


Interview with José Medeiros Ferreira: the EFTA Industrial Development Fund for Portugal (Lisbon, 25 October 2007)

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[Miriam Mateus] In 1975, an EFTA Industrial Development Fund was set up in favour of Portugal and was to come into force later, in 1977. Do you remember how that Fund was applied?

[José Medeiros Ferreira] I wouldn't know about the details, because it was more the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Trade that were responsible for it, rather than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But I do remember that it was very good for showing that our application for accession to the EEC didn't damage us in any way, in that the EFTA countries themselves still intended to continue to support Portugal in that transitional period, even though they knew that we were gravitating towards full EEC membership. And, as I said, that revitalised the Portuguese economy during the political crisis of the transition from dictatorship to the institutionalisation of democracy in 1975, so, from that point of view, it showed that EFTA was interested in Portugal's political, economic and social future.

For the specific details, you'll have to ask the respective sectors — trade, industry — but I do know that it was also useful for maintaining our financial capacity in particular and for programmes for modernising the Portuguese economy. But, above all, it showed, despite the application for accession to the EEC, that the EFTA countries continued to show solidarity with Portugal.

I know that there was a time when Portugal was actually receiving aid from two Funds — I'm not even going to mention the other *ad hoc* Fund that was set up by the Council of Europe, because that's another story. It was the EFTA Fund and the 'pre-accession aid' with which the EEC provided us in the late 1970s — we haven't got there yet, but I can move on a little — precisely because the Portuguese strategy defined by the first constitutional Government and set out in that Government's programme involved an early application for accession and sufficient time for productive negotiations allowing both parties to prepare appropriately for an economy such as ours to accede to the EEC.

So, from that point of view, both the EFTA Fund that assisted Portugal and the pre-accession aid from the EEC were instruments that, to some extent, preceded the application of the Structural Funds in Portugal after we acceded to the EEC. The EFTA Fund and pre-accession aid were, therefore, in some ways, the embryo of that other new feature, the Structural Funds, which came to Portugal once we acceded to the European Community in 1986.