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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/cdlm/7879>

ISSN: 1773-0201

Publisher

Centre de la Méditerranée moderne et contemporaine

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 June 2015

Number of pages: 47-58

ISBN: 978-2-914-561-64-8

ISSN: 0395-9317

Electronic reference

Alice Cunha, « Underwriting Democracy: Portugal and European Economic Community's Accession », *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* [Online], 90 | 2015, Online since 01 December 2015, connection on 08 September 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/cdlm/7879>

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Underwriting Democracy: Portugal and European Economic Community's Accession

Alice Cunha

Democracy is a delicate flower.
Mário Soares¹

Reluctant yet pragmatic: Introduction

- ¹ There was a new development in Portuguese foreign policy from the mid-1970s, with a more interested, active and committed participation in European integration. The end of the *Estado Novo* (New State) authoritative regime, and the beginning of the transition towards democracy, introduced significant changes in the Portuguese foreign policy priorities, specifically in regard to Europe and European integration, even if those changes were not immediate or disruptive.
- ² Between April 1974 and July 1976 the first, timid, inconsistent and somewhat casual pro-democratic steps were taken towards choosing Europe as a political and economic reference for the new political regime. By then, Portugal was no longer an apprentice in regard to European integration, but it had never followed the “main route”,² that is, it had never been fully engaged in it. In fact, from a broader perspective, the participation in the Marshall Plan was the start of the Portuguese “European adventure”.³ Due to the non-democratic nature of the political regime, Portugal was not invited to negotiate the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community, nor the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC), but the country kept on building contacts, mostly economic ones, conducted over the course of more than two decades, in which, despite the government’s little political interest in European integration, it was able to collect economic benefits and advantages from it. Thus, despite two requests to enhance the existing relationship between the country and the EEC in the 1960s and the signing of trade agreements in 1972, it was only after 1974,

with the slow emergence of a new political regime in Portugal, that the relationship between Portugal and the EEC was going to improve and undergo a positive change, especially by the decision to join the EEC.

- 3 Amongst the reasons that supported the accession request one stands out: democratic consolidation. Indeed, several authors point out the establishment and/or consolidation of democracy as a reason for presenting the EEC membership request.⁴ Hence, by addressing the Portugal-EEC relationship between 1974 and 1977, this archive-research article aims to acknowledge the democratic principle as a condition for any state to join the EEC and, particularly, to assess what its role was in the Portuguese goal of joining the EEC in 1977 and of obtaining financial aid from it.⁵

Democracy and accession to the EEC

- 4 Application for membership has its legal basis in article 237 of the Treaty of Rome, which states that “any European state may apply to become a member of the Community”, by addressing “its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after obtaining the opinion of the Commission”. Although the Treaty of Rome is rather vague as to the membership requirements, stating only that the candidate must belong geographically to Europe, the predecessor of the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the EEC, had set some conditions for membership in 1962: geographically belonging to Europe, having a minimum degree of industrialization; being a democratic regime; belonging to Western defence organizations, and accepting the Treaty of Rome.⁶ In the same year, the Birkelbach Report⁷ established similar conditions: only European states could join the EEC; they must have the capacity to pursue EEC’s economic goals; and they had to be a democracy. Later, in 1970, the Davignon Report⁸ supported a vision of Europe built on the respect of freedom and human rights, which unites democratic states that have elected parliaments. Until 1976, except for the geographical circumstance of belonging to Europe, Portugal did not fulfil any of these conditions.
- 5 When the United Kingdom (UK) started to engage its way out of the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) to join the EEC in 1961, Portugal, a founding member of the EFTA, had a choice to make regarding a possible application to the EEC. With an UK-free EFTA, Portugal would lose its main trading partner and some other business benefits. Resigned, but not convinced, Portugal tried to get a closer and more beneficial involvement with the EEC on two occasions, in 1962 and again in 1969, following UK accession requests, even though it did not clearly state whether it was pursuing a fiscal, commercial or association agreement. Neither attempt resulted in more than a trade agreement, because, although the EEC was mainly an economic organization at the time, its genesis included the principle of political democracy, which kept Portugal, an authoritarian regime, away from any other pretension.
- 6 In regard to European integration, the 1953 diplomatic circular on the idea of a European federation,⁹ written by Salazar himself, clearly states that Portugal’s vocation has always been the sea and that the overseas expansion was the most distinctive accomplishment of Portuguese history: the Atlantic is definitely the country’s calling, which, in itself, imposes limits to European cooperation. Nevertheless, the 1960s may be considered as the starting point for a new phase in relation to Europe, characterized

by less isolation and greater openness to the movement for economic European cooperation.

