

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

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[Miriam Mateus] On a more personal note, how did you experience Portugal's accession? How did you experience that historic moment? And what do you think has been the impact of accession on the country's internal structures?

[António Vitorino] Well, in June 1985, I was State Secretary for Parliamentary Affairs in the Portuguese Government, and I had the honour of forwarding the Treaty of Accession for approval by the Portuguese Parliament and of taking an active part in the debate. So I remember the ceremony of signing the Treaty of Accession, first by Portugal, in the morning, in the Jerónimos Monastery, and then, in the afternoon, in the Palácio do Oriente in Madrid. And I also hope to attend a 'remake' of that ceremony when the Reform Treaty is signed in Lisbon on 13 December, since that ceremony is also likely to be held in the Jerónimos Monastery.

Overall, I think that the country suffered a real shock of cosmopolitanism. Portugal is a very inward-looking and parochial country, even though it used to have a huge colonial empire, the last one in the history of the Western world. But it was always a superficial colonialist, as it were, the colonies were never at the heart of the country's development, it always focused first and foremost on itself. So this return to Europe is a shock brought about by opening up to the world, and it was unavoidable and fundamental, firstly, because we accepted an open and pluralist democracy, and, secondly, because, in taking part in the European project, we went through a period of adaptation to the global world in which we live today. So not only is my own appraisal positive, but this view is also shared by the Portuguese people, because surveys show that Portugal is one of the countries in which the European project is more widely supported, although not exempt from criticism. The feeling is, however, that the European project is worth the effort for Portugal and for the Portuguese people.