



## Lorenzo Natali and the first “tangible” steps towards the EEC Iberian Enlargement

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**Abstract.** This article claims that the EEC turned the challenge of Iberian enlargement into an opportunity to relaunch the European project. The text focuses on illuminating the under researched role of the European Commission during the presidency of the British Roy Jenkins (1977-1981). The common thread of the story is made up of the analysis of the work carried out by the commissioner for the Enlargement, the Italian Lorenzo Natali. Far from understanding the accession of Spain and Portugal as a problem for the economic cohesion of the EEC, as some member states raised at the time, Natali saw in it a stimulus to overcome the break following the first enlargement. The text shows how, following Natali’s strategy, the Commission linked the progress of the Iberian agenda to the resolution of the great challenges of the community: the establishment of a European monetary system, the completion of the Single Market, the reinforcement of the international role of the EEC and above all a political and institutional reform able to guarantee the Community to work with twelve member-states.

**Keywords:** Iberian Enlargement; European Commission; Lorenzo Natali; Economic and Social Cohesion; Spanish Transition; Carnation Revolution.

## [es] Lorenzo Natali y los primeros pasos “concretos” hacia la ampliación de la CEE a la Península ibérica<sup>2</sup>

**Resumen.** Este artículo respalda la idea que la CEE convirtió el desafío de la ampliación ibérica en una oportunidad para relanzar el proyecto europeo. El texto se centra en iluminar el papel hasta ahora poco estudiado de la Comisión Europea durante la presidencia del británico Roy Jenkins (1977-1981). El hilo conductor del estudio lo compone el análisis de la labor desarrollada por el comisario para la Ampliación, el italiano Lorenzo Natali. Lejos de entender la adhesión de España y Portugal como un peligro para la cohesión económica de la CEE, según algunos países miembros planteaban entonces, Natali vió en ella un estímulo para superar el estancamiento del proceso de construcción europea que siguió a la primera ampliación. El texto demuestra cómo, siguiendo la estrategia de Natali, la Comisión ligó los avances de la agenda ibérica a la resolución de los grandes retos de la comunitaria: el establecimiento de un sistema monetario europeo, la profundización en el mercado único, el aumento del peso internacional de la CEE y, sobre todo, una reforma política e institucional que garantizase el funcionamiento de una Comunidad de doce miembros

**Palabras clave:** Ampliación Ibérica; Comisión Europea; Lorenzo Natali; Cohesión Económica y Social; Transición Española; Revolución de los Claveles.

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**Summary:** Introduction. 1. European integration and the enlargement towards the Iberian Peninsula: general features. 2. The Jenkins Commission and the Iberian Peninsula. 3. Lorenzo Natali and the years of his political formation. 4. Focus on the Iberian Peninsula. 5. Enlargement to the Iberian Peninsula and its consequences for the European Community. 6. Conclusion. 7. References. 7.1. Primary Source. 7.2. Bibliography

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## Introduction

According to the most recent historiography on the European integration the Seventies were not a stagnant moment between the reconstruction period of the Fifties and the relaunch of the Eighties, on the contrary they were a decade during which the goal of deepening, completion and enlargement set during the Hague Summit in December 1969 contributed to the increase of awareness of the role the Community could play at international level, and changed the balance of power set in the international scenario after the end of the Second World War (Varsori and Migani, 2011: 5). Many volumes have been published on the role played during this decade by the supranational institutions and the member states to widen the common market, set common foreign and monetary policies and promote a reform for the institutions created in 1957 with the Treaties of Rome (Hiepel, 2014: 9; Druol, 2016: 409). The Seventies are with no doubt a turning point not only in the European History but in the broader one of the Cold War as well.

1973 was referred in Kissinger speech on the Atlantic relationship as the year of Europe (Kissinger, 1973:1). The decision taken and the balance of power settled in the framework of the transatlantic alliance of the postwar generation was over and new approaches were required according to the new challenges. Europe acquired its own economic stability and got many advantages from the economic integration. The Détente between East and West has already reached his peak with the agreement on Berlin, the Moscow Treaty and the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks. The relaxation of tension changed the Atlantic relationship. Even the beginning of negotiation on the CSCE – which led in August 1975 – to the signature of the Helsinki Final Act assigned a renewed role for the Old Continent. For the first time the EEC worked there as a single entity and the Community’s joint decision-making turned out to be more coherent than expected (Romano, 2009: 225). Ortolí Commission played a key role on the economic field and succeeded in smoothing the different positions held by the member states at the beginning of the negotiations (Gainar, 2012: 120). The results were not long in coming and by the end of the decade the creation of the European Monetary System, made the EEC to recover from the economic consequences suffered since the collapse of the Bretton Woods System.

We may state that by the end of the Seventies the EEC “came of age” and succeeded in detaching from the Atlantic sphere in everything but for the defence sector, upon which it fully remained dependent on the protection granted by NATO umbrella. Even as for its boundaries, the EEC has already been enlarged by the entrance of Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark and its new stance made it aiming always more eagerly towards the recognition of its independent role in the international setting. In

order to stress its new position, it tried to define more precisely its identity, to foster its external action, to promote a single voice in foreign affairs and to set a common monetary policy. Every step was taken bearing in mind the need to avoid the impasse the enlarged community could suffer.

The enlargement has already played a great role in the internal EEC dynamics, and along this article we would like to raise our attention on the meaning it has been assigned in the late Seventies. Together with the adjustment to the first enlargement the EEC opened its doors to Southern European countries. It was a way full of obstacles. Spain, Greece and Portugal came out from authoritarian regimes – they were not able to guarantee democratic stability –, and also their gross national product was lower than the average of the member states. All of them saw the entrance in the European institutions as a way to legitimize from outside their transition processes, to defend democracy from internal authoritarian threats and to start economic modernization and industrial reconversion plans.

