

Statement by Ernâni Rodrigues Lopes to the Assembly of the Republic (Lisbon, 11 April 1985)

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[Ernâni Lopes] We do of course want accession. But we want it to be a free, conscious act rather than resigned acceptance of some historic inescapable event of supernatural inspiration. This undoubtedly involves an uninhibited expression of opinions, but also requires the firm rejection of political opportunism that so easily transforms criticism into calumny, calling into question, with two or three slogans, a number of years of serious study and work. The importance of the public debate naturally requires those taking part in it to display intellectual honesty and a degree of knowledge of the subject.

It is perhaps worth pointing out that Portugal's application for accession to the Communities, submitted in 1977 and approved in this House by a unanimous vote of the PS, PSD and CDS, was based on sound political grounds, backed, furthermore, not only by the party organisations, but also by substantial social forces, including a clear majority of business people in industry and agriculture.

Aside from the influences of the economic climate, which should not be underestimated, the essential issues were the redefinition of this country's foreign relations after decolonisation, and opting for a democratic, open and pluralist society, after the experience of the revolution. With the end of the Empire, the conditions were created to combine the two terms of this equation, so enabling closer political and economic ties to be forged with continental Europe, in particular by developing the Community.

In fact, after 25 November, the decision to join no longer signified a 'rupture' or historical discontinuity, as would have been the case, in theory, before 25 April. The real break had already occurred with the independence of the colonies, and the European option now emerged onto the political scene as a continuation of the trends that led to the 1972 Trade Agreement and as a reference model for the domestic adoption of an open and balanced model, as opposed to the antidemocratic past and the totalitarian temptations of 1975.

As regards the organisation of economic policy, accession has come to be seen as an instrument for structuring a new market-oriented development model and an external stimulus for the gradual debureaucratisation and liberalisation of a political and institutional framework for production activities that was inflexible, increasingly nationalised and obstructive. We already knew then that the process of European integration alone could not offer specific solutions to the specific problems. And few could doubt the need to negotiate reasonably long transitional periods to alleviate the adverse effects of the initial impact, and to help stimulate adaptation to the new situation.

Within the political bloc that supported and still supports accession, there continue to be clear distances and differences on how the main principle on which I have touched briefly should be applied in the national situation. But of the main parties, only the Portuguese Communist Party took a stance clearly outside this framework. Its position has remained unchanged for over 20 years, when Portuguese participation in the European integration movements was exorcised in the report to the Central Committee entitled 'Heading for Victory'.

Today the Communist Party prefers to base its public opposition to accession on a supposedly aseptic and reasoned consideration of the economic advantages and drawbacks. Affecting a modesty that is hard to understand from a Marxist-Leninist party, it rebels against the political nature of the European option, as if this were grounds for scandal or surprise.

In the PCP's discourse, the careful excision of the sectoral implications of accession and the assessment of the risks and problems that it would inevitably involve nevertheless form a useful smokescreen to camouflage the essence. And the essence is antagonism — a real antagonism — between, on the one hand, the strategic interests of the PCP, its conception of the Revolution, and its model of society, and, on the other, everything that accession represents as involvement in the political and economic integration of western Europe, as a project for the organisation of the political, economic and social system.

[Applause]

What the PCP seems to reject is the stabilisation in Portugal of the system of Western democracy that characterises the EEC countries, the rise of the typical forms of organisation of the private economy, and the consequent destruction of the conditions for the reproduction of messianic vanguardism. It is in this area and no other that we find the differences with the communists over accession to the European Communities; and it is this area and no other that reveals, in the context of the overall political approval of Portugal's accession to the Communities, the political content of their proposals for Portuguese society.

At the other end of the political spectrum, the European question also lays bare the intolerance of those who have difficulty getting used to the idea of living in a free and democratic country. Over the past ten years the Portuguese extreme right has not changed at all and seems to have learnt nothing. Behind the alibi of patriotism it takes refuge in verbal violence to disguise its ideological obsolescence and inability to offer specific, structured and up-to-date responses to the real problems posed by this country's development needs.

Clearly anxious at its change in role from accused to accuser, the radical right forgets its responsibility owing to its congenital immobilisation in blind alleys into which the previous regime was led, not to mention some structural blockages that are still seriously limiting the development of the Portuguese economy today.

[Applause]

The real problems and facts that developments over the past ten years have brought to Portuguese collective life cannot be hidden, but history would be distorted if we feigned ignorance of the deep roots of those difficulties, making a definitive, simplistic and artificial break from the real situation before and after 25 April.

Mr President, fellow members, I do not believe that the evolution of Portuguese life over the eight years that followed the membership application has left the essential fundamentals of the European option behind, on the political or economic front. On the contrary, we have learnt to our cost the price of a systematic failure to strategically define society and we have seen, through bitter practical experience, that the minimum historical conditions do not exist to justify the epic developmentalist projects that the perennial utopia salesmen keep touting as 'independent' alternatives to the supposed 'subordination' to the Europe of the Ten.

The past eight years have also shown us that many of the risks and dangers often associated with accession are not intrinsically inherent in it and may arise anyway without misfortunes arriving from Brussels. Similarly, we should say quite clearly that the modernisation of our economy, with or without accession, will not come about without painful social upheaval and will necessarily reflect the constraints currently applying to Portuguese economic policy as a whole. Listening to some criticism, perhaps precipitated by Community integration, we get the impression that we are living in a wonderland where the clear and smooth paths of progress are suddenly disrupted by a European obsession that provokes difficulties that would not otherwise exist.

The difficulties of the State and business in adjusting are not future hypotheses, but today's reality. Technological obsolescence, administrative sclerosis, structural blockages in society, inflation, imbalances in the public finances, and foreign debt unfortunately are not — I stress — unfortunately are not Community inventions. They are serious domestic problems, stretching over the medium and long term. The solutions to them, while they have to be found internally, will be all the more coherent and radical if they can be applied in the clear and stable development framework that accession to the Communities could undoubtedly provide.

Those who doubt the Nation's ability to give a positive response to the challenge of accession will have difficulty explaining where they will find the energy to escape the implacable inevitability of impoverishment and decline.