

'An asset for France but not for Brussels' from Le Monde (3 January 1981)

Caption: On 3 January 1981, the day after the accession of Greece to the European Communities, French newspaper Le Monde highlights the advantages of Greek membership for France.

Source: Le Monde. 03.01.1981. Paris: Le Monde. "Un atout pour la France mais non pour Bruxelles", auteur:Delarue, Maurice.

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An asset for France but not for Brussels

by Maurice Delarue

Greek accession to the Community has obvious general political advantages, in particular for France, but it will not simplify the current insufficiency of the European institutions and will open the door to further complications which may well prove even more serious.

The primary consequence of its accession — and that which was probably the most significant for the Greek Government — is the consolidation of a still fragile democratic regime in a sensitive region of Europe where such a system is hardly in evidence. Little by little, it will become impossible for a dictator to seize power in Greece without, at the same time, breaking with the political and economic system of Western Europe with which Greece will be inextricably linked.

Greek accession will, moreover, shift the balance of the Community a little further towards the south. Its tilt towards the north, already apparent in the Europe of the Six, became even more pronounced with the accession of the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark in 1973. For a country like France, situated between the Germanic world and the Mediterranean, that situation has all sorts of disadvantages.

Economically, priority was given to the ‘communitarisation’ of northern agricultural products, with France securing satisfactory rulings on sheepmeat and wine, for example, only by throwing tantrums.

Politically, the Community, as Maurice Druon (RPR) said when expressing his support for the Treaty with Greece to the National Assembly, ‘was lacking a Mediterranean aspect’ and ‘was exposed to the Atlantic magnet’. This is not a matter of questioning the alliance with the United States, rather it expresses a geographical concern. In Denmark, the Netherlands and Federal Germany, most people have cared little (at least until recently) about events in the Middle East and in Africa. They see nothing but trouble in France’s interest in these unsettled regions. Greece, a maritime power with access to the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Africa, and sharing a border with Asia, is naturally committed to all forms of dialogue between Europe and the Arab nations, as well as to any balanced initiatives promoting peace in the Middle East, and to an active European policy in Africa.

Political advantages, economic disadvantages

Culturally, Greek accession is an asset for France. The, in the eyes of many, temptingly easy solution, whereby France would resign from its place in world culture, would inevitably result in political suicide. The Community, however, offered it an irreplaceable forum because of the dynamic role played by French politics during the early days of European integration. In the Europe of the Six, French was, by a long chalk, the main working language; today English is proving to be more and more of a competitor. There is good reason to think that Greek accession will reinforce the use of French. In his report, Mr Druon pointed out that, in 10 years’ time, the number of students at the French Institute in Athens has risen from 13 000 to 26 000 and that, in 1977, the Greek Government launched a programme to step up the teaching of French.

These political advantages are relevant not only to the accession of Greece. To varying degrees and respects, they might also be applied to Spain and Portugal. On the other hand, the disadvantages of Greek accession will be multiplied by future accessions.

Even if, legally, Greek accession will not necessarily entail the accession of Spain and Portugal, politically, this argument will not stand up for long.

The Community was founded by countries with a comparable standard of living. Only in Italy did the standard fall clearly below the average, but this did not pose a significant threat to Community solidarity, on which the entire structure is based.