

## 'Spain could join Council of Europe in 1978' from El País (9 October 1977)

**Caption:** Published in the Spanish daily newspaper El País on 9 October 1977, the article sets forth the conditions for Spain's accession to the Council of Europe and the main stages in the admission procedure.

**Source:** El País. 09.10.1977. Madrid. "España podría ingresar en el Consejo de Europa en 1978", auteur: Vilaró, Ramon.

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**Last updated:** 05/07/2016

## Spain could join Council of Europe in 1978

Ramon Vilaró, Special Envoy, Strasbourg

On Monday and Tuesday next week the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, sitting in Strasbourg, will play host to a committee of Spanish MPs. On Tuesday the Parliamentary Assembly is expected to approve a six-point resolution inviting the Spanish Government to apply for full membership. The resolution will be submitted to the Council of Ministers, the European body that will decide at the end of November in favour of inviting Spain to become the Council of Europe's 20th Member State. The official joining ceremony could take place during the Council meeting scheduled for late January 1978. The Spanish delegation, formed by MPs and senators from all the political parties represented in the Spanish Parliament, will be chaired by the President of the Congress, Fernando Alvarez de Miranda, and the President of the Senate, Antonio Fontán. The principal leaders of the political parties are expected to attend – Felipe González, Santiago Carrillo, Raúl Morodo, Manuel Silva Muñoz, and others.

Point four of the draft resolution on Spain's accession to the Council of Europe is particularly important. This states that the assembly expects the new democratic Constitution in Spain to be adopted rapidly and applied without restriction, a point the experts believe Spain will have to resolve before joining. Elections and formal recognition of most political parties is not enough – a democratic Constitution guaranteeing such freedoms is required.

The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly's initiative to back Spain's accession originated last July at the meeting in Belgium. It was agreed to give the British Conservative minister, Paul Channon, responsibility for producing a report on the situation in Spain. Mr Channon visited the country in mid-September to interview senior members of the Government and political parties. He was accompanied by the chairman of the policy committee of non-EEC European countries, the Swiss Liberal Hoffer, and other Council of Europe members.

In its 77 points Mr Channon's document describes the five main aspects of the current period in the Spanish State as a whole: a) the new democratic institutions and political activity after the elections; b) plans for revising the Constitution; c) the trade union and economic situation; d) the regions; and e) Spain's European vocation.

Mr Channon's report on the situation in Spain frequently refers to information and editorials published in *El País*.

The many difficulties Spain is experiencing, particularly in the economic area, have not allowed Parliament the luxury of dedicating itself exclusively to drawing up a Constitution, though the Government's most important decision arising out of the elections is arguably to give priority to drafting a new Constitution to replace the range of 'Fundamental Laws' passed in the Franco era, the report states.

One of the Council of Europe's foremost tasks is to ensure that Member States comply with democratic principles. During the colonels' dictatorship, Greece was obliged to abandon the Council of Europe because of lack of respect for democracy in the country that created these principles. Portugal did not become a member until 1976, after democratic elections and constitutional reform.

The Parliamentary Assembly's draft resolution welcomed the unanimity expressed by all the Spanish political parties in their belief that Spain should adopt the ideals of the European Convention on Human Rights and the democratic ideals of the Council of Europe, and went on to reiterate its hope in a democratic Constitution.

Mr Channon's report states that at political level the Government's decision to reform the Constitution represents a genuine gesture of reconciliation towards the leftist opposition that has always sought a constituent assembly (as in Portugal) and a desire to dissolve the Spanish Parliament after a constitutional referendum, despite the fact that it was elected for four years.

The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly's hope and desire to have a new Constitution in Spain before it joins the Council of Europe is not, however, a totally essential condition. A negotiated compromise, with sufficient guarantees, could be the middle way that would facilitate Spain's membership of the Council, even before the Spanish Parliament approves the new Constitution.

Published in the daily *El País* on 9 October 1977 in the Spain section. Author: Ramon Vilaró.