

III - The Internal as the External in Europe

The magnetism of the Union is a vital aspect of its soft power, and explains the high level of international interest in what happens within the Union; indeed, what happens within the Union is largely responsible for how it behaves outside its own borders, for the success or failure of its foreign policies. For the Union, domestic matters are *primus inter pares* among the factors shaping its foreign policy.²¹ This is because of the Union's "inter-mesticity." In fact, from a different perspective, the same can be said of the support of member States for the Union, and their willingness to support or carry out its foreign action.

The position of the Portuguese *vis-à-vis* the Union during the presidential semester is somewhat paradoxical: while the government is unambiguously "Europeanist," the general public is more sceptical than ever. It is susceptible to an "old guard" that once strongly supported accession and is now taking refuge in a defensive posture, fearful of economic and political competition, not just from European countries but globally (from China especially). This explains why the president of the Union of Banks criticized the Union for accepting Chinese membership of the

²¹ Álvaro de Vasconcelos, "O Papel da Europa num Mundo em Mudança", Intervenção no Forum Novas Fronteiras. (Porto: Palácio da Alfândega, 6 de Setembro de 2006.)

WTO, which in his view presents a strong threat to the interests of Portugal and other European states. These positions reflect that of traditional economic sectors that are used to state protection and want the EU to adopt a similarly protectionist role. There has been a decline in public support for the Union, after what was the enthusiastic backing of the 1990s, the golden years of integration and Portuguese economic development, when the rhythm of catching up accelerated, slowing down. Support for accession and the view that the Union is beneficial has been declining since 2000.

It is inevitable that the serious problems affecting Portuguese economic growth in the last years should have an impact on the image of the European project among the general population, particularly when the limits stipulated by the stability pact and growth, stagnation and the demand to “pinch pennies,” were held up in political debate as examples of external imposition. There has been no decline in support for the institutional reinforcement of the Union, even as the number of the Portuguese who feel that EU membership is positive has decreased from 66% in 2000 to 55% in 2007 (see appendices). On the contrary, there is clear support in Portugal for a more united and efficient Europe, a “support that is based on the acceptance of the European Union as a community and a political system.”²² Indeed, support for reinforced EU competences is particularly strong among Portuguese civil society organizations, as these hope that Europe will provide the stimulus and conditionality that promote Portuguese compliance with environmental norms, among others.

Wanting “more Europe” does not contradict dissatisfaction with current EU policies, or even the tendency in Portugal to reject the constitutional treaty as a way to express that dissatisfaction with the inability of the EU to respond to the needs of its citizens when it comes to issues like unemployment. José Sócrates, who succeeded José Manuel Durão Barroso as Prime Minister after the brief Santana Lopes interregnum, is well aware of the of there being a desire for “more Europe” and an increasingly less positive view of the Union.

²² Pedro Magalhães, “O apoio à integração europeia em Portugal: dimensões e tendências”, IPRI Working Paper 16, November 2006.

Prime Minister José Sócrates unapologetically calls for a politically autonomous Europe within the international arena, and is critical of the “Atlanticist” positions of the so-called “new European” states. But he agrees that there can be no European political autonomy if the political decisions of leaders in the Union lack democratic legitimacy.

The Portuguese prime minister underlines the need to overcome Europe’s democratic deficit and allow citizens to pronounce themselves on what the Union does. He has said that if citizens’ opposition to policies, actions or directives find no outlet, opposition could turn into a wholesale rejection of the European project: “we need mechanisms that allow citizens to have a say about the actions and political orientations of the Union, and there is no reason why [such mechanisms] should challenge the foundation of the European project itself.”²³ Whenever there are questions raised about an EU policy – be it agricultural, commercial or other – the Portuguese are tempted to criticize not just that specific policy arena, but the European project as a whole; and in extreme cases, even to question the decision to join the Community. The view that the Union is in a permanent state of crisis is a product of the fact that there are no mechanisms allowing citizens to distinguish between criticism of fundamental aspects of the European project and of specific orientations or policy options. This also partly explains the erosion of support for European integration in Portugal.

The Portuguese government does not deny that there is a democratic deficit, and against the majority view in Portugal, does not argue that the problem is solved just because the Council is made up of elected governments; nor does it argue that the deficit can be dealt merely by given more supervisory and controlling powers to national parliaments and by improving subsidiarity, a principle that is obviously essential but not sufficient to ensure that there is “a real appropriation of the European project by citizens.”²⁴ The latter requires mechanisms that “reinforce the supranational democratic system,” namely “through the European Parliament, which is a central element of a democratic Europe.” Witch does not contradict the fact that in Portugal there is strong support for a deeper involvement of national

²³ José Sócrates, Speech at the IEEI/Público Seminar, “Portugal and the Future of Europe Twenty Years after Accession”, 8 May 2007.

²⁴ Speech by Prime Minister José Sócrates on the occasion of the presentation of the Programme of the Portuguese Presidency to the European Parliament, 11 July 2007.

parliaments, national governments and the European Commission.²⁵ The prime minister's unequivocal support for the Constitutional Treaty also contrasts with the reserved attitude of the Portuguese diplomacy during the Convention.

In Portugal, one of the Convention debates that sparked a certain level of interest was the issue of identity. This is a country that is overwhelmingly Catholic and in which the Church, although not active in politics since the end of the dictatorship, is still active where "values" issues are concerned. The Catholic Church and some Catholic intellectuals supported the criticism of the Preamble made by Pope John Paul II because it did not refer to the Christian dimension of European identity. But this is a minority view among the Portuguese political elite. Even among those, like António Vitorino (who represented the Commission at the Convention, called for a reference to a religious heritage in the Preamble, wanted a reference to Europe's Jewish heritage and to "other religions historically present in the European space."²⁶ In other words, they wanted the affirmation of unity within diversity. That the European Union is not just Christian but political is confirmed by the Portuguese experience with European integration.

