

Interview with José da Silva Lopes: the Portuguese Presidencies of the EU Council (Lisbon, 23 October 2007)

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[Miriam Mateus] Since its accession in 1986, Portugal has held the Presidency of the Council of Europe three times, first in 1992, then in 2000, and now in 2007. In your opinion, what importance does Portugal attach to holding the Presidency?

[José da Silva Lopes] Well, I think that any small country, not just Portugal, always finds the Presidency more difficult than a large country. So, to hold the Presidency, I imagine that Portugal has to make more effort than France or the United Kingdom. It's also true that it's easier for France, the UK or Germany to secure agreement on difficult issues than it is for Portugal. Although each of these countries holds the Presidency to defend European interests rather than national interests, we know how things are. In that respect, I start from the principle that it's easier for those countries to impose their points of view, but, when they're holding the Presidency, they also have to abandon national interests. And a small country like ours can't even consider imposing national interests.

I think that Portugal has done very well in the Presidencies, and I actually have to say that I'm pleasantly surprised to see that we've responded well to the challenge. Obviously, Portugal's Presidencies aren't as influential as those of other large countries, but they've been good. I think that the Portuguese should be proud, for example, that the Lisbon Strategy was drawn up here in Lisbon and that the Lisbon Treaty was approved here, too ... I'm well aware that the Germans did a lot of work on the Treaty of Lisbon — if it hadn't been for Angela Merkel it wouldn't have come about — but, whatever the case, we also did a lot, and I think that that's positive.

I'm highly critical of what happens here in Portugal, but I have to say that one of the things that I warmly welcome is that we've come out of the Portuguese Presidencies not so badly and, in fact, rather well.