

Interview with José Medeiros Ferreira: economic and trade relations between Portugal and the EEC (Lisbon, 25 October 2007)

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[Miriam Mateus] What was the nature of the economic links between Portugal and the Community countries at that time?

[José Medeiros Ferreira] Well, it was a very transitional period, it might take a while to explain. It was like this: irrespective of the fall of the dictatorship, Portugal had integrated into Europe — I know that what I'm going to say isn't emphasised very much, at least among us — but Portugal had integrated into Europe in the UK's slipstream, so to speak. The fact that the UK hadn't subscribed to the Treaty of Rome, for various reasons, was to result in EFTA. Portugal was to be a founder member of EFTA, together with several countries, including the UK.

In 1962, the UK applied for accession to the Common Market, or the EEC, bearing in mind the Treaty of Rome's initial success from 1957–58 onwards. In 1962, the UK applied for accession. In the wake of that application, although it was the last EFTA country to do so, Portugal also applied for accession, asking for negotiations to be opened with the Common Market. The negotiations were to be interrupted and would be abandoned, because, as we know from our general history, de Gaulle's France would not accept the UK's application for negotiations to be opened in 1962. Portugal also lost interest, as it were, in its application for accession and for negotiations to begin.

Actually, the Universidade Nova holds some papers written by students of mine on that 1962 application that might be of interest to your Centre, and some articles have already been published on the subject.

Then, when General de Gaulle was replaced by President Pompidou, negotiations with the UK resumed in 1969. They were to conclude in 1972, and the UK, the Republic of Ireland and Denmark acceded the following year. The only reason Norway didn't accede was because a Norwegian referendum prevented it. At the same time, Portugal established a trade agreement with the Common Market or EEC, the famous 1972 agreement. And that was precisely because the United Kingdom was going to accede to the EEC. So, from then on, the EFTA countries would negotiate a special trade agreement with the EEC, and Portugal therefore went along with that.

That 1972 agreement, which was very controversial in Portugal, bearing in mind that the Caetano regime was still in power and that the colonial war was still going on, included the 'future developments' clause, which made it possible to improve some mechanisms — which were, in fact, improved during the democratic regime — and negotiations were to be concluded during the term of the first constitutional Government. It was those additional protocols to the 1972 agreement that I was going to sign in Brussels in September (I can't remember the exact date, but I think it was 20 or 21 September) — the additional protocol, the financial protocol, the industrial protocol, the trade protocol, and I made a speech at the time that said roughly that the potential of the 1972 agreement had run its course and that Portugal wanted to begin a new stage of relations with the EEC, which would be marked by the submission of an application to sign up to the Treaty of Rome, Article 236 if I remember correctly again, so full membership, at the appropriate time. It was the diplomatic phrase, so to speak, that I expressed in Brussels on 21 September 1976.

From then on, obviously, all the Member States, which numbered nine at the time — negotiations with Greece were under way — were notified that Portugal was going to apply for accession to the EEC at the appropriate time.

[Miriam Mateus] Having played a part in the Portuguese resistance, if I can put it like that, perhaps you know what the attitude of the European Socialist parties was in relation to Portugal during the country's democratisation. Was there any support or any help from them, either before, during or after the 25 April Revolution?

[José Medeiros Ferreira] I can speak only in political terms, and, in those terms, there was some support that

was very objective and which is historically recognised and speaks for itself.

The Portuguese Socialist Party was founded in 1973 with the support of Germany's SPD, so that says everything about part of your question. But it wasn't only the SPD, the German SPD sponsored the meeting that formed the Socialist Party, let's say. And the UK itself, which was governed by the Labour Party at the time, was showing signs, especially after 25 April, of support for the Portuguese Socialist Party's ambitions, with particular regard to Portugal's application for accession to the EEC.

I'd perhaps like to say here that, bearing in mind not least that the half-yearly Presidency of the Community in the first half of 1977 (when we applied for accession) was held by the UK, our journeys in preparation for the application for accession — because we made two preparatory journeys, one delegation led by the Prime Minister, which included the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the then President of the *Comissão de Integração Europeia* [European Integration Committee] and now Governor of the Bank of Portugal, Victor Constâncio, I hardly need to tell you who the Minister for Foreign Affairs was — we were going to visit the nine capitals and began the journey in which we would inform the respective governments that we were going to apply for full membership — the appropriate time, therefore, came much more quickly than could have been imagined a few months previously, not on our initiative but on the initiative of the European countries themselves — and we began the journey in the UK, in London.

So, from that point of view, I'd say that, by coincidence, London accompanied us, as it were, as we acceded to the EEC, and not only because of party solidarity, because that was your question, but to illustrate the practical side of that solidarity, so to speak.