Among the three countries Greece was in a better position. After the fall of the Colonels Regime, it recovered the status of associated member – frozen under the authoritarian season – and thanks also to its low and uncompetitive level of production, it had a faster access and joined the EEC alone in 1981. The other two Southern European candidates raised more concerns. Allowing their entrance could trigger a competition mechanism between old and new member states, especially in the agricultural sector. This issue made the EEC to carefully balance the initial and spontaneous openness to the Iberian new democratic systems. In spite of these considerations inside the European institutions there were some promoters of a fast Iberian Peninsula membership, who interpreted the enlargement as something very positive for the Community itself. Spain and Portugal were considered part of the Western bloc; they have already been linked to the Community by Preferential Agreements and connected with the Western defence area thanks to the Spanish bilateral agreement with US and Portuguese Atlantic Alliance membership. Defending these countries European integration for the first-time tribute to the EEC the role of democratic guarantee, increasing its international role and made the political project behind the integration process more clear.

This article will focus on the EEC perspective on the Southern enlargement, and it will claim that the EEC turned the challenge of Iberian enlargement into an opportunity to relaunch the European project. The text focuses on the under researched role of the European Commission during the presidency of the British Roy Jenkins (1977-1981). The common thread of the story is made up of the analysis of the work carried out by the commissioner for the Enlargement, the Italian Lorenzo Natali. Far from understanding the accession of Spain and Portugal as a problem for the economic cohesion of the EEC, as some member states raised at the time, Natali saw in it a stimulus to overcome the break following the first enlargement. The text shows how, following Natali's strategy, the Commission linked the progress of the Iberian agenda to the resolution of the great challenges of the community: the establishment of a European monetary system, the deepening of the single market, the reinforcement of the international role of the EEC and, above all, a political and institutional reform that would guarantee the functioning of the Community with twelve member states. The main findings are based on the archival research made at the Historical Archive of the European Union in Florence and at the Central State Archive of L'Aquila.

## 1. European Integration and the Enlargement towards the Iberian Peninsula: General Features

The talks for enlargement to Spain and Portugal underlined for the first time the key political role the EEC could play in the democratic consolidation of the applicant countries, a task already performed during the Greece's entry into the EEC. In March 1985 Spain and Portugal ended their long-lasting marathon towards European institutions and the membership pushed them and the already member states to approve measures to adjust to the enlarged EEC. Concerned about the consequences of the single market on their economic systems, the countries of the Iberian Peninsula obtained a seven-year transitional period for reducing tariff barriers in the industrial field, while for agricultural products, the "wealthier" Spain was given the same term, while the "poorer" Portugal managed to obtain up to ten years. As a Community guarantee to contain possible waves of migration, the Spanish and Portuguese were subject to a suspension, also for seven years, of free movement and access to the fishing zones of Northern Europe.

To date, the historiography has stressed that, in spite of the initial fears and the obvious development gap that existed between old and new members at the time of accession, entry into the European Community was essential for the success of Iberian political and institutional transitions. Since the creation of the EEC in 1957, the two countries, led by authoritarian regimes, even if not invited to take part in the creation of the Economic Community, looked at the changes that were taken place in the European framework and – after the entry into force of the Treaties of Rome – exploited the economic opportunities offered indirectly by the founding members to them (Moreno, 2000: 130; Moreno, 2004: 97; Guirao and Gavín, 2010: 173; Álvarez de Miranda, 1996: 213; Cavallaro, 2019: 123). The attention towards European institutions increased even more during their respective democratic transitions. Since then, Spain and Portugal started to look at the European institutions under a pro-active perspective: to be admitted into them became their primary goal, and in order to make it, the domestic governing forces comply rigorously with European principles and rules in their political programmes (Costa Pinto and Severiano Teixeira, 2003:3; Costa Pinto and Severiano Teixeira, 2012: 7; Magone, 2003: 21; Rollo *et al.*, 2015: 9). EEC took on a fully instrumental character, linked to the need for international recognition of the internal democratization processes that had taken place (Moreno, 1998; Guirao, 2021).

As far as the role played by the EEC in these transitions to democracy historiography is divided. Some historians underline that the political forces represented at Europe's supranational level played an active and direct role that began with the crisis of the authoritarian regimes, helping to trigger the Iberian Peninsula's democratization process (Whitehead, 1996: 261; Powell, 1996: 285); some others stress internal factors and see European institution as an indirect influence, which only denounced the human right violation without taking any political action against the dictatorship (Pridham, 1991: 212; Fishman, 2003:31); (Guirao and Gavín, 2014: 159). Recent analyses from the perspectives of both political science and contemporary history have plumbed the issue further, focusing on the timing of the action unleashed by the synergy among political figures, parties and trade unions on a national and international level, as well as business organizations and interest groups – also domestic and international – in order to assess the extent to which the synergistic action between the two dimensions amplified the results.

What even the most updated studies have paid less attention to thus far are the benefits the Community drew from the Southern enlargement, and the link that existed between the latter and the reform process initiated in the EEC starting in the second half of the 1980s. It was then that the Community, looking to the objective of expansion, implemented a virtuous dynamism that made it possible, all at once: to initiate the change of mechanism for allocating funds, especially those of the much-contested Common Agricultural Policy; to rely with increasing frequency on qualified majority voting system aimed at guaranteeing a broader circulation of goods in the European Economic Area; and to increase the powers of both the Commission and the European Parliament in the name of greater institutional balance. Focusing on the Community's internal balances, in the next paragraphs we will look at the role played inside the Jenkins Commission (1977-1981) – by the Commissioner for Enlargement, Lorenzo Natali – and the guidelines adopted by the EEC toward Southern Europe during this timeframe. This will cast light on how the intersection between the projection of a twelve-member Community and the adopted reform process overall helped overcome the impasse into which the EEC had fallen in the early 1970s.

