

Address given by José Sócrates to the European Parliament (Strasbourg, 11 July 2007)

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Address given by Prime Minister José Sócrates to the European Parliament: Presentation of the Programme of the Portuguese Presidency (Strasbourg, 11th July 2007)

Mr. President (dear Hans-Gert Pöttering),
Mr. President of the European Commission (dear José Manuel Durão Barroso),
Honourable members,

1. Greeting

At the start of the six months of the Portuguese presidency, I want to reaffirm the central idea guiding us to you, the legitimate representatives of Europe's citizens: we want a stronger Europe for a better world!

We make a clear commitment to this large audience: we will do everything in our power to overcome the period of doubt and uncertainty about the path followed by the European project. And here, at the heart of European democracy, we ask all members to accompany us in this common goal!

It is well known that Portugal was not one of the founding countries of the European Communities. But when we re-established democracy in our country in 1974 after a forty-eight year dictatorship, our main aim was precisely that of adhesion to the European Communities. This was achieved in 1986. On taking the presidency of the Union's Council of Ministers for the third time, I want to reassert before you all the Portuguese government's determination and commitment to defend and further the values of peace, freedom, solidarity and prosperity that inspired the founding fathers in 1957. The now twenty seven member states, with almost 500 million citizens, all reaffirmed these values together in Berlin last March.

I am confident that the following six months will mark the end of the deadlocks and blockages that have held the European project back too long. The example of the European integration project motivates many populations and countries from the four corners of the globe who, in fact, find it difficult to understand our deadlocks and are the first to ask to play a more predominant role in the European Union.

I have always believed that the European project is one of the most important and generous political projects of our times. The construction of Europe is important to the European economy, to the promotion of European values and to European citizens. But it is equally important to face global challenges, to take advantage of the opportunities of these times of change and to build a more stable world, that is able to face up to global challenges and take advantage of the opportunities of these times of change. It is not only European people that need a strong Europe. It is the world that needs a Europe with a more audible voice.

The success of a presidency depends clearly on the clarity of its programme. Our priorities have been identified: the reform of the Treaties; an agenda for modernising European economies and societies, and the strengthening of Europe's role in the world.

2. The reform of the Treaties

Mr. President,
Honourable members,

The main challenge of these six months is clearly that of picking up the Treaty reform process, based on the mandate adopted at the last European Council. I am delighted to underline and praise the strategy and negotiation carried out by the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, whom we have always supported during these last six months. I would equally like to thank this Parliament for the clear position taken in the Resolution voted on the basis of the Baron Crespo- Brok Report, in order to reach an agreement between the Member states that continued to believe in the importance of a Constitutional Treaty and that came to terms with the signs from the referenda in France and the Netherlands.

The advance made in the last European Council was only possible due to the impetus of the European

Parliament that was able to define a strong, coherent and constructive position on this matter instead of resigning themselves to deadlock.

The agreement reached in the European Council on 21st and 22nd June gives a clear and precise mandate, as always considered necessary by Portugal. We are now in a position to move forward.

However, I have no doubts: the decisive step was taken in October 2006, when the Heads of Government of the three countries forming the trio of presidencies – Germany, Portugal and Slovenia – agreed to include in our joint programme the resolution of the institutional deadlock as a top priority. At the time few believed that this objective could be met. In fact, this goal is now within our reach.

We are starting out confidently. It is our job to finish this task: to turn the mandate into a new Treaty. I am well aware that the negotiation and coordination that lies ahead will be difficult. But I know that we can do it. One thing is clear to me. Our mandate is not to change the mandate, but to turn the mandate into a Treaty.

It is clear from this mandate what has been abandoned from the former Constitutional Treaty, what has been taken from it in the Reforming Treaty and what has been added in innovative terms to the Treaty of Nice.

It is best to take advantage of the political momentum. We have to move fast. I have decided to convene the Intergovernmental Conference, beginning on 23rd July, back to back with the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council. That same day we shall distribute a draft Treaty drawn up on the basis of the detailed instructions set out in the mandate.

During that same week, we will convene meetings of legal experts to analyse the texts and identify possible difficulties. The informal meeting of the Foreign Ministers on 7th and 8th September will provide the opportunity for a situation report of the work. We intend to work actively to obtain an agreement on the Treaty during the informal European Council of 18th and 19th October in Lisbon. I believe that this calendar best corresponds to the spirit and will of all the European institutions and best serves the Union's interest.

And I am counting on the European Parliament so as to meet this objective. This is why I defended that there should be three representatives of the European Parliament at the Intergovernmental Conference, thereby assuring that this house is better represented.

And this is precisely why I shall propose that the European Parliament is represented by its President whenever the Intergovernmental Conference meets at the Heads of State and Government level.