- 7 By joining EFTA since its beginning in 1960, Portugal ceased to be an outcast from the European integration movements, although once again Salazar yielded without yielding, since Portuguese commitments were purely economic and commercial, and most importantly did not concern or jeopardize the colonial territories, nor the regime.¹⁰ In the end, the EFTA experience facilitated the Portuguese entry in the first line of European integration, and it was indeed the first real step towards its integration into the European economic area, which proved to be fundamental for the signature of trade agreements in 1972. In reality, both movements –decolonization and European integration– had been agglutinated by the Portuguese political elites into a single issue: the regime's survival.¹¹
- 8 After Salazar's rule, Marcelo Caetano's, who came into office in 1968, ideas about the relationship between Portugal and Europe did "not depart out of the pragmatism that was defined by his predecessor",¹² while he maintained two important lines of action: the first concerned the survival of the regime, which was closely linked to retaining the overseas provinces and to the preference for Atlantic relations; the second looked at trade, given the fact that Europe was the country's main trading partner from the 1960s onwards.
- 9 Despite a strong commitment in colonial issues, there was also a new and fledgling pro-European movement that, regardless of numerous obstacles, was able to achieve some positive results and bring the country closer to European institutions.¹³ This was especially true of the 1972 Trade Agreements, which were the last formal act of approaching Europe before the end of the regime. After the Carnation Revolution on 25 April 1974 and the subsequent decolonization, a broad discussion about what the main option of the country's foreign policy should be was on the agenda.
- 10 In the two attempts to get closer to the EEC in the 1960s, "Portugal had problems in almost all areas",¹⁴ but since the Portuguese political situation would change a few years later, the scenario was going to be more favourable for Portugal. After the Carnation Revolution, Portugal began a democratic adjustment of its political institutions, which would last for two years, until the first elected government came into office on 23 July 1976. In the first years after the revolution there was some uncertainty about the options for the direction to take, both domestically and in foreign policy, until three different priorities finally emerged: completing decolonization by 25 November 1975; defining the type of regime for the country, seeking support abroad and approaching the EEC with the purpose of raising financing and furthering trade relations; and moving towards Europe, from the end of 1975 when Europe/EEC began to strengthen its position in the context of the definition of Portuguese foreign policy.¹⁵
- 11 However, as both José Medeiros Ferreira and António José Telo point out,¹⁶ at the time there was a struggle regarding foreign policy preferences, with no clear guidelines, and a multiplication of institutional actors (the Church, political parties, trade unions, etc.) which had their own particular understandings and agenda, and while some supported the reinforcement of Atlantic relations, others advocated total isolation or closer ties with the bloc of "Third World" countries. Despite this profusion of opinions, even if the EEC was not the only choice and the one that gathered the most supporters, the so-called Western/democratic option appeared as "virtually unquestionable", and its

supporters argued that democratic consolidation was a requirement for EEC accession.

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- 12 Among the reasons given in support of Portuguese application, the most cited are precisely democratic consolidation and economic development.¹⁸ In Portugal, as well as in Spain and previously in Greece, such underlying justifications for their respective application were somewhat “cautious and vague”, foreseeing that accession would strengthen democracy and enhance economic development, not considering the full economic and social implications of it.¹⁹
- 13 For applicant countries, the motivations to join, with some few exceptions, were economic and political. The Portuguese case is no exception and has been touted as an example and compared to the Eastern enlargement in its features of democratic consolidation support and economic development. For instance, Pedro Álvares compares the Portuguese accession negotiations with the 2004 enlargement in several areas, such as competition, fisheries, external relations, taxation, social policy and the internal market, and establishes similarities between both negotiations.²⁰ Sebastián Royo presents some lessons, such as the argument that the democratic principle is an incentive for democratization and institutional reform,²¹ and more recently, Martijn Schukkink and Arne Niemann argue that the Portuguese support for the fifth enlargement had always been based on the concepts of democratic choice and stability, presented ever since the Portuguese accession negotiations.²²

