

INSTITUTO DE ESTUDOS GEOGRÁFICOS  
FACULDADE DE LETRAS — UNIVERSIDADE DE COIMBRA



# Cadernos de Geografia

## PORTUGAL AND THE E.E.C. — AGRICULTURAL PROBLEMS \*

J. M. PEREIRA DE OLIVEIRA

### RESUMO

Quando Portugal se tornou membro da Comunidade Económica Europeia isto significou ao mesmo tempo o fim de uma longa etapa de negociações e a abertura de um grande desafio para o seu futuro.

Vantagens ou desvantagens? Que poderia Portugal esperar? Que poderia oferecer em contrapartida?

Sendo a política agrícola da C.E.E. um dos seus maiores problemas — se não o maior — e sabendo que para Portugal pesam muito ainda no conjunto da oferta ao «mercado único» das Comunidades as produções agrícolas, da pecuária e da silvicultura, que perspectivas são as da integração?

Fazem-se algumas simples comparações para atrair as atenções para o seu estudo aprofundado.

### RÉSUMÉ

Lorsque le Portugal est-il devenu membre de la C.E.E., ça signifia au même temps la fin d'une longue étape de négociations et l'ouverture d'un défi pour son futur.

Des avantages ou désavantages? Qu'est ce que pourrait attendre le Portugal? Que pourrait-il offrir comme contrepartie?

Étant la politique agricole de la C.E.E. un de ses problèmes les plus grands — si peut-être n'est pas le majeur — et savant que pour le Portugal ce sont les denrées agricoles, de l'élevage et des produits silvicoles l'offre au «marché unique» des C.E.E. qui pèse presque le plus, quelles sont les perspectives de l'intégration?

On fait une très simple confrontation pour attirer l'attention sur son étude approfondi.

---

\* Conferência realizada na Casa de Espanha, Utrecht (Países Baixos), em 3-6-88 e no âmbito de uma reunião dos Programas ERASMUS, com o Departamento de Geografia da Universidade de Utrecht.

When Portugal became one of the Twelve Member States of the European Economic Community on the first of January 1986, it meant the end of a long period of difficult negotiations, but then there were the not completely unsuspected difficulties, advantages and disadvantages, that the achievement of this goal would bring to this small political space which preserves the oldest borders in Europe.

When, in March 1957, the Treaty of Rome was signed in the city which gave it its name, consequent upon other minority and sectarian adjustments made within European countries a little while before because of their clear economic development, there was a variety of reactions both inside and outside Europe; some responded enthusiastically whilst others were clearly in opposition.

In 1959, one of the results of this reaction was seen in the Stockholm Convention, whereby the United Kingdom, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, Austria and, finally, Portugal created the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). By doing this they distanced themselves from the Rome Project in several important aspects. This association did not have true spirit of European integration which, following the warning sounded by Jean Monnet and the convincing pragmatism displayed by Robert Shuman (9th May 1950), was finally sanctioned by the so-called Single European Act, signed in Brussels on 7th May 1985.

Nevertheless, after the revolution of 25th April 1974, Portugal officially applied for membership of the EEC in March 1977. In actual fact, once Britain, Denmark and Ireland (Eire) had joined in January 1973 and in spite of the prevailing favourable conditions which were clearly of benefit to our country, as specified in Appendix G of the Stockholm Convention, there was no other way of getting into concert with European nations, especially since the regime had changed and many of the post-revolutionary doubts and uncertainties were behind us. This step was fundamental for consolidation of the regime's policy within the ambit of a Pluralist and Democratic Europe, under the 1976 Constitution, in spite of the economic difficulties which were to be, and indeed, still are, expected.

The ideal of a Portuguese Economic Area once dreamed of was now clouded over; Portugal was definitively accepting a European stance without, however, — as is obvious — turning her back on her ecumenical responsibilities.

But what is this country that came knocking at the door of Europe?

She has an area of only a little more than 90,000 km<sup>2</sup>, unequally allocated to a corner of the Iberian Peninsula — truly Europe's land's end — and two archipelagos in the Atlantic Ocean. Here live, distributed unequally throughout the territory, little over 9.8 million inhabitants (1981) and this figure includes almost a million of our compatriots who, within the space of just over a month, left our former colonies and arrived in Portugal. Six years later they were completely absorbed.

What can such a country hope for? What can she offer in exchange?

A few basic indicators can be compared, and this may help us to understand what may be called «the great challenge of Europe» in view of the «Single Market» of 1993. But to analyse them all would not just cause us to lose our geographic perspective, which we believe we must keep, but it would take an unduly long time to be of use by then.

