

DOSSIER - THE CARNATION REVOLUTION: PERSPECTIVES AND LEGACIES

Mário Soares, the socialists and “Europe with us”

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Speech by the Portuguese Prime Minister, Mário Soares, following the signing of the Treaty of Accession to the European Economic Community (EEC). Lisbon, 12 June 1985. Photo: Alfredo Cunha (through the Mário Soares and Maria Barroso Foundation)

Against Portugal’s international isolation

Forty years after the coup d’état of 28 May 1926, which brought the military dictatorship to power in Portugal, the leader of Portuguese Socialist Action (ASP), Mário Soares, drafted a petition addressed to the President of the Republic, in which he stated:

“Through the fault of the Government alone, Portugal is becoming less and less a European country. The economic expansion of Western Europe (which has benefited even countries like Yugoslavia or Greece) has barely touched us. Because our economic and political system is repugnant to the dominant conceptions in Western Europe”. [1]

For the general secretary of the Portuguese Socialist Action (ASP), post-war Europe was a

point of reference. The ASP saw themselves and their ideas on the future of Portugal reflected in the political current in Western European democracies. Thus he stressed the country's isolation and its economic and developmental backwardness, while defending self-determination for the colonies. For Mário Soares, the struggle for freedom and democracy was clearly inseparable from defending Portugal's European integration. They were two sides of a long fight against the authoritarian regime.

Political opposition to Oliveira Salazar's "proudly alone" stance [2] was the cornerstone of Soares's thoughts and action. One of the questions that clearly emerges in his speeches and writings is the need for Portugal to open up to the world. "Who does not see how this isolation is harmful and cannot last indefinitely?" he asked in a statement to the newspaper *A Capital*, further adding:

If Portugal wants to restore its place in the world - and be truly faithful to its universalist vision - it must radically change its foreign policy. This inward-looking isolation that confines us and so belittles us in the eyes of foreigners must be ended urgently. [...] only truly democratic institutions can give us the position of international prestige which is our right"! [3]

In his ongoing struggle, Mário Soares spent the last years of the Estado Novo on initiatives denouncing the regime on the international stage. After being imprisoned 12 times, deported for an indefinite time to São Tomé, where he remained until the fall of Salazar and his replacement by Marcelo Caetano, and after the fraudulent and disappointing legislative elections in 1969, Soares set out early the following year on a two-month journey to Latin America and the United States. He visited Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico and Puerto Rico, where he gave lectures, granted interviews to the media and established contacts with politicians from these countries. Internationally, Soares was already the best-known public face of the non-communist resistance to the Portuguese dictatorship.

In April 1970 he arrived in New York, where he gave an important lecture to the press at the Overseas Press Club, in which he denounced the dictatorship and the Portuguese government's colonial policy. He had been invited by the editor of *Ibérica* magazine, the Spanish lawyer and politician Victoria Kent, with the support of the International League for Human Rights. His declarations were published in *The New York Times* and other media outlets. A few days later, he took part in a debate on Portugal's human rights violations, held during the 22nd ordinary session of the Council of Europe. He stated: "Portugal needs Europe to survive. And it is by strengthening the bonds of economic and political cooperation between Portugal and Europe that a new dynamic can arise to force a change in the Portuguese situation." Soares used each public appearance on the international stage to put pressure on institutions to take action in relation to the Portuguese situation. "This is why we are sure that when the Council of Europe wants to help Portugal, it will not forget it must also help democracy," concluded the socialist leader. [4]

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Mário Soares was forced into exile following his international denunciations of the Portuguese dictatorship. He moved to France, where he continued his intense political struggle. In 1971, in a long article published in *Le Monde*, at a time when Marcelo Caetano's government was moving closer to the European Community, and after a meeting in Paris between the Portuguese foreign minister, Rui Patrício and his French counterpart, Maurice Schumann, Soares posed the question: "How can the European Economic Community welcome Portugal when its government is known to be applying essentially antidemocratic methods of political action" [5]

Soares' indignant protest expressed in the text is that of a person who does not want a Europe that is accommodating towards dictatorships, and who accepts no concessions, especially on the colonial question. On the contrary, he is seeking support from the member states and main figures of the European democracies to publicly condemn the authoritarian regime. He did this at the numerous congresses and political meetings he attended in various European cities, with the firm support of his Portuguese Socialist Action comrades, especially Tito de Morais and Ramos da Costa, both also in exile. From 11 to 13 June, 1971, he attended the French socialists' unification conference in Épinay-sur-Seine, which François Mitterrand left victorious. On 28 June of that same year, he took part in the 8th Conference of European Socialist Parties in Brussels. In June 1972, at the 12th Congress of the Socialist International held in Vienna, the Portuguese Socialist Action (ASP) became a member organisation, although only as an observer (as it was only an organisation and not a party). It was, however, a particularly important moment for Portuguese socialists.

