

CONFERENCE
between the European Communities
and Greece

First meeting at Ministerial level

Statement by the spokesman of the Communities,
Mr Max VAN DER STOEL, Minister,
President in Office of the Council,
on the occasion of the opening of
the negotiations for the accession of Greece
to the European Communities
(Brussels, 27 July 1976)

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Council of the European Communities is very happy today to welcome the representatives of Greece in a new legal context, although all present will be well acquainted with this setting.

There is no need to remind you that the establishment of formal relations between the Community and Greece goes back fifteen years since it was on 9 July 1961 that the European Economic Community together with the six Member States which made up the Community at that time, on the one hand, and Greece, on the other, signed an agreement establishing an Association between them.

In the Preamble to that Agreement the Parties recognized that "the support given by the European Economic Community to the efforts of the Greek people to improve their standard of living will facilitate the Accession of Greece to the Community at a later date", and under Article 72 of the Agreement the Parties also undertook to examine the possibility of the Accession of Greece to the Community "as soon as the operation of this Agreement has advanced far enough to justify envisaging full acceptance by Greece of the obligations arising out of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community".

On 12 June last year, less than a year after democracy was restored to the country, Greece officially applied to accede to the European Economic Community, the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Atomic Energy Community, in accordance with the provisions of the three Treaties concerned. On 9 February of this year the Council of the European Communities gave the application a favourable reception.

On this historic day which sees us gathered together for the official opening of the negotiations on Accession, the hopes which we expressed fifteen years ago are beginning to materialize.

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All too often the prospects for the future outlined by our predecessors - pragmatic and realistic though they may have been - have suffered the consequences of unforeseeable circumstances. In the present case, however, we have a design for the future which has stood the test of time and has survived difficulties - often of the most serious nature - which those who drew up the Association agreement could not have foreseen. Greece's loyalty to the European idea has proved unshakeable, and the Greek people's spontaneous feeling that their place is within the Community is evident to us all.

On 30 June 1970 in Luxembourg, at the opening of the negotiations with the first four countries to apply for Accession to the Communities - three of them have since become an integral part thereof - my predecessor, Mr HARMEL, said, and I adopt his remarks as my own, that in addition to the material aims and their favourable social results for our peoples, the entry of countries which were rich in long parliamentary and democratic traditions, would reinforce the central nucleus of Europe. He emphasized that this central nucleus was more than ever necessary to the idea of total Europe; in Europe we must maintain and reinforce a type of civilisation and a political system which we do not aspire to impose on any State but which in our eyes is the best guarantee of liberty and of the progress of our peoples. He added that other States might perhaps gather around this nucleus in due course, thus taking part in an enterprise whose institutions are founded on the freely expressed will of the people.

These ideals have always been, and still are, relevant, especially in the wake of the decisions which the European Council has just taken concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage.

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Recollection of these ideals will give you an even clearer appreciation of the extent to which we shared in the joy and relief felt by the Greek people when, in 1974, democracy was restored to the country which had been its cradle. We were glad to be able, as a result of those events, to resume our work with you in pursuit of the objective which we had set ourselves in 1961, namely the forging of ever closer links between the Greek people and the peoples of the Community.

This official opening of our negotiations is therefore much more than simply a further step along the road we charted in 1961. It marks a leap forward which justifies our availing ourselves of this occasion - when we shall be telling you of the specific framework within which these negotiations are to take place and how, on our side, we intend to conduct them - to express in particular our satisfaction and our eagerness that progress should be made.

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1. As you know, the Institutions to which you wish to accede are involved in a process of continual evolution; the Communities which are now opening negotiations on Accession with you are living Communities.

You will therefore not be surprised that we, for our part, intend to conduct the negotiations on the basis of the principle that your State accepts the Treaties and their political objective, the decisions - of all kinds - taken subsequent upon the entry into force of the Treaties and the options taken as regards the development of the Communities - in short, what we call the "Community patrimony". The resulting obligations, which Greece will have to meet, cover an area which has become extremely wide. In this context I would like to point out that within the Community we have since 1958 achieved customs union and have defined and

implemented the common agricultural policy and the common commercial policy. The Community has also been endowed with a system of own resources. Considerable progress has been made in the sphere of social policy. A regional policy has been introduced and its results are proving positive. We have also made progress with the harmonization of legislation in a large number of fields. Only a few days ago the European Council affirmed the need to ensure a higher degree of convergence of economic and monetary policies.

But above all, each of us has succeeded in gaining a better understanding of its partners and an awareness of the problems with which they are confronted.

The Community patrimony also covers all the external commitments entered into by the Community. The Community has concluded Association Agreements not only with your country, but also other countries in the Mediterranean; these agreements also provide for the possibility of establishing even closer relationships with these countries in the future. At the time of its enlargement, the Community also concluded free trade agreements with a number of European countries. It has introduced and furthered, for the benefit of developing countries, a system of generalized preferences which may in time be further improved. Furthermore, it has opened its markets to almost all African countries and to certain countries of the Caribbean and Pacific and is granting them assistance. There is no doubt that this policy must be further pursued. The Community has also completed or is on the point of completing the negotiation of a series of agreements with most of the countries of the Mediterranean, as part of its policy of an overall Mediterranean approach.

Furthermore, steps are being taken or will of necessity be taken, in order to achieve the objectives which the Community set itself in the Treaty of Rome, the signatories of which, in their resolve to lay the foundations of ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, adopted as their essential objective the constant improvement of the living and working conditions of their peoples and called upon the other peoples of Europe sharing their ideal to join in their efforts.

For this reason, enlargement of the Community can be conceived of only as a further contribution to the strengthening of this process of continuous creation and not as a process of weakening or dilution of its institutional structures and of its scope for action.

2. As a consequence of the first principle, which I have just described, underlying the Community's action, it is incumbent upon the Community to make it clear that the rule which must perforce be observed in the negotiations is that the solution to any problems of adjustment which may arise on either side must be sought through the establishment of transitional measures and not through changes to the Community rules.

These transitional measures, the purpose of which is to facilitate any adjustments necessary as a result of enlargement, should be so designed as to ensure an overall balance of reciprocal advantages; they should, as a general rule, incorporate detailed timetables and their duration could, if desirable, be varied according to the subject matter.

3. Finally, the negotiations will be conducted at all levels and for all problems, according to a uniform procedure, by the Community, within the framework of a Conference between the Communities and Greece.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The enlargement of the Communities which we wish to achieve together will offer to our enterprise new dimensions and new prospects. We can but glimpse these prospects at present; we must ensure that they lead to a Europe which will be attractive to our peoples not only from an economic point of view but also from the point of view of human, social and cultural values.

I am certain that our views, together with the declarations which you have already made or will make in the future, will serve as a firm foundation for the negotiations.

I have described to you some of our thoughts at this initial stage of our work. This statement could not be exhaustive nor could it touch upon all the problems which will arise during the negotiations. I am thinking in particular of the specific problems surrounding accession to the Treaties establishing the ECSC and Euratom, matters which were not covered by the Athens Agreement.

The task which awaits our negotiators is vast, if only on account of the number and the complexity of the matters to be discussed. I am nevertheless convinced that these negotiations will succeed, thanks to political resolve to make every effort to reach agreement.
