

'Spain must come in' from The Guardian (26 June 1982)

Caption: On 26 June 1982, British daily newspaper The Guardian reports on France's hesitations over the question of Spanish accession to the European Communities.

Source: The Guardian. 26.06.1982. Manchester: The Manchester Guardian and Evening News Ltd. "Spain must come in".

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Spain must come in

The EEC's Brussels summit at the beginning of next week should at least help to clear the air over Spain's application to join the Community. President Mitterrand's recent speech in Madrid did not amount to an outright "non", though he can have left none of his audience in any doubt about the difficulties which the French administration envisages. Taken together with the reported remarks of Mr Andre Chandernagor, France's EEC minister, there is now a distinct corpus of hints that France is about to exercise another De Gaulle veto. The effects within the Community and within the fledgling democracies of the Iberian peninsula are likely to be dramatic.

France's worries are understandable enough. Spain has more vineyards than any other country in the world, and its competition in what is already an area of fierce Italo-French rivalry is of acute concern in the Languedoc-Roussillon. The Languedoc, which adjusts Spain's Mediterranean coastline, is the producer of most of France's plonk and the fear is that financial support at present levels would become prohibitive if Spanish plonk producers were to join the party. The Languedoc, moreover, exercises considerable political pull in Paris, since it is one of the few regularly returns left, of centre representatives. Because of its anticlerical and Protestant traditions, the area is full of marginal socialist and communist seats.

That is nevertheless a bullet which most people in Brussels had hoped President Mitterrand would bite just as the Germans have muffled their worries about Spanish immigration. France may, as she has done in the past, be playing a game of bluff in some hope of extracting further EEC support for her Mediterranean farmers. If that is so, it is a shallow and nasty game. As long ago as 1978, France and Italy won an expensive package of measures designed by the then agriculture commissioner to assuage French fears. Brussels now doles out subsidies for grabbing up old vines, and subsidies for planting more up-market varieties. The system of price support for wine – and fruit and vegetables – has been substantially improved since Spain's initial application to join the Community way back in 1977. In short, France's partners have bent over backwards to meet its justified concerns.

It would be idle to pretend that there is presently an ideal climate for the integration of Spain and Portugal into the Community. High unemployment and recession make every government less willing to take risks, a fact which is apparent in the paralysis of the EEC's institutions. But the French would be pitifully short-sighted to ignore the benefits which Spanish membership might bring, especially to the Midi. It is not so long since industrialists on both sides of the Pyrennean frontier talked of a new sunbelt of prosperity between Toulouse, Bilbao and Barcelona.

It would be worse than short-sighted, too, to ignore the importance which Spain's democrats attach to EEC membership as a guarantee that they have exercised their political poltergeists. Barely a year ago, Madrid's young parliament was stormed by the men on horseback. President Mitterrand must not abandon the wider objectives on which the Community was founded and to which it must remain committed. If he puts a lake of vin ordinaire ahead of a rock of democracy, then history will not forgive him.