Establishing relationships with leaders and figures in the main European socialist and social democratic parties brought him into contact with other political realities, as well as offering him new experiences and knowledge on how these parties were organised and functioned, while consolidating his ideas regarding European politics.

This political maturity is present in his magnum opus *Le Portugal Bâillonné*, published in exile in 1972. The book mixes various genres, while being an extremely important instrument of political combat and a pioneering history book. Already knowing the answer, Soares asks the question: "How could the Portuguese people not benefit from the democratic principles common to all Western Europe?". Although the unceasing struggle for freedom and democracy is a constant theme throughout the book, it also describes the need for Portugal to approach the European project as a form of social development for a country deeply marked by inequality and poverty. Thus, aware that this distance was harming the country, he very lucidly stressed that "Europe is being built in Portugal's absence." [6]

In an interview with the newspaper *República*, eventually banned by the censors, he set out

his ideas on Europe:

“I’m in favour of the Europe of the workers and not the Europe of trusts. I share and subscribe to much of the European left’s criticism of the supercapitalist Europe which is being built, in which multinational companies are a fundamental driving force. I am in favour of a Europe of the workers, which must be built progressively with the development of democracy in each European country. I believe the correct attitude for left-wing parties is to join the construction of Europe and progressively transform it in the direction of socialism and workers’ demands”. [7]

It was in this context, along with his personal reflections, his conversations with his closest comrades and the information reaching him that something was moving in Portugal, that the possibility of converting the Portuguese Socialist Action into a party took shape in 1973, and Mário Soares, along with Ramos da Costa and Tito de Moraes, thought it was the right time to move the project forward.

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On 19 April 1973, the Socialist Party (PS) was founded in Bad Münstereifel (Germany), at a conference attended by 27 delegates from Lisbon, Coimbra and Porto, together with the core members abroad, exiles or immigrants in Europe. Not everyone agreed with founding the party, but for Soares, who was immediately elected its general secretary, there was little doubt it would play a key role in the socialists’ political struggle in the future. “We need an instrument – a Stradivarius as I would call it – with solid European contacts, to be able to impose ourselves when the moment arrives... In other words: when the anticolonialist and democratic revolution triumphs,” he wrote years later in his book *Um Político Assume-se*. [8] The next year, on 25 April 1974, the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) brought down the regime.

From the April Revolution to “Europe with us”

On 25 April 1974, Soares was in Bonn (Germany), at the invitation of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), where he was to interview the chancellor Willy Brandt. At the break of dawn, he received a call informing him of the military movements in Lisbon. He immediately

returned to Paris, from where he set off for Lisbon on 27 April, on the so-called Freedom Train.

Accompanied by Maria Barroso, Ramos da Costa and Tito de Morais, he arrived at Santa Apolónia station on 28 April. At that moment, Soares “did not disembark without support, without instrument, without a role. There was a great deal of strength beneath his apparent weakness,” observed Vasco Pulido Valente [9] Above all, there were the long years of work he had undertaken to prepare a political project for when the “moment of change” arrived in Portugal. He was clamorously received by thousands of Portuguese, who learnt of his return from exile through the press and radio. Soares addressed them with the following words: “I want to say a few words to the armed forces. They have given the Portuguese people back their voice and joy, a historic act that we must never forget. But it is now the turn of the people, the workers, to organise the democracy and bring an end to the colonial war”. [10]

The period that came next allowed Soares to increasingly assert himself as a European leader. In early May, the National Salvation Junta president, António de Spínola, asked him to seek out international recognition for the Portuguese Revolution, and he visited the main European capitals, meeting with Harold Wilson, James Callaghan, Olof Palme, Willy Brandt, Joop den Uyl and Cardinal Casaroli of the Vatican, among others. The world was watching Portugal, the country that had initiated the “third wave” [11] of transitions to democracy, and the consequences the Portuguese revolution might have in other countries, such as its neighbour Spain, which was still under a dictatorship.



