

TRANSNATIONAL PARTY ACTIVITY and PORTUGAL'S RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

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This paper analyzes the interaction of the domestic and international systems during Portugal's transition to democracy in the 1970's. It focuses on the role which the European Community played in the process of democratization there, using transnational party activity as a prism through which to study the complex set of domestic and international variables at work in that process.

The paper responds to the growing interest in the role of the European Community as a political actor, particularly in its efforts to support democratization in aspiring member states. The Portuguese case, one of the first in which the EC played such a role, offers new insights into how EC related party activity can affect policy-making at national and international levels.

The case study centers on the Portuguese Socialist Party (PS) and its relationship with the socialist parties¹ in EC member states, with the Confederation of the Socialist Parties of the European Community and the Socialist Group in the European Parliament. Its central thesis is that transnational party activity affected not only EC policy making in regard to Portugal, but had demonstrable effects on the domestic political system as well.

Using both interdependence and linkages theory as its base, the paper builds on earlier work by Geoffrey Pridham (1990, 1991), Laurence Whitehead (1986, 1991) and others, on the EC's role in democratization in Southern Europe. It differs from them in its concentration on the role of transnational party activity. It also addresses continuing questions in the literature about the viability of EC party groups and their role in Community decision-making, such as those raised by Haas (1968) and Henig (1979) in their early studies of the EC party groups.

Context

Important changes were taking place in the 1970's within European socialism, in the European Community, and in East-West relations which created conditions favorable to transnational party activity in Portugal. European socialist parties were engaged in a re-examination of some of the welfare state's basic assumptions as a result of the world-wide recession and of the move toward increased European integration. The debate in Portugal over regime model and the ensuing struggle between the socialists and communists attracted the interest of both the northern social democratic parties and the Mediterranean socialists who held conflicting views about the nature of socialism and about relations with Eurocommunist parties. Each hoped to see its views validated by events in Portugal.

The socialist Weltanschauung had always involved a commitment to international solidarity, but this was given new meaning and direction in the 1970's as the Socialist International took an increasingly activist stance under the leadership of Willy Brandt, Olof Palme and Bruno Kreisky. The International created the Committee of Friendship and Solidarity for Democracy and Socialism in Portugal in 1975

which became the vehicle through which party leaders were able to coordinate their efforts to provide moral and material support for the PS and for the Portuguese governments of which they were a part.² Within the EC, proposals on European Union, European Political Cooperation and direct election of the European Parliament were being debated. And in 1974 at Paris the European Council, institutionalizing the EC heads of government summits, was agreed upon. The accession of Britain, Ireland and Denmark had paved the way for further enlargement, and negotiations were under way with Greece.

The strategic importance of Portugal, the economic and political stakes involved in the decolonization of its extensive African empire, and the threat of a Communist Party takeover in 1975 gave events in that country a higher priority for Europe (and for the United States and the Soviet Union) than might have been the case otherwise. There were potential repercussions on East-West relations which were entering a delicate phase in the Helsinki negotiations of the CSCE.

Role of political parties

The Portuguese socialists actively sought linkages with European socialists in an effort to gain visibility and legitimacy for their fledgling party. Transnational party activity involving the PS (and its predecessor, Accção Socialista Portuguesa/ASP) and the EC related party groups went through three distinct stages in the 1970's, each with its own particular characteristics. In the pre-revolutionary period (1969-73) the emphasis was on keeping Portugal out of the EC; during the six provisional governments (1974-76) the European socialists worked to secure EC financial aid for Portugal; and during the First Constitutional Government (1976-78) they championed the opening of negotiations with Portugal for accession to the Community.³

Before the Revolution

Transnational party activity took place in two Community arenas, the European Parliament and the Council. In this phase the exiled Portuguese socialists sought ties with the Socialist Group and the Liaison Bureau of the Social Democratic Parties in the European Community as part of their anti-fascist, anti-colonialist campaign against the Salazar and Caetano regimes. The Bureau, organized in 1957, had reflected the stagnation affecting the European integration movement as a whole in the 1960's. With the Hague summit in 1969 and the forward movement resulting from the decisions to expand the Community and to increase the level of economic integration, the Bureau took on new life.

