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CE&C

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GREECE/EEC: FRENCH VIEWS

1. When I took Mr Cormack to see M. Villemur this morning we concentrated on Greek entry to the EEC on which Villemur, who is evidently engaged in an in-depth study of the problems, foresaw a number of difficulties.
2. Though he welcomed the setting of a date at last for the formal opening of Greece's entry negotiations, he was worried by the vagueness of the phrases used to reassure the Irish about concessions to be made to the Turks. It would have been better to have been much more precise. The concessions were unimportant in themselves but the precedent was very important and would be used by Cyprus and later by Spain and Portugal. At the same time he could not see what could possibly be given to the Turks which would satisfy them either in terms of finance or of freedom of movement.
3. He foresaw another period of pressure by the Greeks on timing of signature of their entry documents in about two years' time. The negotiations would take two or three years. The earliest they might be concluded was about July 1978, which meant that if Karamanlis intended to go to the country on the basis of their success the timing would be tight (the latest date for the Greek general election is November 1978). Another major factor in Greek minds was the importance of Greece's being a full member before the opening of the Spanish negotiations, since so many of the two countries' products were competitive. They had however now seen the danger that their bargaining position would be weak if they were seen to be in a hurry and he had noted that Mr Hattersley had said in Athens that it would be a mistake for Greece to accept EEC membership on any terms.
4. M. Villemur found it difficult to see what was to be done about Greek agriculture. This was a particularly difficult problem for France. He was preparing a study on the subject and was gravely handicapped by the extraordinary lack of statistics. He agreed with Mr Cormack that when the Greeks produced what they said were the facts and what they said were the statistics that backed them up, it was difficult to see how we could double check. M. Villemur wondered if in fact certain statistics existed at all. The French had noticed that when they tried to extract statistical information the Greeks became very secretive.

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5. He was also concerned about the very small number of Greek Civil Servants who understood the magnitude of the problem they were facing. There were only three or four people who did so and who took all the decisions. Varfis for example had complained that he could get nothing at all out of the Ministry of Agriculture beyond a bland statement that "there were no problems". It looked as if Kyriazis (Deputy Governor, Bank of Greece) was going to lead the negotiations but it was not clear that he had the necessary width of expertise. It appeared there was going to be no separate Minister detailed to conduct them because the three or four sufficiently senior to do so had no intention of removing themselves from the internal political scene.

6. Finally, Villemur expressed reservations very similar to those held in this Embassy about the extent to which the highly inefficient Greek bureaucracy was capable of gearing itself up to make the necessary efforts. The "dossier" for new entrants these days contained some 40,000 documents; it was hard to see the Greeks translating these and disseminating them in any systematic way. Commission documentation had grown into a sort of monster which Greece, unlike Ireland, would have to face all alone and not on anyone else's coat tails. Yet many Greeks did not see themselves as part of a state machinery in the modern sense; ideas of social security and centralised planning were alien to them.

*[for Franco-Greek relations]*

7. Answering the question, M. Villemur also made it clear that he recognised the considerable dangers inherent in the extent to which the Greeks were relying on the French as their advocates at the present stage of the negotiations. But only a very few senior Ministers, including Karamanlis, realised that there were going to be stages in the coming bargaining when French and Greek interests would be clearly opposed.

*P. Verker*

P W M Vereker

13 July 1976

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