


# Interview with José Medeiros Ferreira: political reactions to Portugal's accession to the European Communities (Lisbon, 25 October 2007)

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[Miriam Mateus] On 12 June 1985, as we know, Portugal signed the Treaty of Accession to the European Communities. What was the attitude of the political parties, trade unions and employers to Portugal's accession?

[José Medeiros Ferreira] Well, there's an eclectic view of that just now, and everyone likes to say, while things are going well, that everyone was in agreement. Nowadays, everyone claims that they've always been Europeans. But that wasn't really the case. If we go through the history of the positions, such as when we were applying for accession, for example, there were many analysts, politicians and businessmen and, obviously, the trade unions as well, particularly the unions most closely linked to the Communist Party, and the Communist Party itself, that saw no good at all in Portugal acceding to the EEC. For business people, it was to do with having to face up to the international competitiveness that would ensue. For the Communist Party and the trade unions, it was because of geostrategic issues and apprehension, so to speak, about a liberalisation process that they didn't think was suitable either.

The major weapon at the time was that it would be difficult for Portugal to overcome the challenge of the struggle between its economy and the economies of the more developed European countries. That was a forecast that was made in 1976 or 1977, one which accompanied the negotiations, to some extent. Because now, the Portuguese strategy, in short, was to ensure an early application for accession and plenty of time for negotiations. During the negotiations, however, so up to 1982–1983, there were many reservations, even within the country, about Portugal acceding to the EEC. These reservations tended to be pessimistic, predicting that the negotiations wouldn't reach a conclusion and wouldn't be easy and that we'd end up with no fisheries or agriculture and without our territorial waters. A range of sectoral criticisms suggested that we might not accede. There's often not much difference between expectations and wishes.

When it came to accession, I think that the only parliamentary party that came out against it was the Communist party and its allies at the time, because the Communist Party stood at the elections with other groups and adopted another name, but, in essence, it was the Communist Party and its allies that expressed those reservations or, in other words, that took a stand against accession. But a right-wing party that likes to present itself as such, the CDS-PP, from a certain point in the first Paulo Portas version — I say the first Paulo Portas version because there have been several versions — the first Paulo Portas or Manuel Monteiro version was very reticent about the European question. In that period, only someone like Lucas Pires would project a certain European spirit — we're talking about the early days of accession — to the Social Democratic centre.

So there were more forces that were reluctant, so to speak, about acceding to the EEC than were pleased with the success of our accession. It was the start of a very good period, the period from 1986 to 1992, it was a very positive period at Community level. And, in Portugal, the critics were the Communist Party and its allies, the critics, let's say, on the other side of the political or the business spectrum — excluding the sectors to which I referred a short while ago, fisheries and some sectors of agriculture, since agriculture was also to undergo unequal development because of the common agricultural policy and the Structural Funds that were to arrive in Portugal. But, with the arrival of the Funds and with the development of exports at the time, Portugal was to enjoy perhaps its best period after democracy. And all the political parties were to dilute their criticism of Portugal's accession to the EEC and were, on the contrary, often to be uncritical of Community policy, too.

From 1992, when the possibility of Economic and Monetary Union and the question of the Maastricht Treaty arose, Portugal went through a stage in which our pro-Europeans didn't criticise the Community model. Everything handed down from Brussels was accepted virtually without criticism. Of course, this also made the conduct of Portuguese society and the Portuguese state rather less rational. In that period of 1992, the Portuguese state was to have two or three less rational attitudes, and one of them — the problem's been resolved and is a thing of the past now, but it's just to give an example, since you asked — when Portugal joined the European Monetary System in 1992, the exchange rate in the monetary 'snake' was bad for the

competitiveness of Portuguese export industries. Portugal accepted membership anyway, however, exactly at the time when the UK withdrew from the European Monetary System. So, since we were talking about the UK a short while ago — just to complete the train of thought, because I think we're drawing to a close — Portugal had accompanied the UK in much of its process of European integration, even before it acceded to the EEC, with EFTA, the applications for accession in 1962, the 1972 agreement, and submission of the application for accession in the half-year when the UK held the Presidency.

In some way, the bond between Portugal and the UK broke in 1992. Firstly, this was because the trade links weren't so intense at the time — France and Germany started to replace the UK, and then Spain did shortly afterwards — but it was also because Portugal was going to join the European Monetary System, which would lead to the single currency, as it was called at the time, to the euro zone as it's called now, and the UK was going to withdraw. So, in my view, that long-standing bond between Lisbon and London effectively ended when Portugal joined the European Monetary System in 1992, the very same year that the UK withdrew.