

Address given by Pedro Pires Miranda in the Portuguese Parliament (Lisbon, 18 December 1986)

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The Minister for Foreign Affairs (Pires de Miranda): Mr President, Honourable Members: You are now all very familiar with the document that the Portuguese Parliament is considering today with a view to its formal ratification. We all remember the debate held here, on the Government's initiative, on 7 February this year on the Single European Act itself, a debate that was wound up by the Prime Minister. Two days before that, I myself appeared before the Commission for European Integration to clarify and provide information on the Single Act.

Since the Government attaches the utmost importance to an effective and constructive dialogue between Parliament and the Executive on major foreign policy issues, particularly the crucial matter of Portuguese integration into the European Communities, we were careful — even before the Single Act was signed — to ensure that this new important instrument regulating Community life was scrutinised by this House. As early as December 1985, moreover, and in another telling illustration of the value which the Government attaches to dialogue with the opposition parties represented in Parliament, the Prime Minister met the leaders of those parties to inform them of policy guidelines on the European Communities and of the substance of the Single European Act in particular. After these meetings, the Prime Minister forwarded the text of the Single Act to those parties in late January.

I should now like to reiterate the Government's willingness to continue and intensify dialogue with Parliament in the area of foreign policy, the Single Act being a good example. As we all know, there is a healthy consensus among the democratic parties on the major priorities of this policy, as demonstrated by the continuity of the Portuguese state's conduct of foreign policy over the last ten years. Such consensus reinforces the credibility and effectiveness of our foreign policy which must, therefore, be continuously strengthened.

This is what we have tried to do. The State Secretary for European Integration and I myself, in the specific area of European integration, have always been willing to cooperate with Parliament, particularly by appearing before the Commission for European Integration when asked to do so. I must also stress that dialogue between Parliament and the Executive on the progress of European integration in general, and on the Portuguese position in that progress in particular, will henceforth be more necessary than ever. While, in our first year of membership, the Portuguese negotiators (life in the European Community involving permanent negotiation) had relatively clear objectives because there was little doubt as to what Members of Parliament and Government both wanted, things will become more complex from now on. Our integration into Europe will increasingly bring about new problems, and, for that very reason, the dialogue between Parliament and Government will have to be intensified.

The experience acquired by Members of Parliament and the Government from this first year of European Community life will pave the way for more permanent dialogue. We ourselves shall endeavour to promote such dialogue, the only limit on which, as everyone will understand, is the occasional need to remain prudently reserved as regards tactical positions to be adopted within the Community so as not to prejudice Portuguese negotiating power.

Mr President, Honourable Members: Since the Single European Act was signed exactly ten months ago, it is fair to ask why the Government is only now asking Parliament to ratify this document.

The answer is simple: although the debate that we held here, even before the Single Act was signed, conclusively highlighted the broad majority feeling in the House, and although no doubts whatsoever were raised on the matter, the Government wished to let some time pass before formal ratification so that people could get an idea of how the first year of membership would develop.

It was appropriate that a measure as significant as the ratification of important amendments to the Treaties establishing the European Communities should be taken only after the doubts inevitably arising at the beginning of our integration were clarified. In this first crucial year of membership, a large part of our future

as a Member State was at issue. Now, when the country has attained most of its objectives, such uncertainties have disappeared, and the Single Act can and should be ratified in full awareness that we are on the right road. I am sure that you will endorse this approach, which is governed by the most basic rules of caution that such sensitive issues demand.

We felt it was appropriate that this debate on ratifying the Single Act should take place only after the London European Council, which was very important both for us and for the future of European integration. That spectacular decisions were not taken in London should not obscure the essential fact, which is that significant progress was made in raising the awareness of both Member States and Community institutions of the urgent need to take drastic measures enabling Community finances to be reformed and for economic and social cohesion to be reinforced — i.e. channelling fewer funds to artificially sustain prices and providing more resources for restructuring and conversion, making it possible to reduce disparities in development within the Community.

With the experience accumulated in our first year of membership, culminating in the London Council, the Portuguese Parliament's ratification of the Single European Act takes on a significance that it would certainly not have had if it had been ratified just a short while after the document was signed.

Mr President, Honourable Members: The balance of Portugal's first year as a member of the European Communities is clearly positive. The results are, in fact, much better than many Portuguese and most of our Community partners and the EEC institutions expected.

At the end of the year, the financial balance with the Community, which is favourable to Portugal, should amount to around 30 billion escudos. This is an important result, but it is not *the* most important. What matters is that we have been able to take advantage of Community aid, demonstrating an excellent capacity to submit valid projects to Brussels.

The Portuguese Public Administration's capacity to respond to the demands arising out of accession has been remarkable. From adapting a vast amount of legislation to Community rules to regular participation in a wide variety of Community organisations, all levels of the Administration have surprised many people in Brussels and have made us not only justifiably proud but also, and above all, confident in Portugal's future in Europe.

At the same time, the private sector is also responding positively. This is reflected, for example, in the improvement in the coverage of imports by exports to Spain (partly as a result of the success obtained in the negotiations on rules of origin) and in growing interest in the direct use of Community aid.

As is widely known, during this first year we had to conclude negotiations on matters that had not been closed or resolved in the Treaty of Accession. By way of example, I would remind you of what we achieved with regard to trade with Spain and our former EFTA partners — with a very favourable impact on our textile exports, both to EFTA and to the Community — by making Protocol 17 more flexible. We also made progress in negotiating the agricultural rules and the PEDAP (Specific Programme for the Development of Portuguese Agriculture), while Portuguese interests in areas such as Community Mediterranean policy and the new Multifibre Arrangement were duly safeguarded. The trade dispute between the EEC and the United States was also closely monitored.

