



# JANUARY 1958: EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY



**SIXTY YEARS AGO, ON 1 JANUARY 1958**, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and the Federal Republic of Germany jointly formed the European Economic Community (EEC) with the goal of economic integration and free trade within a customs union.

• Although the immediate goals were explicitly economic, the aspirations were always far higher: In the first two sentences of the founding document, the Treaty of Rome, the member states declared their determination “to lay the foundations of an ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe” and “to ensure the economic and social progress of their countries by common action to eliminate the barriers which divide Europe.” Sixty years ago, these goals seemed to be quite unrealistic: Europe was divided not only by national prejudices and economic inequalities but, most fundamentally, by the Iron Curtain, which ran from the Baltic to the Black Sea, with Moscow controlling the nations to the east of it. • That Soviet control was reasserted after the failure of the Prague Spring in 1968, while the EEC continued to integrate and to accept new members: the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Denmark in 1973; Greece in 1981; Spain and Portugal in 1986. And then, after the USSR collapsed in 1991, the way was open to pan-European integration. In 1993 the Maastricht Treaty established the European Union; in 1999 a common currency, the euro, was created; and by 2007, 13 new countries had joined the union, with Croatia becoming the 28th, in 2013. • The EU has just over 500 million people, less than 7 percent of the global population but nearly 24 percent of the world

economic output, as against 22 percent for the United States. It accounts for nearly 16 percent of global exports of goods, a third more than the United States, including cars, airliners, pharmaceuticals, and luxury goods. Moreover, half of its 28 members are among the top 30 countries with the highest quality of life as measured by the United Nations’ human development index.

And yet the 60th anniversary of the EEC is less the occasion for genuine celebration than a milestone for mounting worries and disaffection. The bonds of union are loosening, and the U.K. is leaving outright.

In Europe, the commentariat offers endless explanations of this new centrifugal temper—

the excessive bureaucratic control exercised from Brussels; the reassertion of national sovereignty; and poor economic and political choices, notably the adoption of a common currency without common fiscal responsibility.

I must confess that I am puzzled. As somebody who was born under the Nazi occupation, who grew up on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain, and whose family history is typical of Europe’s often so complicated national and linguistic origins, I see today’s Europe—shortcomings and all—as a staggering outcome, too good to be believed. Surely these achievements are worthy of redoubled efforts at compromises to reunite it.

Instead, decades of peace and prosperity have been taken for granted, and lapses and difficulties (some inevitable, some unpardonable) have served to reignite old biases and animosities. My wish for new Europe at 60: Make it work. The failure to do so cannot be contemplated lightly. ■

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