I know that I can rely on the collaboration of all the institutions. I would like to thank the European Commission and the European Central Bank for rapidly issuing their indispensable opinions.

And I would also like to thank the European Parliament for its opinion so that it can be approved today, thus concluding everything necessary for the opening of the Intergovernmental Conference.

I am relying on the determination and commitment of all the Member States. This is a moment of convergence in which all the institutions join together so that a rapid decision on the Treaty can serve as a clear sign of Europe's confidence and determination to advance with its Union project.

3. An Agenda to modernise the European economy and society

But the reform of the Treaties is just a part of the Union's task in the coming months. In fact, in addition to institutional matters, European citizens demand answers to questions which directly affect their everyday lives and where they recognise that Europe can produce concrete results that make a difference and contribute to improving their living conditions.

Europe has to invest more in a modernization agenda.

Just over seven years ago, the then Prime Minister of Portugal, António Guterres, came to this House to present the Lisbon Strategy which has been the roadmap for the modernisation of the European economy and society.

It is therefore with a special sense of satisfaction that I tell you that the “Lisbon Strategy” will, yet again, be at the forefront of our concerns. The strategy defined in 2000 to strengthen competitiveness with social cohesion, through pledging in knowledge and innovation, remains the right path to follow and holds the support of the main European political forces.

The results of economic reforms are not always immediately apparent. But they are now becoming clearly visible in a more consistent trend of growth in the European area. It is necessary to strengthen its implementation, with a better conjugation of all the new instruments adopted in 2005, from the national reform programmes to the community programmes and the structural funds.

We are going to actively contribute to a new cycle of the Lisbon Agenda, which will be approved in spring 2008 during the Slovenian presidency. But as we prepare this new cycle, we are maintaining the balance between the three dimensions of the Agenda: economic, social and environmental.

The revision of the internal market will enable us to place emphasis on companies’ competitiveness, on the opening of markets and on the elimination of context costs (with special attention given to the contribution of e-government) as well as on the role cultural industries can play in terms of job creations, economic growth and innovation.

The next six months will also be especially relevant for the choice of energy and environment policy. Here, Europe must have just one goal: to maintain its leadership in the environmental field and, in particular, in the fight against climate change.

From the outset, we will meet the aims of fostering the debate on a new technological action plan regarding energy and the environment, focusing especially on energy efficiency; we will also underline the role of bio-fuels more specifically in the framework of the relations that resulted from the first EU-Brazil Summit.

We shall also place the questions of water shortage and drought situations on the European agenda and go forward with preparations of the Union’s position for the conference to debate the Post-Kyoto reference framework. We will also launch the debate for the construction of the foundations for an effective European maritime policy.

We also intend to give the social dimension of the “Lisbon Strategy” the relevance and visibility it deserves. Ten years after the launch of the “European Employment Strategy”, we believe it is vital to further debate on the best ways to coordinate employment policies with a view to fostering the creation of sustainable work posts in the current context of global competition. This line of action of the Portuguese presidency will be closely articulated with the qualification of human resources, the conciliation of work and family life, the fight against poverty and exclusion.

The European Social model, in its recognized diversity, requires joint reflection on the sustainability of the retirement pension systems, as well as the identification of the reforms necessary in the labour market and in the protection systems given the social risks. In this context the debate on the so-called flexi-security should be guided by the search for comprehensive and balanced solutions, translated into general and common principles common at European level, which take into account the diversity of the social realities in the different member states of the Union.

Mr. President
Honourable members

For the Portuguese presidency, one of the structuring values of the European project is that of the freedom-security interface as inseparable elements.

In this context, the strengthening of police and judicial cooperation in the fight against terrorism and organised crime is also a priority of this Presidency.

Terrorism continues to be one of the biggest threats to international peace and security. But democracies do not fear terrorism and know how to be firm in the face of this threat. A good example of this firm position is that of the British government last week and I would like to express the solidarity of all the countries of the Union with them.

The fight against terrorism should therefore remain a common aim among all member states. Because only European cooperation allows us to prevent, protect and pursue terrorism.

The Portuguese presidency will work towards the implementation of the initiatives underway in the ambit of the European Union's Strategy against Terrorism, to comply with the Action Plan for the Fight against Terrorism and to continue applying the strategy against the radicalisation and recruitment of terrorists, which will be revised over the next six months.

We therefore consider it urgent to replace Mr. DeVries and to define the means and mandate which will enable him to fulfil his mission effectively.

There can be no freedom without safety. This is the lesson we learn from history. The Union's security policy is therefore vital to preserve the openness and tolerance of European societies.