In terms of cooperation in external policy, we demonstrated a great capacity for national assertiveness, making much use within the Community framework of our special historical, cultural and political relations with other areas of the globe — particularly southern Africa, Brazil and the United States. Our vote has therefore counted, and counted heavily, whenever the Community has sought to establish common positions on certain problems such as those afflicting southern Africa.

The fact that we have started to contribute to finding common European positions on major international policy issues in no way affects our overriding national capacity to determine our foreign policy independently. Nothing and no one can oblige us to accept anything with which we do not agree and which may not coincide with our national interests. Yet everyone will understand that it is also in our national interest to ensure that

Europe — and thereby Portugal — increasingly speaks with a single voice on the international stage.

For a country of our size, European foreign policy cooperation reinforces national assertiveness in the international arena, and I believe that it is now clear to everyone that the fact that we are in Europe is an additional reason for us to stress our historical relationship with other regions of the globe and thereby enhance our contribution to Europe itself.

Allow me to illustrate these basic principles of Portuguese foreign policy with the happy coincidence that, at this very moment, the Angolan Foreign Minister is on an official visit to Portugal for the very first time.

After almost a year's participation in the European Communities, Portugal can generally be said to be getting used to Community life — without upheavals, in the normal, natural way of those who feel European and feel capable of responding to the challenge of integration. In my opinion, Portuguese society's gradual and natural integration into the Communities, on a variety of levels, is the most positive feature of the first year of membership.

Mr President, Honourable Members: The European option is a national choice that deserves the welcome that it has been afforded by all democratic parties and the support of the vast majority of the Portuguese people. It is, in short, the option for a democratic, Western model of the economy, society and the state.

The Single European Act seeks to revive European integration, placing the Treaties establishing the Communities on a realistic footing and opening up new prospects for the future. It has not gone as far as many of us intended, yet we must, above all, tread carefully, rejecting supranational illusions now belied by experience without jeopardising the ideal of a more united Europe that nevertheless retains its great wealth: the diversity of its peoples, its regions and its nations.

In our debate here on 7 February this year, most parties unequivocally supported the Single European Act. On behalf of the Social Democrats, the Honourable Member Vítor Crespo signalled his full agreement with the revision of the Treaty of Rome which the Single Act presupposes. For the Socialists, the Honourable Member Jaime Gama felt that the platform established in the text of the Single European Act was irrefutably a cautious and positive compromise that represented a clear step forward in the way in which the Communities function. The Honourable Member Cristina Albuquerque, for the Democratic Renewal Party, felt that Parliament should welcome the Single European Act and, for the same party, the Honourable Member Silva Lopes said that his Parliamentary Group's position was that Parliament should support the Government so that the latter could sign the Single Act. The Honourable Member Narana Coissoró expressed the same opinion, highlighting the Social Democratic Centre's support for the Government in negotiations to give tangible expression to the Single Act.

Mr President, Honourable Members: In the light of the positions taken in this Parliament last February, there is no doubt as to the majority support in the House for the ratification of the Single European Act. It is pointless to repeat the analysis that I myself made of the substance of the Act at that time. I should just very briefly like to recap some of its essential features.

The Single Act enshrines the objective, which Portugal supports, of creating a single European area without internal borders, in principle by 1992. Establishment of the internal market should, however, be accompanied by another measure which is also enshrined in the Single Act and which is of great relevance to us Portuguese: the promotion of convergence between Member State national economies in an attempt to reduce disparities in development. For Portugal, the measures provided for in the Single Act that tend to reinforce the economic and social cohesion of Community Europe represent an additional contribution — that is to say, besides those already provided for in the Treaty of Rome and the Treaty of Accession (the latter, furthermore, naturally not affected in any way by the Single Act) — an additional contribution, as I was saying, in terms of helping the country make up the distance separating it from Community social and economic standards.

The Single Act also enshrines new institutional mechanisms, in particular qualified majority voting in the Council, rather than unanimity on certain well-defined issues.

The intention is to ensure that the institutions function rapidly and effectively. This objective will not jeopardise national independence, however, not only because the voting system itself makes it extremely unlikely that we shall not be able to block decisions potentially unfavourable to our national interests in alliance with other Member States but also because, if interests vital to Portugal are at stake, the Single European Act provides for the requirement for unanimity (although extreme and, therefore, only applied in special cases) as a possibility open to any Member State.

As I pointed out here in more detail last February, our country ensured that the application of majority voting in certain areas should not be prejudicial to sensitive sectors of our economy and that appropriate transitional measures were to be established whenever necessary.

The Single Act, meanwhile, envisages a greater institutional role, albeit on a modest scale, for the European Parliament and enshrines intergovernmental cooperation between Member States as regards external policy — an area in which the benefits for the international assertiveness of Portuguese diplomatic positions are evident, as I have already stressed.

Mr President, Honourable Members: The Government, like the majority of this House, is convinced that the Single European Act is an important step forward for European integration, to which our country has long been committed.

As Europeans, we have an interest in the Community progressing towards integration in a realistic and balanced fashion. As Portuguese citizens, we are not only committed to the integration of Europe, of which we form part and whose civilisation we have done so much to spread, but we also have a vital interest in stepping up the country's economic and social development.

For all this, we supported the drafting of the Single Act and signed it last February. It is now up to the Portuguese Parliament to ratify it.