‘Greece is proving no easy partner and is causing many problems for the EEC' from Le Nouveau Journal (17 December 1980)

Caption: On 17 December 1980, the French daily newspaper Le Nouveau Journal outlines the problems which will arise for the Common Market when Greece accedes to it, particularly because of its economic situation.

Source: Le Nouveau Journal. 17.12.1980. [s.l.]. "La Grèce se révèle un partenaire peu commode et pose de nombreux problèmes à la CEE".

URL:
http://www.cvce.eu/obj/greece_is_proving_no_easy_partner_and_is_causing_many_problems_for_the_eec_from_le_nouveau_journal_17_december_1980-en-2118c6d5-edaa-45d5-8896-8d671fbb537a.html

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Tenth member of the Common Market

Greece is proving no easy partner and is causing many problems for the EEC

Nineteen years after signing an association agreement with the EEC and five years after negotiations on full accession began, Greece will officially join the Common Market on 1 January next, thereby becoming its tenth member. Five years ago, the then Prime Minister, Konstantinos Karamanlis, had already referred to Greek accession as the greatest event of the 20th century.

Today, some serious questions are being asked in the Community bodies, prompted above all by the fact that the new Greek partner is turning out to be even tougher than the British. This emerged clearly enough last week in Brussels when a number of specific issues relating to the five-year transitional period had to be settled. The exorbitant demands coming from their Greek colleague provoked an angry response from the other nine Agriculture Ministers, who could only conclude with some bitterness that Greece's accession had, perhaps, not been sufficiently well prepared.

In a report submitted on Monday in Luxembourg to the European Parliament, the Committee on Agriculture also made the point that more time ought to have been taken to study the immediate, tangible implications of Greek accession.

While approving the Commission's proposals seeking to amend the prices, applicable to Greece as from 1 January 1981, of certain agricultural products (cereals, rice, sugar, beef and veal, vegetables, fresh and processed fruit, wine, etc.), the Committee on Agriculture greatly regretted that the question had been considered in the absence of Greek Members, as they would have been in a position to provide useful guidance on the impact of the proposed measures and, in particular, the impact on the incomes of Greek producers.

The Committee noted that Greece would be more of a burden than anything else: a farming sector 20 years behind the times and employing 30 % of the working population (compared with 7.6 % in the rest of the EEC) on fragmented holdings, inflation at 15 %, per capita income lower even than that of Ireland, a currency not quoted on the foreign exchange markets … this will all have to be 'digested' in a difficult economic situation and at a time when the entire Community machinery seems to have seized up.

It should be noted that on Monday, but this time in Brussels, the Tunisian Foreign Affairs Minister, Hassan Belkhodja, raised with the Nine the issue of Common Market enlargement and called for Tunisia to be consulted in accordance with the 1976 EEC–Tunisia Cooperation Agreement. The most serious problem, in his view, relates to olive oil exports from Tunisia (41 000 tonnes a year to the countries of the Common Market).

An extra burden

The entry of Greece raises many other problems, too.

So it is that, as from January, staffing levels are set to rise at the various Community institutions in Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg as some 500 Greek civil servants, politicians and linguists join the ranks of existing personnel. The bulk will go to the Common Market Commission, a body with a staff of 8 000 which proposes and ensures the implementation of Community policies.

The highest ranking Greek official will be George Kontogeorgis, who has been appointed Commissioner. It seems likely that he will be given the transport portfolio, given the size of the Greek merchant navy, which accounts for 68 % of the EEC's entire merchant fleet.

Greece will also have 24 out of the 410 seats in the European Parliament and a judge at the Luxembourg-based European Court of Justice.

Initial controversy has centred on the question as to which political groups the Greek MEPs will join in the European Parliament. The two main groups — the Socialists and the Christian-Democrats, with 113 and 107 members respectively — have already offered the new MEPs various committee positions, but they have preferred not to commit themselves.

Another minor conflict concerns the share that Greece will receive of the Community's Regional Fund in the 1981 budget. Athens is asking for 15 % of the 850 million dollar fund, while the other Member States are proposing a 13 % upper limit. This is a foretaste of what may be in store when Spain and Portugal accede in their turn.