The 1973 Mozer report called for coordination of policy by parties in and outside the European Parliament. It recommended an expanded organization which in addition to the European Parliament members would include socialist members of the Commission, representatives of the Socialist International and representatives from the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe as well as representatives from the national parties.⁴ Given its commitment to the enlargement of the EC, the Bureau came to take a more active interest in domestic politics in southern Europe where regime changes were underway or expected to come in the not too distant future.

In 1971 the Bureau had invited the exiled Portuguese socialists to attend its meetings as observers, and it began to issue statements criticizing the regime and calling for democratization in Portugal. The socialists stressed publicly that EC membership was reserved for democratic states. They invoked the Birkelbach Report which had stated that "we are of the opinion that only those states which guarantee on their territory truly democratic governmental practices and respect for basic rights and liberties can become members of our Community."⁵

With the accession of EFTA partners Britain and Denmark to the EC in 1973 there was increasing economic pressure on the Caetano regime from economic elites and from foreign investors to join the EC. However, Portugal was unable to progress beyond a free trade agreement with the EC in 1972. Here it seems the political pressures against Portuguese membership brought by the European socialists (and by other parties as well) bore fruit.

After the Revolution/Encouraging Democratization

Once back in Portugal the newly established Portuguese Socialist Party (PS) continued to pursue links with its European counterparts. The support of the European parties and socialist government heads was important in giving the new party credibility at home, electoral support against the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), the only party which had existed in the country before 1974, and moral support in keeping pressure on the military leadership to continue democratization.

In the period following April 25, 1974 there were interesting dynamics at work in the EC relationship with Portugal. One observer described it as a two-pronged approach with the socialist parties and groups holding out the "carrot" of assistance and eventual accession, and the Commission and member states making clear that none of this would happen unless Portugal remained a democracy.

From 1974 on there were visits of socialist delegations to Portugal and reports to the European Parliament on their return, public statements by the Socialist Group and the Confederation, debates on the floor of the European Parliament, and the use of Question Time to press the Commission and Council for action. Socialist MEP's acknowledged that Parliament itself lacked decision-making power, but they saw their role as one of influencing the Commission and Council and working through their parties at home to affect government decision-making. Judging from the outcome they met with considerable success.

At the European Parliament, according to observers, the Socialist Group did a good job of seeing that the debate remained focused on the political importance of helping Portugal, and doing so sooner rather than later. The Socialist Group played an effective role in the debates, giving firsthand reports on the situation in Lisbon and reassuring others in Parliament that democratization was continuing. Following the visit to Lisbon of a delegation in May 1974, for example, Mr. Della Briotta, the Socialist Group spokesman, called for an association agreement, similar to what the EC had recently negotiated with Greece and Turkey, which would open up the possibility of full membership later on. Commissioner Christopher Soames acknowledged the importance of the question, but noted that it behoved the Community "to tread carefully," given that "internal developments in Portugal are in such a fluid state."⁶

Throughout 1975 the Commission continued to take a cautious view. The EC as an institution was uncomfortable with much that was happening in Portugal; the revolutionary rhetoric, the nationalizations, the growing influence of the extreme left. The Commission viewed the Portuguese situation in economic terms, while the Council and many in the Parliament (not only in the Socialist Group, but in other parties as well) viewed it as a political problem which needed prompt attention. The Parliamentary debates were useful in airing concerns which certain national officials and parties preferred not to raise publicly themselves. And the expression of these concerns in Strasbourg and Brussels played back into the domestic political debate in Portugal, giving military and political party moderates ammunition to support their demands that democratization must continue.