So I do not hide my pride in saying that it was Portugal that proposed the technological solution (SIS-ONE4ALL) which was conceived by a Portuguese company, so that the new member states could adhere fully to the Schengen space and so that the borders with these countries could disappear by the end of the Portuguese presidency.

In this way, one of the greatest wishes of those citizens will be achieved: the free movement of people in the Union's area.

But I would also like to say a word about immigration policy. Special attention will be devoted to this issue during our presidency. Europe today receives millions of immigrants who come to live here, work here, raise their children here and whose contribution to the economic growth of Europe is indispensable. We must therefore build a European immigration policy based on fighting illegal immigration, with a policy of inclusion and integration of legal immigrants; there must be effective cooperation with the countries of origin so that the migratory flows can be managed to the mutual benefit.

Only a policy that is active in the origin and destination country, in the causes and the effects, will be able to deal with the size of this phenomenon and in harmony with our values and our responsibilities.

4. Strengthening Europe's role in the world

Mr. President
Honourable members

The current international situation requires that the European Union assumes special responsibilities. European citizens make a clear demand for active international protagonism based on the values of international rights, dialogue and coordination. They are equally clear about their expectations of the international community regarding the Union's determined and cohesive involvement in the key international issues.

In the second half of 2007 unavoidable decisions must be taken about delicate questions on the global agenda - the future of Kosovo; the Iran nuclear dossier; the humanitarian crisis in Darfur – with a number of particularly relevant bilateral summits: India, China, Russia and Ukraine. The relationship with the United

States, in the framework defined by the Washington Summit during the German presidency, will be closely monitored as required by the strategic relevance of transatlantic relations.

We will assume the responsibilities required of the presidency of close articulation with the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Javier Solana, and with the European Commission.

There are three initiatives to which we are linked that merit special emphasis: the Summit with Brazil, the Summit with Africa and the Euro-Mediterranean conferences (in the areas of migration, energy, foreign affairs and ecofin/trade).

In the first week of the presidency we have already held the summit with Brazil with a view to take our relations to a higher level of mutual knowledge and close cooperation in every way. This initiative is particularly dear to us, the Portuguese, as we share the same language and much of our culture and history with Brazil. We therefore want to create the political conditions, so that, just as with other emerging economic powers, a relationship will be formally established that is mutually beneficial to Europe and Brazil, and in this way also contribute to enhancing general relations with the whole of Latin America.

The closer relations with Brazil will also have concrete results in the response to global challenges. The summit last week with President Lula da Silva enabled a window of opportunity to be kept open and which it is important to exploit in the Doha Round negotiations. I am among those who believe that the “Doha Round” negotiations are important to the regulation of globalisation and the presidency continues to be concerned about their positive conclusion.

The EUROMED ministerial meetings also come under the priority we have decided to give to cooperation with the South, in the framework of the Barcelona Process and the New Neighborhood Policy. They emphasise the importance we give to the re-launching of an in-depth political debate with our partners on the southern margins of the Mediterranean. We share common concerns and are faced with challenges of development and social cohesion that underline the growing interdependence of the two margins of the Mediterranean and we are convinced that we can contribute to overcoming some of the blockages in fundamental areas such as the management of migratory flows and the contribution the diaspora can make to the development of the countries of origin, with the support and commitment of European countries and relevant international institutions.

Finally, we propose convening the second EU-Africa summit in December, having played a fundamental part in the previous summit in Cairo in 2000. Without overlooking some problems that must be overcome, we believe that nothing can justify the lack of any kind of high level meeting during the last seven years, considering that what is in question is the relations between two continents which are both historically close and very interdependent in our world today.

Portugal is particularly well positioned to assume this responsibility and is relying strongly on the contribution of the African Union and all European and African countries so as to enable this summit to relaunch dialogue and cooperation on important subjects of interest to both. We recognize the need to define a new strategic partnership between the EU and Africa, so as to develop sustainable growth, guarantee peace, combat endemic disease and achieve a balanced and mutually advantageous management of migratory flows.

5. Building consensus for the European project to move forward

Mr. President
Honourable members

We are aware of the fact that we are assuming the presidency at a delicate moment in the international stage and that we have been ambitious in the definition of our goals that I have just outlined to you. We know that presidencies in themselves do not resolve all the problems raised; but they can make a difference if they assume clear goals, show humility in the pursuit of these goals and a will to foster the necessary consensus.

Many European philosophers characterize the world of today as a 'post' - world. Post-democratic, post-modern or post-industrial. What these concepts mean is only this: we live in a world of change that we see happening but that we don't grasp in full.

In the midst of so many uncertainties, something is certain: in a world of change the worst error is not to move. This is the error Europe could and should not make – to remain still. This is our firm determination: to make Europe move forward to build a better world.