

‘What answer to give Portugal?’ from the Bulletin Quotidien Europe (7–8 March 1977)

Caption: On 7–8 March 1977, Emanuele Gazzo, Editor-in-Chief of Agence Europe, emphasises the need for the Nine to give a clear and rapid political response to Portugal’s forthcoming application for accession to the European Communities.

Source: Bulletin Quotidien Europe. Editor Gazzo, Emanuele. 7-8.03.1977, No 2170. Brussels: Agence Europe. "What answer to give Portugal?", auteur:Gazzo, Emanuele , p. 1.

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What answer to give Portugal?

Mr Mario Soares is in Paris today, where he is embarking on the second and last lap of his tour of the capitals of the Nine. In its concluding phase, this tour will take Mr Soares before the Parliament in Strasbourg, the Court and the EIB in Luxembourg and the Economic and Social Committee in Brussels and, naturally, the European Commission. It is to be hoped that this solicitude for the Institutions and organs of the Community is not only a sort of formal homage, but corresponds to the profound conviction that in the strength of the Institutions lies the best chance for a positive development of the process of European integration and, consequently of Europe's capacity for enlargement, notably to include Portugal.

The conclusion of Mr Soares' visit will doubtless be followed in the short term by the submission of an application for membership based on art. 237 of the EEC Treaty. As we have already explained (see our Editorial of 24 February) it is up to the Nine to decide whether the application is to be accepted, and the conditions on which negotiations could be initiated. The Nine will consequently soon have to adopt their position, taking all the elements into account, the principal one being that Portugal's accession must not have a negative impact on the integrational process, from the political, economic and institutional point of view, which would be to the detriment of Portugal itself. It is possible that the Heads of government, who are to meet in Rome in less than three weeks' time, will themselves want to deal with this question, in order to weigh the terms of a reply and to give this reply the solemn character it deserves.

Some observers, and in the first instance the Portuguese themselves, have a tendency to point out that, for a Community of 260 million inhabitants, the question of "integrating" a country like Portugal is certainly not beyond its scope. This is true. But everyone knows that the question arises in completely different terms, that is to say, that Portugal's accession is only one element in an enlargement of the European Community as it stands at present to the whole European sub-continent. The dimension, whether one likes it or not, is just that, and the solutions to be sought are in relation to that dimension. That is why Mr Jenkins on several occasions spoke of an "overall" assessment. This overall assessment will not be easy: it is very difficult to foresee its results.

The fact remains that the question to be settled in the short term is what answer should be given to Portugal. This is an important question for the recently established democratic regime. The psychological impact of this answer will be considerable and could contribute, positively or negatively, to the solution of the political and economic problems facing Lisbon. Having warned against the risk of a hasty enlargement, we feel that in Portugal's case the Community should act with wisdom and courage. This means that the answer to be given, which it is expected will be positive on the political level, should make it possible to embark on a process which will be long (something of which the Portuguese government is perfectly well aware) but the broad outlines of which should be seen by Portuguese public opinion, which will therefore itself have to contribute to the search for suitable solutions. It will not indeed be a question of "annexing" to an over-developed zone a new market which would be kept alive by circumstantial subsidies. Enlargement could become, for Europe as much as for Portugal, an opportunity, the big opportunity, for a re-think on the basic questions of the structure and development model of the Europe of the future. The latter will doubtless not be the same as the one we know. But we must be careful: different must mean better, better balanced, more attractive to men, able to be more generous towards the developing world.

If Portugal, whose historic, cultural, human contribution to Europe is doubtless precious, seizes this opportunity, if it desires itself to go beyond its individual case to contribute towards an overall solution, it will have an opportunity to contribute to a "new founding" of Europe. In order for this to be possible, one will of course need the agreement of all the governments, some of which are reticent because they see the real difficulties in the immediate future. But it will also be necessary for Portugal, at the very moment it is presenting a problem, to clearly make it known that it will provide its total assistance in solving it. And in the first place that it is ready to work to strengthen the institutions and decision-making process of the Community. A complete return to implementation of the Treaties in respect of majority votes is one of the points on which Portugal must now express its agreement with the forces which hope that its entry to the Community will not mean the beginning of the end for that Community.

Em. G.