Democracy and financial aid

- 14 The fragile political situation in Portugal and the needs expressed by the Portuguese authorities led many European leaders –Max Van der Stöel, Claude Cheysson, Altiero Spinelli, Edmund Wellenstein, Roland de Kergorlay, Xavier Ortoli, Christopher Soames–²³ to visit Portugal between 1974 and 1976 and some Portuguese government officials – Rui Vilar, Ernesto Melo Antunes and José da Silva Lopes– to visit Brussels in order to learn what the position of the EEC was in relation to Portugal and its claims.
- 15 Two months only after taking office on 16 May 1974, the first interim government expressed at the third meeting of the Joint Committee EEC-Portugal, held in Brussels on 27 June, its intention to apply the evolutionary clause of the 1972 trade agreements, thus demonstrating interest in “consolidating and intensifying the existing relations”²⁴ with the EEC. In addition, the government also conveyed the hope that the EEC could quickly help the Portuguese economy, stressing the link the country had with the democratic principle and the fundamental objectives of the EEC.²⁵
- 16 On a visit to Bonn (19-20 May 1975), the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ernesto Melo Antunes noted that, at the time, the exclusion to accession was due specifically to Portugal’s poor economic development.²⁶ Underlying this statement, however, was a governance shift leftwards. In fact, “the radicalization of the revolutionary process would hinder closer relations with Europe”, not only due to the EEC’s rigidity in supporting only a democratic regime, but also because provisional governments “are not committed in this reinforcement, for which they have rejected any possibility of association with the Community and explicitly assumed the privileged relationship with the Third World countries”.²⁷

- 17 During the spring of 1975, the Portuguese political situation became increasingly unstable. The EEC remained attentive to the unfolding events and fretted with the succession of provisional governments, and especially with the possibility that the country would head towards communism, so it responded cautiously to Portuguese needs, since no member state considered the presence of communists in the interim governments as a positive factor. There was however the understanding within the EEC that the country should not be left alone. In June 1975, the Commission suggested an economic and financial aid so as to contribute to the country's economic development and to show the Portuguese that it was willing to help the nation move towards democracy.²⁸
- 18 The second interim government led by Vasco Gonçalves brought more military to ministerial posts and started a left-leaning political turn. Soon afterwards, the third interim government, which took office on 30 September 1975, formally assumed in its programme the will to submit proposals to modify some clauses of the EEC-Portugal trade agreements, namely regarding the textile and steel industries, and to extend cooperation to other areas. This was, however, a fleeting endeavour, as a government reshuffle led, four months later, to another provisional government, which adopted a "gently apart and reticent"²⁹ position regarding Europe.
- 19 In regard to the Portuguese transition to democracy, particular assessments on different actors were made, such as on Mário Soares's role and the way his actions contributed and/or influenced the country's path towards choosing a political regime in 1975-1976; on the German policy towards Portugal for the establishment of a pluralist and Western-like democracy; on the United States' political action and its impact in Portugal during the democratic transition; and also on US reaction to the Portuguese revolution and its impact on the relations between the United States and its Western European allies; finally, on NATO members' attitudes towards the evolution of the revolutionary process in Portugal.³⁰
- 20 Francisco Castro examines the influence that both the EEC and the United States of America had in the Portuguese transition period, revealing two distinct positions: the USA would not tolerate the presence of communists in the government, but it would not intervene, so for the Americans, Portugal should serve as an example to other countries. As far as the EEC was concerned, moderates should be helped, in view of a political evolution towards parliamentary democracy.³¹ But even these distinctive positions were not inflexible. Whilst Secretary of State Henry Kissinger wanted the communists to take power to turn Portugal into a model of a communist regime, the Ambassador to Portugal, Frank Carlucci, on the other hand wanted to help the moderates, a solution that would prevail in the end. Similar contrasts applied within the EEC, where Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was against any aid to Portugal because of the risk of it becoming communist, whereas the Federal Republic of Germany financially supported the moderates.
- 21 In the midst of these two diverging opinions among the member states, at the Brussels European Council (16-17 July 1975), there was an understanding that the EEC aid should be conditioned on the progress made towards pluralist democracy. In the conclusions of this Council, a statement on Portugal clearly indicated that the EEC was willing to cooperate more with the country in economic and financial areas, as long as Portugal became a democratic state.³²