## **2. The Jenkins Commission and the Iberian Peninsula**

A new Commission came into office in January 1977. To begin with, its President, the British Labour Party's Roy Jenkins, did not enjoy broad political legitimacy. Although his appointment had passed muster with the Giscard-Schmidt duo, his poor knowledge of Community dynamics and his arrival at the higher echelons of European leadership as a “consolation prize” for not being named Foreign Secretary – a position for which Prime Minister James Callaghan had chosen Anthony Crosland a year earlier – had weakened his image in Europe. His appointment occurred at the moment when, for the first time since the start of the Cold War, the Euro-Atlantic relationship, following the change brought by the passage from the Pompidou-Brandt to the Giscard-Schmidt administrations, was beginning to lose cohesion from the economic standpoint, and the Community was increasingly committed to the dual goal of structuring a foreign policy capable of achieving uniform external action, and of designing a common monetary and economic policy.

Although foreign and monetary policy, in line with the Werner Report in 1970 and the Tindemans Report in 1975, had become the main objectives of European institutions as a whole – and are to this day recalled as the cornerstone of the Jenkins Commission's proceedings – during that timeframe the hypothesis of enlargement to the Iberian Peninsula took on unprecedented importance, and was dealt with more concretely than had been the case in the recent past (Ludlow, 2014: 143). Unlike under the leadership of Ortolí (when activity related to Southern Europe had been wholly delegated to the Commissioner for External Relations, Christopher Soames), President Jenkins appointed an ad hoc Commissioner for Enlargement, the Italian Lorenzo Natali, while continuing to personally promote a strategy of rapprochement and bilateral meetings with the heads of the applicant countries' governments, showing the Commission's complete and ongoing willingness to open its doors to the new democracies of Southern Europe. To date, the activity in favour of enlargement to Southern Europe from 1977 to 1981 has been interpreted in parallel to market devel-

opment, and as secondary to monetary policy and maintaining social cohesion (Gilbert, 2003; Dinan, 2010; Cini *et al.*, 2010).

An overview of the various EEC negotiating tables during those years describes a more articulated image showing greater complementariness between these two spheres, and demonstrates how the allocation of funds to foster the principle of industrial conversion and of the modernization of productive plants throughout Community territory – along with the innovative idea of understanding available resources both as a source of development and as compensation for not creating imbalances – responded directly, not only to the objective of expanding the market and creating monetary union, but also to the new frontier of Southern enlargement.

The entry of Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark had not required an excessive effort to harmonize economic development between the existing Member States and the candidates. Although income was unevenly distributed within the three applicants' own national territories, the difference between their gross domestic product and that of the founding countries was negligible. Spain, Greece, and Portugal presented very different features. The candidates were leaving a long stretch of authoritarianism and had a gross domestic product less than half the EEC average. Their accession required redistributing regional development funds, strengthening the infrastructural networks and initiating industrial conversion programmes, in addition to assessing the impact that the Communitarian institutions would have after the severe test already experimented after the first enlargement (Varsori, 2017: 19). The aftermath of the entry of the northern European countries had seen a different allocation of regional funds; however, in the second half of the 1970s, progress had yet to be made in terms of institutional and policy reforms.

The Jenkins Commission was established under difficult conditions: the first consequences of the oil crisis – which had brought about sharply increased prices and unemployment rates – were being felt, and existing member States were at the same time showing resurgent protectionism and demanding increases in Community resources. Against this background, the new Commission started to grapple on a number of fronts with the challenges of a new enlargement, this time aimed at the more problematic Southern Europe. The central importance of this last objective can be seen in the large number of ad hoc tables that were constituted.

In the transition from Soames to Haferkamp, whom Jenkins chose for External Relations, the President opted, as mentioned, for an ad hoc Commissioner for Enlargement. He accordingly downsized the duties of the task force set up by Ortoli and led by De Kergorlay, in order to give greater powers and legitimacy to the role of new Commissioner Natali. He tasked Secretary-General Émile Noël with setting up a working group to examine the institutional implications of this enlargement, and, as a result of the meeting organized in La Roche-en-Ardenne in September 1977, the President instituted the weekly convening of the College of Commissioners and of the heads of the relevant Directorates General to discuss the expansion talks' progress. Although Spain's and Portugal's official requests were still in an embryonic state in comparison with Greece's, this Commission structured its activity from this moment forward with a view to the implications of enlargement in an overall perspective, including not only Greece, but the Iberian Peninsula as well (Ludlow, 2016: 148; Karamouzi, 2014: 38).

The Jenkins Commission would only see the conclusion of the Greek negotiation. The President officially visited Athens twice over the course of his term and demon-

strated the support of the assembly he led. During those years, he also paid several visits to Madrid and Lisbon, seeking to reactivate the negotiation when it was deadlocked. However, beyond the efforts made by the Commission, the member States – the real holders of Community decision-making power – maintained an attitude towards the Iberian Peninsula, particularly Spain, that was far more hostile than that shown towards Greece. Exemplifying the weight of the individual States on European choices was the interruption of the talks, proposed by Giscard in June 1980 to protect farmers in Southern France who feared competition from Iberian Mediterranean products (Trouvé, 2008: 313). The French position, better known in Spain as the “*Giscardazo*,” caused a slowdown that was to short-circuit the hypothesis of the Iberian Peninsula’s accession by the end of 1983, the year that been initially established (Trouvé, 2020: 59; Cavallaro, 2020: 107).