If we bear in mind the EEC's percentage distribution of expenditure in 1985, the eve of Portugal's entry, it can immediately be seen that there is a striking imbalance. In fact, 72.9% went to implement the agriculture and fishing policies; 5.9% and 5.7% was spent on regional and social policies, respectively; 3.9% was for development aid; lastly, 2.6% was spent on research, energy, industry and transport. The remaining 9.0% was for administration and sundry costs. However, the revenue needed to cover this expenditure amounts to only 1% of G.D.P. for the group of ten member countries of that year.

It is with the burden of the Agriculture and Fishing sectors accounting for nearly 3/4 of total expenditure, (in a policy where the most important thing is to guarantee the price of agricultural produce within EEC — in actual fact a substitute for state intervention in this sector) that a country such as Portugal, having very profound structural distortions in this same sector, is going to have to face up to an economy of some continually increasing surpluses.

I believe that it is precisely in this subsector of Agriculture that it will really be of interest to make comparisons, given that it is clearly impossible to deal with all negative aspects.

Even now, just over two years after entry there are no proper perspectives for assessment of the geo-human impact of that event, but a simple comparison of some available indicators will not raise expectations.

The physical realities of Portugal are clear from the start. The European twelve has an agricultural area (AA) of about 58.9% of its total area (TA). Latest figures for Portugal show that 41.7% of TA is used for agriculture/forestry and, since forestry accounts for around 32.0%, this means we have to think in terms of 9.7% as being actually agricultural land. This figure certainly includes non-afforested grazing pastures, both natural and artificially created. It should be realised, however, that most of the remaining area still does not have agricultural characteristics comparable with those which can be found in the greater part of the twelve's 58.8%. They differ in many natural and geo-human respects.

Allow me to give a simple explanation.

In the country slightly to the north of the Tagus valley, the contours are strongly marked, sometimes with lofty peaks and steep slopes, characterised by tectonic alignment and the different petrographic aspect of the rocks — granite, slate and greywackes — essentially Pre-Cambrian and Palaeozoic. There are some exceptions, however, such as the Minho's brooks, the plateaux of Tras-os-Montes or

alluvial plains of the Vouga and Mondego rivers, as well as the deep channels at the bottom of some river valleys, and their tributaries.

Rainfall varies greatly from North to South and from the western Atlantic coast to the eastern interior territory; here and there the general pattern is modified by the effects of altitude and orientation. Here, too, the same factors may affect the temperature range, and not merely season by season. Whereas the coastal areas have a fairly small temperature variation, further inland there are substantial fluctuations, not only during the year, but during each month and even each day. The temperatures along the Atlantic seaboard are, nevertheless, very irregular since they are susceptible to the general atmospheric influences and variations of weather patterns in the North Atlantic. In this region the soil is so difficult to work and its cultivation so unrewarding that it can be used for little else other than forestry.

To the South of the Tagus the general physiography is very different. The alentejana penepain rolls out across the landscape, and is only occasionally broken by hills, tectonic or differential, or small interfluvial hillocks. In contrast to the area previously described, the North, which has an average altitude of 700 m, the average in the South is a little less than 300 m. The South is more varied, geologically speaking; the post-Primary covering is much more extensive there, but the soils are, with a few exceptions (such as the clays) relatively poor and fairly shallow. Mean rainfall levels are very low and in many areas are only just on the limit (400 to 500 mm per annum) of what is required for production of cereals such as wheat. Where there is one dry month a year in the Northeast, there are two or three in this region. In order to be profitable the land needs to rest by reverting to pasture, being allowed to lie fallow, or at least by crop rotation (in the richer areas). Land may be fertilised in the intervening seasons by letting lambs graze on the stubble.

In this physiographic scene, poorly outlined in general terms, lives an unequally distributed population in densities ranging from more than 1,000 inhabitants per sq.km. to fewer than 20 inh. per sq.km. Throughout the Atlantic seaboard, from the River Minho to the River Sado, and then along the Algarve coast, population density varies 1000 to 80 inh. per sq.km., and in the municipalities of Oporto and Lisbon and their environs, including those of Lisbon's «Other Side», there are sometimes 10 or more times the upper limit of those figures packed together; the inland areas beyond the hills, — the Beira transmontana, the Castelo Branco plateau, the whole of the Alentejo, have, with a few exceptions, densities of fewer than 40 inh. per sq.km. There are, furthermore, other substantial differences which apply to the whole group, since it seems to us that localities having similar population densities are actually very different: the inhabitants may be scattered, oriented or not, like the Minho and part of the Beira Litoral and the East of Algarve; agglomerated, with or without secondary intercalary dispersion, as is found in

