

Note from the British Government to the German Government concerning the European Common Market (18 November 1955)

Caption: On 18 November 1955, the British Government informs the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) that it will not be able to participate in the Common Market because of its economic and political links with the Commonwealth countries.

Source: Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, Potsdamer Str. 1 56064 Koblenz. <http://www.bundesarchiv.de>, Bundesministerium für den Marshallplan, BArch B 146/591-594.

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Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom have followed with close interest the discussion in Brussels between the six Messina Powers on the subject of a possible European Common Market. Careful study has been given to the possibility of United Kingdom participation in such an arrangement.

2. Her Majesty's Government are aware of the arguments in favour of further economic integration as a means of promoting political stability, higher productivity and a more efficient use of resources. But after full consideration, they have decided that they could not join in such a project. In reaching this conclusion they have been influenced by the consideration that United Kingdom participation in a European Common Market of the kind suggested so far could not be reconciled with the United Kingdom's economic and political relationships with the Commonwealth. They also believe that to enter a European Common Market would be inconsistent with their existing policies for freeing trade and payments.

3. The United Kingdom is particularly anxious, not only from its own point of view but as the Government holding the Chairmanship of O.E.E.C., to promote economic cooperation in Europe as a whole. Her Majesty's Government think it important that every effort should be made to keep the special interests of the six Messina Powers in harmony with the wider interests of O.E.E.C. so as to avoid the danger that the new initiative might have the effect of dividing Western Europe into two groups, that comprising the members of the Common Market on the one hand and the remaining members of the O.E.E.C., on the other. In Her Majesty's Government's view it would take a very considerable time to establish a Common Market and its growth might involve an increasing measure of discrimination which could undo the work done gradually over recent years in reducing discrimination. The result might be to aggravate protectionist tendencies or provoke regionalism in other parts of the world. Such a development would be contrary to the general principles of free trade and payments for which the United Kingdom, in co-operation with the Federal German Government, has been working. The member countries of O.E.E.C. have already made valuable progress in freeing intra-European trade and payments in a manner consistent with the objective of freeing world trade generally. Her Majesty's Government considers that the best hope for further progress lies in this direction. In their view the political cohesion of Western Europe would be damaged rather than served if the establishment of closer relations between the six Messina Powers resulted in a weakening of O.E.E.C.

4. In the circumstances Her Majesty's Government suggest that it has become most desirable for the relationship between the Messina initiative and the O.E.E.C. to be discussed between all the interested parties in the O.E.E.C. forum.

5. Her Majesty's Government have wished to give the Federal German Government this informal indication of their views on this important question. They would prefer that the Federal Government should not inform the other Messina Powers of the United Kingdom position. Her Majesty's Government will be communicating with them direct at a suitable opportunity.

November 18, 1955.