- 22 The same understanding was reaffirmed later in 1975 in the Luxembourg European Council, where member states agreed that EEC's support truly depended on the developments of the Portuguese political state of affairs and its commitment towards democracy, which leads us to the relationship between democracy and financial aid.³³ On this matter, the Commission position was very clear, when it stated that "the emergency aid should clearly be framed on the perspective of the consolidation of a pluralistic democracy in Portugal, being of the Community best interest to support Portugal to that end", adding that if "Portugal does not pursue that goal or it becomes out of reach, all the arguments in favour of that help will lose their legitimacy".³⁴
- 23 On the relationship between democracy and European integration, Robert Fishman believes that the EEC did not create Southern Europe democracies, on the occasion of their applications to become member states,³⁵ but in fact the relationship between democratization and European integration "evolved to the consolidation path".³⁶ Precisely, one of the most distinctive lessons learned from the Portuguese case is the important role that organizations such as the EEC could play in transition periods towards democracy. Portugal was indeed one of the first countries where the EEC used the prospect of economic aid and eventual membership as an incentive for further democratization.³⁷
- 24 In that sense, it was only at the end of 1975 (7 October), when the government was already free of a communist trend and more stable, and the EEC believed that Portugal would follow the route of a pluralist democracy, that an exceptional emergency aid was given to Portugal. Later that year (25 November), a military coup put a definitive halt to any further left-wing progression.
- 25 At that early stage of democracy-building in Portugal, the EEC was apprehensive, fearful that a real democracy might not be accomplished. With that in mind, it was often said by Commission officials that the EEC was willing to help Portugal by any means, but that it would only do so if Portugal presented proofs that it was actually heading for a democratic regime. During the Strasbourg session of the European Parliament (16 to 20 June 1975), the European Commissioner for External Relations, Christopher Soames, called on the EEC to grant an immediate and substantial assistance to Portugal, a financial aid which would help Portugal progress towards a pluralist democracy. This proposal was, in fact, presented at a time of growing scepticism among European leaders in regard to the latest developments in Portugal, who were not confident about the effect that such aid could have.³⁸
- 26 A sign that things were getting on track, proven by the beginning of the stabilization of the Portuguese democracy, was given on 20 January 1976, when the Council authorized the revision of the 1972 trade agreements. Negotiations were achieved six months later. Although this revision was important, especially for Portugal, it did not fundamentally change the relationship between Portugal and the EEC, since it remained a purely commercial involvement. Nevertheless, after Portugal had been considered as the "Albania of Western Europe",³⁹ 1976 was an important year in the improvement of that liaison, setting in motion a course of action that would lead to presentation of the accession request in 1977.

Membership as a reward for democratization

- 27 When the first constitutional government, led by Mário Soares, came into office in 1976, the history of the relationship between Portugal and the EEC changed. Until then the EEC had a somewhat secondary place in Portuguese foreign policy, but from that moment on it became a priority, which could only be fulfilled with accession.
- 28 In order to achieve that goal, Prime Minister Soares decided to go on a European *tour* and visited the member states' capitals between 14 February and 12 March 1977 in order to gain support. From the beginning of these visits, the main argument was set: democracy in Europe,⁴⁰ an argument that British and Germans suggested from the beginning. In this respect, Suzannah Verney argues that democratic tradition was not present at the time of the creation of the EEC, but it developed during the next half century, expanding in response to external and not to internal stimuli.⁴¹ In fact, initially, none of the founding treaties established democracy as an objective of European integration, although from the 1960s it began to appear in the Community's discourse, until it found an explicit reference in the Single European Act (1986). But already with the first enlargement in 1973, "the international support for democracy became a publicly proclaimed goal of the Community".⁴²
- 29 The outcome of the European *tour* was positive in regard to the political support that all member states endorsed for the country's democratic consolidation, which used a weakness –the fear of becoming a communist state– as its strongest argument.⁴³ Indeed, the importance of economic factors should not overshadow the political motivations of joining the EEC, since "accession was primarily a political choice: EEC integration created a complex system of incentives (symbolic and material) and guarantees that favoured democratization" both in Portugal and in Spain.⁴⁴ On 28 March 1977 Portugal presented its application to join the EEC and the arguments presented to request accession were essentially two: democratic stabilization and economic development.
- 30 The first constitutional government played an important role in regard to Portugal's European integration, by providing a new impetus and by delivering the accession request, signifying that Europe was no longer just an economic option, but rather a political one. On 28 March 1977, the Portuguese Ambassador, António de Siqueira Freire, presented the EEC accession application, which entailed a long and thorny accession negotiation process, during which the argument supporting the consolidation of Portuguese democracy was repeated several times throughout the negotiations and by different actors, who considered membership as "a guarantee for the consolidation of the young democracy"⁴⁵ and a "means of underwriting democracy".⁴⁶
- 31 In Portugal, Greece and Spain the progress towards democracy was undeniable⁴⁷ and that pleased the EEC, whose representatives assumed their commitment towards it. On the other hand, it was evident that rejecting an application from those three countries would "stimulate the Communist forces evidently alive in each of them",⁴⁸ a fact that determined that the reasons underlying both the second and third enlargements were political, both for the applicant countries as well as for the member states.⁴⁹
- 32 The accession request entailed a complex negotiation process, in which what might have appeared, at the start, to be a simple and fast negotiation, similar to the previous ones, ended after almost eight years of negotiations. All sort of things interacted with