Tras-os-Montes, the Beira Interior and the Alentejo. Naturally this population, in their various types of settlements, differs again in respect of employment distribution and if these are considered under the simple classification embodied in Colin Clark's now classical sectors, namely, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary, we may say from the beginning that Portugal has, in fact, shown a positive evolution over the last 3 or 4 decades. Thus in 1960 43.9% of employed people belonged to the Primary Sector, as opposed to 29.1% and 27.0% to the Secondary and Tertiary Sectors respectively. By 1970 we had, using the same system, 32.6%, 33.3% and 34.1%; in 1980 the figures were now 27.2%, 36.0% and 36.19%. Finally, in 1984, shortly before our entry into the EEC, figures obtained from a specific inquiry were as follows: 24.5%; 34.6%, and 40.9%.

The country was becoming «tertiarised» at the expense of a Secondary sector which was either static or breaking up, and also of a pronounced rural exodus which cannot be explained away merely by the phenomenon of migration, nor by the theory of positive evolution in the Portuguese agricultural economy. Economic factors, such as energy crises and internal upheavals (following 25th April 1974) combined with instability (resultant negative investment) and the necessary transformation of productive infrastructures, are at the root of the slow development, apparently normal in the agricultural sector. Confidence began to be restored, but also only slowly, in the years 1984-85-86, and it is undoubtedly true that it was the preparatory support measures taken during the pre-accession phase of EEC membership (through the EEC Development Fund) that were starting to take effect. Their effects have still not been fully assessed in terms of numerical indicators, but these will certainly be available very soon.

We must not forget, moreover, that three relatively densely populated districts — Vila real, Bragança and Viseu, all of them in the northern interior — have more than 50% of their active population occupied in the Primary sector and that the coastal districts of Porto, Braga, Aveiro, Coimbra, Santarem, Lisbon, Setubal and Faro Have 27.2% of their active population in the same sector; a lower percentage than that for the nation as a whole (1987 data). Finally, compared with the 12 EEC member states where the decrease in the number of the active population employed in the Primary sector was 15.2% (between 1975 and 1985), in Portugal it was only 11.5%. This rate, lower than that of the Community as a whole, is due to fundamental structural problems in this sector in Portugal, although there are other factors involved as well.

It will suffice at present to compare the average figures for cultivable land available and its percentage distribution in the twelve EEC countries and Portugal, since we have 13 and 4 hectares respectively, but whereas in the EEC 45% of the cultivable lands are between 2 and 20 hectares, in my country the figure is 24%. In the same way, where 39% have a figure of 2 or less hectares for the twelve, for

Portugal it is no less than 74%. Finally, still using the same system, whereas the Community has 16% with more than 20 hectares, this corresponds to a Portuguese figure of 2%.

In addition to these facts it should be added that there are, on average, in Portugal 57 agricultural holdings per km<sup>2</sup> — contrasting Aveiro (with 180) and Evora (with 3), for instance — and that, being unequally distributed throughout the country, these properties are juxtaposed in a variety of ways. Those having fewer plots (tracts of neighbouring plots being worked together) are found in the Alentejo districts of Beja, Evora and Setubal which average 2.7, 2.1 and 1.5 plots per tract worked, whilst the highest averages are in the North, once again, where Bragança, Viseu and Vila real have 11.9, 8.8 and 8.8 plots per tract worked. In 10 out of 18 districts in mainland Portugal, on the other hand, the average land area of agricultural holdings is less than 1 hectare.

In spite of the progress which has been made the signs of a deficient agrarian structure are clear: it bears the burden of an elevated percentage of small farmers: — 68% of land worked and 57% of the area. Moreover, 49.5% of those responsible for the land under cultivation were, according to the latest surveys, over 55 years old and 60%, all told, were either illiterate or semi-literate.

Mention must furthermore be made that, as a consequence of renewed investment and the regaining of confidence, slow though it was, there began to appear, in agriculture as well as in industry, a new generation of young managers in whom lay the hopes for necessary reform of methods and mentalities.

But more lies beyond this framework, marked by diversity, but also by natural/physical weaknesses — scarcity of energy resources and raw materials, lack of sizable agrolological units, on account of unfavourable topography which comprises sun-filled landscapes, stretching to the seashore, cultivated meadows scattered with picturesque villages among the plateaux, valleys and mountains; there is the presence of sometimes almost «preserved» collections of humanity, rich in simple traditions but, at the same time, vigorous, born in and bonded to an old and unmistakable cultural identity.

