


# Interview with José Medeiros Ferreira: the development of Portugal since its accession to the Communities (Lisbon, 25 October 2007)

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[Miriam Mateus] You are now a university professor, and you're also a specialist in international relations. How do you define Portugal's development since it acceded to the Communities? In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of Portuguese accession?

[José Medeiros Ferreira] Well, that's a huge question, and my answer will have to be succinct. But I'll say again that I think that Portugal did the right thing in acceding to the European Community. The initial period was very positive. The fact that it was so positive ended up by turning us into the 'good pupil', it ended up by undermining the Portuguese elite's criticism of European integration, and that could have some damaging effects.

I'd say that, since the Stability Pact and the dual conversion of the escudo, the 1992 exchange rate, to which I've already referred, I won't repeat it, for joining the European Monetary System snake in 1992 and then the rate for converting escudos into euros in 1998 or 1999, overvaluing the escudo, always penalised the competitiveness of the Portuguese manufacturing industry, particularly its export industry. I also know that we could be talking about a transitional adjustment, but that caused real difficulties for the country's economic growth, something which is illustrated by the fact that, in recent years, Portugal hasn't kept pace with average European economic growth.

So many issues have been talked about — we've already talked about vocational training — and those involved say very little, for example, about those two monetary and financial factors which I think should be studied. The same applies to something else that hasn't been studied in Portugal, I don't know if it's done in other countries, but, in Portugal, there's no reflection on negotiating techniques and on how to negotiate in the EU, whether at Commission, Council of Ministers or European Parliament level. But, perhaps the most interesting aspect is the Commission's right to propose legislation for approval in the Council of Ministers — that's what we're talking about. So there's no reflection on those negotiating techniques, and consequently ... Obviously, the diplomats will certainly have their notions and their practice, but, in my view, there's no culture of developing those techniques.

I'll say again that it's vaguely connected to the idea that the European Union will always generally be beneficial for Portugal. I think that, too. Obviously, in general, and this is a political choice, it's beneficial. But it might be advisable for the Portuguese elite to take a more critical and rational view of their involvement in the European Union rather than that slightly ... 'contented citizens' view, taking a roughly similar position to Poland's a short time ago. Without going as far as Poland, I think that what Portugal lacks is a critical mid-term appraisal of what's going well and what's going badly in terms of the European Union.

And I think that a fundamental point is connected with relations between the European Central Bank and the economic coordination of Ecofin or that there should at least be some reflection on this. Portugal never proposes anything in this area, does it? That's what I mean. Portugal is incapable of going to a meeting of this kind and saying that we need greater understanding between Ecofin and the ECB or asking why the ECB prints money when there's an international credit crisis and why the members of Ecofin don't have anything to say about it. These are just a few examples to show that the Portuguese elite needs to be more active or proactive as regards European integration.

The Spanish elite made very good use of accession, didn't it? And, to some extent, Spain's accession — Portugal has a President of the European Commission, you might think I'm forgetting that, but I'm not. But Spain achieved responsibilities and positions within the EU's mechanisms more quickly. I'm not trying to compete, I'm just saying that Portugal will have to develop a more active attitude within the European Union.

[Miriam Mateus] In conclusion, and on a more personal note, how did you experience that historic moment of Portugal's accession to the European Communities?

[José Medeiros Ferreira] Well, I'll tell you something to do with my citizenship. Since I was Minister for Foreign Affairs when Portugal applied for accession, I felt very responsible for the way in which Portugal's accession to the European Community had gone or would go. That was why I opted to stand as an MEP. So, I spent the first four years of Portugal's membership of the Community as an MEP, precisely so that I could observe the consequences of accession as far as I could and with a sense of individual and political responsibility. But, obviously, I saw it as a very positive thing. And I was in the Jerónimos Monastery, I was invited as former Minister for Foreign Affairs to be there when the Treaty of Accession was signed, and that was a defining moment in the history of Portugal. I usually say, and will say in conclusion, that Portugal's European choice was the key strategic choice of the Portuguese democratic regime.