

Address given by Ernâni Lopes to the Assembly of the Republic (Lisbon, 9 July 1985)

Caption: On 9 July 1985, addressing the Assembly of the Republic (Portuguese Parliament) in Lisbon, Ernâni Rodrigues Lopes, Portuguese Finance Minister, outlines the economic benefits that Portugal will derive from its accession to the European Communities.

Source: Debates Parlamentares. Diários da Assembleia da República. [EN LIGNE]. [Lisboa]: Assembleia da República, [28.05.2004]. Disponible sur <http://debates.parlamento.pt>.

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Last updated: 04/08/2016



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Mr Speaker, Honourable Members: By signing the Treaty of Accession on 12 June, Portugal opened a new stage in its relations with the European Communities, bringing to a close an eight-year process of negotiation and a period of gradual and cautious approximation to European integration that began in the early 1960s. The approval of the Treaty, our business today, is the very turning point between the recent past, i.e. the outcome of the negotiations, and the near future, the organisation of the integration schemes as a whole. Put more simply, this session represents a point of convergence which simultaneously encapsulates the groundwork for and the implementation and consequences of Portugal's 'European option'.

It would be wrong to see this moment of convergence merely as a legal pretext, as it is, in fact, the starting point for a complex process of economic, political and administrative reorganisation leading to the gradual integration of Community reality into national everyday life. This is particularly true for everything associated directly or indirectly with the use of the European structural funds, the impact of which will be crucial to the reorganisation of Portuguese investment mechanisms. Having expressed the problem in these terms, the approval of the Treaty of Accession essentially raises two distinct and, to some extent, complementary issues for us: on the one hand, the sanctioning of the outcome of the negotiations, and on the other, the conditions for the Portuguese contribution to building the future Europe and defining our position in the world as an integral part of a multilateral space with an undeniable influence on global political and economic balances.

The debate on the influence of the European issue over the last two decades of Portuguese life must also be placed in this context. Without wishing to go into a comprehensive analysis of the issue here, I would like to remind you that the roots of our approximation to the Common Market lie in the gradual (albeit sometimes sudden) change in the forces that sustained Portugal's post-war geo-economic situation.

Among other less important facts, five sets of events have played a crucial role in the development of this phenomenon. In chronological order, I shall refer first to the United Kingdom's accession to the European Communities in January 1973, rendered politically viable by the lifting of the French veto at the 1969 Hague Summit.

It is well known that the cautious Portuguese approximation to the Communities was initially linked to British initiatives. It should also be remembered at this point that in May 1962 the Government sought to open negotiations with the then six Member States. The initial meeting with the Portuguese Delegation, proposed for February 1963, did not take place, precisely because of the first breakdown in negotiations between the Community and the United Kingdom. For Portugal, this concerned a particularly important movement which is not difficult to illustrate: with the first Community enlargement alone, the EEC's share in Portuguese foreign trade automatically rose from 20 to 40 %, while EFTA's proportion fell from 36 to 14 %. This alone would be sufficient justification for the trade agreement signed in 1972 between Portugal and the Communities.

The second set of events that was crucial to altering the country's external framework was the world economic crisis in the early 1970s. There is clearly no need to detail the profound effect this crisis had on our collective life, but at least two of its consequences must be mentioned:

at global level, the major impact that it had on the structure of international specialisation, the monetary and foreign exchange markets, and the organisation of trade flows;

and at a more specific level, its impact on the mobility of labour all over Europe, leading to the sudden collapse of Portuguese emigration flows, the principal balancing element of the 1960s growth model. By way of illustration only, and without citing the fundamental issue of employment, in 1970, the money sent by emigrants represented 10 % of gross national product, 50 % of gross fixed capital formation and 40 % of imports.

Irrespective of their impact on the internal economic situation and on the mechanisms ensuring the overall

regulation of the system, the new international context of Portuguese emigration objectively placed the protection of communities living abroad, particularly in Western Europe, at the forefront of national priorities.

The third event that made a key contribution to the radical change in Portugal's international situation was the 1974–1975 decolonisation process. This is, obviously, one of the most important aspects of Portugal's 20th century history, drawing a 600-year-old cycle to a close and totally transforming, in its own right, all the assumptions underlying our foreign policy, not to mention the bases of our position on European integration.

The fourth event was the trend for the Community to enlarge to include countries in Southern Europe, a trend which began as early as the 1960s, was mapped out more clearly in 1974, and was confirmed in 1975 with the Greek application for accession.

After decolonisation, in particular, Portugal's self-imposed isolation from this trend was to place obvious difficulties in the way of reorganising the country's external framework, especially in terms of relations with Spain, whose integration into the Community could already be predicted quite confidently at the time. Confirmation of this global trend, with far-reaching implications for the structure of political relations and trade flows between northern Europe and the Mediterranean, seen in a broad sense, is one of the factors that would most directly counter the temptation to adopt a model of gradual approximation to the Community based, for example, on a hypothetical status as a developing association.

The fifth and final element is manifested in a frequently underestimated fact: the bringing to fruition in 1979 of the agreement between Spain and EFTA, which finally opened our eyes to the inevitability that customs barriers between the two countries, imposed by the intrinsic logic and inertia typical of the trade liberalisation movements with which both countries were already associated, would be dismantled. This meant that the bases for future intra-peninsular economic relations had been transformed once and for all. All that remains to be done is to define the speed, conditions and direction in which the change should be carried out, with joint accession undoubtedly representing the best framework in which to do so.

[...]

Portuguese Parliament- DAR, I Series, No 105 of 10 July 1985