

## Address given by Anna Diamantopoulou at the signing of two Operational Programmes for Portugal (Lisbon, 13 July 2000)

**Caption:** On 13 July 2000, Anna Diamantopoulou, Member of the European Commission with special responsibility for Employment and Social Affairs, delivers an address in Lisbon at the signing of two Operational Programmes for Portugal, one concerning employment, training and social development, the other education. For the Commissioner, these two programmes are in line with the strategy defined by the Lisbon European Council in March.

**Source:** RAPID. The Press and Communication Service of the European Commission. [ON-LINE]. [Brussels]: European Commission, [24.10.2007]. SPEECH/00/269. Disponible sur <http://europa.eu/rapid/setLanguage.do?language=en>.

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**Anna Diamantopoulou**

European Commissioner responsible for Employment and Social Affairs

## **PORTUGAL Community Support Framework III (2000/2006)**

Signature of the Operational programmes "Employment, Training & Social Development" and "Education"  
**Lisbon, 13 July 2000**

Minister Ferro Rodrigues, Minister Oliveira Martins, ladies and gentlemen,

### **1. Introduction**

I am very pleased to be here today to sign two major Operational Programmes that will be financed by the European Social Fund and by the European Regional Fund. One on "Employment, Training and Social Development". The other on "Education".

The significance of this occasion stems partly from the sheer scale of the Programmes. Together, they account for 48% of ESF funding for Portugal. But their signature together, today, also has wider and symbolic importance. Acknowledging the link between these two major fields of activity education and training and leading the way towards a convergence on lifelong learning as a fundamental element of economic and social policy.

### **2. Main challenges**

The two Programmes touch on all the most important areas covered by the European Social Fund. And contain a wide range of measures to develop Portugal's human resources. In so doing, they will play a major role in enabling Portugal to implement its national action plan under the European employment strategy, and to achieve its cohesion objectives.

The Programmes have been custom-built to suit the economic and social conditions in Portugal. They have been designed to address the main human resources problems that Portugal will face in the years ahead.

I would like to draw your attention to three challenges that I consider to be particularly important:

– The first challenge is to raise the level of skills and qualifications. I know that it has sometimes been a struggle to get these issues high enough up the political agenda, and to attract adequate funding for reform and development. And I am aware that deep-seated problems cannot be resolved overnight. However, the fact remains that over 40% of 18-to-24 year-olds have left the education system at the lower-secondary level or below, and are not currently receiving any further form of education or training. That is a cause for concern which I know you are determined to address.

– The second task, closely related to the first, is to make life-long learning a top priority. That is crucial if you are to continue to raise the productivity and competitiveness of Portuguese companies and, above all, the small-business sector. The renewal and upgrading of workers' skills will require massive investment to enable the Portuguese economy and businesses to fully exploit the opportunities of the emerging new economy in Europe.

– The third challenge is dealing with poverty and social exclusion. These are problems we cannot simply ignore in the hope that higher employment will take care of them automatically. Portugal already has high employment rates, yet poverty is also high, in absolute and relative terms. There are at least two different problems to address.

On the one hand, there are those who have a job, but whose lack of skills denies them the opportunity to raise their productivity and living standards. Then there are those who are in an even worse position effectively excluded from the labour market, if not from much else in society.

You are not alone in facing these problems. They are common across Europe. But we must be even more committed to tackling them in the future than we have been in the past.

I would also like to draw your attention to two specific areas that are crucial to ESF operations over the next few years Equal Opportunities and the Information Society.

Equal Opportunities is often regarded as an issue independent of overall economic and social developments. That is not the case. The issues are inter-twined. I know we share the same opinion: that women have a right to be able to participate fully in economic, scientific, social, political and civic life; and that participation is an essential element in promoting social and economic progress.

As for the Information Society, we are all aware of the growth potential associated with the new technologies and new forms of communication. But if we want people to reap the benefits, we must help individuals not just young people, but adults too to equip themselves with the relevant skills. Reducing the skills gaps in this area is a key challenge across Europe, not just in Portugal.

### **3. Coherence between the two OPs and the Lisbon Council**

The two ESF Programmes share a common, coherent approach. They complement each other, and they respond to the challenge laid down at the Lisbon European Council in March.

At Lisbon under the powerful guidance and encouragement of your government and your Prime Minister we relaunched the whole economic and social debate in the Union, and set ourselves a new strategic target for the decade ahead:

"To become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth and with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion".

In order to achieve this objective, we have to put the development of human resources at the very heart of the Union's policies as the Heads of State and Government effectively called on us to do in Lisbon.

Investing in human resources is the core mission of the ESF. And the Lisbon conclusions correspond directly with the goals of the Portuguese authorities responsible for education, employment and social affairs. We are linked by this common task and I am certain that, on our side and on yours, we will do our utmost to deliver the results expected.

### **4. Our future action the Social Policy Agenda**

I would like to mention, finally, that we have now agreed, at European level, a coherent framework for further, continued, action in the social policy field in the form of the new Social Policy Agenda for Europe.

Building on the results of the Lisbon Summit, the aim of the Agenda is to provide a comprehensive and coherent approach. To enable the European Union to confront the new social policy challenges resulting from the radical transformation of Europe's economy and society.

Its guiding principles are to strengthen the role of social policy as a productive factor, and to develop the quality of our employment, the quality of our social support, and the quality of our industrial relations.

The Agenda promotes a positive and dynamic interaction between economic, employment and social policy. Bringing together all key actors in a common cause.

A wide range of measures are outlined in the Agenda:

- Some of them are targeted at realising Europe's full employment potential, by creating new and better jobs, anticipating change and fully exploiting the potential of the knowledge-based economy,
- Others will focus on modernising and improving social protection, promoting social inclusion, fostering gender equality and combating discrimination;
- Other initiatives will be devoted to preparing for enlargement, promoting international co-operation and encouraging the social partners to meet the various challenges through the social dialogue.

Not all the measures proposed in the Social Policy Agenda are new, but we aim to realign existing ones with the new political guidelines laid down at Lisbon.

We will extend the method of open co-ordination combining common EU-wide targets with national action priorities beyond the employment policy area, to other social policies. That should enable us to achieve the kind of co-operation, and results, that we have attained through the Luxembourg process in other areas too.

## 5. Conclusion

Ministers, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to end with congratulations for the success of your Presidency of the European Union. Following the Lisbon Summit, we have both the strategic objectives, and the operational tools, we need to create a truly inclusive European society, and a competitive, high-performance modern economy.

Our task now is to implement those policies, and to ensure that we persuade our governments to direct an increasing share of public expenditure resources towards new priority goals like investment in people.

The two Operational Programmes that I am about to sign are both excellent examples of this new approach. In negotiating the programmes, the Commission and the Portuguese authorities have built up a productive and cooperative working relationship. I am sure this co-operation will continue throughout their implementation.

I wish you well in that work, and in the continuing modernisation and development of your country. Incomes per head in Portugal were little more than 60% of the EU average only a decade ago. Today they exceed 75%. That is an excellent achievement. I am sure you are determined to make the same progress in the coming decade.

You can look forward to our continued support.

Thank you.