and delayed Portuguese accession. Along the way, as Tsoukalis points out, the Portuguese negotiating strength was sustained by both its economic weakness and the threat of a radical reorientation of its foreign policy.⁵⁰ Future EEC membership considered accession as “a reward for democratization”,⁵¹ which makes democracy a key point in the history of the relationship between Portugal and the EEC.

Conclusion

- 33 For two decades, between 1951 and 1972, Portugal decided, partly on its own, partly due to external constraints –mostly to its non-democratic political regime– to continue relations with the EEC without seeking closer involvement, also given the fact that in the 1960s and 1970s joining the EEC was neither a real possibility nor a genuine desire.
- 34 With the overthrow of the authoritarian regime, Portugal initiated its path towards democracy. However, it took some time before the achievement of a minimum degree of democratic consolidation. Concerned about the political developments in Portugal, the EEC subordinated from the beginnings its economic assistance and support to the instauration of a democratic regime. Only a democratic Portugal could, first, receive economic and financial assistance, and then become a member state.
- 35 In two years, between 25 April 1974 and 1976, when the first constitutional government took office, six interim governments held office, lasting between one and ten months. Under those circumstances, any further and more concrete definition or precise and structuring collaboration with the EEC would be characterized by a lack of political credibility and legitimacy. Hence, and eventually up to 1978, when negotiations officially began, there were few but significant improvements: the recognition that Portugal was establishing a democratic regime, albeit still fragile; the membership acceptance principle; and the formal opening of negotiations. At a time when the country was dealing with many internal problems and decolonization, there was a firm commitment with a foreign entity, as a source of support and assistance for democracy and for economic development. In fact, the EEC was seen as a new national project for the country, which had just lost a long-lasting empire. It would certainly not substitute it in the memories and affections of the Portuguese, but it was a real and concrete project in which the country could be involved in.

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ABSTRACTS

In the 1960s and early 1970s, Portugal's first two attempts to become more involved with the European Economic Community (EEC) and gain membership met with failure, mainly for one reason: the undemocratic nature of the Portuguese regime. In 1977, only three years after the overturn of the *Estado Novo*, Portugal applied to become a full member of the EEC with new political credentials. This article contributes to the understanding of the link between democracy and accession to the EEC, assessing the role that democratic principles, acknowledged in several political reports and enshrined in the Treaty of Rome, played at a very early stage in the Portuguese negotiations.

Dans les années 1960 et 1970, les deux premières tentatives du Portugal de s'impliquer de manière plus étroite avec la Communauté économique européenne (CEE) dans le cadre d'une politique visant à terme à l'adhésion ont échoué pour une raison principale : la nature non-démocratique du régime portugais. En 1977, trois ans seulement après l'avènement du *Estado Novo*, le Portugal présente sa demande pour une adhésion pleine et entière à la CEE, dans un nouveau contexte politique. L'article se propose d'éclaircir le lien entre démocratie et accession à la CEE, en évaluant le rôle que le principe démocratique, reconnu dans plusieurs rapports politiques et inscrit dans le Traité de Rome, a joué dans les premières phases des négociations portugaises pour l'adhésion à la CEE.

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Mots-clés: adhésion, démocratie, Communauté économique européenne (CEE), Portugal

Keywords: accession, democracy, European Economic Community (EEC), Portugal

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