To go back a little, in February 1976, if I'm not mistaken, there was a large International Socialist meeting in Oporto, under the slogan 'Europe with us', I think. The Portuguese Socialist Party attended with its European partners to show the Portuguese nation that its struggle for representative democracy and for the country's progress was supported by the European Socialist and Social Democratic Parties. I think that that meeting in Oporto, if I remember correctly, because it was some years ago now, was held in February 1976, under the title 'Europe with us'.

And then there was a committee, but that was a little while before — I've jumped a little here — in August 1975 at the Helsinki Conference, which enshrined East-West *détente* and the famous Helsinki Final Act, which went some way towards stabilising relations on the European continent. A solidarity committee with Portugal and with the Portuguese Socialist Party was also going to be set up because of the unrest prevailing at the time, when there were still no representative democratic institutions in Portugal and when such institutions appeared to be threatened here and there.

So, for a clearer summary, I'd say that the solidarity of the European Socialist and Social Democratic Parties is clearly illustrated by the fact that the German SPD hosted the founding of the Socialist Party and by the fact that the European Socialist Parties had formed a solidarity committee with Portugal in summer 1975, in response to the period of transition prevailing in Portugal. Afterwards, in February 1976, there was the meeting of the International Socialist parties in Oporto under the slogan 'Europe with us', which was, moreover, also used in the Socialist Party's parliamentary election campaign in April 1976.

[Miriam Mateus] So, to be a little more specific perhaps, you said a short while ago that you represented Portugal's first constitutional Government in signing the additional protocol to the 1972 agreement, the financial protocol and the interim agreement with the EEC in Brussels on 20 September 1976. Could you be more specific about how important those agreements were for the country and how the negotiations that led to the agreements unfolded?

[José Medeiros Ferreira] The negotiations were relatively easy, because, in the end, the protocols weren't particularly significant. They simply indicated that Portugal wanted to keep what it had secured in 1972 and then to move rapidly on to the application for accession. So, in essence, the additional protocols were a kind of 'scaffolding' for us, so that we could climb higher up the structure of European integration. That's why I declared at the time that the 'future developments' clause in the 1972 agreement had run its course. We

didn't want to continue to work on our relations with the EEC on the basis of an agreement that didn't allow us to be at its very core, that didn't allow us to participate in the Community institutions, the [European] Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the Luxembourg Court. So, the 1972 agreement was an obstacle to some extent, if we continued to bring it up, in the way of the first constitutional Government's real strategic objective, which was the application for full accession, i.e. for Portugal to become part of the Community bodies rather than being a partner like Turkey and as Greece still was at the time, although it was already negotiating. And why not mention right now that our application for accession preceded Spain's, since, in terms of the development of a democratic regime, Portugal was more advanced than Spain at the time.

[Miriam Mateus] We know that the United Kingdom and Portugal are two founder members of EFTA, two countries that always maintained preferential economic and trade links. So, when the United Kingdom withdrew in order to accede to the European Communities in 1973, do you think that EFTA's position was weakened? And do you think that the UK's withdrawal influenced Portugal's position in relation to EFTA in any way?

[José Medeiros Ferreira] Well, from the historical point of view, I think that it's been shown that the UK's withdrawal from EFTA in order to accede to the EEC was the beginning of the end for EFTA. After all these years, though, if we have to mark the process, you could say that when Europe went from 12 to 15 Member States, the Europe of the 15 bore witness to the fact that EFTA was effectively over, because EFTA was always a kind of transitional host for states that would accede to the EEC sooner or later.

At that time, there was a problem generated by the Cold War that prevented some neutral countries, such as Finland, for example, or Austria — not to mention Switzerland, which has a different kind of neutrality — from acceding to the EEC in the immediate future. As soon as the Cold War ended, however, and Germany reunified, and that whole process was over, countries that might have a certain formal difficulty in acceding to the EEC, such as Finland and Austria, would do so, and they would naturally do so because their economies were already geared heavily towards the market economy that laid down its rules in the EEC. So, it was a natural process. Out of the EFTA countries, if my memory doesn't fail me, I think that the only one that didn't accede was Switzerland.

So once the UK acceded — to answer your question specifically — EFTA's demise could be foreseen, because, in terms of British strategy, it was always a kind of comfortable halfway house for its future accession to the EEC. And it turned out to be the same for Portugal, too. Portuguese economic history and even some of its political history — though I disagree with certain aspects of that interpretation — like very much to point out that Portugal's membership of EFTA was a kind of first stage of European integration, and it certainly was in terms of what could be called trade or commercial liberalisation, with the added gratification of the famous 'Annex G' that was negotiated in 1959–1960. So, in that respect, EFTA wasn't always a factor for European integration, it represented another approach that was very different from the EEC. I'd say that the EEC was the real objective of a country like the United Kingdom.

And, to be frank, Portugal was very closely linked to the United Kingdom at that time because, among other things, its trade with the UK and some of the foreign investment in Portugal, but especially trade, was much greater than it is today. Portugal was heavily dependent on the markets opening symmetrically between the United Kingdom and Portugal.