** Ministère des Affaires étrangères ; Commission de Publication des DDF (sous la dir.). Documents diplomatiques français. Volume II: 1958, 1er juillet-31 décembre. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1993. 969 p. p. 682-683.

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[http://www.cvce.eu/obj/letter\\_from\\_charles\\_de\\_gaulle\\_to\\_harold\\_macmillan\\_paris\\_15\\_november\\_1958-en-a71161e4-5d08-4ed6-bf9f-a57f92924a2d.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/letter_from_charles_de_gaulle_to_harold_macmillan_paris_15_november_1958-en-a71161e4-5d08-4ed6-bf9f-a57f92924a2d.html)

**Last updated:** 06/07/2016



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My dear friend,

Your letter of 7 November has clearly shown me once again the overwhelming importance, firstly, of the implementation of the Treaty of Rome and, secondly, of the problems which it creates in terms of trade between the Six of the Common Market and the other eleven countries of Western Europe.

I was struck in particular by what you wrote concerning the misunderstanding at the centre of the negotiations under way between the two groups. Without going into what could have been claimed — in vain — by the two groups in the course of these prolonged talks, it appears to me that we have arrived at a point at which the intentions stated thus far, and the procedure and framework used, offer few opportunities for attaining practical results. However, I am inclined to the belief that, in this respect, it is practical results that are at issue.

Clearly, such results cannot entail the establishment of a free-trade area on the terms proposed by the Eleven. The very existence of the Common Market, the obligations which it entails for the countries belonging to it and the present state of their economies — or in any event, the state of France's economy — would be incompatible with an area set up in this way. However, I am satisfied that certain arrangements could be made which would gradually facilitate trade between the Common Market and the other eleven countries of Western Europe.

In my view, the problem should be viewed from this angle. Since you wished to express your concerns to me directly, I feel bound to inform you that my government would be willing to contact your government in order to carry out an initial review of the actual avenues open, it being understood that we, for our part, must act in consultation with our partners in the Common Market.

Although it would, in my opinion, be advisable for such talks — if you were amenable to them — to be opened at an early date, I do not feel that they should be held with the kind of haste that might well jeopardise them. It is true that 1 January is the date fixed for the beginning of the Common Market's implementation. However, as you know, this implementation will initially bring about no profound change to the present system of trade.

If our wish is the same as yours, we have the time required for us to revisit the matter. Rest assured that we, for our part, firmly hope, for the sake of the harmony of Europe and the friendship of our two countries, that it will be possible ultimately to reach agreement on this important issue.

Kind regards.