However, the failure to conclude the negotiation with Spain and Portugal cannot be considered an indicator of the Commission’s reduced commitment. To the contrary, in our opinion, it is an indicator of the power of the nation states and of the highly confederal nature of Community institutions during those years. Even after the *Giscardazo*, Jenkins continued to make clear statements advocating a rapid conclusion of the agreements with the Iberian Peninsula (Ludlow, 2016: 154). Whereas the President set the objectives since 1977, exercised a guidance function, and spared no declarations of encouragement in order to conclude the negotiation in progress as quickly as possible, Natali, the Commissioner for Enlargement, was the man tasked with transforming Jenkins’s guidance into political strategies.

### 3. Lorenzo Natali and the years of his political formation

Natali made his entry into European institutions in 1977, when his national political career was in some way solid. He was appreciated above all in the current of Fanfani’s Christian Democracy (DC), even if he had always been – on a local level in Abruzzo, his adoptive region – a second-tier figure. He had begun his political activity during the Italian Resistance; at that time a student in the law faculty and already an activist in Christian Democratic Party leading groups of the party’s youth organization. In 1943, he volunteered for the national liberation corps, and it was there that he consolidated the anti-Fascist values that were to define his political work, transposing them into projects for the reconstruction of postwar Italy.

From the current of Fanfani in general, and from Giorgio La Pira in particular, he inherited an interest in and sensitivity towards social issues and incorporated such concepts as Catholic solidarity and ethical finalism. From here, he developed the concept of international cooperation understood as the elaboration of projects in favour of less-developed countries or initiatives of economic or industrial recovery aimed at reducing the gap between the industrialized countries and those whose income was still mainly agricultural. He served within Italian institutions for seven legislatures from 1950 to 1977, before embarking on his career at the Commission (Jenkins, 1989: 663). Some of the offices he held in Italy gave him in-depth familiarity with the characteristics and dynamics of Southern Europe, and once inside the Commission, the experience made in his own country allowed him to deal more competently with direct or indirect problems connected to enlargement. From this standpoint, it is sufficient to recall his participation in various parliamentary enquiry

committees between 1950 and 1977. He served on the Committee for Unemployment in Italy between 1950 and 1953, on the Committee for Industry and Trade between 1959 and 1960, the Special Committee for the examination of the draft law concerning “regulation of interventions for the development of Southern Italy” between 1966 and 1968, and lastly the Committee for Foreign Affairs between 1976 and 1977.

His participation in government was also active; during the third Moro government, between 1966 and 1968 he served as Minister of the Navy and promoted shipyards and shipbuilding; in 1968 he went on to Public Works, where he devoted his efforts to major highways to link the then isolated Abruzzo region to Rome. Between 1970 and 1973, he held office as Minister of Agriculture. During his years leading this ministry, he managed to launch the citrus plan with a financial allocation of 200 billion lire, aimed above all at modernizing the sector in Southern Italy (Gramaglia, 2010: 19). In 1977, after amassing a fair amount of both legislative and executive experience within national boundaries, he embarked on his European adventure, not only serving as Commissioner for Enlargement and Environment, but also, in parallel, assuming the Vice-Presidency of the Commission itself (Jenkins, 1989: 15).

The EEC’s Member States, and in particular the leading figures in the first enlargement, had already set an order of priorities that complicated immediate action towards Southern European candidates. The Nine advocated a necessary reform process inside the EEC, covering both institutions and policy-making process, before opening up to new countries and, in light of the oil crisis in 1973, they opposed the petitions for talks from the new Iberian and Greek democracies. But despite this hostile national attitude, the Commission – bearing in mind the spirit and essence of the Treaties of Rome – showed a clear desire to explore Southern European requests. Since the Sixties the Mediterranean had played a central role in bipolar geopolitical dynamics but had remained somewhat sidelined in the European political landscape. In the Seventies, Spain, Greece, and Portugal, still led by authoritarian regimes, had signed agreements that in various ways – association in the Greek case, and preferential for the Iberian Peninsula – guaranteed them the possibility of maintaining sufficient trade relations with the European Community, but it was not enough to get out from their marginal condition. In April 1974, the landscape had suddenly and unexpectedly shifted. The outbreak of the Carnation Revolution had turned Southern Europe from a marginalized area into centre stage for Euro-Atlantic relationship: playing a new role in this scenario became a new frontier for the EEC. Promoting and guaranteeing the democratic consolidation of countries that, at the time, were initiating their own processes of political and institutional change, could foster the Community to play a more independent role in the bipolar context.

The Carnation Revolution, the fall of the Junta, and the death of General Franco had strongly destabilized the entire area, and the risk of the Communists’ taking power and the area’s subsequently slipping into the Eastern sphere of influence made the Mediterranean area to affect, not only the broad bipolar perspective, but also the Old Continent balance of power. The democratization processes underway in all the three countries followed different paths. But all of them saw EEC accession as a symbolic endorsement of the internal democratization that had taken place. This was the picture of the relationship between Southern Europe and the EEC at the starting of the Jenkins Commission mandate. In continuity with the time when the Commission was



driven by Ortoli the involvement in the external legitimization of the Mediterranean transitions was perceived as a moral duty; the novelty was that these processes were also associated to a way to increase the Commission's role in shaping the Community foreign policy. Interpreting Jenkins's political guidance and the strength of his role as Vice-President, Natali followed and deeply interpreted this moment as an opportunity.

