

'Portugal, Spain and the EEC' from El País (27 May 1985)

Caption: On 27 May 1985, the Madrid daily newspaper El País considers the implications of the enlargement of the European Communities, on 1 January 1986, to include Spain and Portugal.

Source: El País. 27.05.1985. Madrid. "Portugal, España y la CEE", auteur:Riaza, José María.

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Tribune: José María Riaza

Portugal, Spain and the EEC

The author's starting point is an article published in the Portuguese press two and a half months ago, before Spain and Portugal signed the agreement on the transitional period that will govern relations between the two countries until their full integration into the EEC, and certainly before anything was known about last weekend's summit meeting between Felipe González and Mario Soares. That article, which is very relevant to the latest developments, serves the author as a springboard for wider reflection on Spanish-Portuguese relations.

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Spain's accession to the EEC along with Portugal raises once again the issue of our relations with a neighbouring country on which we have turned our back — an unhappy situation that has caused me considerable concern for many years. In the 1960s I promoted Spanish-Portuguese contacts on various occasions, both in the review *Cuadernos para el Diálogo*, on which I was a consultant during the first eight years of its eventful existence, and in other contexts. My old concern has come to the fore again on reading a long and interesting article by a Portuguese intellectual, Rogerio Martins (in *Diario de Lisboa*, 19 March 1985), entitled *O grande desafio. Carta aberta a espanhóis e também portugueses* (The great challenge. An open letter to Spaniards, and to the Portuguese). It was written after a trip to Barcelona, where Martins had delivered a lecture on Portugal, Spain and the EEC to an audience of 200 entrepreneurs, economists, students and journalists. I thought it best to follow his article very closely, both because of what he says and because his judgments and opinions on delicate aspects of relations between the two countries are particularly significant coming from a Portuguese.

It should be noted that Martins states specifically: 'I was thinking of publishing this article in one of the Spanish dailies. They, at least, are read not only in Spain but in Portugal too, since they are on sale in Portuguese newspaper kiosks.' Why didn't he publish it in a Spanish newspaper? He doesn't say. But the reasons, genuine or otherwise, are fairly obvious.

The fact that the Portuguese press does not reach Spanish newspaper kiosks seems to Martins symptomatic of the mutual ignorance and lack of understanding between the two countries. From the absence of the Portuguese newspapers in Spanish kiosks — which he attributes to petty-minded officials or unimaginative businessmen who have erected a barrier to distribution of the Portuguese press in Spain — he deduces the existence of 'tangible signs of indifference between brothers leading to a state of chronic irritation between the two countries.' He argues that 'these minor frictions feed general incomprehension, a widespread, morbid malaise' that has grown stronger in recent years.

Active reconciliation

The following episode also seemed significant to the author of the article, and is worth stressing: 'I am still asking myself how it was possible for a statesman like Felipe González to venture to Lisbon, in a plane full of ministers and top officials, without noticing the general lack of preparation for his visit, which would have passed off quite differently had the Prime Minister had at his disposal at least half a dozen Spaniards who know and understand Portugal and half a dozen Portuguese friends of Spain and Iberian cooperation capable of explaining what form events should take.'

Another point that he makes is that invitations to appear on Spanish television, like the selection of participants in round tables and meetings organised by cultural or official bodies, seem to be governed by political prejudice rather than objective criteria.

On the basis of these observations, Martins asks: 'What can be done to increase mutual understanding and cooperation between the two neighbouring countries? What can be done to help overcome the obstacles, dispel misunderstandings and put an end to this foolish anachronism?' He believes that, as a first step,

Spaniards and Portuguese must be made to think seriously about the historically shameful character of this persistent prejudice. ‘Anachronistic and historically shameful,’ he repeats emphatically. ‘And I weigh my words carefully.’

He goes on to argue that in an age characterised by reconciliation, such as that between China and Japan or France and Germany, the lack of understanding between Spain and Portugal, who have not been at war with each other for three hundred years, makes no sense at all. The achievement of European unity is an opportunity for active reconciliation, ‘burying history and its poisonous prejudices’. ‘In a European context,’ he adds, ‘our two peoples can be the best of neighbours and a shining example of peaceful coexistence. For beneath it all the Spanish and Portuguese peoples are close friends.’ Given this opportunity — as he sees it — all the governments of the Ten, and the European administration in Brussels, are hoping that we shall come to an understanding and ensure that our entry into the EEC is smooth and effective by resolving any outstanding issues bilaterally, without recourse to Community bodies.

‘Are we Spaniards and Portuguese not mature enough to get on as neighbours?’ he asks. In his view, ‘both sides are to blame. The Portuguese are unjustifiably distrustful and need to understand how to talk to Spaniards with the desire to achieve something new, rather than raking over old grievances. The Spaniards are unjustifiably contemptuous; they need to be aware of Portuguese difficulties and to understand that, although weaker, their neighbour has a great deal to offer in an alliance.’

Reciprocal trade

Martins argues that trade between the two countries needs to be placed on a new footing. Franco German relations could serve as a good example since, after the OPEC countries, it is with Germany that France has the greatest trade deficit. At present, taking the figures for the first half of 1984, the OPEC countries are Portugal’s main creditors, accounting for 50 % of its trade deficit. The United States comes second, with a further 28 %, and Spain is third, with 9 %. As for the balance of trade between the two countries, during the six months in question Spain exported to Portugal more than twice as much as it imported. The result was a balance of 150 million dollars in Spain’s favour — not very much in itself, but an enormous burden on the shaky Portuguese economy.

Given this situation, Martins believes that Spaniards should make an effort to focus on the problem and see the advantages of reversing the trade deficit by locating production units or commercial structures in Portugal so as to promote exports of Portuguese goods to European countries. He argues that both countries should strive to take maximum advantage of the economic area constituted by the combined population of Portugal and Spain, which totals almost 50 million and would put us in the group of EEC countries with the largest markets. The synergy thus generated would ‘speed up economic progress in both countries’. But none of this can happen unless we are convinced that ‘the first duty on both sides of the political frontier is to break the historical taboos and embark on the task of full economic and institutional cooperation.’

There are other interesting suggestions in Martins’ long article, which I have tried to summarise objectively. I believe that it raises issues that deserve the thorough consideration for which he is calling. To that end, we must step up contacts of all kinds (some of which have already been initiated). The development of closer relations will encourage much more intensive Portuguese-Spanish cooperation and help us prepare jointly for accession to the EEC.

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