

'The Greeks are coming°...' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (20 December 1980)

Caption: On 20 December 1980, the German daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung is worried about the problems, especially financial and agricultural, arising from the accession of, firstly, Greece and, subsequently, of Spain and Portugal to the European Economic Community (EEC).

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. Hrsg. Eick, Jürgen; Fack, Fritz Ullrich; Deschamps, Bruno; Fest, Joachim; Reißmüller, Johann Georg. 20.12.1980. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Die Griechen kommen.", auteur: Stadlmann, Heinz, p. 1.

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The Greeks are coming ...

... and so are the problems

By Heinz Stadlmann, Brussels

The accession of Greece to the European Community will become official from 1 January 1981, but it has been casting a shadow over Brussels for weeks in advance of the event. There is an argument between the European Parliament and the EC Commission about the very considerable cost of the conversion work required on the 13th floor of the Commission headquarters to provide appropriate accommodation for the new Commissioner from Greece. Attitudes are distinctly prestige-conscious, and this dictates that the office suites must be situated on the same floor as those of his colleagues, the other Commissioners. An extraordinary meeting of the Council of Agriculture Ministers had to be convened, because it had been impossible until literally the very last minute to reach an agreement on Greek prices for various products. During the last few months, Athens has been implementing very steep price increases and is now insisting on full consideration in the adjustment to EC price levels. The obligations accepted in the Treaty of Accession were interpreted by the negotiators at the most recent discussion sessions in Brussels consistently to their own advantage. The prevailing sentiment in Brussels is quite unanimous: the Greeks will not be the easiest of bedfellows.

The conduct that appeared to be egoistical and sly negotiating tactics on the part of the Greeks was actually prompted by compelling reasons for the delegates from Athens. The accession of Greece to the European Community is based, above all, on political considerations. Everyone knows that the country's economic structure and development stage mean that it does not fit into a Community consisting predominantly of advanced industrial countries. Once the military regime had been overthrown, the politicians surrounding Konstantinos Karamanlis were concerned, above all, to provide a safeguard for the democratic state. Membership of the European Community, which consists of democratic countries, was regarded as potentially helpful in this venture. The hope of economic support for their backward country also played a part. At home, there was the need to deal with the Socialist, Papandreou, who was actively opposed to joining the Community. The consequence of this constellation of circumstances was the attempt by Athens, that at times gave the impression of being close to desperation, to join the EC at any price and as quickly as possible.

During the negotiations on accession, which were drawn out over more than four years, a number of concessions were then made that were, in fact, hardly justifiable. The Community also allowed itself to be persuaded, against its better judgment, to keep the transitional periods for the adjustment shorter than would really have been required in the best interests of both sides. In recent months, the Greek Government has apparently begun to get cold feet, and at the most recent negotiations in Brussels, it attempted to grab whatever advantage was still to be had.

The second enlargement of the Community, which is now beginning with Greece and which is to be followed by Spain and Portugal, is taking place at the most inopportune point in time imaginable. The world economic recession and global political tensions are forcing all countries to become more cautious and to make greater savings. The European Community itself is facing a hard test of strength. Its funds are being exhausted, and, without radical reforms, it might even collapse. Changes to the very costly agricultural policy, which swallows up most of the money, are, however, the subject of serious disputes within the EC. Several countries are refusing to make fundamental changes.

The barrier which has been set up against further increases in expenditure by the Federal Republic, above all, is no longer accepted by the smaller countries. They consider that the provision of more money is inevitable. The accession of new countries, which all want to receive economic support from the Community because of their relative underdevelopment, also means that this is impossible to avoid. However, for the moment, attitudes are hardening, and the tensions in relationships within the EC are growing. Italy has never made any secret of the fact that it is not enthusiastic about the admission of Greece, and the French were also tending towards a more reserved position. Here, the comparable production

structure in the agricultural sector and the fear of not being able to withstand the cheaper competition both have a role to play. Possessing political insight into what needs to be done is not at all the same thing as being willing to make the requisite economic sacrifices.

The existing Community has, to date, also been trying to dodge clarification of the institutional issues associated with the second enlargement, first, to ten and, subsequently, to twelve Member States. It has been clear since the accession of Great Britain, Denmark and Ireland to the original EEC of six countries that the old methods of cooperation and of the decision-making process are no longer sufficient. The principle of unanimity had already made many decisions very difficult when there were only six members, and it frequently became a dead weight in the Community of the Nine. It does not take much imagination to get an idea of the same procedure for ten or twelve representatives around the Council table in Brussels, especially if the differences in interests are increasingly widening because of completely different economic conditions. The danger of the Community becoming totally paralysed is increasingly significant. In Bonn, the counter-argument is that enlargement does not bring any problems that would not already have appeared by now. However, this fails to recognise that the larger number alone creates an additional problem. To date, no one has wanted to draw the inevitable conclusions, which are: greater powers for the EC Commission and restriction of the unanimity rule in the Council of Ministers to genuinely vital issues.

How the Greeks will fit into the Community under these conditions remains to be seen. It is to be hoped that the Treaty of Association, which has been in existence since 1962, will have the effect of facilitating matters, even if many objectives of that agreement have not been attained. The transitional period of five to seven years before application of the treaties in full creates a limited amount of extra time for flexibility. Given the domestic political situation in Greece, however, it seems not out of the question that the Community will have to renegotiate the conditions of entry, just as it did in the case of Great Britain. A victory for Papandreou in the elections scheduled for next year would entail a referendum on continuation of EC membership.

The scepticism with which many regard this fresh enlargement comes not so much from the accession of Greece. The EC can cope with the 9 million Greeks and their economic problems. The unease stems from the fact that this step has to be seen in conjunction with the enlargement to include almost 37 million Spaniards and a further 9 million Portuguese. The result of this will be unpredictable financial burdens for the common agricultural policy, and it is unlikely that the preference system for trade in the Mediterranean region will be sustainable. A more protectionist Community that is becoming more loosely linked together is not, however, what the founding fathers envisaged. It would be the opposite of their vision of a politically unified and powerful Europe.