In light of a strong decentralization policy promoted by his Commission, when appointed, he carried out a highly dynamic reform of Directorate-General VIII and bearing in mind the centrality of reaching a common foreign policy, summoned only career diplomats to join his cabinet staff; prominent among them were Paolo Pensa and Alessandro Vattani, who were appointed cabinet chief and deputy respectively<sup>3</sup>. He strengthened coordination and synergy between his staff and DG VIII for more effective action, and saw the two institutions not only as complementary, but as communicating vessels.

In an interview with RAI when he took office in Brussels, he stated, perhaps slightly cryptically, that he would contribute towards strengthening Europe both inside and out<sup>4</sup>. "We should work as European citizens and as Europeans in the world", he declared in that interview. During his term, the meaning of his words became clear. He mined the association between solidarity and welfarism and, taking inspiration from the principles of Christian social doctrine, proposed solidarity as an instrument to promote and develop the less-favoured regions and as mediation between social and territorial concerns, while at all times seeking a synthesis between the advanced northern economy and Europe's age-old Mediterranean culture. Internally, he worked on Southern enlargement and, synchronously, on reforming the decision-making process of European institutions. Externally, he concentrated on strengthening Europe's role on the global scene<sup>5</sup>. The more Europe could reduce the gap between its members in the northern and southern areas, the more its institutions would increase their influence as leading figures in the world's north-south dialogue. As Commissioner for Enlargement, he started with internal questions, creating a link between the two processes, which he interpreted as two sides of the same coin.

#### 4. Focus on the Iberian Peninsula

Both Natali and Jenkins were aware that this second enlargement would not merely require shifting expenditures from the CAP to the industrial conversion funds, as had been the case following the entry of the countries of northern Europe. Here, there was a need, not only for tax redistribution among the Member States, but also for an increase in the Community budget. From this perspective, Natali sought to grasp the differences in the matter of overall development, dealt with analysing the deficit-to-GDP ratio in the Mediterranean candidates, and promoted the drafting of numerous studies on various production sectors, from a comparative perspective. However, at

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<sup>3</sup> Central Archives of the State (henceforth ACS), Collection Lorenzo Natali (LN), Folder 12: Speeches: "EUI VIII Conferenza JEAN MONNET". Held by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Giulio Andreotti on the European Union.

<sup>4</sup> ACS: Collection LN, Folder 5: Speeches: "Natali, Commissario Europeo". RAI Interview 10 January, 1977.

<sup>5</sup> ACS: Collection LN, Folder 12: Speeches: "Intervento del Vice Presidente della Commissione delle Comunità Europee Lorenzo Natali, in occasione del seminario IPALMO sul tema della Convenzione di Lomé".

no point did he support the globalization of the negotiation out of a desire to have a unitary framework of reference. Quite the contrary: the Commissioner was in contact with the Spanish and Portuguese delegations, was well apprised of the situation and, once the similarities and points in common were highlighted, he exalted the differences to buoy those on the peninsula who feared a parallel and unitary negotiation (Cavallaro and Muñoz Sánchez, 2017: 395). From the beginning, Natali linked the hypothesis of enlargement to the concept of economic and social cohesion and looked not only to the consequences for the applicants but to those for the EEC as well<sup>6</sup>. The Commission's preparatory works, which were later to contribute to the famous April 1978 "Fresco", outlined, as early as the year of the Commission's establishment, the advantages and disadvantages of enlargement to Southern Europe<sup>7</sup>.

The advantages included the contribution to the growth of the EEC's external role and to the consolidation of the Community's Western alignment, as well as to expanding the market and lowering the average age of European citizens. Meanwhile, the disadvantages included the impossibility of putting off institutional reform, competition with the third countries lining the Southern shore of the Mediterranean and their progressive impoverishment, as well as the possibility of outbreak of social unrests in the area<sup>8</sup>. The analyses were not innovative. The gap in the economic development between the states already members and the candidates, along with the need to initiate an overall process of institutional reform, had already been highlighted by the previous Ortolí Commission. What did change, however, was the perspective. Given the situation, Natali interpreted this enlargement not as a threat but as a challenge, both to overcome the internal problems and deadlocks that had burdened the Community since the first half of the 1970s, and to reinforce its extra-European projection and raise the EEC's credibility as a global player<sup>9</sup>. The EEC's role in the Mediterranean became a key passage to this strategy.

As far as the Mediterranean was concerned, Natali immediately saw a positive and a negative outcome in Spain, Greece, and Portugal entering the EEC. The process would be more advantageous in terms of trade, since it would push more than 57 million consumers into the arms of the European market, discouraging them from seeking to redirect their trade flows to the East or to other industrialized countries; the disadvantage, however, would lie in the destabilizing effect that the Iberian Peninsula's membership would have on trade relations between the EEC and the countries of North Africa. The North African countries' trading deficit with the EEC was already high, and a reduced flow of exports from his shores to the EEC – as a result

<sup>6</sup> Historical Archives of the European Union (henceforth HAEU): COM (78) 630/9 Vol. 1978/0243 "Projet Avis de la Commission a Conseil concernant la demande d'adhésion de l'Espagne (présenté par M. Natali), (Observations de Direction générale du Développement); COM (78) 630/4 Note à l'attention de MM. Les Membres de la Commission".

<sup>7</sup> HAEU: COM (78) 120 European Communities Supplement 1/78: "Enlargement of the Community. General Considerations. General considerations on the problems of enlargement (Communication sent by the Commission to the Council on 20 April 1978).

