



*European Parliament*  
*Press Release*

20 Kensington Palace Gardens  
London W8 4QQ  
Telephone: 01-229 9366

August 8, 1975

The following are excerpts from the transcript of an interview given by Sir Christopher Soames, Vice-President of the Commission of the European Communities, responsible for external affairs, to the BBC World Service, on Portugal. The interview was first broadcast on the World Service on Wednesday evening, August 6 and subsequently on Thursday morning. It was translated into Portuguese and broadcast in the Portuguese Service of the BBC on Wednesday evening.

Sir Christopher said: "The Commission put forward a proposal about two months ago to the Council of Ministers recommending really massive financial aid to Portugal and recommending that this should be done as project aid to encourage investment in Portugal which has come, as far as one can understand, almost to a complete halt. There is pretty well no investment going on in Portugal at all at the moment and no country can live without investment. Our proposal was that the Community should give project aid in some hundreds of millions of dollars over a period of years. This was considered in the Council of Ministers and in principle it was looked on with favour but we never got any further with it because things got so chaotic in Portugal that clearly it wasn't the time to take it further. We are hoping that the time will come when it will be possible to take it further."

Question: "Last month the Community Heads of Government stated that they would only grant economic aid to Portugal if that country remained a pluralistic democracy. What would count now as a really concrete gesture by the rulers of Portugal that could satisfy the Common Market on that point?"

Sir Christopher: " We in the Commission were not recommending that the Community should give money of this order or magnitude to a dictatorship government. Nothing would be further from our minds. When you ask what would satisfy the member states, the Community as a whole, where Portugal is concerned as to what is and is not a pluralistic democracy - well, we've had the elections, the people spoke very clearly in those elections that they wanted a government of a certain character. There is now a constituent assembly which hopefully will be set up and the idea is to have more elections in the near future. If that is held to, and the people of Portugal speak their voice again and it is hearkened to, and the government is accordingly set up, then this will be a pluralistic democracy."

Question: " Some observers feel that the Community is being tougher in its attitude to Lisbon than towards other countries with which the Common Market has trade and aid agreements."

Sir Christopher: " No, this isn't true. We've already got a free trade area agreement with Portugal and we don't expect the same standards all the way around the world as we do in Europe. It is for the Portuguese people we hope, to decide their own future and what I think we ought to do is to make it quite clear how we would react to what circumstances. If we didn't make this clear I think we would not be fulfilling our obligations in this regard. It is not for us to interfere in what is going to happen in Portugal but it is for us to draw our conclusions and to reach our decisions accordingly. I think that it is right and proper and quite understandable that the Member States should make it clear under what conditions they would be prepared to give a lot of extra aid."

Question: " They would expect them to be slightly more democratic simply because Portugal is a part of Europe?"

Sir Christopher: " We have a free trade area agreement with Portugal and we don't have agreements of that character with any country other than a democracy. We have an agreement with Greece and when the colonels took over in Greece that agreement was frozen and we just did not give any aid to Greece until they came back to the way of democracy again. Now we are going ahead and I think that this is quite plain and understandable. I think the Community's policy is well understood here."

Question: " The Helsinki conference last month saw agreements on non-interference in the affairs of other countries. Isn't the Common Market, with its economic pressure on Portugal to maintain a pluralistic system, interfering with Portugal's internal affairs?"

Sir Christopher: " No. What we are saying is that if things go in a certain way in Portugal, and we understand this to be the way that the Portuguese people wish it to go because they decided freely when they went to the ballot boxes, then it looks to me as if the Community will be prepared to make very considerable efforts to help Portugal. This isn't interfering in the affairs of another country; it's drawing conclusions what happens. Of course other countries don't have a free trade area agreement with Portugal - the Community does."

Question: " Do you agree that the Common Market attitude could make it very difficult for member governments to criticise Russian aid to Portugal for instance?"

Sir Christopher: " No, as I say we already have a special relationship with Portugal which the Russians do not have and the fact that we have a free trade area relationship with Portugal is a very special relationship. It means that they can export pretty well everything that they produce to us without any duty at all."

Question: " Supposing there were these elections and Portugal was a pluralistic society - how far left could Portugal swing for the Community to be sympathetic towards it given for instance that the Community is very sympathetic towards Yugoslavia."

Sir Christopher: " Here again we haven't got a free trade area relationship with Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia has not indeed sought it. Yugoslavia gets the generalised preference scheme from the Community."

Sir Christopher (cont'd): " As to the questions of how far left Portugal could go this isn't a matter that you measure from left to right. What we want is for the Portuguese people's voice to be heard, to be listened to, and to become effective. If this happens I think the Community would be ready to give a lot of help and goodness knows it is quite evident that Portugal is in very considerable need of a lot of help."

Question: " There must be calculations within the Community about what their withholding in economic aid could do to Portugal. It might make it even more anti-democratic and drive it into the arms of Russia."

Sir Christopher: " We are not withholding aid. There wasn't aid going to Portugal before. What we are considering is whether we should now begin to give pretty massive aid to Portugal. We were delighted when we heard that democracy was going to be restored in Portugal; we were delighted when the elections took place; we were delighted when the people spoke. But it wasn't for us to say whether it was too right or too left or centre or where it was. This isn't what we were worried about. What we are anxious to say is that given certain circumstances we would be prepared to give very considerable help to Portugal. We aren't withholding any aid as we weren't giving it before."

"But I don't think you will find the Council of Ministers looking favourably upon a new aid programme for Portugal unless it be in the context of a democratic régime in Portugal and I don't think indeed that this would be very popular among the people of the member states in Europe unless it were a democratic régime they were helping."

Question: " If Portugal's leaders did become more enthusiastic about democracy, how would you see relations between Portugal and the Common Market developing?"

Sir Christopher: " I think one has to divide this into the short term and the longer term. On the short term I would see the Council of Ministers giving very intense consideration to what sort of aid the Portuguese government might require and to what extent the Community could fulfil their needs. That would be I think the first step."

"Now the second step - it may or may not be that the Portuguese government would think in terms of altering, as it were, their institutional relationship with the Community. This would be for the Portuguese government to decide. If they did this well, of course, it would be considered also by the Council of Ministers, but I think it's much too soon to be talking in these terms yet. I think the immediate question is whether Portugal is going to put herself in a situation where the Council of Ministers can be considering afresh whether or not to grant this aid which the Commission has recommended should be granted in certain circumstances."

+++++