

INTERACTION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE SPANISH  
CIVIL SOCIETY DURING THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE  
ACCESSION OF SPAIN INTO THE EUROPEAN UNION

*Raimundo Bassols Jacas*  
*Ambassador of Spain*

## **1.- General Considerations.**

Western countries have established themselves and developed over the last two centuries in the model of the Nation-State, founded on national sovereignty. Civil societies from these countries have been educated and conditioned to respect and fully accept the principles and symbols of a sovereign Nation. They are sharply nationalistic civil societies.

The Economic and/or Political Integration processes that have been attempted and established, to different degrees of success and intensity, during the second half of the last century in Europe, Latin America and Asia, have implied alterations of varying extents in exercising sovereignty in the States that have opted to join an integration model. Therefore it has been necessary to illustrate to the civil society, which is so identified with the concept of sovereignty and nationalism, that both concepts subside or tend to disappear in their own country, on behalf of supranational institutions from the new Community. These supranational institutions, in time, and with the evolution and consolidation of the corresponding Integration Organism, direct and govern the new union of countries that have chosen to become integrated.

It is a fact that some Economic Integration processes require a transfer of national sovereign competencies in favor of their own Supranational Institutions. This is the case in Customs Unions, Common Markets, Economic and Monetary Unions, and in their day Political Integrations. Even if such sovereignty transfers may be slowed down or postponed, they will have to be accepted when integration reaches maturity.

Other Economic Integration processes of a different magnitude, such as Free Trade Areas, maintain their character as Intergovernmental Agreements, with no explicit transfer of sovereignties. But even in these cases, there is in fact a reduction in the liberty to legislate and a necessary increase in harmonized and eventually dependent behaviors, even if they are not administered by a Supranational Institution.

The experience in these situations, gathered during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reveals that western civil societies, educated and developed under the sovereign Nation-State principle, undergo a sense of anxiety and insecurity in a partial loss of national sovereignty in favor of Supranational Institutions, which in the end must come with an Economic Integration process and its future development.

Such anxiety and insecurity of civil society in the circumstances mentioned may produce resistance against those changes that surely will be introduced by the Economic Integration process, even if the changes prove to be convenient. It is possible that there arises a visible loss in popularity and affective accession towards the process, within those generations educated under the Nation-State principle. The creation of the European Union is a manifest example of this psychological situation. In spite of its remarkable successes and its solid development, it has not completely uprooted the nationalistic sentiment in older generations, nor has it generated unanimous European enthusiasm in the younger generations. The new European Union historically owes more to the political and economic needs it had to endure in the early stages, than to the enthusiasm and inclination of the peoples to be united.

All that has been said hints that Governments that aim to create or accede into a new Economic and/or Political Integration system must undertake a serious effort to convince civil society of the advantages of this process, to explain the inconveniences of isolating from it, so that, on its part and reciprocally, the civil society explains and clearly points out the harms it fears, the benefits and improvements it expects, the process and terms it desires, etc.

This interactive relationship between the Governments and their respective civil societies are the reason that motivates this paper.

## **2.- The Spanish Experience.**

### **2.1. Introduction and General Aspects of the Spanish Civil Society Information Program.**

Spain requested accession to the European Communities, now the European Union, on July 28, 1977.

Accession negotiations began on February 5, 1979.

The Treaty of Accession was signed on June 12, 1985.

The Spanish Administration determined that in the first five years, between 1977 and 1982, it was necessary to guide and convince the Spanish civil society of the advantages of our accession to Europe and learn, in reciprocity, the profound criteria of the Spanish civil society regarding the process's advantages and difficulties.

Since the beginning, in 1977, it was clear that the hypothesis of entering Europe, as referred to the political aspect, was shared by all political forces of the parliament, from left-wing to right-wing political parties, in the new Spanish democracy. This was an unprecedented event in the domestic policies of the eleven countries that preceded us in forming Europe and in entering the European Communities.