Mário Soares and his wife Maria Barroso are interviewed on the train as they return from

exile in Paris on 28 April 1974. Photo: Alfredo Cunha (through the Mário Soares and Maria Barroso Foundation)

The international contacts Soares made on his official visits were also “very beneficial to the Socialist Party (PS)”. European socialists’ support for the young party, which was still being structured and establishing its base, was diverse (financial, technical and material) and led to François Mitterrand and Willy Brandt taking part in rallies, but also visits to Portugal by Michel Rocard, Olof Palme, Felipe González, Bruno Kreisky and many other political figures. From the beginning, all this was decisive in the “national projection and organisation” of the Socialist Party, as by 1974 it already had 35,000 new members. [12]

Appointed Foreign Minister in the first three provisional governments (1974-1975), Soares could finally apply his ideas and projects, benefiting from the image of credibility he had forged whilst in exile. He prioritised opening Portugal to the world, and his intense diplomatic activity was characterised by establishing relations with numerous countries and moving closer to the European Economic Community. In September 1974, in his first address to the United Nations General Assembly, he stated: “I would like to make it quite clear that the free and democratic Portugal we are building, with great difficulty, but stimulated by the general trust of our people, is now proudly beginning to feel accompanied.” [13] Soares’s politics as foreign minister had a clear goal, which he himself recalled some years later:

“[...] I understood that I had to show the United Nations that we would take the path towards self-determination to be able to establish relations with all the world’s countries, end international isolation - we had been reduced to a ghetto - and restore Portugal’s prestige on the international stage. I thought the counterpoint to democratising the Portuguese Republic was a solution to the colonial question.” [14]

Meanwhile, Soares had initiated the decolonisation process he had fought for. During these months, in which the political and military conflicts worsened, Soares consolidated his position as the main political figure defending a pluralist democracy for the future of the country. He was re-elected general secretary at the first legal conference of the Socialist Party (PS), in December 1974, the first major step in clarifying the party’s political project and affirming its identity. Various representatives from the European socialist and social democratic parties attended the conference, which was particularly important for the PS. In international terms, it helped “project the Portuguese political situation in Europe, with the inherent importance of the PS to a political outcome that matched Western interests”; while domestically, it helped “give the PS credibility, as it showed it had support from European leaders”. [15]

Upon returning from exile, Mário Soares stated that “the armed forces have given the Portuguese people back their voice and joy, a historic act that we must never forget. But it is now the turn of the people, the workers, to organise the democracy and bring an end to the colonial war”

With their victory in the Constituent Assembly elections on 25 April 1975, the Socialist Party had won undeniable democratic legitimacy. There were clashes between the Socialist Party and the Portuguese Communist Party, political-military documents presenting different projects for the country multiplied and the political conflict intensified, creating a pre-civil war climate. In this context, in which “the viability of an open and plural society seemed to be seriously at stake, the defenders of this path once again put their faith in Mário Soares”. European leaders’ hopes for a stable future for Portugal were placed in Soares. In the Hot Summer of 1975, [16] when the final minutes of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) were about to be signed, “after showing the Soviet Union leaders the disadvantages of a revolutionary deviation in Portugal, the Western European leaders met in Stockholm to agree on their positions”. [17] This led to the creation of the Committee for Friendship and Solidarity with Democracy and Socialism in Portugal, chaired by Willy Brandt.

Events followed on quickly. After 25 November, the correlation of political and military forces changed and the process of institutionalising Portuguese democracy began. Mário Soares and the Socialist Party maintained their strategy of moving closer to Europe. The signing of a new pact between the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) and the political parties early in 1976 and the approval of a new constitution in April established the conditions for holding legislative elections. And it was in this context that European integration was set out more clearly than ever in the programme the socialists presented to the Portuguese (“Programme for a PS government”).

Furthermore, before the elections, Soares would demonstrate, at a time of enormous political and media impact, that European socialists and social democrats stood by him and the PS’s project. By organising a major summit in Porto, in the context of the previously mentioned Committee for Friendship and Solidarity with Democracy and Socialism in Portugal, the socialists consolidated their position as a pro-European party. They wanted to turn Porto into the socialist capital of Europe and they set in motion the goal of Portugal applying for membership of the European Economic Community. To do this, in March 1976, under the slogan “Europe with us”, figures such as Willy Brandt, Olof Palme, Bruno Kreisky, Joop den Uyl, François Mitterrand, Francesco De Martino and Felipe González addressed a packed hall.