<sup>8</sup> ACS: Collection LN, Folder n. 10: "Relazione Introduttiva" R. di Carpegna, Deputy Chief of Cabinet of the Vice President of the Commission, Lorenzo Natali. European Parliament –PPE group –Florence 30 August - 3 September 1982; "La politica Mediterranea" Speech of Natali, European Commission Vice President – European Parliament PPE group – Florence 30 August - 3 September 1982.

<sup>9</sup> ACS: Collection LN, Folder 12: Speeches "Speaking note del Vicepresidente Natali in occasione del Consiglio Europeo di Milano il 28 e 29 giugno 1985".

of Iberian competition – would further weaken the underdeveloped African economies<sup>10</sup>. Natali deemed it necessary not to present the EEC's relations with Southern Europe as an alternative to relations with the countries of North Africa. It was worth establishing strategies – and allocating new funds – to preserve trade relations with North Africa without neglecting the need to keep Spain, Greece, and Portugal well anchored to the European area. If, as the Commissioner would often say in public speeches and at meetings with his cabinet, the EEC missed this opportunity, it would confine itself to a secondary role on the global level. In order to avoid this, between 1977 and 1979 Natali's activity was strongly oriented towards developing the compatibility between expansion to Southern Europe and the maintenance of relations with the North African shores of the Mediterranean, as well as towards coordinating the enlargement strategy with those of the Commissioner for Agriculture, Finn Olav Gundelach.

The era of military control by a few powers had now passed; the Cold War, in the second half of the 1970s, was traversing the peak of *Détente*, and Natali interpreted this historic contingency, too, as an opportunity for the Community to open to the Southern Europe. By strengthening the Mediterranean *tout court*, with no specific distinction between the Southern European and North African shores, the EEC would ensure itself a phase of expansion for its market and develop a European neighbourhood policy more focused on increasing collaboration, at defusing tensions and containing a possible destabilization of the entire area<sup>11</sup>. Expressed in more schematic terms, the enlargement to Southern Europe was doubtlessly a factor of stabilization for the applicant countries, but also a long-term economic and institutional benefit for the Community. In order to convince his colleagues on the College of Commissioners, Natali placed much more emphasis on this second point<sup>12</sup>. To reconfirm this interpretation, the Commissioner for Enlargement also stressed that, as its “dowry”, a “Europeanized” Spain and Portugal would bring the Community a bridge to expand contacts with the Latin American continent, to which Spain was closely tied both culturally and economically, and with Africa, with which Portugal had maintained a constant relationship even after late decolonization<sup>13</sup>. If Mediterranean Europe were to manage to become a pole of attraction also for the developing countries on the Asian and African continents, from the global perspective, the EEC could take on an unprecedented key role in the North-South dialogue.

Compared to the changing, turbulent scenarios of the early 1970s, at the decade's end, Europe was increasingly developing the principle of multilateral diplomacy in continuity with the activity undertaken by the Ortolí Commission, strengthening commercial contacts with China, opening up to Japan and Yugoslavia, and initiating a negotiation that was to culminate in 1985 with the signing of trade agreements with

<sup>10</sup> ACS: Collection LN, Folder 11: Speeches: “Effetti dell'ampliamento sulla politica mediterranea della Comunità Europea”, Rodhes 2-5 May 1983 – PPE group – “Discorso del Vicepresidente Natali”, 7; Folder 5: “Progetto di intervento del Vice-presidente Natali. Apertura del Festival di Primavera della C.E. Amman, 27 Marzo 1983”.

<sup>11</sup> HAEU: COM(78)90 Vol. 1978/9004 “Rapport sur les problèmes économiques généraux liés à l'élargissement (Présenté par M.Natali).

<sup>12</sup> ACS: Collection LN, Folder n.11: Speeches “Effetti dell'ampliamento sulla politica mediterranea della Comunità Europea. Rodi 2-5 maggio 1980: Giornate di studio del PPE. Discorso del Vicepresidente Natali”.

<sup>13</sup> ACS: Collection LN, Folder n. 7: “Intervento del Vicepresidente Natali al XXI Congresso dell'U.E.D.C”, Lisbon 24 June 1980; HAEU: COM (78) 220 Vol. 1978/9006 “Projet D'avis De la Commission au Conseil concernant la demande d'adhesion du Portugal”.

the Comecon. Having overcome the storm of opposition with the United States following the first oil crisis, and the launch of the EMS, it consolidated its relations with Washington, while its role as stabilizer and promoter of peaceful coexistence in the Mediterranean area also augmented its projection towards Asia and the East. Above all, for Natali, the agreement with the People's Republic of China and the contacts with Comecon drew international attention towards the European Community and signalled the overcoming of the EEC's exclusively trans-Atlantic dimension, as well as its progressive interaction with Asia and the Soviet Bloc<sup>14</sup>.

## 5. Enlargement to the Iberian Peninsula and its consequences for the European Community

As already discussed, the promotion of the road to enlargement was associated with increased overall financial resources and with a redistribution of spending, but also with a project of both political and institutional reforms for the Community. EEC funding had to increase on three fronts: to the candidates, to the countries already members, and to the countries on the Mediterranean's African shores. In spite of the effort made since the launch in Spain of the Stabilization Plan (1959), at Community level, in the late 1970s, the Iberian Peninsula was still perceived mainly as a rural society. The objective of increasing budget spending in that area was to contribute towards its transformation into an industrial society. Launching structural policies made it possible to finance industrial conversion and the modernization of production facilities, as well as to promote social cohesion – an essential prerequisite, according to the Commissioner – for the full development of a common market. “Solutions that are socially inequitable and economically too demanding must be avoided,” he was wont to say, expressing his adversity to the hypothesis – espoused by many at that time – of a two-speed Europe<sup>15</sup>.