Portuguese agriculture is also imprinted with this stamp of tradition, although nowadays — owing to the recent European perspective — we can already talk of the dialectic — here, too — between Tradition and Progress. If, in fact, it can be seen that, slowly, irrefutable traces of modern technology are now beginning to be applied to agriculture, livestock-rearing and forestry, in the areas of phytology and zootechnics, general agrolology, soil mechanics and their agrolological aptness, just as they are to harvesting techniques, conservation, selection, transport and product presentation, it is no less true that, side by side with this development, in large, very isolated areas techniques so archaic that they would not be out of place in a museum continue to be used. If, here in Neederland, it has been deemed necessary

to create living ethnographic museums artificially, in order to preserve habits and customs of olden times, in Portugal there still flourish habits and customs which we cannot, indeed must not, describe as museum pieces.

The agricultural structures are even now largely influenced by circumstances of space and time, physical and historical, by the pooriness of the soil and by several kinds of isolation; they are hidebound and, in many ways, resistant to change. Emigration to Europe yielded some returns in the shape of a certain opening up and a sort of evolution in the sense of introducing more modern methods of land use, as well as aid from the EEC's Development Funds. This is starting to broaden and rationalise those efforts. The introduction of new, more rational production methods, on the other hand, came as a consequence of projects and achievements in the ambit of integrated regional programmes and by organisation of the land. This was done by creating and adjusting water-supply infrastructures (irrigation), transport and traffic-flow, as much as by creating new enterprises and managers prepared to get profits from investments, within not only the scope of the single European market in 1993, but also that of potential external markets.

Within the agricultural system already discussed, the broad significance of the kind of subsistence farming and self-sufficiency which still characterises a large part of Portuguese agriculture can be appreciated. Agricultural industries, though there have already been many successful attempts (manufacture of tomato and fruit preserves, for instance) at production in combination with the factors of production and demand, are now beginning to appear as a new competitive force. Even so, many measures still need to be taken to improve the volume of production and profits. This can be done by means of selective investments, directed not only at economies of scale, such as increased production and profits, but with the ultimate object of specifically improving competitiveness, as much in the ambit of the «Single Market» as in the external markets.

In Green Europe, with its increasing surpluses, certain areas of agricultural or livestock production have to be carefully equated in the Portuguese situation as she cannot forever benefit from a privileged status under the pretext of late development.

Is the problem only one of economic policies? Does it go further and become one of economic policies? Does it go further and become one of culture, too? Without doubt the problem is one of evolution of mentality without prejudicing identity.

Reference has previously been made to the significance of utilisation of the EEC's development funds — FEDER, FSE, and FEOGA-ORIENTATION — whose importance in portuguese development policies — with their costs and consequences, their ups and downs — is evident and almost begins to come to life, whilst it has not yet reached a perspective for just assessment.



The imbalances, so strongly imposed by Geography and History, are beginning to weaken, and it is hoped that they might continue to do so; there is still concern to provide appropriate training for young people, despite incentives having already been given, and their employment; and the infrastructure for fundamental lines of development of the Portuguese rural world, without overshadowing other sectors and plans for economic and cultural life, has come to benefit, in the European framework of the Twelve, from these funds, which are now possibly to be increased.

Therefore it is important to mention on account of their overwhelming importance the support and financial machinery made available for Portugal through EPDPA (European Plan for Development of Portuguese Agriculture), from which it is hoped for results which will «wrench Portuguese agriculture from its state of age-old underdevelopment» in the words of a specialist from the Portuguese Embassy to the EEC.

If I may be permitted, I would like to conclude with these words from the same highly-placed diplomat: In specifically agrolological terms, food farming constituted the solution which permitted in the Community, within the framework and stimulus of common agricultural policy, an expansion of production and an increase in farmers' returns to levels unforeseeable at the time of the creation of the EEC.

New techonology and in particular biotechnology will constitute today the driving force of the agricultural revolution of the future, in that an infinite variety of new produce will meet the new necessities which will emerge, and this will permit a speedingup of the expansion of global demand for agricultural products which have so far suffered natural limitations imposed on them by weak population growth at a European level.

At the same time as extending the range to the new possibilities it will allow for more intense competition, in a context that for us, if we so wish it and are aware, the fact of being a late arrival could be an advantage rather than a limitation.

In these conditions the transitional stage of our becoming members of the EEC, after effecting the radical changes which are allowed us or imposed on us, and having responded to the challenge of placing our problems within European and world parameters (it will be essential for us to have done this, otherwise we will have to face realistically what many people today fear), we will at last be able to express our worries at a different level from that which has always been our lot and we will then take care of problems of competition where the only winners will be those who through the use of the most sophisticated technology have equipped themselves sufficiently well to satisfy the demands of the year 2000.