As stated by Guilherme d'Oliveira Martins, "the fundamental definition of the European Union today ... is a community with a plurality of ends and values."²⁷ Clearly, the debate has a lot to do with how national identity is constructed in a country that, for a good part of the twentieth century, was shaped by nationalist ideology, the rhetoric of "proudly standing alone" and of anti-Spanish sentiment. However, the view that "national identities coexist and are completed and enriched by opening up to a cosmopolitan and universalistic context" is gaining ground, even though the progression is not always linear.²⁸

Portugal's preference for an exclusively political or citizenship-based definition of European identity was linked initially not so much with the founding ideas of European integration (free voluntary association between states to ensure peace) but rather with the strong connection between democracy and integration. From 1975 onward, enlargement encompassed countries that were emerging not from

war like the original Six, but from dictatorship: Portugal, Spain and Greece, and later, the countries of Eastern Europe. Thus, the consolidation of democracy and integration were intertwined. The Union's democratic project became overriding, and enlargement came to be seen as the best way to protect democracy on the continent. At the same time, the de-legitimisation of old nationalisms on the Iberian Peninsula worked with integration to sweep away the nationalist discourse of the New State (Estado Novo) about the "Iberian enemy." After 1986, Spain quickly became Portugal's main economic partner, and an infrastructure network physically integrated Portugal within the Iberian Peninsula. Resistances to peninsular integration have not completely disappeared, as Durão Barroso and now José Sócrates have learnt from experience. As illustrated by the opposition of some Portuguese economic sectors to the network of high speed trains linking the Portuguese and Spain rail networks, there are still echoes of the old dream of piggybacking over Spain into the centre of Europe.²⁹ However, while they get some media coverage, these views are clearly those of a minority both among the public and within political circles.

Democracy, association between 'equal' states, the de-legitimisation of nationalism: these are essential aspects of open integration and the Constitutional Treaty aptly consecrated them with the motto "unity within diversity." It is essential to preserve this vital acquis of the Convention, particularly when pragmatism is held up as the way out of crisis in Europe, and the reformed treaty, or "simplified treaty," will not include the preamble of the Constitutional Treaty.

One of the most important issues, for the future of the European model and its global outreach, is the way its member States deal with immigration. Portugal is a country of immigrants by tradition and necessity, but today it is also a receiving country. Africans, Brazilians, Ukrainians and others are an important part of the resident population in Portugal. In less than a decade, the number of foreigners leapt from a few thousand to nearly half a million, or five percent of the 10 million-strong resident population.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ António Vitorino, *Diário de Notícias*, 21-04-2006.

²⁷ Guilherme d'Oliveira Martins, *As fronteiras da Europa*, <http://www.umoderna.pt/tejo/turquia/fe.htm>

²⁸ See: Guilherme d'Oliveira Martins, *Portugal. Identidade e Diferença*. (Lisbon: Gradiva, 2007.)

²⁹ See: Álvaro de Vasconcelos, "O Comboio da Europa (The European Train)", *Público* (Lisbon), November 2003.

One of the deepest value challenges facing the Union is related with the rise of the extreme right and its xenophobic and anti-immigrant policies, and with a European policy that is being “communitarised” more in terms of security than in terms of integration and citizenship. Above all, unity within diversity means the ability to integrate immigrants and turn them into active participants in relations with the countries from whence they came. It has taken Portugal some time to use Luso-descended migrant communities as a vehicle of its foreign policy and national development. This is a recent change, and it appears in the programme of the presidency, which states that the Union should integrate immigrant communities as a part of its external relations, recognising the “contribution that diasporas can make to the development of their countries of origin with the support and commitment of European countries and relevant international institutions.” This is also why the presidency is supporting the adoption of a European Charter on the rights of Migrants. It is another classic example of an issue that is both domestic and international.

Portugal can claim some victories in what is very likely to be one of the last national presidencies of the European Union. First, there is an awareness that the Union cannot simply respond with bilateralism to multipolarity. Clearly, Portugal neither wishes nor can stand against the current of multipolarity; but it can push it in the direction of effective multilateralism. Second, there is the strong association between democracy and regional integration, and with a view of identity based on citizenship rather than culture. This trump card is not to be scoffed at in a context of “pragmatism” and renewed faith in “economic” instruments to solve the ills of humanity, as well as the persistent “securitisation” of national police forces the world over (trends that the Union has not known how to deflect).³⁰

The way that the Portuguese think about Europe is certainly the product of a more or less intense debate within intellectual and political circles, although all those involved in the European debate in Portugal know that these are subjects such as relations within the Portuguese speaking world or the problem of the Turkish membership are of the greatest public interest and should be broadly debated. But, as I hope I have demonstrated, European thought is above all a product of Portugal’s own experience with membership of, and increasingly active participation in, the

³⁰ See, M.R. de Moraes Vaz, «El Triunfo de la Normalidad», in *Anuario Cidob* 2005. (Barcelona: Cidob, 2006.)

European project. In my view, this gives the Portuguese experience, in particular its presidencies, much “value-added” and justifies any attention they get, not least because, with the likely approval of the reform treaty, the end of the rotating presidencies is near, and it will then become necessary to find creative ways to ensure that the specific contributions of member States are not lost. In the debate about the Union and the global order, we would do well to reflect on the words of the Portuguese poet, Miguel Torga: “The universal is the local, but free of walls.”