

Address given by Michel Barnier at the signing of the CSF for Portugal for the period 2000–2006 (Lisbon, 31 March 2000)

Caption: Address given by Michel Barnier, Member of the European Commission with special responsibility for Regional Policy, at the signing of the third Community Support Framework (CSF) for Portugal for the period 2000–2006.

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Signing of the CSF for Portugal for 2000-2006 (Lisbon, 31 March 2000)

Michel Barnier

Member of the Commission for regional policy with responsibility for the Intergovernmental Conference

Signing of the CSF for Portugal for 2000-2006

Lisbon, 31 March 2000

Prime Minister,

Ministers,

Members of Parliament,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, please allow me to thank you for inviting me here today to sign the decision on the third Community support framework alongside you.

I feel that this event is particularly important for us all:

- for Portugal, above all, as the signing of the CSF III expands and builds on the efforts put into developing and modernising this country, started in 1989 and followed up with great success in 1994-1999;
- then for the Commission, and regional policy in particular, as this signing confirms the European Union's political commitment to building a strong, cohesive, successful Europe. With the help of structural operations, all countries and regions in the Union should be in a position to integrate themselves into the dynamic of the single market and to share in the progress already made together.

I am especially pleased to observe that the CSF was drawn up in Portugal through a process of participation in a national consensus framework, which has certainly contributed to the quality of the exercise.

Ever since the Portuguese authorities presented the regional development plan in October last year, I have followed the preparation of CSF III very closely. I know that a great deal of reflection and intense negotiation have been put in since that point.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my great thanks to all those on the Portuguese side who, under your authority, Prime Minister, have contributed to this task in a constructive and responsible manner. They are far too numerous for me to credit everyone, but nevertheless I would like to mention:

- my friend Elisa Ferreira, Minister in charge of the regional development plan, with whom I was in contact right throughout the negotiations,
- her predecessor João Cravinho, who handed the regional development plan over to me on 13 October 1999,
- João-Nuno Mendes, Secretary of State for the regional development plan, who has followed every step of the drafting of the CSF;
- and finally Nuno Vitorino, Chair of the negotiation commission appointed by the Portuguese Government, to whom I would like to pay a special tribute for the painstaking approach, the understanding and the loyalty which he has demonstrated throughout the negotiations.

Naturally, my thanks also go to all the members of the negotiation committee, who gave unstintingly of their time and efforts.

Finally, please allow me to pay tribute to my staff, who have continually striven to achieve a positive result both for the Commission and above all for Portugal.

I believe the result of our efforts meets up to our expectations. I would just like to point out some objectives which seem essential to me, in that they all aim to produce global improvements in productivity in the Portuguese economy.

- Firstly, we will measure the effort put into improving the level of qualification among the Portuguese population, in particular among young people, through education and vocational training.

Significant efforts will be made in the areas of research, technology and innovation, which are indispensable in improving productivity in businesses.

- Secondly, I am genuinely pleased that the development of the information society for young people is being fully taken into account in the CSF, and even financially reinforced during the negotiations. The European Council meeting which you hosted last week put the spotlight on the decisive role which new communications technologies have to play in the European economy of tomorrow.

In this regard, CSF III provides finance for diverse initiatives, notably to disseminate the necessary technical knowledge, in particular among younger people, and to modernise public administration. All these initiatives are looking to the future.

- Thirdly, the priority given to developing and modernising SMEs, in line with the Commission guidelines of July 1999, seems to me to be particularly relevant for a country like Portugal, where small and medium-sized companies make up the bulk of the industrial and service sectors.

We must ensure that all the technological, financial and advisory resources that these companies need for integration into an open market economy are made available to them.

- Fourthly, I appreciate that the CSF has confirmed the position of agriculture, rural development and fishing. The significance of rural areas in Portugal far exceeds their traditional function of supplying agricultural produce, and they are now playing an increasingly important role in maintaining an ecologically sound countryside, which is indispensable for a high-quality tourism industry.

This CSF clearly demonstrates the solidarity needed between rural regions and urban areas.

- Fifthly; the Azores and Madeira. The CSF is clearly in line with the Commission report on the implementation of Article 299 (2) of the Treaty on the most remote regions. You will be aware of the personal attention which I will continue to pay to on this partnership with our seven most remote regions. It is precisely for this reason that I chose to go to the Azores on 9 January for my first working visit to one of the seven most remote regions of Europe.

I know that, by definition, appropriations are never sufficient for the needs of these regions. Please allow me, however, to mention just one fact: 9.6% of Community payments to the CSF III will go to the regions of the Azores and Madeira.

I would also like to reiterate my vigilance with regard to actions in favour of the environment to be carried out thanks to the CSF and operations jointly financed by the Cohesion Fund.

Whether they concern water conveyance or treatment networks, treatment of urban and industrial waste or protection of endangered natural sites, all these investments are laying the foundations for our future.

The Natura 2000 network is thus an essential element for all Member States. The Commission has therefore obtained a pledge of commitment from the Portuguese authorities that they will submit a list of the sites to

be designated part of this network by the end of the third quarter of 2000, in order to guarantee consistency between the programmes and protection of these sites, and to not allow them to deteriorate when operations part-financed by the Structural Funds are implemented.

A total of EUR 23.5 billion (PTE 4 711 billion) in Community funds, including the Cohesion Fund, will be spent in the 2000-2006 period. In addition to this, there will be European Investment Bank operations, your own national measures and private funds, all leading to an additional annual GDP growth of two points and the creation of 80 000 jobs throughout the whole period.

All of this will require considerable effort to manage, which we will do with concern for effectiveness and transparency. This will form the basis of the new measures governing the Structural Funds, i.e. with increased subsidiarity.

This does not worry me: the painstaking and professional way in which the Portuguese authorities have implemented the two previous CSFs bodes well for the future.

As for me, you can count on my personal commitment and that of my staff to making the most of the resources at our disposal throughout the coming five years.

We can already make another date for our diaries: the mid-term review of CSF III, scheduled for 2003, in which the Portuguese authorities and the Commission will jointly carry out a clear-headed, objective appraisal of what has been achieved and where any new requirements will be taken into account.

As a matter of fact, seven years is a long time for our economies: we must be prepared to adapt flexibly to changes in society, the men and women who make it up, new technologies and markets.

Finally, I would like to tell you two things of which I am sure:

- The first is that Europe will truly become a great area of prosperity and of equality among people.

All the Member States and regions will have a part to play in this.

Nothing would be worse for the future of the European project than a kind of chronic despair in some European regions, whose citizens looked on disillusioned while others profited from the benefits of Europe, feeling powerless or overlooked, left by the wayside.

It was to avoid such a divide that the EU created this regional and cohesion policy. The Community support framework for Portugal which we are signing today is a major element of this policy. Over and above its technical and financial content, we should stress its political dimension.

- The second thing of which I am sure is that this CSF comes at a crucial moment for Portugal's future. The European Union of 2006 will not be the same as the European Union of today. The rate of technological advance will accelerate, the single market will develop and consolidate and new Member States joining the Union will have a level of development lower than that of Portugal on its accession fifteen years ago.

European regional policy will be challenged by all these changes, although I cannot yet predict with any certainty what the consequences will be.

I only know that this enlargement should not neglect the environmental frontier, the Atlantic frontier and [sentence incomplete]

Thus it is essential that the CSF III gives the Portuguese economy the opportunity to prepare for the new Europe which awaits us.

This is a challenge, but also a source of hope.



Thank you for your attention.