European heads of government made clear to the Portuguese military that without evidence of democratization, there would be no financial aid and certainly no EC membership. This was the message conveyed, for example, by British Foreign Secretary James Callaghan during his February 1975 visit when he met with President Francisco Costa Gomes, Prime Minister Vasco Gonçalves and Foreign Minister Mário Soares. In his private conversations the British Prime Minister was quite blunt, said a participant in the meetings, warning the President that Portugal could find itself isolated in Europe unless the country kept to the democratic route. If it did, help and support for reform, including support for EC membership, would be forthcoming.

In June 1975 Irish Prime Minister Garret FitzGerald visited Portugal in his capacity as President of the European Economic Community. His mission was to make clear the EC's willingness to help, but also to make clear that it depended on the establishment of a pluralist democracy.⁷

This was the position FitzGerald recommended to the European Council meeting July 16-17, 1975.

The Council agreed to discuss closer economic and financial cooperation, but went on to note that "the EC can give support only to a democracy of a pluralist nature."⁸

The Germans and British took the lead in making the case for Portugal at the Council of Ministers and European Council levels where the decisions on assistance and on membership would be made.

Although these were government level decisions, they reflected the commitment to support Portugal

made by socialist party leaders as part of the Socialist International's Committee of Friendship and Solidarity for Democracy and Socialism in Portugal. And the Portuguese party assiduously pursued its bilateral party relations to promote a favorable outcome. Mário Soares, as a Vice-President of the International, travelled frequently, updating socialist leaders on domestic politics. He did the same during his frequent visits to Brussels where he briefed the Commission. Soares was in close touch with Willy Brandt of the SPD, visiting Bonn frequently and communicating from Lisbon through the SPD's representative there.

Once Brussels saw that the forces of moderation in the military and civilian sectors were in the ascendancy, the Council moved ahead in October 1975 to authorize emergency financial assistance. Under the rubric of the 1972 Free Trade Agreement emergency aid of 150 million units of account was granted in subsidized loans from the European Investment Bank. And in January 1976 the Council authorized the Commission to open negotiations with Portugal which would: enlarge the existing trade agreement to permit EC access for additional Portuguese products, develop a financial protocol, and discuss technological cooperation and the treatment of Portuguese emigrant workers in the EC.

First Constitutional Government/Getting Portugal In

But this was not enough for the leadership of the PS which wanted full membership. First and foremost they saw the EC as a political anchor for the country. In Soares own words, "we are Europeans, we feel European, and we Portuguese want our country finally to have a voice and to participate actively in the construction of Europe." (1976, 27). The socialists believed that EC membership would reinforce the democratization already under way, and would reassure the more conservative elements in society, including the business community, thereby helping to prevent a reaction from the right. EC membership would help to compensate for the years of being a political pariah in Europe, and for the loss of Empire by giving the nation a new focus and a new international identity.

The revolutionary military leadership was committed to a third world orientation in foreign policy and the majority of the military had not formulated views about the EC. The PS took the lead in "selling" the idea of the EC as the panacea for the country's economic ills, billing itself "the party of Europe" in the process. The socialists stressed the idea of the EC as the vehicle for modernization of the economy. Assistance from the Regional Development and Social Funds would help Portugal "catch up" with the rest of Europe. Advocates also pointed out that as an EC member Portugal would be able to help the former colonies under the Lomé Convention. The decision to seek accession had the support of the PSD and CDS. Only the the Communist Party voted against the government's motion in the Assembly of the Republic.

In January 1977 Portugal announced that it was interested in pursuing full membership and a delegation of government and PS officials, led by Prime Minister Soares embarked on a series of visits to the capitals of the nine EC members to take soundings. Prime Minister James Callaghan pledged the Labour government's help in shepherding the Portuguese application through the EC. The democratic underpinnings the EC could provide were important; there was unambiguous support for Portugal, said a Labour Party official. In the Federal Republic of Germany there was enthusiastic support not only from the SPD, but a commitment from the CDU as well. Willy Brandt, said an SPD official, had an understanding with Helmut Kohl about the need to prepare the ground for Portuguese and Spanish entry. In September 1977 the Portuguese signed in Brussels a financial protocol annexed to the 1972 Free Trade Agreement. Under this there was provision for 200 million units of account in the form of loans from the European Investment Bank at 3% annually.