When the Spanish Congress of Deputies (*Congreso de los Diputados*) had to deal with this issue, on June 27, 1979, when the negotiations for accession had already begun, it approved a motion supporting the decision to integrate Spain into the European Communities, by 285 votes in favor against only 2.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "1. The Chamber has taken note of the communication of the government regarding the European Communities, the negotiation process and the consequences of integration.

2. It has heard the positions of every parliamentary group regarding these issues.

3. It expresses its support for the decision to integrate Spain into the European Communities.

4.- It requests the government to timely continue informing the Chamber, at the level of Commission, about the negotiations, and encourages it to conduct them with utmost firmness in the defense of Spanish interests.

5.- It asks the government to periodically inform labor and business organizations and other economic forces about the state of the negotiations.

But one thing was political support and another the informed knowledge the Spanish civil society needed to have about what our entry into Europe meant to its interests.

To orient civil society, the mentioned motion of Congress declared under paragraph 5: “request the government to periodically inform labor and business organizations and other economic forces about the state of the negotiations.”

During that time I was the Ambassador of Spain to the European Communities in Brussels. On September 21, 1977 in a letter addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain, I urged the creation of the Spanish negotiating team, while advising that one of its missions be to inform the Spanish civil society about the negotiation process that must conduct us to Europe.<sup>2</sup>

The Spanish government rightly decided to launch a wide Information Program for the Spanish civil society, to interest and engage the diverse economic, political and social groups in the country, in the great effort to adapt the Spanish society to the community facts and contexts.

It was correctly thought that a country’s entry to an Integration Organization produces consequences for almost every sector in its economic and social structure: agriculture, industry, social agents, banking, insurance, commerce, fishing, steel, transportation, regional politics, right of establishment, movement of capital, social affairs, customs union, patent system, own resources, political cooperation, etc.

Before going into the concrete measures of this Information Program for the Spanish civil society, it is convenient to mention in a few words something that at first

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<sup>2</sup> My book “*España en Europa*.” Editorial Estudios de Política Exterior S.A. 1995 page 207: “I believe it is urgent to name someone responsible for the negotiations and that this person forms the team right away, for the Commission’s opinion imposes a necessary and immediate intervention of the Spanish negotiating team. And this action, in my opinion, must urgently extend to the wide operation of integration as a whole and must include: a) negotiations with the Communities; b) coordination not only of the Administration, but also with the country’s large organizations, that is, with Chambers of Commerce, Employer Associations, labor unions, etc. and c) clear and convincing information for the country and public opinion regarding accession, its need, its advantages, inconveniences and difficulties.” (Letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Marcelino Oreja).

sight may seem like a contradiction. On one hand the civil society, the Spanish people, really, was as much in favor of entering Europe as the political class. To accede into the European Communities meant to leave the international isolation Spain had endured since the Potsdam Declaration in August 1956, to anchor democracy and to begin a stage of serious economic progress. These positive aspects were shared by most Spaniards. But, on the other hand, the negotiation process was complicated and the Spanish civil society was concerned about its launch and execution. They feared immediate damages to our industry, which was less competitive than the European industry, and they worried that the Europeans indefinitely delayed advantages for our agricultural sector, the free movement of our work force, and an increase in our possibilities to fish in communitarian waters. Therefore the phrase that really summarized the civil society's sentiment was coined: "Yes to Europe, but not at any price."

The Information Program's mission consisted in explaining that we were entering Europe and reassuring the civil society regarding the price we had to pay for this project.

Having been launched by other organs at first, this Information Program was in charge of, with noticeable success, the Minister of Relations for the European Communities, created in March 1978, and converted in 1981 to the Secretariat of State for Relations with the European Communities.

