

'In its response to the EEC on agriculture Spain rejects the step-by-step approach but allows for the possibility of transitional periods' from El País (22 March 1984)

Caption: On 22 March 1984, the Madrid daily newspaper El País analyses Spain's position in the negotiations relating to the entry of its agricultural products to the European Common Market.

Source: El País. 22.03.1984. Madrid. "La respuesta agrícola de España a la CEE rechaza el sistema de etapas, pero acepta la posibilidad de períodos de transición", auteur:Ortega, Andrés.

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In its response to the EEC on agriculture Spain rejects the step-by-step approach but allows for the possibility of transitional periods

Andrés Ortega — Brussels

The Minister for Relations with the EEC, Manuel Marín, yesterday presented to the Ten the Spanish response to the Community declaration on agricultural issues. Marín himself acknowledged that it added little to the initial Spanish position presented in January 1982 and that now a negotiating strategy focusing on 'the art of the possible' was being pursued. Although in principle it rejects the step-by-step approach to the integration of Spanish agriculture, the Spanish document opens up the possibility, subject to agreement on a wide range of technical details, of real negotiations with the EEC by accepting the principle of differentiated transitional periods for agricultural integration. Despite the crisis at the Brussels European Summit, negotiations between Spain and the Community are continuing.

Spain says nothing in the document about the length of the transitional period (the EEC proposed 10 years), although it allows for the possibility of a longer transition over and above a reference period on some issues such as the conclusive alignment of prices or the trade monitoring system. The Spanish Government is seeking the removal, immediately upon accession, of all current discriminatory measures against Spanish exports to the EEC, starting with lower prices. It also wants the European Economic Community to adopt a position on olive oil and refuses to accept a specific system which monitors the production of wine solely in respect of Spain. It is also requesting access to the EEC's social and structural funds in the sector, which is of great importance for the development of various Spanish sectors.

Spain does find some positive points in the EEC statement, principally in the form of the system for monitoring agricultural trade between Spain and the Community. But it wants that system to be balanced. And if the EEC attempts to put the brake on imports of Spanish fruit and vegetables, Spain, in accordance with the principle of equilibrium, would similarly put the brake on imports of continental Community products (milk products, cereals, meat and others), the weakest sector in Spain. That is the thrust of the document, the intention of which is to reshape the Community proposal.

By insisting on the gradual opening up of markets on either side, Spain is accepting that there are sensitive areas on both sides and is seeking to maintain a slow rate of growth in respect of its imports of sensitive products at the beginning of the transitional period. That opens the door to differentiated periods for the transition, given that if the EEC allows this system for Spain it will seek a similar rate of growth for Spanish exports of fruit and vegetables. That marks the point where the document focuses on the art of the possible, although Spain is seeking a uniform, uninterrupted period of transition. The EEC was offering a step-by-step or phased approach to the integration of Spanish agriculture, but Spain has rejected it.

Third-country treatment

However, in the first four-year phase proposed by the European Economic Community, Spanish fruit and vegetables would not have access to the real heart of the Common Market: the price guarantee fund. Spain rejects this third-country treatment and is seeking progressivity in the system of Community interventions.

France is willing to make the concession. The northern European countries are not. The cost to the EEC would be low at first, given that prices are lower in Spain for most products. In principle, Spain has only 6 % of the system of producer organisations required for the common agricultural policy to apply. The document indicates that access to the intervention funds of the European Economic Community would be an incentive to develop those organisations.

As far as prices are concerned, the position of the Spanish Government is inconsistent. It wants its farmers' incomes to rise, but it does not want to spark off inflation. Accordingly, the alignment of Spanish prices with Community prices will be slower at the beginning of the transitional period, particularly during the first two marketing years, than at the end of it.

Some loose ends were tied up at yesterday's negotiating session, the Euratom chapter was closed and progress was made on patents. No new Community position is anticipated on agriculture before June. But negotiations are continuing. Marín is insisting on the three principles of equilibrium, progressivity and reciprocity.

Accession — a self-contained issue

For Marín, the failure of the Summit was a 'shame', as it would have represented 'a psychological rather than an effective spur to negotiations.' However, 'the paradox has arisen where the accession dossier is acquiring a significant degree of self-containment and its own pace as against internal EEC issues, although it is affected by them.'

At a press conference, the President of the European Commission, Gaston Thorn, indicated that the failure of the Summit would not delay the negotiations with Spain, but neither would it speed them up. The breakdown of the Community would not make anything easier.

Thorn stated that 30 September still stood as the date for concluding the negotiations, as did the connection between the accession of Spain and Portugal and the new financial resources for the EEC. He said that it was widely known how much the EEC needed the new resources and that it was not in the EEC's interests to drag things out *ad infinitum*.

By contrast, the President of the European Commission welcomed the initiative announced by François Mitterrand to combine the efforts of those members of the EEC who wish to rescue Europe, especially those who wish to see a Europe based on the Treaty of Rome.

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