

'The new EEC and Spain' from El País

Caption: On 17 December 1985, the Spanish daily newspaper El País outlines Spain's position following the disappointing outcome of the European Summit held two weeks previously in Luxembourg.

Source: El País. 17.12.1985. Madrid. "La nueva CEE y España", auteur:Leal, José Luis , p. 11-12.

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Last updated: 05/07/2016

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The new EEC and Spain

As was to be expected, the results of the Luxembourg Summit were modest; it did not mark the decisive step forward for which some people had been hoping. At the previous Summit in Milan, the aim had been to give fresh impetus to European Union by thoroughly exploring the possibilities for creating a genuine common market in Europe, abolishing individual states' right of veto in Community bodies and giving more power to the European Parliament. All that ought to be taken for granted years after the Treaty of Rome, which already assigned priority to creation of the common market (now renamed 'European area' in a semantic slight of hand) and provided for majority voting rather than unanimity. So what has happened in the intervening years to make it necessary to rewrite the Treaty of Rome today? Some progress has been made with regard to European integration, but so slowly that, contrary to the theories of the mathematicians, the European Achilles has not caught up with the tortoise. There is sufficient reason to think that the renewal of the European idea which we saw in Milan reflects awareness of a new European reality. Only a few years ago it seemed possible for Europe to catch up with the American standard of living. We were convinced that, except in a few limited fields, European technology was at least equal to that of the United States. We thought that we had discovered the secret of economic growth and the redistribution of wealth. Almost none of that conviction remains today. We see the United States and Japan forging ahead towards the post-industrial society while the old nations of Europe seem content to rest on their laurels. If it does nothing to remedy the situation, Europe will remain enmeshed in the industrial society, the prisoner of a world that it was able to invent but from which it is apparently unable to escape. Fifteen or twenty years ago it was still possible, from the point of view of production, to think in terms of national markets. Today that illusion has vanished because the bar has been raised much higher. Computers, aircraft, telecommunications systems — everything that brings us nearer the post-industrial society — has to be conceived in terms of world, or at least continental, markets. Hence the urgent need to create a genuine European common market that conforms to both the letter and the spirit of the Treaty of Rome. The first to demand this are the most advanced sectors of European industry, who consider the narrowness of their national markets and the insuperable differences in national regulations as a serious threat to their own existence. Until very recently, governments, often more concerned with day-to-day problems than with fundamental issues, preferred to sacrifice the long to the short term. The Milan Summit and the launch of the Eureka project, followed now by the Summit in Luxembourg, may perhaps mark the beginning of a change in attitude to the problems and hopes of a new era.

It is impossible to say how long it will take for good intentions to become practical realities. For Spain, this period is of crucial importance, because the task is to speed up a process that seemed to have come to a halt. If accession to the EEC requires a great effort in the second scenario, it is not hard to imagine the extent of the adjustment process that the first scenario would require. In Luxembourg, Spain backed the most European proposals, which may mean that we are disposed to move quickly towards the full integration of markets.

The argument is twofold: for Europe there is no possible alternative to the full and rapid establishment of a genuine common market, and for Spain there is no possible alternative to integration in Europe. So we are about to move forward much faster than could have been foreseen a few months ago. We must realise that it will require a much greater effort than hitherto to mobilise all the forces in Spanish society. In this period of crisis and difficulty, pursuit of a European destiny depends solely on our own determination.

Published in the Opinion section of the daily newspaper *El País* on 17 December 1985. Byline: José Luis Leal.