The team that was created for this Program had to face the following initial problems:

- ?? The civil society's ignorance regarding the possible and reasonable schedule of our accession negotiation to the European Communities.
- ?? The lack of information of the Spanish civil society on what other accession processes had been like, before the Spanish one (United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark). It was important to alleviate an

eventual Spanish “victimization,” explaining the vetoes and setbacks that these countries had suffered in their negotiations.

?? Need to explain with some clarity: a) what the European Communities were; b) what Spain’s accession to them meant in real terms, and what the complex negotiation process that was beginning must be; c) the political, economic, social and legal reasons that justified the option taken by the Spanish Government to enter Europe; and d) the horizon of eventual benefits and eventual submissions and losses that came with the negotiation, and, definitely, with our accession to the European Communities.

In addition, it was the first time a Spanish Government informed the whole society in depth, regarding a negotiation with such scope and content.

To develop this information program, three types of acts were selected, which were repeated in every Spanish provincial capital, except Madrid and Barcelona which, due to their size, required a different treatment.

The model acts that were held in every capital of the 50 Spanish provinces were as follows:

?? Meetings with professionals of the local media. They were not traditional press conferences, but extensive work meetings with the representatives from the press, the radio and television, to explain to them what the European Communities were and what they meant to us, and to provide knowledge that allowed them to treat the complex issue of Spain’s accession to Europe with adequate information and knowledge.

During these meetings a dossier was given to the journalists, which complemented oral information.

To establish information for the press, a direct information service for journalists was created within the Ministry of Relations with the European Communities, which was maintained until the end of the negotiation.

As the negotiation advanced, these meetings with the press multiplied, and in a sense they were enriched. Aside from these pedagogic and discussion meetings in the Spanish provinces, the Negotiator met in Brussels, after each negotiation session, with the Spanish press, radio and television correspondents from that city and briefed them about each negotiation session, excluding, of course, reserved and confidential issues.

?? Round Tables with economic circles –especially agriculture, industry and services- from each Province. These circles were oriented about the system of negotiation, the possible terms and the conditions judged desirable by the Government. These Round Tables gathered, at the same time, information about the specific reservations, desires and problems that concerned these economic actors at the possibility of accession. This was a valuable, interactive and very varied process, given that the different economies from the various geographical regions in Spain manifested, naturally, diverse qualms related to their respective productive processes. The summary of these provincial Round Tables was extremely useful for the negotiations and allowed them to discover the fears and needs of the various regions with different interests among them, in the process of integration. It was, definitely, a continuous poll of the economic sectors that felt most affected by the imminent entry of Spain to Europe.

?? A public act in which the four basic issues in the public opinion were discussed: a) What were the European Communities? b) Why should Spain adhere to the Common Market? c) When would Spain's accession



to the Common Market occur? d) How would Spain's accession to the Common Market be?

?? Finally, at the beginning of the Information Program Sessions, the Department of Inquiries was created within the Ministry of Relations with the European Communities, whose mission was to handle questions about community and political institutions, Community Law, etc.

?? The executors of the Information Program prepared three basic papers they developed in the Program's execution Sessions. The first dealt with the present and future of the European Communities, their institutions and achievements. The second with the history of the Spanish-Communitarian relations. The third paper developed various basic ideas about the manner in which Spain's accession to Europe could affect local economies and the Spanish economy as a whole.

The organization of these Sessions and this Program in all of Spain was supported by the Spanish Superior Council of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Navigation, as well as by the Confederation of Public Savings (*Confederación de Cajas de Ahorro*). Both Organizations very efficiently cooperated in the project's success. Consequently, the team from the Ministry of Relations with the European Communities was enriched on many occasions, with experts in community issues from the European Communities Committee of the Superior Council of Chambers.

As a visual aid and to enliven the Sessions, 3000 posters were placed in strategic locations in each province.

In parallel to the Information Program acts, the Minister of Relations with the European Communities and later, when the charge disappeared, the Secretary of State for Relations with the European Communities that substituted it, received representatives from the opposition political parties, Employer representatives and from the Unions, after every negotiation meeting at the ministerial level, in order to explain

to them its development, favorable or negative results that had been produced and the current affairs.

