

## Interview with José da Silva Lopes: conditions for Portugal's accession to the European Communities (Lisbon, 23 October 2007)

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[Miriam Mateus] In the early 1970s, how far did the introduction of the common regional policy influence Portugal's attitude to the Community? And how did it boost, as it were, the willingness to get closer, or how far did it speed up the application for accession to the Communities?

[José da Silva Lopes] I suppose that it wasn't a key factor. I mean that, when we negotiated the 1972 commercial agreement, it didn't include any aspect of the common regional policy. It was purely commercial, there was no Community financial aid, there was nothing. As I say, the political conditions weren't right for that, they didn't allow it. I've already said that Portugal had political difficulties at the time, even in its relations with Europe, because of its colonial policy. So, at the time, it wasn't possible to include any financial support mechanism, so the 1972 commercial agreement wasn't influenced by regional policy at all.

After the 25 April Revolution, when Portugal became a democratic country, we renegotiated the terms of the agreement with the European Community, and a financial component of aid to Portugal from the Community was introduced. It wasn't really incorporated into regional policy, because regional policy was only for Member States, but a financial support component was introduced that hadn't existed until then, and it only appeared with Portugal's democratisation.

Then Mário Soares became Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1974, and he had very close links with Europe. Mário Soares suggested that we should submit a formal application for accession to the EEC. I was also in the Government at the time. Mr Soares consulted several members of the Government, not just me, who were regarded as 'technocrats', and asked us what we thought of it. He still tells that story today, and it's good to clarify it.

He said that the Government's technocrats said that it was unthinkable. And I was one of them. I was one of them because, hitherto, the European Community had always set two conditions. There was the famous Birkelbach report — I think that was the name — which said that countries that wanted to join the European Community had to fulfil two conditions: they had to be democratic and they had to be sufficiently well developed. If they fulfilled the first condition, they could become associates, and, if they didn't, they couldn't even do that. That's why they accepted Greece as an associate but not as a member, because, when Greece signed the association agreement, it was considered to be a democratic country, but it wasn't considered to be sufficiently well developed.

When Mário Soares submitted the proposal, I and the other technocrats said that we fulfilled the first condition but not the second. It was unthinkable. At best, we could aspire to becoming an associate member. Mário Soares told us that we were wrong, and he was right. There was a change in policy in the European Community at the time. The European Community no longer placed the same emphasis on the level of economic development as it had hitherto. So it opened up, not just to Portugal but to Greece and Spain as well ... It began to show an openness that it had not shown previously.

Mário Soares therefore decided to go ahead with the application for accession, and a good thing, too — fortunately, he succeeded, and so did we. Now, it wasn't the policy that had been pursued hitherto by the European Union, by the EEC as it was called at the time, it wasn't the policy that had been pursued, but, fortunately, it changed. And, from then on, I was one of the major supporters of accession, although, previously, I was convinced that it wasn't possible, I was a bit out of step. Mário Soares had political contacts at the highest European level, he was better placed than I was.