

Interview with António Vitorino: the history of the Portuguese Presidencies of the Council (Lisbon, 24 October 2007)

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[Miriam Mateus] Since its accession in 1986, Portugal has held the Presidency of the EU Council three times, the first in 1992, the second in 2000 and the current one in 2007. What importance does Portugal attach to the Presidency? Do you think that Portugal can be said to have asserted itself at European level in these Presidencies?

[António Vitorino] This is likely to be the final Portuguese Presidency, because, if the Treaty of Lisbon comes into force, as expected, the system of rotating Presidencies will cease. I think that the Presidency is a particularly high-profile period for the host country. And there's another side to the picture, namely a period in which European issues are discussed much more, documented much more and are much closer to citizens in the host country, and that's very positive for both sides.

In my opinion, the history of the Portuguese Presidencies is a history of success, because the first Presidency was in 1992, when Portugal had to deal with the Balkan crisis, then at its height, and the impasse in negotiating the Maastricht Treaty immediately afterwards. In the 2000 Presidency, Portugal hosted the first EU/Africa Summit and adopted the Lisbon Agenda, which is now the reference point for the strategy for modernising the European economy in today's global world. And now we have this third Summit, which is still only halfway through but which will undoubtedly now be marked by the fact that the Reform Treaty has been approved.

The Presidencies are very intense and high-profile periods for the host country. Now, with regard to the definition of a profile of an EU country, it cannot be defined in just six months. In fact, it represents a continuous effort over a period of time and depends on the clarity of the country's priorities in participating in the European project and on the stability and consistency with which it pursues those priorities, outside the periods in which it holds the Presidency from time to time.