

'Portugal seeks transitional period for sensitive economic sectors' from the Diário de Notícias (18 October 1978)

Caption: On 18 October 1978, reporting on the negotiations for Portuguese accession to the European Communities, the Lisbon daily newspaper Diário de Notícias discusses the problems of the transitional period in respect of agricultural issues and relating to the free movement of workers, services and capital.

Source: Diário de Notícias. 18.10.1978. Lisboa. "Portugal pede período de transição para sectores sensíveis da economia", p. 5.

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Portugal seeks transitional period for sensitive economic sectors

The Portuguese Government formally opened negotiations for the country's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) in Luxembourg yesterday. Speaking at the opening session of the EEC meeting, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and leader of the Portuguese delegation, Mr Correia Gago, urged the Nine to help the Portuguese economy which, he said, needed a transitional period in respect of agriculture and the free movement of labour, services and capital.

Welcoming the Portuguese delegation, the Minister of State of the Federal Republic of Germany, Klaus von Dohnanyi, Chairman of the meeting of EEC Foreign Ministers, said that the EEC was prepared to study possible measures to support Portugal's own efforts.

Mr von Dohnanyi added, however, that, despite the Community's decision to treat each applicant country on the merits of its specific circumstances, consideration had to be given to the fact that two other European countries had also applied for accession.

Roy Jenkins, President of the European Commission, supported this view, saying that the 13-member executive body was ready to consider possible joint action with Portugal in order to help to reorganise the country's economy. He would also call for early meetings with a view to studying the sectors that both sides agreed were sensitive, so that their strategy could be coordinated before Portugal's accession.

Correia Gago: 'Accession to the EEC is a guarantee of the consolidation of democracy'

In his speech at the official opening session of negotiations on Portuguese accession to the EEC — talks are scheduled to begin in earnest in January next year — the Foreign Minister, Mr Correia Gago, began by justifying Portugal's European option which, he felt, was possible because of the conditions created by the introduction of pluralist democracy and the conclusion of the process of decolonisation. He said that the democratic institutions created under the Constitution approved by the elected representatives of the Portuguese people on 2 April 1976 had an unambiguous duty to accept Portugal's European context and to submit the country's application for accession to the European Communities.

After confirming that Portugal unreservedly shared the ideals of democracy, peace and freedom and the political aims and objectives of social and economic progress enshrined in the Treaties of Paris and Rome, the Portuguese Minister argued that, for Portugal, accession to the EEC guaranteed support for the consolidation of democratic institutions, guaranteed that the political equilibrium of Europe would be maintained and guaranteed that Europe's role in preserving peace in the world would be reinforced.

He went on to say that with its capacity for and experience of dialogue with nations of other continents, Portugal would make a positive contribution to the Communities, which were open to the outside world and were prepared to play a mediating and conciliatory role on behalf of a civilisation at the service of nations. He said that Portugal was prepared to offer such a contribution from the outset.

At the press conference held at the end of the meeting of the EEC Council of Ministers, Mr Correia Gago reiterated this position and said that Portugal's application might encourage Angola and Mozambique to join the African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP) that were associated by the EEC Lomé Convention on trade and aid.

Agriculture: a delicate issue

In the official opening session, Mr Correia Gago also referred to certain aspects of the negotiations on accession to the Common Market.

The customs union for industrial products, for example, should be achieved after a relatively short transitional period, thus bringing to fruition the dismantling currently in progress in Portugal of customs barriers vis-à-vis the EEC.

In addition, Portugal was also unlikely to face problems as regards Community trade policy and Community agreements with third countries, once the appropriate transitional periods had been completed.

As for agriculture, the Minister said that Portugal would need a much longer period for adapting to European Community markets and pricing rules.

Pointing out that Portuguese agriculture did not represent a threat to Community agriculture, Mr Correia Gago also said that Portugal should intensify and continue to build its agricultural structures and the technologies used.

As far as the free movement of persons, services and capital was concerned, the Minister drew attention to the flexibility that should govern the impending negotiations, saying that it was an area in which the Portuguese had to be very flexible and that this had to be taken into account in the negotiations as a whole.

Mr Correia Gago also referred to adapting to Community tax systems (still some way off), and the need to define the various forms of Community financial support to Portugal and subsequent Portuguese contributions to the Community budget, bearing in mind the differences in development between Portugal and the Nine.

The Minister pointed out that Portugal's European integration should not be seen exclusively from the perspective of the international division of labour but should take account of the objectives of the country's industrial and agricultural development.

Mr Correia Gago concluded by adding that accession should not hinder the technological progress of certain sectors and that it was to be hoped that restrictions would not be placed on Portuguese imports at that time and during the negotiations.

The definition of joint action to be developed henceforth between Portugal and the EEC would, in fact, be the best way of consolidating the support that the EEC had been providing to Portugal in recent years, particularly in the financial area.

Roy Jenkins: 'Political instability will not hinder the integration process'

The initial negotiating session on Portugal's accession to the EEC was followed by a press conference attended by Mr Correia Gago and the Vice-Governor of the Bank of Portugal, Vítor Constâncio, as well as Roy Jenkins and Klaus von Dohnanyi.

In response to journalists' questions, Mr Correia Gago denied that government instability in Portugal might hinder negotiations on accession to the European market.

Internal government crises should not be seen as a weakness of the democratic system itself, he said.

He added that the basic choices had been made and would be maintained in matters of foreign and economic policy, despite changes in government.

Mr Jenkins then made a point of stressing that the stability of the democratic system in Portugal was not at issue and that there were no indications to suggest a return to a situation similar to that existing before April 1974.

He went on to say that political crises and government instability did not represent a delay and would not hinder the process of European integration, the proof being that negotiations had begun.

Protracted negotiations

Speaking to Portuguese television, however, Mr Constâncio, Chairman of the Committee on Integration into

the EEC, who, together with Raquel Ferreira and the Portuguese Ambassador to the EEC, Sequeira Freire, has been a member of the negotiating delegation from the outset, conceded that negotiations would be protracted, since every aspect was ultimately important.

Mr Constâncio said that one of the most protracted issues was the customs union, but he stressed that the most delicate and difficult aspects to negotiate would clearly be agriculture and financial problems connected with Portuguese relations with members of the Community, as well as the free movement of labour.