

Address given by Manuel Lobo Antunes to the foreign press (Brussels, 28 June 2007)

Caption: On 28 June 2007, in Brussels, Manuel Lobo Antunes, Portuguese Junior Minister for European Affairs, outlines to the foreign press the priorities of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the second half of 2007.

Source: Intervention by the Secretary of State assistant to the Minister and for European Affairs, Manuel Lobo Antunes, at the presentation of the Priorities for the Portuguese Presidency to the foreign press. Lisbon: Ministério dos negócios estrangeiros, Secretário de Estado Adjunto e dos Assuntos Europeus, 28.06.2007. 6 p.

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Presentation of the Priorities of the Portuguese Presidency to the foreign press (Brussels, 28th June 2007)

The third Portuguese Presidency occurs in a year that is crucial to the political future of the EU.

The priorities of our Presidency are coherent with the plan traced for the eighteen months, which is reflected in the “Trio programme” (Germany, Portugal and Slovenia) presented to the EU institutions in the beginning of the German Presidency. It would not be needed to explain them again in all their broad scope and deep detail.

As on our previous two Presidencies (1992 and 2000), we will try to give a Portuguese personal remark to the semester ahead. My Prime Minister presented yesterday the priorities for the next six months to the Portuguese Parliament. The Prime Minister’s speech can be consulted on the website of the Portuguese Presidency www.eu2007.pt. There you will be able to find the document with the priorities of the Portuguese Presidency, which could constitute a source of inspiration to your questions.

Before answering your questions, I would like to make some remarks.

Cooperation with the other “Trio” elements (Germany and Slovenia), responsible for leading Europe into the eighteen months that started on January 1st, 2007, brought clear gains in both coherence and predictability of the actions carried out by the rotating presidencies. This cooperation properly represents, from my point of view, the diversity of States that build the European Union and its global balance: it enhances trust, proximity and the consequent establishment of a close relation between politicians, diplomats and public administration of the three Member States involved.

The collaboration with the German Presidency was excellent, particularly concerning the negotiations aiming at obtaining a mandate for the IGC, which we intend to initiate and also wish to conclude during our Presidency, as decided in the last European Council.

According to many observers, the most mediatic and politically sensitive dossier of the Portuguese Presidency will be the negotiation and agreement on a new Treaty. Aiming to give support to these expectations, we will open the IGC on the 23-24 July General Affairs and External Relations Council with a mandate for writing down the future European Treaty. Thanks to the excellent performance by the German Presidency and to the wiliness of all Member States, we have a clear, precise and detailed mandate, which will constitute the basis and the exclusive framework of our work. We have a mandate, not a Treaty yet. This has to be highlighted. This task will constitute our main priority for the next six months, which we look forward to complete as soon as possible. The Union must supply itself with the necessary tools and policies to face the new challenges. In addition, other priorities urgently deserve our attention.

All of us, Member States of the EU and their citizens, need a commitment that allows the EU to move forward. Another step forward. We could not face another failure. The commitment reached on the last European Council represents a typical example of the commitments obtained on other several steps of the European construction: nobody was totally satisfied, but everybody could comfortably live with the final result.

A IGC is a political exercise – not just merely technical nor bureaucratic – that will only successfully reach the end if everybody is totally involved, sharing the feeling that they were listened and contributed to the final agreement. All the Member States of the EU share equal and sovereign legitimacy. The final agreement must be signed for all governments and accepted by their respective Parliaments and public opinions. These are the rules of the game, and our works will be based on them.

2007 is the first year when all the tools of the Lisbon strategy will be working together. It is also the moment to initiate the preparation of the new cycle that will be launched in 2008. Portugal is now collaborating in this effort, in close articulation with both the Commission and the Slovenian Presidency. Improving the quality of public finances, enhancing the knowledge triangle – innovation, research and education -,

enhancing the social dimension and employment, but also the environment dimension and energy, constitute other priorities of the Portuguese Presidency as well.

In addition, we want to reinforce the area of freedom, security and justice.

Enlargement issues will be equally analysed in our Presidency, as determined by the calendar. Turkey, Croatia and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia dossiers and the European perspective of the Western Balkans countries will be on the table. Accession negotiations have, all of them, a final objective: the accession of the candidate countries to the EU once the stipulated criteria are totally fulfilled. Duties are on both sides. On one hand, the UE must negotiate on the basis of goodwill and transparency. The commitments assumed by the Member States must be respected. On the other hand, the accession criteria, valid to any candidate country, determine the strict respect for the values and principles that were the great contribution of the “Century of Lights” to what Europeans are today and want to go on being.

