

Address given by Anibal Cavaco Silva in the Portuguese Parliament (Lisbon, 8 February 1986)

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The Prime Minister (Cavaco Silva): Mr President, Honourable Members: The imminent signature of the Single European Act, which amends the Treaties establishing the European Communities, is a matter of sufficient national interest for the Government to ask Parliament to hold this debate.

When I came here for the first time on 15 November to present the Government's programme, I said that we were in favour of dialogue, coming together and consensus. I also pledged that the Government would keep the Opposition informed of all issues that had a direct impact on essential aspects of national interest.

We have been engaged in dialogue. This debate reflects our wish to continue to develop that dialogue in relation to all issues that require a broad national consensus.

We wish to fulfil our commitments on this point, as we do on all others. When I came back from the Luxembourg European Council, I met delegations from the parties represented in Parliament and outlined to them the agreement reached by the 12 Heads of Government on the amendments to be made to the Treaties establishing the European Communities. I recently sent the party leaders a copy of the Single European Act. By taking the initiative to propose this debate, the Government assigned the major issues of national interest to their proper place — Parliament.

Just as in 1977, when our application to join the European Communities was being drawn up, the democratic parties now have no doubt that integration is a clear political option in Portugal's engagement with Europe. The political, economic, social and cultural changes that determined our choice are every bit as valid now as they were nine years ago. Just as in 1977, alternatives to Europe are unthinkable today.

Portugal has been a full member of the Communities since 1 January. We have representatives in the principal Community institutions, in the Councils of Ministers and in the European Parliament.

Our participation in the European Communities is both a political project and a tangible process of transforming the country's economic and social situation. During eight centuries of history, the Portuguese nation faced up to and overcame many challenges, and history now offers us a new challenge. Accession is not and cannot be a project for political forces or parties. Accession is a reality that involves all the Portuguese. Only our capacity to organise and to respond to specific day-to-day challenges will allow the Community framework to contribute towards the country's progress so that the living standards of the Portuguese people improve.

Something that has often been overlooked must be made absolutely clear: in joining the European Communities, Portugal accepted the challenge of rising to Europe's economic, social, cultural and technological level. The negotiated transitional periods constitute an exception and will allow adjustments to be made and allow us to benefit temporarily from certain favourable schemes. We must all be aware, however, that the commitment to progress made by the Government began on 6 November and extended to Europe on 1 January.

Applause from the PSD.

Accession involves accepting all European Community objectives and the legislation already adopted by the Member States, referred to as the Community *acquis*. The Government will manage the potential offered by the transitional periods with care and determination. We cannot exclude specific difficulties and problems in some areas, but we can, once again, make a commitment to the Portuguese people that we will stubbornly defend our national interests in Brussels, take due advantage of existing mechanisms and bring our legislation properly and rapidly into line with Community provisions. We have been doing this since we presented the Government's programme here in Parliament.

Voices from the PSD: Hear, hear!

And the outlook will be optimistic if, as we trust will be the case, the state, economic operators, workers — in short, all the Portuguese people — are capable of responding. The problem is not the Government's or, should I say, is not the Government's alone. It is a collective wager made by the country that has consequences that must be weighed up: Portugal cannot lose the battle to reach the level of the modern, developed Europe. If we do not do this by the end of the century — and there are less than 15 years to go — our children will find it harder to defend their national identity and to respect the history that we hope to bequeath to them. For all this, I firmly believe that the prospects are optimistic. It is no coincidence that we are now experiencing a climate of hope and that the Portuguese people are full of confidence.

The Treaties establishing the European Communities, which have been successively amended with the various enlargements, were never seen as static and final instruments. European parliamentarians and leaders have, for some years, advocated the need to intensify cooperation, broaden integration to other fields, create new areas for common policies, reinforce the powers of the European Parliament — now elected by direct suffrage — and reappraise the Communities' decision-making mechanisms.

The accession of Portugal and Spain coincided with the political will that was to lead to the process of negotiating the revision of the Treaties. The decision to convene the Intergovernmental Conference was taken at the Milan Summit just a few days after Portugal signed the Treaties of Accession.

