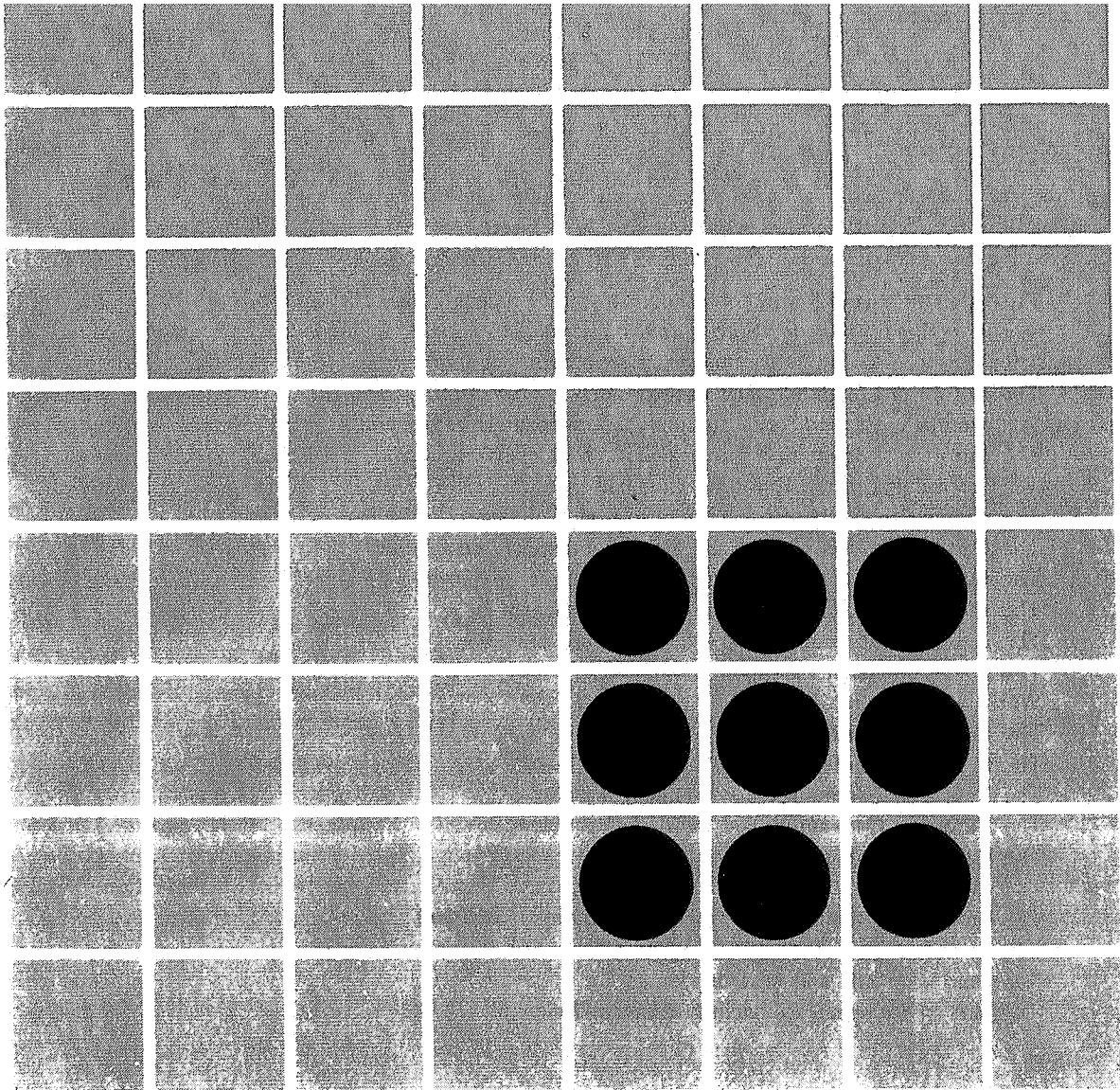


The second enlargement of the European Community



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Introduction

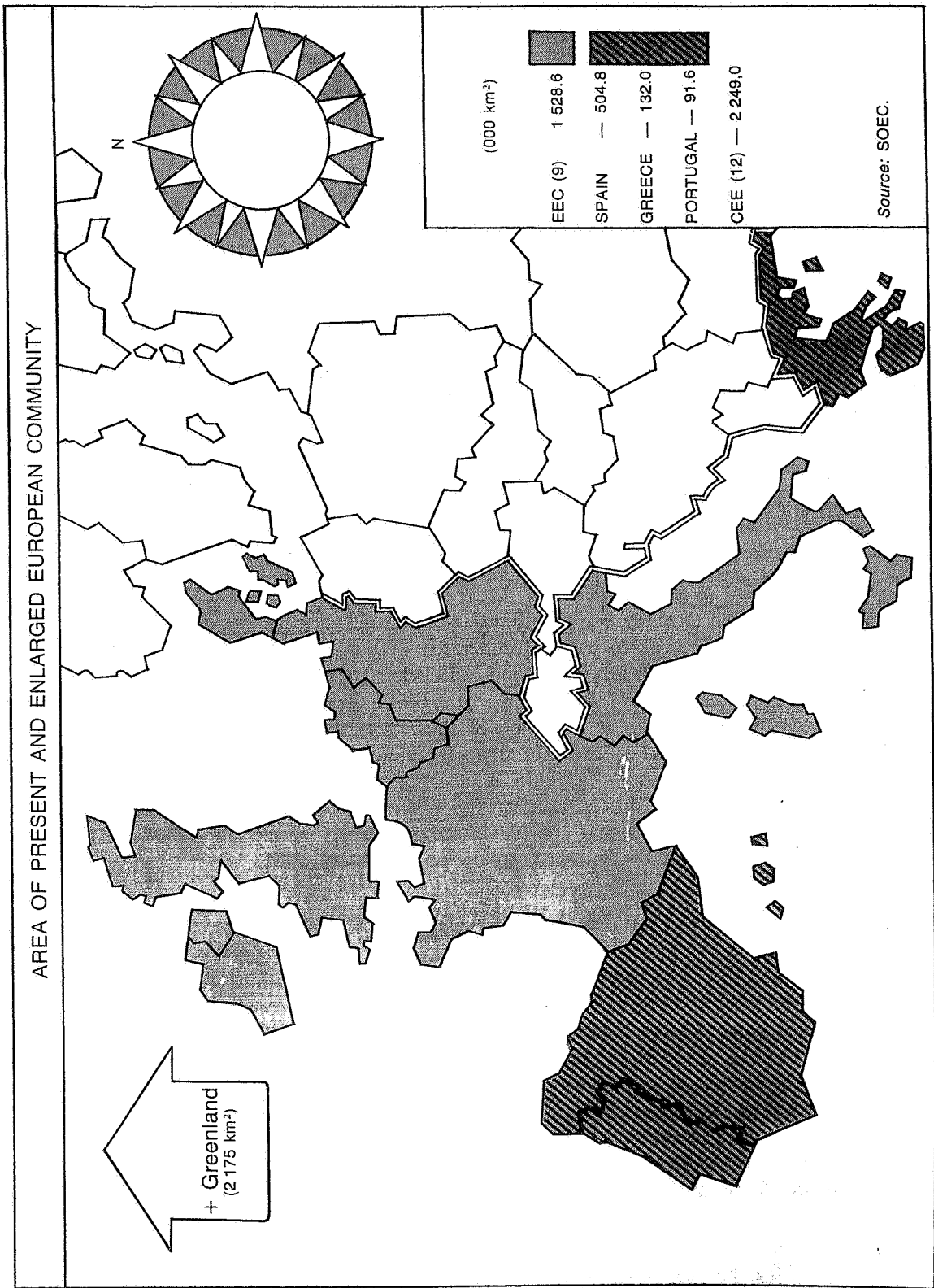
'When Greece, Portugal and Spain, newly emerging as democratic States after a long period of dictatorship, asked to be admitted to the Community, they were making a commitment which is primarily a political one. Their choice is doubly significant, both reflecting the concern of these three new democracies for their own consolidation and protection against the return of dictatorship and constituting an act of faith in a united Europe, which demonstrates that the ideas inspiring the creation of the Community have lost none of their vigour or relevance.' Thus wrote the Commission of the European Communities on 20 April 1978, in its 'General considerations on the problems of enlargement'.¹

