

'Spain and Maastricht' from El País

Caption: On 17 November 1991, one month before the meeting in Maastricht of the Heads of State or Government of the Twelve, the Spanish daily newspaper El País deplores the fact that the Spanish Government's proposals have not been accepted in the preparatory negotiations and takes a pessimistic view with regard to the conclusion of the Treaty on European Union.

Source: El País. 17.11.1991. Madrid. "España y Maastricht".

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Editorial

Spain and Maastricht

Just three weeks before a vital summit of European Community Heads of State or Government in Maastricht, prognoses for the outcome are rather pessimistic. The participants' mandate is clear: agreement must be reached on two draft treaties, on the one hand, on economic and monetary union, and, on the other hand, on political union. For once, the Member States will not be able to extricate themselves with a mere communiqué (which on previous occasions has undoubtedly been very useful for Community progress) or with instructions for future negotiators. What is more, the new Treaties must be ratified by the respective parliaments. Spain, one of the most fervently pro-European Member States, is facing the challenge under very difficult (and particular) circumstances that threaten to put fundamental concepts of its Community membership to the test. It is clear, on the one hand, that the Government wants the treaties to result in a genuine European union, with a common foreign and security policy, that will pave the way for monetary union and confer greater powers on the European Parliament and the Commission. At the same time, however, it is absolutely crucial for Spain that the principle of cohesion, approved in the 1986 Single Act, should play an essential role in the new treaties, no longer in rhetorical terms and official declarations but in specific measures laid down in the articles that guarantee their application.

Spain and the other less developed countries should be given a Community funding deal that takes due account of its current level of development. If Spain had to pay the EC more than it received in return, it would create a situation totally unacceptable to the general public because they would be incapable of seeing the advantages of the system. The Government has submitted specific proposals to ensure that this cohesion is coordinated and that methods are devised, as regards income and expenditure, that take account of Community members' levels of relative wealth.

To date, the main Spanish proposals have not been taken into consideration at the Community negotiating table. They do, nevertheless, include a principle inherent to Spain's membership of the EC. These are not fanciful or easily relinquishable demands. This makes the rejection of the Spanish principles at the Foreign Ministers' meeting in Noordwijk last weekend rather more than a failure, no matter how much the Government, having to screw up its courage, has reiterated Spain's European credentials and the desire not to undermine the success of Maastricht with 'untimely' vetoes. This does not mean that it is acceptable for the other EC countries to ignore its demands or simply respond to them with a declaration equivalent to the usual 'kind words'.

On such a problematic issue, one that was likely to put serious obstacles in Spain's way, it is difficult to understand why the Government has acted without really consulting Parliament. France and the United Kingdom will hold debates in their Parliaments next week, so that their Executive and the other EC Governments know what MPs are thinking *before* the Summit. The Spanish Government's position of not giving Parliament and the public the opportunity to take part in the major debates on Europe — or of doing so only after the fact — and of being economical with information has always suggested a certain mistrust towards both. In present circumstances, this is doubly negative: a Spanish position is at stake that no longer needs to be defended in terms of national interests but rather so that our own Europeanism does not eventually lose its fundamental reason for being. Time is short, so the Executive should make effective use of it.

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