Portugal also defends that leadership of this process, from the EU side, must be on Commission’s shoulders. The Commission knows deeply in detail these dossiers and also has a global perspective on them, which gives them the responsibility to synthesise the general interest.

The last group of East accessions was coherent with the historic fate of the European ideal: build peace and stability in the European continent, by means of democracy and shared prosperity. This fate still has to be fulfilled in some parts of Europe: take the Western Balkans as an example. Europe cannot have a “black hole” within and, consequently, it seems right that the wishful stability of that region has to be accompanied by a tangible perspective of European accession.

In what **external relations** are concerned, the objective of organising summits with Africa and Brazil reveals the important contribution that Portugal wants to give to enhance the structured dialogue with other counterparts, either regionally or individually considered. We have already proved it in the past (with the first EU- Africa and EU-India summits, both taking place in 2000), and we want to repeat it in this Presidency. The Portuguese language is the sixth most spoken language in the world (the third Western European language, after English and Spanish). It was Portugal that introduced Europe to many parts of the world.

The EU-Brazil summit was totally justified, given that Brazil is a crucial strategic partner of the EU. A gap had to be fulfilled, as the EU already maintained this level of relationship with all BRICs other than Brazil. It was naturally and delightfully that we assumed the responsibility of building up this necessary bridge between the EU and Brazil.

The difficulties felt regarding the setting of the EU-Africa Summit are broadly known. Nevertheless, this summit is something that we do not give up on. All resources at our disposal will be used for this summit to take place in December, in Lisbon. This is a matter of conviction, and not of a simple desire for visibility by setting up a summit. The European strategic interest of maintaining a high-level dialogue with the African continent in a “globalised world”, fully justifies, and perhaps in more urgent terms than in 2000, the risk taken and our efforts – and also those by our partners, both European and African.

I took part in the process that led to the first EU-Africa summit in Cairo and I remember that we managed to overcome some hurdles that were taken as insurmountable, both procedural and political obstacles with origin on both partners of this dialogue.

We regret that at least seven years and another Portuguese Presidency have passed before another high-level dialogue with Africa takes place. At the end, this reality might show some European negligence towards Africa. In the meanwhile, others do not wait and benefit from this European apathy.

The preparatory works on the substance of the Summit proceed at a steady pace, together with our African friends. Issues such as immigration, climate change, security and defence, health (particularly the fight against pandemics), good governance and human rights will be discussed.

Europe needs concrete progress in external relations. We must focus on what can unite us. We must follow examples as those recently given on the leadership role that Europe wishes to play regarding climate change.

Some additional words on the internal challenges that the EU faces might be said. Unemployment is clearly the most common problem on European concerns, as Eurobarometer shows. More growth and employment are needed, by means of enhancing the coordination effort – namely between the governments of the euro area – in some areas as the economy and the social policies. The euro is a great success, but a common currency by itself is not enough to maintain the employment level and deepen into the European social and economic cohesion. The reinforcement of the social pillar of the Lisbon Strategy gradually emerges as a priority, which we would like to push forward during our Presidency, as the Trio programme already states.

Europe has to be much more than a mere open market, ruled by some common policies. The political Europe is not just a group of well- defined institutional rules. Europe must be above all a community of values, which could be felt as fundamentals by their citizens, which could be a synonym of hope and in the name of which they would be willing to make some sacrifices, if needed.

The identification with these values is enhanced throughout European projects that bring some real benefits to the citizens in their daily life. Some progress by means of the abolition of borders, the common currency or the students' exchange programmes have changed, in a positive way, our ways of life.

Just negotiate a new Treaty is not enough. Treaties are legal tools, but they are not substitutes of the political will to move forward, together. New projects able to give shape to that collective political will that Europe seems to lack are needed nowadays. Undoubtedly, some domains still subsist where the political answers must be given within a limited national scope, but other domains exist where a cooperative and mutual helpful approach must be enhanced with increasing urgency, in the name of effectiveness and solidarity.

We must not delude ourselves. Maintaining the status quo is not an option. Other challenges emerge, such as migrations and energy, for instance, whose dimension demands urgent political answers, taken on a collective level. New and deeper commitments must be made – namely on issues that affect the cohesion of the EU, both in its social and economic dimensions.

We need a stronger, better equipped, EU – in terms of rules, policies, tools and own resources – to deal with the challenges of our time and match on such a way the expectations of the great majority of the European citizens. Europe can and should emerge as a bastion of both hope and the possibility of building up a model able to synthesise freedom, economic growth, social justice and the preservation of the environment, all in a logic of partnership, cooperation and shared accountability, helping in that way to build a fairer and more balanced World.

This is the motto of our Presidency: “A stronger Union for a better World”.