The Portuguese socialists embarked on another series of visits to European party and government officials orchestrated by the PS International Office. The other democratic parties did the same, attending party congresses, meeting with government officials to develop political support for Portugal's application at the Council level. Portugal submitted its formal application for membership to the EC on March 28, 1977.

Once the application process began, new mechanisms of party cooperation were put into place which helped the Portuguese begin to institutionalize their relationship with the EC. The Socialist Group in the Parliament, for example, accepted trainees from the PS who worked with the Group's Secretariat learning about EC institutions, procedures, political culture, and negotiating style. Some trainees

moved from the Group into the Community bureaucracy where they began to form a nucleus of EC specialists available to advise both the party and the Portuguese government. As negotiations got underway there was created a Joint Parliamentary Committee of 18 MEP's and 18 members of the Assembly of the Republic who were charged with monitoring the EC-Portuguese relationship. The committee met twice yearly. This provided an avenue for keeping the party groups up to date on what was happening in Portugal and increased the familiarity of Portuguese parliamentarians with EC issues which were of concern to them and which could affect the accession process.

At the bilateral party level European socialists with EC experience served as advisors to the Portuguese. Brussels has its own style of operating and negotiating, said one, and it was important for the Portuguese applicants to learn how to structure discussions with EC officials and how to pursue their objectives within the EC bureaucracy.

In the European Parliament the Socialist Group came out strongly in support of Portugal's accession, seeing it as the means of guaranteeing the consolidation of democracy. An article in its newsletter EUSO noted that:

We must now make sure that the preparation of the accession negotiations and the negotiations themselves are not hampered by second thoughts in certain member states. This applies first to the Commission which, under the Treaties, is required to deliver an opinion on the application to join.... The Socialist Group promised Mário Soares in Strasbourg its support for Portuguese accession and stands by this position.⁹

The Parliamentary debates which ensued were important because they provided an opportunity for various views to be aired and the opposition to Portugal's admission to be addressed openly by its supporters. In this way, the debates, in which the Socialist Group played the leading role, influenced Community decision-making, both in Brussels and in the member states. But party cooperation was not easy. Having been united in their support of Portugal in the critical period 1974-76, the Socialist Group began to show some signs of internal dissension once the discussion turned to accession itself. Here, national interest began to outweigh socialist solidarity.

The French, who had supported the PS from its creation and were on record as favoring the admission of Portugal, Spain and Greece, had domestic political reasons for backpedaling. While the government of Raymond Barre had at first encouraged Portugal, it then took an anti-enlargement position especially regarding Spain because of its concerns about agricultural competition. The PSF could not be seen at home to be voting against French national interests. The party found some protective cover for its pro-Portugal position as part of the Socialist Group. Later, it developed a position which supported enlargement, but only with certain conditions, among them inclusion of Mediterranean products in the Common Agricultural Policy, changes in regional and industrial policies and the establishment of various transitional periods with preconditions.¹⁰ The Italian socialists also worried about agricultural competition from Spain and Portugal and about having to share some of the Social and Regional Development Funds. As the negotiations continued through the 1980's, these concerns were resolved with reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and increased resources for the special funds. Thus, with some difficulty, the Socialist Group was able to maintain its cohesion.

Debate about Portugal continued at the September 1977 sitting of Parliament where the Bayerl Report of the Committee on External Economic Relations was adopted. It approved the Additional and Financial Protocols to the 1972 Free Trade Agreement with Portugal. The Socialist Group noted that in addition to financial help the Portuguese needed "some solidarity from this Parliament and everyone in Europe, and a feeling that we are with them." The Group proposed that the Portuguese Foreign Minister be invited to join the EC Foreign Ministers meetings on political cooperation, and that a Joint Parliamentary Committee be established. ¹¹ This position was endorsed by the European Christian Democrats as well.

