

'Will Europe be the victim of its own expansion?' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (14 April 1977)

Caption: In April 1977, the German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung expresses its concern regarding the difficulties involved in a possible enlargement of the European Economic Community (EEC) towards southern Europe.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. Hrsg. Eick, Jürgen; Welter, Erich; Fack, Fritz Ullrich; Deschamps, Bruno; Fest, Joachim; Reißmüller, Johann Georg. 14.04.1977, Nr. 86. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Wächst Europa sich zu Tode?", auteur:Stadlmann, Heinz , p. 1.

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Will Europe be the victim of its own expansion?

by *Heinz Stadlmann*

Politically understandable — economically impossible. This short phrase summarises the opinions expressed in most Member States of the European Community on Portugal's application for accession. It is true that it sounds somewhat friendlier in official government declarations, but it is difficult to ignore the scepticism of many of them.

For that reason, the Economic Community — suffering as it is from internal weaknesses — sees once again the question arising whether it really is possible to admit new countries without first consolidating the existing membership. Within a few months, the Portuguese application for accession should be followed by one from Spain and, ever since the autumn of last year, negotiations have been progressing with the Greeks on the terms for accession.

Experience acquired with the first enlargement of the Community was not encouraging. Since the accession of Britain, Ireland and Denmark to the Community in 1973, there has been no further progress on internal development. Even at that time, the opinion was widely held that the half-developed state of the Community of the Six could not take any additional strain that would inevitably occur with the addition of three new Member States. It is futile to debate whether the six founder members would actually have made any progress on their own. The decision in favour of enlargement has been made principally on political grounds; accordingly, those today who say that the fundamental decision on the enlargement of the Community had already been made in the late 1960s are quite correct. However, the essential distinction remains that, in the case of Britain and Denmark, those countries were admitted on the basis of an economic performance which fitted into the professed structure of the EEC. Ireland was an exception on account of its close ties to Britain. Portugal and Greece are developing countries, which will still require considerable time before they reach the average economic level of the Community.

On top of the economic arguments come the political anxieties. Luxembourg's Prime Minister, Gaston Thorn, who is seen more and more as the critical conscience of the Community, is aware of the danger of dilution. He has expressed his suspicion that the swift assent of several countries to Portugal's accession was aimed simply at covering up the internal problems of the Community. Two earlier EEC Presidents have expressed their reservations even more clearly: the Frenchman François-Xavier Ortoli spoke of a 'physical risk' to the Community as it stands; the Belgian Jean Rey said that enlargement must go hand-in-hand with the strengthening of its institutions. A study drawn up in Britain, and one of the most thorough on this subject, comes to the conclusion that the Community is running the risk of sacrificing the concept of union and settling for a loose association.

Political critics and analysts are united on one point: with 12 Member States, it will no longer be possible to safeguard the ability of the Community to function — something already frequently called into question — without the introduction of majority decisions. The situation regarding the national interests of different countries, which are becoming more and more varied as economies diverge, currently allows little hope of any agreement. However, no one believes that it would be possible to reach agreement on majority decisions at this time. None of the big countries is ready to allow majority voting when it comes down to defending their own interests — not even the Federal Republic of Germany. The opponents of enlargement find themselves in an awkward situation: majority decisions to improve the functioning of the Community will not be brought about by force. So, should Greece, Portugal and Spain, countries for whom membership of the Community is an important tool in their struggle to develop democratic forms of government at home, be turned away?

It is obvious that all three of these countries are really putting all their eggs in the political basket. In an accurate assessment of the dilemma for the Europeans, the Portuguese Foreign Minister said that the Community must decide whether it wants to be a club for mature nations or a union of democratic European countries. For the Greek Prime Minister, Konstantinos Karamanlis, increased security against the Turks demands internal political stability. The political priority is so unambiguous that the economic aspect is

totally sidelined.

Ignoring the economic considerations will cost the Community, and possibly also the applicant countries, dear. Expansion to the south will bring a complete change in the common agricultural market, which might not survive this process. It will collapse under the weight of costs and surpluses. In spite of long transitional periods, the applicant countries that are still undergoing industrial reconstruction are going to be confronted with competition about which they apparently have very little idea. All hopes of economic and monetary union must finally be buried. With such serious economic differences, there can be no common economic policy. Whether the political gain bought with these sacrifices will be adequate compensation for this remains to be seen. What is now looming could well be the beginning of the end for the European Economic Community.