

'The Portuguese are in no mood to celebrate' from Le Soir (12 June 1985)

Caption: On 12 June 1985, the day that Portugal's Treaty of Accession to the European Communities is signed in Lisbon, the Belgian daily newspaper Le Soir analyses the position of the country's fishermen and farmers.

Source: Le Soir. 12.06.1985, n° 135, 99e année. Bruxelles. "Portugal: le peuple n'a pas le coeur en fête", auteur: Vaes, Bénédicte, p. 20.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_portuguese_are_in_no_mood_to_celebrate_from_le_soir_12_june_1985-en-d6c4dof8-126a-4b89-8dba-aa6a418604e4.html



Last updated: 05/07/2016

The Portuguese are in no mood to celebrate

From our special correspondent

The Jerónimos Monastery in Lisbon, built to celebrate the opening of the route to the Indies by Vasco de Gama, is today playing host to eight Prime Ministers of the EEC who have come to celebrate Portugal's accession. After having lived enclosed in isolation for so long, turned in on its dictators, Portugal will, after having waited patiently for eight years, be definitively moored to Europe. But not all the Portuguese are in a mood to celebrate.

Out of half a million poverty-stricken unemployed, only 60 000 of them receive benefits. Over 100 000 workers employed by businesses in difficulty have not been paid for months. This is the case of the workers of the Lisnave shipyards, which used to repair 20 % of supertankers in the world's largest dry dock and are now working at only 10 % capacity. Portugal is suffering under the draconian austerity measures imposed by the IMF to renew finances bled dry after three years of right-wing coalition government and under the handicap of major industries in crisis and small- and medium-sized enterprises with inadequate resources.

For workers and the unemployed, Portugal's accession to the EEC remains a mystery: will it revive the Portuguese economy or, on the contrary, will it cause it to sink once and for all under foreign competition? The Communist trade union CGTP was resolutely against accession to the EEC. The Socialist trade union organisation UGT, however, feels that accession to the European economic network is the only salvation. The UGT is having a very hard time convincing its rank and file to accept a drastic remedy that will begin by making things worse. But it feels strongly about this therapy: 'We shall have enormous difficulties at the start. Unemployment will rise. Small- and medium-sized enterprises will go bankrupt. But there is no alternative. If we do not join the EEC, we shall become a Third-World country,' says UGT leader José Manuel Torres-Coupo.

Small-scale fishermen

But the most anxious Portuguese are, no doubt, the farmers and fishermen. Three spokesmen for the (Communist) Federation of Fishing Unions explain: 'Half of our fleet is ancient and should be scrapped. The European funds for reconversion will, no doubt, be seized by shipowners with big trawlers. And yet 60 % of fisheries in Portugal is small-scale. It is made up of independent fishermen or small business owners who have only small inshore fishing boats. It needs modernising. But if the competition is too harsh, the entire sector will crumble.'

Portuguese agriculture, however, has two sides to it: in the north, very small farms sometimes practising subsistence farming; in the south, large estates (latifundia) that were occupied by farmers and most of which have now been returned to their owners. The land reform now applies to a mere 550 000 hectares out of 1 200 000. Agricultural production is so low that the country has to import 50 to 60 % of its needs. To renew these virtually medieval structures, it counts on the aid for modernisation promised by the EEC: more than 30 billion Belgian francs over ten years.

'Where will the money go?' asks Victor Louro, who was Communist Junior Minister for Agriculture in 1976. 'Hitherto, the Government has shown itself to be incapable of setting up projects and appropriate structures. We fear that the idea will be poorly implemented by our ineffective bureaucratic machinery. We also fear that accession will destroy the fabric of small family farms, as it has done in other countries. Small farmers, who are often illiterate, are not capable of benefiting from Community aid. Alentejo cooperatives, on the other hand, could do so because of their size and their mechanisation. But the current Government swore to ruin them and will prevent them from obtaining aid.'

How will the European funds be used? The answer depends partly on the Portuguese Government but also on the European Commission. Whether businesses in difficulty, fishermen or farmers are involved, Portugal's accession will no doubt be the most difficult test imposed on the Community to prove its

economic and social efficiency.

Bénédicte Vaes