Willy Brandt, the former German chancellor and leader of the German Social Democratic Party, restated his support for the Portuguese Socialists: “We will always, always, be by your side. [...] The Portuguese people are welcome in European society.” During his long

and passionate speech, Soares underlined that this was the path he wished to take for the country. “It is in this direction, with Europe’s help, with the world’s help, joining this great collective movement of European integration, that the Socialists want to advance. And we will do it if the Portuguese people give us a clear electoral victory.” [18]

After the summit, this discourse was maintained throughout the Socialist’s campaign. “Europe with us” was even the campaign slogan for the legislative elections, the first free elections with direct, universal suffrage, which ended on 25 April with victory for the Socialist Party. There is no doubt that the priority given in the PS programme, and particularly in Mário Soares’s action, to Portuguese membership of the European Economic Community immediately after the Revolution demonstrated Soares’s conviction, constancy and commitment to relations with Europe

“Europe with us” was even the Socialist Party’s campaign slogan for the first free elections with direct, universal suffrage following the 25 April

As Dina Sebastião says, “it shows that his discourse in exile was not just rhetoric to win support against the dictatorship, but a structural part of his thoughts on the future of Portugal”. [19] In 1977, Mário Soares, as the prime minister of the first constitutional government, requested Portuguese membership of the European Economic Community, and in 1985, as leader of the ninth government, he signed the membership treaty.

REFERENCES AND FOOTNOTES

- 1 — Draft of the petition to the President of the Republic, Américo Tomás, entitled “Nos 40 anos do Estado Novo - um projecto”, March 1966. File: 00002.009. Mário Soares Archive. Mário Soares and Maria Barroso Foundation.
- 2 — Translator’s note: The expression “proudly alone” (“Orgulhosamente sós”) was used by the dictator António de Oliveira Salazar to describe the country’s geopolitical stance during the Estado Novo, particularly during the colonial war, to denounce the lack of support from its allies.
- 3 — Mário Soares, in response to a survey by *A Capital*, October 14, 1969. File: 00032.002. Mário Soares Archive. Mário Soares and Maria Barroso Foundation.
- 4 — Soares, M. (1975). *Escritos do Exílio*. Lisbon: Bertrand, pp. 44-45.
- 5 — Mário Soares, “Portugal e a Europa”, *Le Monde*, March 3, 1971. File: 00032.002. Mário Soares Archive. Mário Soares and Maria Barroso Foundation.
- 6 — Soares, M. (1972). *Le Portugal Bâillonné - Un témoignage*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy.

- 7 — Interview with Mário Soares in *República*, banned by the censors. April 30, 1972. File: 00007.001.002 Mário Soares Archive. Mário Soares and Maria Barroso Foundation.
- 8 — Soares, M. (2011). *Um Político Assume-se*. Lisbon: Temas e Debates, p. 161.
- 9 — *Observador*, January 14, 2017.
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- 13 — Soares, M. (1975). *Democratização e Descolonização. Dez meses no Governo Provisório*. Lisbon: Publicações Dom Quixote, p. 125.
- 14 — Avillez, M. J. (1996). *Soares. Ditadura e Revolução*. Lisbon: Circulo de Leitores, p. 297.
- 15 — Sebastião, D. (2018). *Mário Soares e a Europa: pensamento e ação*. Lisbon: Princípiã, p. 96.
- 16 — Translator's note: Reference to the so-called Hot Summer: a moment in which, after the clearly left-leaning 5th Provisional Government took office, there was a mass anti-communist mobilisation in central and northern Portugal, encouraged by moderate sectors, the right and the far right, which surrounded, assaulted and set fire to the headquarters of the PCP and other left-wing organisations, which took Portugal to the brink of civil war.
- 17 — Castaño, D. (2012). "Mário Soares e o sucesso da transição democrática: breves notas". *Ler História*, no. 63, p. 23.
- 18 — Soares, M. (1976). *A Europa Connosco - Dois Discursos Proferidos na Cimeira Socialista do Porto*. Lisbon: Perspetivas & Realidades, p. 18.
- 19 — Sebastião, D. (2018). *Mário Soares e a Europa: pensamento e ação*. Lisbon: Princípiã, p. 118.



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