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BACKGROUND FEATURE

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COMMON MARKET AHEAD OF TIMETABLE

WASHINGTON, D.C., May 17 -- The European Economic Community is progressing more rapidly than its planners had hoped.

The extra reduction of intra-Community duties, set ~~yesterday~~^{May 15} in Brussels for July 1, will be the final step in giving effect to the speed-up decision taken by the EEC Council of Ministers two years ago. That decision provided for two extra cuts in customs duties. The first was applied on December 31, 1960. The second will be effective on July 1 this year, by which date the basic duties on industrial products will have been halved.

Also by July 1, the reduction of basic duties on a large number of agricultural products -- will reach 35 per cent.

The July 1 cut in customs duties between member states will also mean a second general adjustment -- upwards or downwards, -- of national tariffs to the common customs tariff earlier than specified in the Treaty. It will take place on July 1, 1963, and not on December 31, 1965, as originally planned.

The pace of tariff disarmament that the authors of the Treaty thought reasonable in 1957 has thus been far exceeded. Member states were to endeavor to reduce basic duties by at least 25 per cent by the end of the first stage of the transition period. Six months after the end of Stage I, December 31, 1961, the duties on industrial products will have been halved and those on all agricultural products will have been cut by more than the required minimum.