

The Commission's White Paper and proposals

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The European Commission has played a key role in the creation and implementation of the single internal market. As early as 1982, it was recommending that the Council of Ministers define a procedure to allow the objective of market unity to be attained. From 1983 onwards, the Commission's efforts were supported by the European Round Table of Industrialists, the brainchild of Pehr Gyllenhammar, former Chairman of Volvo, and the European Commissioner with special responsibility for Industry, Étienne Davignon, who recommended that a genuinely homogeneous common market be established by liberalising trade, harmonising taxation, standardising technical norms and opening up public procurement procedures.

Within the Commission itself, which had taken office in January 1985 under the presidency of Jacques Delors, the Commissioner with special responsibility for the Internal Market, Lord Cockfield, then had a White Paper drawn up: a programme for the completion of the Internal Market, proposing the total abolition of physical, technical and fiscal frontiers on the basis of a precise seven-year schedule and setting out some 310 directives and regulations to be adopted to that end by the Council of Ministers. Having been adopted by the Commission, the White Paper was submitted to the Council on 14 June 1985 and subsequently approved by the Milan European Council (28-29 June).

At the Intergovernmental Conference, which met in Luxembourg from 9 September 1985 to revise the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, the Commission presented many well-prepared proposals which it was able to fine-tune so as to take account of the reactions of the national delegations. In early September, it presented a complete chapter on the 'Internal Market: An Area Without Internal Frontiers', as defined by the White Paper. Then, in October, it published a text on the institutional provisions that would be required for the completion of a single market: Commission proposals, decisions of the Council of Ministers taken by qualified majority and, under the cooperation procedure, in conjunction with the European Parliament, which had to endorse such decisions.

The Single European Act incorporates the most important aspects of these proposals, with unanimity continuing to be required for decisions relating to the free movement of persons, to tax policy and to workers' rights.