

Interview with António Vitorino: the support of the Portuguese people for accession to the European Communities (Lisbon, 24 October 2007)

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[Miriam Mateus] When Portugal joined the Communities, what was the attitude of the political parties, the trade unions and Portuguese employers to accession?

[António Vitorino] Perhaps I should say that I believe that the first main feature of accession in Portugal was a political feature. We had an unstable democracy that had recently emerged from a period of 48 years of dictatorship. There was a troubled revolutionary period in 1974 and 1975 after the fall of the dictatorship, and, against that background, accession to the European Union, or the European Communities as it was at the time, was largely a kind of insurance policy for pluralist democracy in Portugal. The Portuguese understood that accession to the EU would give them that guarantee of democratic stability and then, naturally, in a complementary way, an opportunity for economic development and for improving people's living conditions and welfare. So, at the time, the political decision enjoyed broad support both from the general public and among the political parties, the only exception being the Portuguese Communist Party; all the others voted in favour. At trade-union level, the political divisions were mirrored to some extent — the trade union federation allied or closer to the Communist Party was against accession, while the other trade unions were in favour. Most employers' associations were in favour of acceding in 1986.