

'EC enlargement: "Everything will change"' from Der Spiegel (8 April 1985)

Caption: In April 1985, the German weekly magazine Der Spiegel reviews the potential advantages and disadvantages of the enlargement of the European Economic Community (EEC) to include Portugal and Spain.

Source: Der Spiegel. Das Deutsche Nachrichten-Magazin. Hrsg. AUGSTEIN, Rudolf ; Herausgeber BÖHME, Erich; ENGEL, Johannes K. 08.04.1985, n° 15; 39. Jg. Hamburg: Spiegel Verlag Rudolf Augstein GmbH. "EG-Erweiterung: Alles wird sich ändern", p. 114-115.

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EC enlargement: 'Everything will change'

320 million people, a high concentration of economic power, the largest market in the West: the enlargement of the EC to include Spain and Portugal has been successfully completed. However, it also brings serious new problems for the Community, since over-production in agriculture, its chief evil, will increase even further, and the North-South divide will become even more pronounced.

It was as it always is when Europe temporarily wakes up from its gloom and gets itself ready to go: after the EC Summit on 29 and 30 March, at which the Community finally came to an agreement about the accession of Spain and Portugal after eight years of wrangling, widespread hopes were flourishing and comparisons of historic significance were being made.

In Bonn, Chancellor Helmut Kohl went into raptures about this 'historic stage' in the course of the Community's development: 'We are admitting two nations that were among those who have shaped the character of Europe.' The current President of the Council, Italy's Bettino Craxi, saw the sun rise again over the European Community after many years of gloom. 'The clouds have dispersed,' was his verdict.

France's François Mitterrand, who was, initially, not at all well disposed towards EC enlargement, was pleased that the Community had, after all, proved to be more than just a large free-trade zone.

The new EC structure is already looking impressive: once the parliaments of the 12 countries have ratified the accession of Spain and Portugal, there will be 48 million inhabitants to add to the present 272 million — totalling more than either of the two superpowers USA and USSR which have so much influence in Europe.

With the addition of Spain and Portugal, the EC of the Twelve is the largest market in the Western world and by far the greatest trading power in the world. Over 30 % of the gross national product of all the Western industrialised nations will then be produced in the European Community.

It seems that the new giant stimulated the despondent politicians of Europe. If we are to believe what they say, there is now a renaissance beckoning the EC after years of sheer unstoppable decline.

Can Spain and Portugal really be seen as stimulants? The two EC new boys have certainly contributed a great deal to the importance of the old continent in history, and the committed European from the Palatinate is certainly right about that. After all, these two countries were already world powers when most others that are today admitting them out of pity still had very little to say in the world.

However, the former imperial powers of Iberia are no more, and the two countries have long been missing out in the development of the modern age, having long since used up all their wealth.

The impoverished Iberians will therefore not, at least not initially, be able to contribute to a renaissance of a Europe that must compete fiercely against the USA and Japan. On the contrary, they both hope initially to profit hugely from the Community.

'Everything will change,' enthused the Prime Minister of Portugal, Mário Soares, in a radio and television address to his people after the conclusion of the treaty. 'We we are now joining one of the most dynamic groupings in the world, and in five years our country will be transformed.'

But there were already signs of the endless disagreements about olives, fish, wine and vegetables. However monumental the Europe of the Twelve might appear, the risks entailed by enlargement are, in fact, very considerable.

For Europe's permanent sickness — constantly increasing agricultural surpluses — will surely get even worse. The addition of Spain and Portugal means that the area of agricultural land in the Community will increase by 35 %. It is true that there will be an 18 % rise in the number of consumers, but the number of farmers will go up by more than one third.

Once they have become members, the two new countries will make re-negotiations necessary. The best way to do that was demonstrated long ago by Britain's Iron Lady, Margaret Thatcher, and by the eccentric Andreas Papandreou from Greece.

The accession means that the disparity in living standards in the Community becomes larger — between the richest regions and the poorest the difference is now in the ratio of seven to one.

How the EC is still supposed to develop a common policy for all in the face of such great contrasts is a complete mystery. The President of the Commission, Jacques Delors, already fears that the increased disparity between North and South could become an explosive issue for the Community, because the prosperous North simply cannot provide as much assistance as the South needs.

However, the chance to profit from the prosperity of the North was not even the main motive of the Spanish and the Portuguese for accession to the EC.

The change of direction towards Europe is 'the only salvation' for the ten million inhabitants of Portugal, according to President Ramalho Eanes, 'the only way to overcome the trauma' that was left behind by the precipitate de-colonialisation after the end of the Salazar-Caetano dictatorship just 11 years ago.

And Europe means even more to Spain than it does to Portugal, which did not discover Europe until after the revolution and the inglorious end of its colonial empire. According to the European politician Jon Gongoiti from the Basque Country, it was 'the greatest challenge we have faced this century'.

Once it was freed from the dictatorship of Franco, the fledgling Spanish democracy saw in the European Community the 'nucleus of a historic project', as Prime Minister Felipe González put it: the end of centuries of isolation during which Spain lived in spirit as well as in fact behind the Pyrenees.

It was, above all, the historic adversaries, France and Great Britain, who made Spain out to be a country of darkness, superstition, fanaticism and inhumanity.

As the patron of the Counter-Reformation, Spain lost contact with developments in the Europe whose emergence into the scientific age was inspired by Protestantism.

Even today, many people in Europe still like to see Spain as the counterweight to the over-rationalised technological civilisation of Europe — reduced to assets such as Carmen, Flamenco and Toreros.

The Spanish themselves have suffered not only from intolerance and having decisions taken for them by their rulers, including Franco, they have also suffered from a serious inferiority complex in regard to the more developed part of Europe. This meant that modern Europe came to be the model for the Iberian Peninsula, according to Prime Minister González a 'challenge for all'.

Unlike in Portugal, all political parties in Spain, even the Communists, have gone along with the Government in its long march up to admission into the EC, almost with enthusiasm. The true cost of the EC for Spain — apart from losses in agriculture and fisheries — is not being spoken out loud in Madrid for the moment: it means Spain will be compelled to stay in NATO.

In 1982, Madrid hastily became a member of NATO in order to prove its 'unreserved commitment to the West' — and this was against the wishes of the majority of the population. Felipe González, who was an opponent of NATO himself at that time, promised a referendum on remaining in the alliance — and now he has to win in this referendum.

For the Heads of Government of the powerful EC Member States have made it clear to Spain at every opportunity during the course of the negotiations that the new Member States could not benefit from the advantages of the Economic Community without contributing to its defence.

Without the certainty that the referendum scheduled for March 1986 would have a positive outcome for NATO, the parliaments of the European countries, who still have to ratify the accession of Spain and Portugal, would be unlikely to say yes. In the autumn, González intends to launch an advertising and information campaign about the alliance.

His most important argument in it will be the admission of Spain into the EC.