The EC decision to open negotiations with Portugal was made at the Council level, based on the recommendations of the Commission. Council members realized that there were serious economic problems connected with the application, but were willing to put their reservations aside. Their motives in supporting economic assistance and accession for Portugal were political. The commitment of Germany and Great Britain to enlargement was a determining factor in the ultimate success of the Portuguese application. They made an effective case for accession, despite the initial French

misgivings. At the Council level the Portuguese socialists worked the party network hard on a bilateral basis. Willy Brandt and other Socialist International personalities were "exceptionally important" in getting the Portuguese into the European Community according to Manfred Michel of the Confederation of the Socialist Parties of the EC. Brandt saw the EC as the means to establishing a socialist Western Europe. He had been a strong supporter of enlargement from the beginning, believing that Scandinavia and Britain had to be in the EC if Europe were to become an economic and political power internationally. European unity, in his view, would make the EC attractive to Eastern Europe. For the SPD, as Lodge notes, its EC and Blocpolitik were linked.(1976, 38-40).

The emphasis of Council members and of the Socialist Group on the political importance of helping Portugal finally got the message through to the Commission. It presented its formal opinion on Portuguese accession to the Council on May 19, 1978 and the Council agreed to its recommendation in its June 6, 1978 meeting. The reasoning outlined in the Commission statement closely followed the tenor of the debates in the European Parliament. Commission Vice-President Natali acknowledged the role of the Parliament during question time in July 1978:

The main lines of the (Commission's) opinion (on the Portuguese application) accord perfectly with successive votes of this Parliament. Portugal wishes to enter the Community not so much for economic as for political reasons and this is true also for the other applicant countries: choosing Europe means choosing democracy, freedom and peace!... (The Commission) will act on the basis of the political views which have emerged in this Parliament; it has respected them in its opinion and intends to remain faithful to them."¹²

The Commission noted that the very valid political reasons for Portugal's admission should not obscure the serious economic problems which accession entailed, particularly for the Portuguese. The magnitude of the task ahead was illustrated with these facts: a current account deficit in 1977 of USD 1,500 million, with reserves nearly exhausted, major structural weaknesses in all sectors of socio-economic activity, 28% of the population still engaged in agriculture, but producing only 14% of GNP, and an industrial structure dominated by traditional sectors which are depressed world-wide.¹³ The recommendations called for extensive EC financial and technical support to help the Portuguese government deal with the necessary restructuring. The Socialist government fell within two months of the Council decision, and it remained for succeeding Portuguese governments to deal with these issues.

Impact on Domestic Politics

The statements by European Community party groups and heads of government linking progress in democratization to granting of EC financial aid, had an impact on Portugal's military rulers, as did the doubts publicly expressed by the Commission and in Parliamentary debate. Portugal was in severe financial difficulty and moderate military leaders realized that the country needed help from the EC and from traditional allies such as Britain, France and Germany. The visits by European political leaders and party delegations, their participation in rallies and appearances on television all helped to develop support for a democratic outcome and gave a visible signal to the military government and to voters of their preference for that outcome. The Portuguese case demonstrates how important the support of external actors can be to national politicians in encouraging them to continue their efforts to democratize, against what often seem to be overwhelming odds.

At the party level there were visible effects on the PS leadership and organization, its ideology and its alliance strategy. The decision to seek accession to the EC marked a turning point in the development of the Socialist Party. In early Declarations of Principles and Program the PS had endorsed the idea of integration but made clear that the new Europe should be a Europe "at the service of the working classes."¹⁴ Initially at least, the PS decision to embrace the EC won it points with the Portuguese public. The high visibility visits, the warm reception given Prime Minister Soares in Brussels and other capitals all boosted the image of the PS. In the election campaign of 1976 the emphasis was on Portugal taking her rightful place again as a European nation. There was little realistic discussion of the price that membership might entail. Preoccupied as they were with domestic politics and their first opportunity in forty years to participate freely in politics, most voters knew little about the European Community or what role it might play in Portugal's future.¹⁵