This enlargement operation, the entry of three new countries into the Common Market, is first and foremost a response to political imperatives. Future historians of Europe will doubtless date the entry of Spain, Greece and Portugal into the European Community not from the official request for negotiations with the Nine, the completion of those negotiations or the signing of the accession treaties, but from the moment when those countries threw off the shackles of dictatorship and rejoined the mainstream of European life. Indeed, Greece, then under democratic rule, signed an association agreement with the Community back in 1964, as a first step towards membership of the Common Market. On 3 April 1979 it was announced that Greece's accession treaty would be signed by the summer, and that full membership would follow on 1 January 1981.

How does a country join the European Community?

It was with the political dimension firmly in mind that preparations for the second enlargement got under way. Broadly speaking, the procedure for a country wishing to join the Community is as follows. First of all, of course, the Government of the applicant country has to submit an official request: Greece's was dated 12 June 1975, Portugal's 28 March 1977 and Spain's 28 July of the same year. These applications were duly received by the Council of the European Communities, and detailed opinions on the three requests were prepared by the Commission. The opinion on Greece's application was delivered on 28 January 1976 and advocated that an affirmative response be given, while suggesting that the country should be allowed a preliminary period in which to carry out, with financial

¹ Supplement 1/78 Bull. EC, p. 6, paragraph 1.



assistance from the Community, a number of structural reforms to prepare its economy for the forthcoming integration with the economies of its future European partners. The Commission submitted its opinion on the Portuguese application on 19 March 1978, again saying that Portugal should become a member, and that negotiations should get under way without loss of time, but that Portugal should receive immediate help from the Nine for restructuring its economy. The opinion on Spain's application went to the Council on 29 November 1978. Again, the Commission called for a rapid start to the negotiations, coupled with cooperation, particularly on industrial restructuring, with the Spanish authorities.

The third stage is for the Council to decide, on the basis of the Commission's opinion, whether to give the go-ahead for the start of accession negotiations. Once this is done, talks can get under way. Negotiations with Greece opened in July 1976, with Portugal in October 1978 and with Spain in February 1979. These negotiations take the form of conferences composed of delegations from the Community and the applicant country, with the Council acting as the spokesman for the Community. The two sides meet once a month at ambassadorial level and formally every three months at ministerial level.

Once the negotiations are complete, the accession treaties have to be finalized and signed, and lastly, ratified by the national parliaments.

This might seem rather a leisurely way of proceeding, but the time allowed merely reflects the importance of the issues at stake.

The importance of enlargement

In the preamble to the Treaty of Rome, which gave birth to the European Economic Community, the founder members declared themselves 'Resolved by thus pooling their resources to preserve and strengthen peace and liberty' and called upon 'the other peoples of Europe who share their ideal to join in their efforts'. Therefore, once Spaniards, Greeks and Portuguese had taken the political decision to apply for Community membership, the Community could not very well refuse without denying the principles of its existence — or, for that matter, acting against its own interests. The nine Community countries are not unaffected by the political, economic and social stability of their European neighbours. The consolidation of democracy in Greece, Spain and Portugal is, therefore, a factor in the stability of the EEC as a whole.

The enlarged Community with its new southern dimension will also be able to carry more weight on the international scene; it will constitute the biggest presence on the Mediterranean seaboard, and will enjoy stronger links with South America thanks to Spain's and Portugal's special relations with that continent. The fact that the three applicant countries have not yet reached the same stage of economic development as the other EEC members undoubtedly raises serious problems, but should help change the Community's image, particularly in the Third World by making it even more unrealistic to talk of a 'rich man's club'.

In this context it is interesting to look at the new perspectives opened for the Community by the last enlargement operation.

