

'A decisive stage' from Le Populaire (14 May 1960)

Caption: On 14 May 1960, the French Socialist daily newspaper Le Populaire comments on the decision taken by the representatives of the Six to speed up the implementation of the objectives of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (EEC).

Source: Le Populaire. 14.05.1960. Paris: Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO). "Etape décisive", auteur:Thibault, Pierre.

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A decisive stage

A new and decisive stage has been reached in the process of European integration. The spirit that reigned in the Council of Ministers of the Six was reflected not so much in the decisions that were taken, though momentous in themselves, as in the desire to make headway and overcome the obstacles on the path to unification. There was talk yesterday in Brussels of days that will go down in history and which show the determination to take irreversible steps, to quote Walter Hallstein, the author of the acceleration plan that was adopted yesterday by the six Ministers.

The objections raised by several Member States had, of course, to be accommodated, and the plan was not adopted in its original form.

Hence, on customs tariffs, we know that the German Government had requested a slower rate of acceleration. The planned changes will be introduced at the end of the year rather than on 1 July. But the principle was accepted and is as follows:

- for internal customs tariffs, a 20 % reduction will take effect by 1 January 1961 and a further 10 % by 1 January 1962, with a possible further 10 % cut on 30 June 1961. This represents a total of 50 %, as provided for in the Hallstein Plan (a 10 % cut took effect on 1 January 1959);
- for the common external tariff, and in order not to harm third countries too much, a 20 % cut will take effect as of 1 January 1961, but some reciprocity clauses will apply. Each Member State may request certain exemptions;
- quotas must be scrapped by 1962.

Since they affect the conditions of trade among the Six, these measures will affect manufacturing, but they also affect the agricultural sector, where very specific problems exist. The Hallstein Report included agricultural products in the acceleration plan, and this was supported by the Netherlands which, as a major exporter of agricultural products, saw big advantages in a scaling down of external and internal tariffs. West Germany, on the other hand, being a mainly industrial country, wanted to maintain some protection for its farming sector, and the other Common Market countries were, to a lesser extent, also concerned about the impact that these acceleration measures would have on their agriculture. It should be added that Germany, in breach of the Common Market Treaty, has been using a system of bilateral accords that enable it to sell its industrial products more easily.

The talks principally addressed agriculture, but a compromise was finally reached that does not run counter to the acceleration principle.

Firstly, the internal tariff will be cut by only 5 %, and the reduction in quotas will take place in annual tranches of 20 % for global quotas. There will be no cut in the common external tariff similar to that for manufactured products, something which considerably limits foreign competition.

Secondly, and most importantly, in accordance with the very principles of the Treaty, it was decided that the acceleration of the Common Market should take place in parallel with a common agricultural policy. Thus, by 1 January 1961, several ministerial meetings will be held to review the impact of the first batch of measures in order to determine further measures in this area and, possibly, to amend tariffs and quotas. A special committee will be charged with drafting a report on this common policy by 30 June. It will then be submitted to the various authorities for review and a decision.

With regard to third countries, particularly the seven countries in the small free trade area, the wish to pursue a liberal policy was reiterated, since the Six do not want to become a fortress at the heart of Europe. The cut in the common external tariff is important in this respect. By 1 January 1961, talks will be held with the Seven with 'a view to mutual reduction in trade barriers', but 'without calling into question the creation of the customs union on which the European Economic Community is based.'

The concern set out in the Common Declaration to ‘pursue acceleration as quickly as possible, not only with regard to the customs union but simultaneously in all sectors of economic integration’, should be stressed. Accordingly, harmonisation in social affairs will be accelerated (for example, equal pay for women and welfare charges). Foreign aid will also evolve at the same pace.

These decisions and commitments show that the deliberations in the Common Market’s Council of Ministers are of major importance for European integration. A really significant step forward has been taken.

Pierre Thibault