The ten member countries were also quite cautious; in the European Councils, they showed great political openness to Southern Europe, attention to the Community's moral duties, the will to defend liberal democratic principles, and devotion to the primacy of human rights as enshrined by the Treaties of Rome, but little desire to give up, in the name of European solidarity, part of the resources allocated to them. In particular, Italy and France masked their fear of losing funds behind the defence of supranational interest. To limit surplus increases and prevent price reductions in the EEC farm and fisheries industries, both hoped to limit the entry of (especially Spanish) products, raised the need to maintain a balance between extra-European exporting and the presumed exporting of the new members, and vociferously demanded maintaining the funds collected until that time in order to contain competition as a major effect of the enlargement on their economies. Last but not least, the possibility of a sort of compensation was also advocated for Africa's northern strip. This would be needed to prevent a higher trading deficit between North African

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<sup>14</sup> ACS: Collection LN, Folder 12: Speeches: “Speaking note del Vicepresidente Natali in occasione del Consiglio Europeo di Milano il 28 e 29 giugno 1985”.

<sup>15</sup> ACS: Collection LN, Folder10: Speeches: “La politica Mediterranea. Necessità di un nuovo impegno”; Speech of Lorenzo Natali, European Commission VicePresident – European Parliament PPE group – Florence 30 August - 3 September 1981, in details pp. 6-8.

countries and Europe, and to contain the increased security problems which, in the event of local political unrest, might lead to repercussions in Europe.

As to reforms, the most recurrent themes associated with Southern European enlargement – to use Natali’s own words – regarded the common agricultural policy and in general the allocation of the EEC’s resources in a more redistributive way; the promotion of a technological development plan; the strengthening of economic and social cohesion; the expansion of the principle of fair access to resources; and, only last on the list, a greater spread of the principle of solidarity<sup>16</sup>. For the Commissioner, these principles had to be translated into political programmes aimed at achieving equitable production means among the various countries, in order to contain the increase in non-uniformity, once enlargement was complete. From 1977, but even more after 1979, which is to say during the initial phase of the negotiation with the Iberian Peninsula, the Commissioner’s reflection – running counter to the emerging criticisms on the impasse of European institutions – concentrated on their solidity. For Natali, Spain and Portugal’s applications – according to his reading on studies conducted by the two countries’ main ministries on the political “necessity” and the long-term economic “benefit” of entry into Europe – proved the European Union’s strength and its dynamic nature. By 1979, at the closing stage of negotiations with Greece, he realized the impossibility of meeting the 1983 deadline to conclude talks with the Iberian Peninsula as well; in spite of this, throughout the following five years, he sought to prevent the two negotiations from running aground, and to have them advance in parallel, because he remained firmly convinced that globalizing the negotiation would have a negative effect, especially for the richer Spain. The advance of Portugal – a less complex case than Spain – would result in a full-blown Spanish exclusion, *sine die*<sup>17</sup>.

By 1980, the difficulty of resolving the issue of agricultural competition that Spain’s entry would generate with Mediterranean production overall had contributed to a new stalemate. However, in light of the existing situation and the growing mistrust especially from the Portuguese delegation towards the Spanish side, Natali made an effort to contain the delay. He increased the frequency of meetings, with the mirror objective of limiting the spread of anti-Europeanism on the Iberian Peninsula, and to promote the long-awaited reform policy that would allow the Community, as a whole, to overcome the stagnation ushered in with the start of the 1970s. The papers of the Commissioner’s cabinet for Enlargement do not turn a blind eye to the initial difficulties that the peninsula would have to face, but at the same time provide a glimpse on the immediate opportunities for the countries already members. Reference is in fact made to “an initial weakening of the economies of the Iberian countries, and the enormous opportunities that would open for the countries already members, which would be able to invest above all in industry”<sup>18</sup>. Contrary to the focus of journalistic analyses, according to Natali, the entry of the Iberian Peninsula would have a positive effect for the EEC as a whole, and on its existing Member

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<sup>16</sup> ACS: Collection LN, Folder 7: Speeches: “Il significato dell’allargamento”, Speech made by the European Commission Vice President Lorenzo Natali during the Conference of the European Journalists Association, Rome 23/10/1980.

<sup>17</sup> HAEU: SEC (78) 2857 “Adhésión de la Grèce, Espagne e du Portugal” 28/6/78; 23/10/1980.

<sup>18</sup> ACS: Collection LN, Folder 12: Speeches: “Intervista al Presidente Natali per il Resto del Carlino e La Nazione (Mila Malvestiti).

States in the area of agriculture too. At the community level, it could present an opportunity to set out a true Mediterranean policy, while at the State level it could encourage Italy and France in particular to establish ties with Spain and create a Mediterranean axis cutting across this area's regions, capable of defending their interests within the framework of a larger international context. This possibility pushed Natali, during his frequent trips to Spain, to dialogue, not only with the institutional representatives of the regions and cities he visited, but also to make direct contact with producers and agricultural cooperatives, in order to incentivize them – also through a greater use of European funds – to modernize production facilities and to open up to the possibility of transnational cooperatives.

To those who associated enlargement with EEC debilitation, Natali consistently replied that the gap between rich and poor countries on the European continent, the differences between north and south, and between the Mediterranean and continental economies, were already established facts prior to the Southern opening, and the forecasts and studies undertaken by the Jenkins Commission bore witness to the fallacy of this association<sup>19</sup>. Indeed, he believed the contrary: that the entry of Spain and Portugal would promote their democratic consolidation and foster greater government stability; the EEC would thenceforward be able to present itself as a guarantor of the spread of liberal democratic values, thereby boosting its standing on the international stage. From the institutional perspective as well, the Commissioner and his cabinet saw enlargement as an opportunity to accelerate reform by focusing on streamlining the decision-making process and on strengthening the Community's federal character.