## 2.2. Motivations, Opportunity and Objectives of the Information Program for the Spanish Civil Society.

### 2.2.1. Motivation of the Sessions.

The basic notions that preceded the sessions' orientation stemmed from the following considerations:

?? Spain's accession to the European Communities was not simply a negotiation with foreign powers; rather it distinctly affected the Spanish domestic life, since it was a process that inevitably would lead to transference of competencies in favor of supranational organisms.

?? The Spanish Administration desired that the various society groups and the public opinion learned the general lines of the negotiation process and felt associated with it. It was not convenient that the negotiations were conducted in a laboratory, nor behind closed doors in the ministries, but rather in a close relationship with those who, definitively, were affected and benefited by Spain's integration into the European Communities, that is the economic and social sectors and every citizen.

### 2.2.2. Opportunity of the Sessions.

A few years back, Spain had left behind an authoritarian Regime, in which decisions regarding important issues for the citizens were taken unilaterally by the Government with no consultation, or with a directed consultation, and with unreliable results.

The transition to democracy ended that situation, which damaged such legitimate rights as freedom of speech and freedom of information.

In the same way the new Constitution was submitted to national referendum, which substantially regulated Spain's legal system; it was considered that there had to be a period of information and transparency in the process of negotiation of our accession to Europe, which affected the Spaniard's economic, social and legal way of life.

The communitarian reality was very specific and transcended the classic framework of international commercial or economic relations.

The classic idea of different but related economic spaces disappeared in order to give way to a single integrated space. This new situation launched a great project that affected all aspects of life.

The Spanish citizens that had chosen and created a new democracy had to know, in the clearest possible way, that Spain was beginning a process of transfer of national sovereign competencies in favor of supranational Institutions, which demanded that they feel truly identified with the negotiation process, and informed by a democratic Government that completely departed from the previous political Regime. The negotiation had to rely on the double standpoint of the Administration and the citizens, which required for the latter a great effort given the technical aridness and difficult comprehension by the citizens. It did not mean that the negotiation was to be taken to the public nor conducted by plebiscite, but to prevent the separation of the new reality and the citizens, who in the end were to be the recipients of the new reality.

This spirit justified the opportunity for the Information Program, coinciding with the moment in which the Spaniards received and learned to use a new democracy.

### 2.2.3. Objectives of the Sessions.

The Information Program tried to achieve the following objectives:

- 1.- Facilitate impartial information regarding the Community, its operation, Institutions and achievements, explain the process, the system and calendars of the negotiation, and carry out a general balance of the problematic aspects and the positive effects in the accession perspective.
- 2.- Collect information on the agricultural and industrial sectors, on their concerns and the problems that the accession pose to them. This material was passed on to the negotiator as necessary information for his strategies.
- 3.- Press directly on the spirit of the public opinion. Personal contact was preferred over television programs which were too impersonal.
- 4.- Generate within the Spanish society an interest on the accession to the Community. Of course, it was not a matter of promoting excessive expectations or false concerns. Instead it was a matter of:
  - ?? promoting healthy concerns so Spaniards would get involved in the great political and economical action that was to come.
  - ?? facilitating the definition of business strategies in face of the entry to the European Community.
  - ?? increasing the efforts for an internal economic rehabilitation, to progressively adapt the Spanish economy to that of the Community.
- 5.- Improve information and contact mechanisms between the Administration and the various social, business, public opinion, or media sectors.
- 6.- Make it clear once and for all, as was expressed in the “Opinion” of the Commission, that the reason why Spain had not previously entered the European

Communities was due to political reasons. Once these reasons were overcome, the time had come to contemplate the accession from the point of view of the interests and the economic and social difficulties between Spain and Europe.

