

THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORICAL MEMORY A FIRST PERSON ACCOUNT OF THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR PORTUGAL'S ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

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The negotiations for Portugal's accession to the then European Community was a lengthy process that spanned several years. Discussions on the most sensitive chapters (which included agriculture, fisheries and social affairs) took place over countless rounds of negotiations and technical meetings, putting to the test the negotiating and diplomatic skills of the many people that were part of the Portuguese delegation during this period. The negotiation process is obviously of historical interest, not least of all because its success allowed Portugal to embark on the path of economic development and democracy with greater confidence. However, few studies have specifically addressed the intricacies of the negotiations and even fewer include direct testimonies of those involved in them. The book entitled *Memórias da Adesão à Mesa das Negociações*, organised by João Rosa Lã and Alice Cunha, published by Book Builders, fills this gap in the Portuguese literature on European studies. It is the outcome of a cycle of conferences commemorating the

thirtieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Act of Accession, and is a compilation of testimonies from thirty five of the negotiators who played a decisive role in the discussion of the different dossiers. It thus sheds light on a milestone in the path of modern Portugal or, in the words of

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AND ALICE CUNHA (ORGS.)

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da Adesão à Mesa
das Negociações.**

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Luís Aires-Barros who wrote the preface, on “the history of our country in a period of the utmost importance to the evolution of our society” (p. 11).

THE NEGOTIATORS TAKE US ON A JOURNEY TO THE PAST

The reports from those involved in the negotiations on Portugal’s accession to the European Community are divided into twelve chapters. These follow the usual preface, and an introductory note written by João Rosa Lã in which he contextualises and describes the research project “Memories of the Accession”, now published in book form. The closing text is written by Alice Cunha, co-organisator of the project. Over 358 pages, the testimonies written in straightforward and easy-to-read language provide a detailed description not only of the official negotiations but also of what went on behind the scenes. As the aim of the book is to allow the reader to go back in time and to accompany the difficulties and successes of these negotiations, it was decided to use direct discourse, in a register of memory. The work includes reports describing the most technical details and strategies that governed the definition of the Portuguese position on the different matters under discussion (the chapters addressing the dossiers of the negotiations, pp. 99-298, and the chapter on Luso-Spanish relations, pp. 299-312), the background to and start of the negotiations (pp. 73-99), the view of the journalists covering the negotiations (pp. 313-329), and testimonies presenting a broader picture of the negotiations and the domestic and international context. This last group

includes, for example, the chapter transcribing the communication made by António Martha, then President of the Commission for European Integration (CEI). The description of the negotiation process offers insights into the complexity of these negotiations for membership of a supranational organisation *sui generis*, an area few people know about. If there were any doubts, this reports confirms the distance between negotiations in practice and the theory described in the manuals. António Martha also shares some episodes of interest though little known to the general public. This is the case, for example, of his appointment as President of CEI which, in his own words “was by chance ... a wrong telephone call and a matter of persuasion and adventure” (p. 53); and also the way Portugal managed to postpone the first Portuguese Presidency of the European Community, which he acknowledges was a difficult but sensible decision as it gave the country time to acquire greater experience and knowledge of European affairs, which in turn assured the success of the Presidency in 1992. In the chapter by João Salgueiro (then Minister of Finance and Planning), he provides a detailed description of the context and circumstances that led to Portugal’s request for European Community membership and the challenges resulting from accession. In addition to the description, we find a critical analysis of the last thirty years which highlights the importance of learning from the «Experiences and lessons of accession to the European Union» (title of the chapter) and alerts readers to the fact that Portugal has been ignoring “in practice, the need to

constantly affirm itself in the new European context” (p. 45). Nonetheless, João Salgueiro does not make Brussels the scapegoat for the problems Portugal is currently experiencing; swimming against the tide of the increasingly popular Eurosceptic discourse, he notes that these problems are a result of “postponing solutions that we are entirely responsible for” (p. 49). In “The day after”, Vítor Martins, former Secretary of State for European Integration, draws attention to the path that had to be taken to make our participation in the Community credible and to take advantage of the benefits that this brought Portugal both internally and externally, whilst not ignoring «participation in an EEC that intervenes and takes initiative” and “total commitment to European integration” (pp. 338-339). In the final chapter, Alice Cunha abandons the memory register and proposes a reflection on the interest that European integration aroused among academics, leading to a new area of study: European Union studies (p. 346). In relation to Portugal, this reflection is partly limited to a list of works on the subject of Europe; out of necessity, this is not exhaustive but, for example, it lacks a critical analysis of the contribution these works make to the affirmation of European studies or an evaluation of the evolution in the teaching of this area at our universities, and above all of courses that confer a degree (perhaps because an exercise of this kind does not fall within the objectives of this book). Nevertheless, it is an interesting starting point for the more in-depth reflection that needs to be made on the state of the art of this disciplinary area in our country.

AN EXTREMELY VALID CONTRIBUTION TO THE PRESERVATION OF MEMORY

In short, at a time of growing Euroscepticism in which many people both in Portugal and across Europe are questioning the relevance of the European Union (see the result of the referendum in the United Kingdom which has left the Union facing the imminent exit of a Member State), the register of the memories of the accession in conjunction with the critical evaluation of the importance of the integration process to Portugal’s modernisation and democratic consolidation make this a book of great relevance in the current times. The book also reminds us (again) that accession was not the end but the beginning of a process that requires constant and on-going work, an idea that is clearly reflected in the words of Vítor Martins: «In the post accession phase (...) the results are not yet crystallised, rather there are on-going and dynamic negotiations in all areas, and this is much more demanding» (p. 334). This book is therefore recommended reading not only for those interested in European matters but also for those who want to glean a better understanding of the circumstances and the historical context of Portugal’s accession. As João Salgueiro noted, the book also has merit in that it preserves a memory “already in danger of disappearing” whilst providing a framework to assess the challenges that the European project presents today” (p. 21). *Rd*

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