

Interview with José da Silva Lopes: the Lisbon Strategy (Lisbon, 23 October 2007)

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[Miriam Mateus] In conclusion, and looking more towards the future, perhaps, as an economist, what do you think of the Lisbon Strategy? Does it put forward the right methods for attaining the objectives established by the European Union or not?

[José da Silva Lopes] Well, this is where what I call my exacerbated ‘Europhilism’ comes in. I think that the Lisbon Strategy is good, but it hasn’t been given adequate resources. And, when I criticise the European Union, it’s precisely because of that. The European Union sometimes has good ideas, but, afterwards, it doesn’t want them to be carried out. The Lisbon Strategy can’t function without the significant support of the Community budget, and the EU budget is a disaster, in my opinion. I think that the European Union should have a much larger Community budget, it should spend much less on agricultural policy than it does — agricultural policy isn’t only a disaster in terms of economic efficiency, it’s also a disaster in terms of economic equality, so they should spend much less. But we know that it’s the political power of the French and others that keeps it going.

So, in my opinion, expenditure on agricultural policy should be greatly reduced; regional policy should be much more stringent than it is — and we’ve sinned in that area, too, because we’ve never been very rigorous in that respect — and, in particular, the European Union should have a strong budgetary basis on which to support the Lisbon Strategy.

I remember that Jaques Delors proposed a vast network of European communications infrastructure. They never wanted it. The Finance Ministers and the Heads of Government didn’t want it. But how can you build Europe without a huge network of EU-funded infrastructure? In my opinion, the fact that Europe nipped Delors’ idea in the bud is a great ... but that’s to do with my vision of Europe. My vision of Europe doesn’t involve countries being in Europe to exploit some things and then wanting full sovereignty as well. I think that, if countries are in Europe, they have to concede some of their sovereignty. Now, if they want to be in Europe ... that’s what I say about the British, not to mention the Poles — they want to be in, yet they don’t want to be in. And then, when they are in, they opt out, and so on.

In my opinion, Europe has to spend more on the Lisbon Strategy. The ‘method of open coordination’ on its own isn’t enough, although I’m not saying that it isn’t positive. But it’s not enough, money has to be spent.

I think, for example, that even if much more money were spent on scientific research in Europe, even the Portuguese wouldn’t gain much from it, because we engage in less scientific research than the British or the French. British and French companies, experts and scientists might gain, but Portugal won’t gain much. That’s how Europe works, though. It’s not the British engaging in their research, the Germans in theirs, everyone engaging in their own, and so on. In that respect, the Lisbon Strategy is very good, but they should give it the means to function. They don’t, though, they just talk about it.