### 2.3. Conclusions regarding the Information Program.

In order not to make this memorandum unnecessarily long, it is enough to point out that the described contact with the civil society was useful to:

- ?? Reflect upon the consequences that the entry of Spain to the European Communities would have on the political, economic and social sectors.
- ?? Promote the Spanish Administration's reform with a view to its adaptation and integration in Europe.
- ?? Fix in the civil society's conscience, that the road to enter Europe should not be hindered by problems like inflations, strikes, labor relations, energetic programs, stock market, etc.
- ?? Highlight the imperative need to restructure the economic and business sectors.
- ?? Adopt a communitarian mentality in Spain, in contrast to the traditional nationalist mentality.
- ?? Detect the repercussions of the European integration in the medium and long term and its effects on determinate regions and economic areas.

- ?? Get prepared to face the inevitable conflict between the concessions and the demands that had to take place, and were of the industry and agriculture.
- ?? Reflect upon the need to avoid that the excessive pressure by the political sector would produce difficulties to the economic sectors.
- ?? Multiply information actions, through the White Paper, as well as publishing technical documentation, sectorial studies, training seminars, television programs, etc.
- ?? To favor studies, in support of the negotiations, of sectors and very specific problems that multiplied during the course of the information sessions, especially in the following sectors: agricultural cannery industry; meat industry; corks industry; tomato concentrate industry; fish preserves industry, restructuring of the textile and steel industries; elimination of export licenses; policies regarding the importation of furs; modification of the National Industry Protection Law, acceleration of infrastructures in general; supposed communications Policy, and special attention to road transportations.

#### 2.4. The numbers.

According to data provided by the Ministry of Relations for the European Communities, between 1977 and 1982, dates during which the Information Program was developed, 2,593 symposiums, conferences and round tables took place in Spain regarding its accession to the European Communities, with more than 250,000 people attending.

The Ministry of Relations for the European Communities held in parallel, during the same period of time, 175 working sessions with labor unions and business organizations, 210 sectorial meetings and 4 seminars with journalists.

### **3.- The Spanish experience in view of eventual consultations with the civil society of Latin American countries, within the context of the negotiations for a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).**

The Spanish experience regarding the Administration - Civil Society dialogue, with the occasion of the negotiations of Spain's accession to the European Communities, was fully satisfactory. The results of such dialogue were very useful for the Administration and reassuring for the civil society.

However, the truth of the international life shows that not always experiences of this nature are transferable from one society to another, with the same results.

A great deal of the success of the Spanish case may be attributed to the need that the Administration and the civil society had to consolidate an understanding in a rising democracy; the unanimous feeling that our future was linked to Europe, both politically and economically; and to the conviction with which the Spanish people repudiated the international isolation it had suffered for so many years, and longed for the normalization of our international relations. Evidently these factors assured the dialogue's success.

It may be convenient to analyze the circumstances, feelings and opinions of the different Latin American countries, in view of the FTAA negotiation. Understanding that this issue is a basic aspect to foresee in advance the dialogue's success with the civil society in the different Latin American countries. Perhaps the system used may be similar to the one used in the case of the Spanish negotiations with the European Communities. But success will depend in part on other factors, and it is probably not convenient to take the Spanish experience literally.

Anyhow, and without venturing comparisons between the two cases, which may not be done lightly and that occasionally are wrong, my personal conviction, expressed at the beginning of these document, is inclined to believe that an integration process, be it of great complexity like in a Common Market or of certain simplicity, like a Free Trade Area, requires a good understanding with the basis, with the civil society, to be successful. But one case or the other, it is necessary for the communication to be, above all, pedagogic, so that the civil society knows where the process is heading to, so it may assimilate and comment on it more easily.

To end, I insist once more that the current nationalisms cannot pass on to the Integration Systems, no matter how different is its entity, without certain trauma.

In my opinion dealing with this trauma with patience, information and a well-conducted dialogue tends to visibly improve the understanding and the final results.

Madrid, July 2002