

Single European Act

Came into force 1 July 1987



Sets target for completing the Single Market

It sets 31 December 1992 as the target for completing the Single Market, defined as: “An area without internal frontiers in which the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital is ensured in accordance with the provisions of this treaty.”

Among articles in the Treaty aimed at trade liberalisation and exploiting the internal market are the requirements that major public sector contracts should be by open competitive tender, and that product standards set by law in one member state should be recognised in all member states.

First powers for European Parliament

For the first time the Parliament is given a role in the legislative process. In relation to most reforms to do with the Single Market, the Council of Ministers now acts on a Commission proposal “in cooperation with the European Parliament”. However if Parliament rejects or amends a common position proposed by the Council, its decision can be overturned by the Council acting in unanimity.

Applications from countries to join the European Economic Community now need to be approved by Parliament by an absolute majority.

Extends Qualified Majority Voting to speed decision-making

On legislation to do with the Single Market, the Council of Ministers now votes by qualified majority. Previously decisions had to be unanimous. This change is intended to speed up the completion of the Single Market. Unanimity is retained in Single Market matters relating to tax.

Other provisions

- Under Social Policy encourages improvements in the working environment as regards health and safety, and encourages dialogue between management and labour at European level.
- Amends policy on economic and social cohesion to as to reduce economic inequalities in the regions that could result from completing the internal market.
- Strengthens scientific and technological co-operation by means of part financed framework programmes so as to make European industry more competitive.
- Boosts the Community’s efforts to protect and improve the environment.
- Sets the framework for a European foreign policy.

Federal aspects

The granting of a role in the legislative process, albeit somewhat limited, to the directly elected Parliament, expands the federalist structure of the EU.

For the full text of the Treaty see
http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/emu_history/documents/treaties/singleeuropeanact.pdf