In the late 1970s, the Council of Ministers dominated the communitarian institutional landscape. The entry of Great Britain, Denmark, and Ireland consolidated a stalemate in which the EEC was increasingly hamstrung by the excessive use of the unanimous voting system, leaving Community institutions unable to meet the challenge of enlargement, and threatening to allow the already harmful stalemate to give way to full-blown institutional paralysis. Focusing on streamlining the decision-making process and on strengthening the Community's federal character appeared to be a possible way out. To achieve the first objective, Natali insisted on the need to increase the use of the reinforced qualified majority voting system, by abandoning the practice reached in 1966 with the Luxembourg compromise, and therefore eliminating the use of unanimous voting in the Council of Ministers even for issues deemed of vital interest for the individual Member States. For the second objective, he tasked the reform of the European Parliament and the Commission with improving the efficiency of Community life. While the former was attributed legislative functions and the latter had expanded its executive competences in order to “contain the heterogeneity of the Member States”, both would help contain the power of a Council of Ministers “excessively influenced by national bureaucracies” – to use the Commissioner's own words – the downsizing of the states' institutional weight would help “crack the whip towards counterbalancing the inertia of Community institutions”, thus making the objective of building a European federation increasingly tangible.

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<sup>19</sup> ACS: Collection LN, Folder 7: Speeches: “Problematica dell'allargamento”, Speech made by Vice President Lorenzo Natali at the Conference of the European Journalists Association, Rome 23/10/1980.

The adjustment of the EEC's institutional mechanisms, the narrowing of imbalances between the continent's north and south, and the need to promote social and economic cohesion, not only were in line with the ethical objective of reducing differences, but they were also needed to achieve an extensive internal market. Even if these goals will find complete harmonization in 1986 with the signing of the Single European Act, under Delors Commission, it was during the Jenkins Commission's term that the issues set out above for the first time intersected with – and cut across, at times directly and at times indirectly – the issue of enlargement to Southern Europe, and to the Iberian Peninsula in particular. After the first enlargement, Member States, caught up in the spiral of problems caused by the two economic crises of the 1970s and by the worsening of Community problems, cast a sceptical eye on the new applicants, while the latter were torn by their need for international recognition and their fear of being unprepared to withstand economic competition from existing members. Thanks to an arrangement of proceedings rooted precisely in this particular Commission, both “fronts” came to understand that by joining rather than excluding, they would make it to harbour earlier and more safely.

## 6. Conclusion

The main goal of this article has been shedding a light to one of the less investigated aspect of the enlargement to Spain and Portugal, that is the benefits the Community drew from it, and the link that existed between the latter and the prodromes of the reform process initiated in the EEC during the second half of the 1980s. The research has been based on the archival sources of the Jenkins Commission and the private archive of the *ad hoc* appointed Commissioner for Enlargement, Lorenzo Natali. The results have shown the key role played by Southern Europe for the Community life under their mandate and to what extent the connection made between the market development and social cohesion during the second half of 1980s is rooted in the time span here described.

Another aspect the research underlined has been the role played by Lorenzo Natali himself. Very well known in Greece and in the Iberian Peninsula and among European officers, in his home country, Italy, he is only remembered as a second rank politician of the Christian Democracy very close to Amintore Fanfani. He was not a second rank politician at European level at all. He played a major role and served three Commission in charge of enlargement, environmental policies, and also as a Vice-president. As far as the enlargement is concerned, he did not only focus to solve the question of Mediterranean competition on agricultural products, but he placed the issue of membership of the applicants from Southern Europe in a broader context and he linked it to the need of increasing EEC – and more in detail the Commission competences – in defining external role and foreign policy guidelines. At the same time, he worked on reforming the decision-making process of the European institutions. In different occasion he underlined the need to extend as much as possible the qualified majority voting system in the Council of Ministers to avoid to block the decision-making process and policies implementation in an enlarged Community.

Strongly contrasting with the narrative on the stalled moment the European institutions were living at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, the Commissioner Natali described this time a dynamic moment. The request of Spain and Por-

tugal, their willingness to become full members, instead of renewing the already existing preferential agreement with the EEC, proved – according to him – to what extent these countries wanted not to lose the chance to join a solid supranational structure. Jenkins and Natali presented the enlargement as a positive outcome even for the bilateral relation between the EEC and north African countries. Enlarging the EEC Southern flank would have promoted the vision of the Mediterranean area as a single unity, smoothing the differences between European and African sides, helping the EEC to ensure for itself a more flourishing market and to design a neighbourhood policy focused on increasing the collaboration between the two shores.

Differently from the past at the end of the Jenkins mandate the image spread at European level was that Southern enlargement was something positive in the long run not only for the applicant countries but for the Community as well. Of course, not all the European institutions shared this point of view. Especially in the European Councils, nation state representatives – such as the Italian and the French one – defended their immediate national interests and did not follow Natali's idea on the possibility to create a Mediterranean axis with Spain capable of defending this area peculiarities. They were scared to be damaged by Spanish competition, especially in the agricultural sector, and so they did everything they could to postpone especially the entrance of Spain as long as possible. In spite of their resistance, the position matured between 1977 and 1981 in the European Commission was able to change the old perspective and worked as a point of no return in the community agenda setting for the Southern enlargement.

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