

'Europe says "Yes" to Greece' from Le Monde (11 February 1976)


Caption: On 11 February 1976, the French newspaper Le Monde describes the implications of the Council decision not to impose a pre-accession probationary period on Greece.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Fauvet, Jacques. 11.02.1976. Paris: Le Monde. "Le «oui» de l'Europe à la Grèce", p. 1.

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Europe says 'Yes' to Greece

The outright and massive 'Yes' that the Council of the Community gave to Greece on Monday is a 'historic event', according to Mr Karamanlis. The Community, it is true, is hardly short of such occasions. Historic for Greece, from now on sailing with the European fleet, but the event is even more so for the Community, whose course is being steered in an unpredictable direction.

Greece, since 1962 an Associate Member of the Community, applied last year to become a full member, not only for economic reasons, it had several political motives too: its accession will strengthen its position vis-à-vis Turkey. In accordance with the provisions of the Treaty, the Commission delivered its opinion: unfavourable to a swift accession, it wished to impose on Greece a 'pre-accession' period. However, the Council decided to overrule the Commission: Greece's application was declared admissible without conditions, as France and West Germany, amongst others, had wished.

Like the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark, Greece will not have to meet any preconditions but will benefit from transitional periods once within the Community. Some people no doubt think that, by dragging out the accession negotiations, they will be able to offset this. Yet the example of the preceding 'enlargement' shows that, when the political will is there, negotiations, even if they do not actually resolve them, do at least manage to have technical problems put to one side.

The Council's decision is a snub for the Commission. At a time when, with the Tindemans Report, discussions about the reform of the institutions are being resumed, several governments, in particular that of France, are not displeased to see an institution which the 'supranationals' would like to see as the 'government' of Europe put its 'technical' place.

To delay Greek accession, the Commission put forward three arguments: its economic backwardness, the ongoing conflict with Turkey, and the danger of successive 'enlargements' that follow each other too rapidly for the Community to absorb. The first argument is not irrefutable: Ireland's standard of living is no higher than that of Greece. The second was a real annoyance to the governments: the Commission is exceeding its mandate, claim the most displeased, by taking a stance on international problems that lie outside its remit.

That leaves the third argument. The Community was founded by six continental States. The accession of three further countries has already changed its nature. No one, however, could raise any lasting objection to the entry of countries where the standard of living is as similar to the 'Continent' such as the United Kingdom and Denmark. As for Ireland, it was impossible to detach its future from that of the British economy. With Greece, however, a further step is about to be taken in the internal diversification of the Community, a diversification which, for a Mediterranean country like France, does not have only disadvantages but which will nevertheless make true economic integration impossible, to say nothing of the political integration as dreamed of by the 'founding fathers of Europe'.

Now that Greece has been admitted, the Community will hardly be able to keep it closed later when, once a democratic system of government has been established, Turkey, Portugal and Spain come knocking too. The conclusion is clear: either Europe becomes a miniature — but equally powerful — version of the UN, or it will have to resort to a 'Directorate', as Mr Giscard d'Estaing thinks, or else a 'multispeed' Europe, as is proposed by Mr Tindemans.

The Treaty of Rome states that its signatories are resolved to establish an 'ever closer union' between Europeans. The Nine have just decided to establish an ever larger union.