

'Greece and Europe: a moral obligation, but ...' from La Libre Belgique (16 February 1976)


Caption: On 16 February 1976, the Belgian newspaper La Libre Belgique welcomes the positive decision taken by the Nine concerning Greece's application for accession to the European Communities, while describing the problems raised by this decision, particularly at an institutional and agro-economic level.

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Greece and Europe: a moral obligation, but ...

And so, the die is cast. One day or another, Greece will become the tenth member of the European Community. The Council of Foreign Ministers of the Nine decided so last week when it came out in favour of the Greek Government's application for accession.

It could not have been any other way. The Treaty of Rome makes it quite clear that the European Community is open to whatever country applies to join as long as it agrees to abide by the Treaty provisions. Greece has given just such a commitment.

Although the Council of Ministers' decision is therefore to be expected, it is no less significant, even in a sense astonishing. We were no longer used to the Council making such quick decisions. Some people went so far as to wonder whether the Foreign Ministers would not once again refer the question to the European Council. That didn't happen. And so much the better. What is more, by making this decision, the Council clearly rejected a new concept that the Commission wanted to introduce: 'pre-accession'. But the Council of Ministers' rejection of this notion does not mean that it has responded to the concerns which prompted the Commission to suggest it.

Greece's accession — it would be foolish to deny it — poses serious problems for the European Community.

The first is the fear of a significant dilution of the Community's political power. Obviously, it is more difficult for nine to make decisions than it is for six, and it will be more difficult still when there are even more of us. Mr Robert Ducci, former Director of Political Affairs at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, saw — besides this paralysis — two dangers in a further extension of the Community: the transformation of the Community into a sort of Council of Europe and the re-emergence of the idea of a core *directoire*, in the name of efficiency. Is it not strange that this idea was brought up again in France at the very time when the Council of Ministers, spurred on by Mr Sauvagnargues, was coming down in favour of Greece's accession?

Since 1972, Europe has been handicapped by institutional inefficiency because it could not or would not take the necessary measures to strengthen its institutions in time, i.e. before its enlargement. It must not make the same mistake today. In accepting Greece's application, the Nine must therefore agree once again to relinquish some of their sovereign prerogatives, this being the only real way of strengthening the Community's institutions.

Unfortunately, however, this is not the only problem raised by Greece's accession. There is also the dispute between Greece and Turkey. It is fair to assume that Athens, even if it denies it, intends to oblige the Community to take its side in its conflict with Ankara. And yet if Europe does not want to lose all credibility in its dealings with Turkey, with which it has concluded an Association Agreement, it must not head down that road. Europe has offered to mediate in the dispute but, until now, Ankara has always refused. The Council's decision is unlikely to encourage the Turkish Government to review its position. Quite the contrary. Consequently, all the Community can do is hope that the problem will be solved by the time Greece becomes a fully-fledged member.

It is, however, certain that if Greece were to declare its intention before joining the Community to settle, if not its dispute with Turkey over Cyprus, which is more an international than a European issue, then at least the Aegean question, the suspicions that some people harbour would be allayed.

The other problems, economic in nature, are equally important. Greece is obviously not at the same economic level as its future partners and, in a Community that is above all a common market, this poses enormous problems. In answer to this objection, Athens argues that the Community accepted Ireland, which is more or less at the same level. That is perfectly true. But is the Community in a position to take on two 'Irelands' without running risk of creating the 'two-speed Europe' that everyone claims to be against?

It probably is, but only by imposing drastic remedies on Greece, the effects of which are likely to take quite

some time to feed through. This seems particularly true of agriculture, which is one of the only sectors in which the Community has become a reality.

While the agricultural area in use in Greece amounts to less than 10 % of that of the Nine, 35% of the Greek working population is employed in agriculture, compared with 9 % in the case of the Community. Agriculture accounts for 16 % of the Greek national product, but only 5 % of the Community's. Output per person employed in agriculture is only 40 % that of a European farmer.

These discrepancies will pose enormous problems, especially as Greece's geographical position threatens to create certain difficulties with respect to the unity of markets, this being one of the pillars of European agricultural policy. And these difficulties, which are generating such strains in the Mezzogiorno and certain parts of Ireland, are likely to prove even more painful in Greece.

To adjust in a coherent way to the economies of its future partners, the sine qua non of a successful accession, Greece must carry out fundamental structural reforms. This is likely to take time and to be a painful process. But that is no doubt the price Greece will have to pay if it is one day, with its future partners, to influence, as Mr Karamanlis has put it, the onward march of history.

Even though it does not seem to derive any immediate benefit from this accession, Europe is ready to facilitate it. It has a moral obligation to do so. And it is certain that in the long term, Europe's material interest will come to match today's moral obligation.