At the ideological and policy-making level, the EC option meant that the PS would have to continue its move to the center of the political spectrum with all that entailed for the party electorally and internally. The austerity program negotiated with the IMF and the effects of closer relations with the EC on the Portuguese economy would create additional hardship for workers, small business owners and farmers, voters on whom the party depended. And additional compromises with the socialist agenda fed the factional disputes which continued to plague the party. Election results showed the penalty to be paid. In the 1978 municipal elections, for example, support for the PS in Evora fell to 17% from the 33% the party had polled just two years earlier. And in the legislative elections of 1979 the PS took 28.1% of the vote, down from its 35% in 1976.

The party system was affected as well. Its EC option committed the PS to the center and reinforced its rejection of alliance with the PCP. It also re-opened the possibility of a working alliance with the Social Democratic Party (PSD), but this would not come until 1983, after Constitutional revision and after changes in the PSD leadership. Indeed, the hope expressed by many in the PSD and Social Democratic Center Party (CDS) that EC membership would shift the internal balance of political power to the right, was realized in the 1980's. (Cravinho 1983, 139). While the PS dominated the Bloco Central, having gotten 36.4% of the vote to the PSD's 27% in 1983, just two years later the Socialists took only 20.8% of the vote. The PSD was well its way to becoming the majority party, a status it achieved in the 1987 elections with 50.1% of the vote.

The European option gave the PS visibility, prestige and a focus for its economic policy. But at the same time it exacerbated its leadership and organizational weaknesses. As the negotiation process unfolded, Prime Minister Soares personally took charge of relations with European party and government leaders on the issue of EC membership. His assumption of foreign policy responsibilities in a number of areas cut the Foreign Ministry out of the communications loop frequently and contributed to the October 1977 resignation of Foreign Minister José Medeiros Ferreira who later left the party as well.

The EC negotiation process reinforced the PS' oligarchic tendencies as the small leadership cadre took on EC relations as well as governing a country in economic and political crisis. The organizational weaknesses in the party continued.

Impact on EC Relations

The Portuguese case demonstrates that EC party groups, though still limited by the institutional balance of power in the EC, could influence Community decision-making when they remained cohesive and coordinated their work carefully with the national parties. The socialists in Parliament were determined to help Portugal and the PS. They worked with the limited power they had to bring the Commission around to their point of view and coordinated with national parties to get action at the Council level. The European socialists were successful because they were able to combine party solidarity with national government power and interests.

The Portuguese experience also demonstrates that during a period of regime change, party links can provide useful channels of communication. This is especially true in the period between the collapse of the old regime and establishment of new institutional frameworks, including those with regional organizations such as the EC. At such times established links are broken, civil servants with ties to the former regime are mistrusted and ministries may be inadequately staffed, given competing claims on the new leadership. In underorganized societies such as Portugal personal contact and non-governmental channels of communication play an important role in the decision making process.

For transnational party activity to be effective the Portuguese case reveals that there needs to be political convergence; interest on the part of the domestic political party and openness to external linkages; interest on the part of the national political parties of the member states; interest in the issue by the EC party group; and, perhaps most importantly, interest on the part of the national governments. For the bottom line in the Portuguese case was that it suited the national interests of the member states to help Portugal financially and to encourage her membership in the EC.

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NOTES

Among the party and EC officials interviewed in connection with this research were: Prof. Jorge Campinos (PS and EC), Hans Eberhard Dingels (SPD), Prof. José Medeiros Ferreira (Foreign Minister 1976-77), John Fitzmaurice (European Commission), Veronica Isenberg (SPD), Hans Janitschek (Socialist International), Rui Mateus (PS), Tom McNally (Labour Party), Manfred Michel (SPD, Confederation and Socialist Group).