A 12-strong Europe would have to be different from the original 1957 six-member EEC. The change in the international political and economic situation could not be addressed with mere compromises on decision-making processes. The economic crisis and unemployment faced by the West after the oil crises, competition from the United States and Japan, new technologies, the social problems generated by the third industrial revolution — all this contributed to the vital need to reappraise Europe's role at the end of the century. Yet the accession of Portugal and Spain meant that old issues had to be looked at from new perspectives. Europe was quickly forced to reconsider its structures and policies. Accordingly, our contribution to reassessing the European Communities was important and crucial.

Portugal played an active and equal part in revising the Treaties. Despite our status of observer in the Communities until the end of 1985, we were granted the right to take part in drafting the Single European Act, the subject of this debate.

As the Minister for Foreign Affairs stressed, the Single Act is one of the most profound qualitative changes in the European Communities since the original Treaties were signed in 1951 and 1957.

The establishment of a new concept of qualified majority in the Council, the new institutional relationship between Parliament and the Commission, reinforcement of the powers of these two Community institutions and the new attributes of the Court of Justice reflect the changes to which we propose to sign up.

Meanwhile, extending common policies to the internal market, cooperation in the fields of economic, monetary and social policy, research and technological development and the environment, the formal embodiment of the principle of economic and social cohesion and the institutionalisation of cooperation in foreign policy matters are important (albeit as yet, perhaps, insufficient) steps in reinforcing European unity. Today, however, they are Europe's proper, practical response to present challenges.

As the President of the Commission of the European Communities said, the current version of the Treaties should remain in force beyond the 20th century, since European integration is not up for review every day.

We are pleased to be able to acknowledge that, even before it joined the Communities, Portugal had a unique opportunity to contribute towards European integration.

Mr President, Honourable Members: This Single European Act is important for our country.

Firstly, Portuguese interests have been fully safeguarded: the new provisions do not revoke our transitional

schemes, and a Government declaration protected our position on two aspects of the Council voting system that were not foreseen in the accession negotiations.

Voices from the PSD: Hear, hear!

Secondly, the changes introduced into relations between the various Community institutions should favour the Portuguese position, since the special nature of our situation should be enhanced by the new weighting in the decision-making centres and by the introduction of the concept of qualified majority voting. Reinforcing Parliament's powers and extending the Commission's areas of execution and management should also allow our interests to be properly understood and expressed.

Finally, the introduction of the concept of economic and social cohesion, which seeks to reduce disparities between the various European regions, is expected to favour Portugal in particular. The harmonious development of the Community as a whole and the coordination of Member State economic policies, achieved through the structural funds, are now enshrined principles that will certainly be of benefit to us.

Two aspects of the Single European Act remain to be stressed: reinforcement of the scientific and technological bases of European industry, and provisions in the area of social policy, making it possible to improve and harmonise working conditions and promote dialogue between social partners. As can be seen, making the labour market more flexible is not the Portuguese Government's concern alone. It is a specific priority introduced by the Europe of 12 in the Single European Act.

I would also like to stress the importance of including European political cooperation in the Treaties. The Community states, belonging to the same geopolitical space and united in defending the concepts underpinning Western values, decided to enhance coordination in the area of external policies. Consultation mechanisms were created to guarantee that positions converge, that joint actions are undertaken and that the influence of common positions is effective.

Everyone will recognise that this cooperation does not threaten sovereignty or even our right to hold our own positions on external policy issues. Quite the contrary, and now in a European framework, Portugal is able to influence the formulation of a common policy towards regions such as Southern Africa, where we are particularly well-placed to contribute to universally acceptable solutions.

Mr President, Honourable Members: As I said at the beginning of my speech, in proposing this debate on the Single European Act to this House, the Government intended to bring the discussion of an issue of national importance before Parliament and, hence, before the country.

Portugal cannot distance itself from the functioning, perspectives and priorities of the European Communities, which are also its own.

Portugal must not neglect the Community institutions for a single moment if it is to defend its interests to the full.

The Government understands that this debate has contributed to the creation of a broad national consensus on the Single European Act. As in the major issues of national interest, there is a convergence of positions among all the democratic parties, which I am pleased to note.

Voices from the PSD: Hear, hear!

Once again, before Parliament and the Portuguese people, I formally pledge that the Government will do its utmost to wholeheartedly and effectively ensure that our participation in the European Communities represents a decisive step forward in the progress, prosperity and living conditions of the Portuguese people.

And I would like to repeat here once again: let us fulfil our commitments, and let us govern.