


Interview with António Vitorino: assessment of Portugal’s accession to the European Communities (Lisbon, 24 October 2007)

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[Miriam Mateus] And what, in your opinion, were the advantages and disadvantages of Portuguese accession to the Communities?

[António Vitorino] There are always positive and negative aspects in any process of this kind, and, now, the overall balance is extremely positive. The country doesn't look the way it did 20 years ago. People tend to think about the infrastructure, particularly the motorways, that's the visible face. But there's a much more important hidden face. Portugal's accession to the European Communities was a clash of cosmopolitanism, a clash that was positive, both for civil society and for central government, and even for the local authorities. We had to coexist with demands, trends and realities from outside that represented a challenge to our capacity to adapt and to change, and I think that, overall, the results for the country have been very positive. And, in the sectors in which results haven't been so positive, I think that responsibility there lies less in the fact that we're taking part in a European project and more in the fact that Portugal itself hasn't carried out the reforms required to respond to those challenges.

Some sectors have obviously benefited more than others, such as agriculture for example, where the common agricultural policy hasn't always been consistent with the essential aspects of Mediterranean agricultural produce, although it has been consistent with cereals, meat and milk, which are less predominant in Portuguese agriculture. In fisheries, some constraints connected with legitimate concerns to preserve fish species have been met with incomprehension and difficulties in Portugal. But, as I say, I've given these two examples that seem to me to be genuine but specific cases because the overall balance is extremely positive in terms of cohesion, infrastructure development, administrative modernisation and the provision of incentives for modernising civil society in a European context.