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Subject : Plenary session of the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 11 July 2007:  
**Presentation of the programme of the Portuguese Presidency**

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*In the presence of Prime Minister José SÓCRATES, President of the Council, and  
Mr José Manuel BARROSO, President of the European Commission.*

*A transcript of Mr SÓCRATES's speech is annexed to this note (ANNEX I).*

*A transcript of Mr BARROSO's speech is annexed to this note (ANNEX II).*

The following Members spoke on behalf of the political groups.

On behalf of the EPP-ED Group, Mr DAUL (EPP-ED, FR) congratulated the Portuguese Presidency on its ambitious yet realistic priorities. On institutional reform, Mr DAUL said he was satisfied that the agreement of 21 and 22 June essentially reflected the improvements made with respect to the previous text, and expressed the hope that ratification of the reform treaty before the spring of 2009 would enable the EU to take decisions in an efficient, transparent and democratic way in areas such as security, growth, energy, climate change and demography. He warned against reopening the compromise reached in June and emphasised that the intergovernmental conference must concentrate on the legal finalisation of the agreement. Mr DAUL also called for more

cooperation to ensure security for citizens in Europe and welcomed the Portuguese Presidency's commitment to the replacement of the EU's counter-terrorism coordinator. The renewed focus on the implementation of the Lisbon agenda was welcome; with regard to the completion of the internal market and regarding the consolidation of economic growth, Mr DAUL called for tangible results for the citizens of Europe. Finally, Mr DAUL endorsed the Presidency's priority objectives in external relations.

On behalf of the PSE Group, Mr SCHULZ emphasised the fundamental importance of overcoming division in the European Union and wished the Portuguese Presidency success above all in converting the mandate adopted by the European Council in June into agreement on a reform treaty, pledging the Socialist Group's full support in the pursuit of that goal. As regards the Lisbon Agenda, Mr SCHULZ deplored the stalemate in the implementation of the Strategy since its relaunch in 2005 and especially regretted its failure to deliver on social security. On climate change, Mr SCHULZ encouraged the Presidency to seize the present opportunity of political convergence and make progress in the interest of all but especially in that of African countries, which would be worst affected by global warming. Finally, Mr SCHULZ welcomed the Presidency's commitment to enhancing relations with Africa and with Latin America.

On behalf of the ALDE Group, Mr WATSON (ALDE, UK) encouraged the Portuguese Presidency to revitalise the Lisbon Agenda, to secure a sustainable economic recovery in Europe built on job creation, and to initiate debate on flexicurity. Mr WATSON urged the Presidency to find ways of merging the Lisbon Agenda with the EU's objectives in the fight against climate change. He warmly welcomed the Presidency's commitment concerning the African continent. On strengthening of the field of justice and home affairs, Mr WATSON warned against the erosion of civil liberties and called in particular for the adoption of a framework decision on procedural safeguards. As to the IGC mandate, Mr WATSON urged Member States not to unravel the package agreed at the June summit.

For the UEN Group, Mr CROWLEY (UEN, IE) called for rapid adoption of the reform treaty - on the basis of the detailed mandate given by the June European Council - by the end of the year. On the EU-Africa summit to be held under the Portuguese Presidency, Mr CROWLEY welcomed the fact that the summit would provide an opportunity for the European Union to engage in genuine dialogue, to bring together opposing parties on issues such as the conflict in Darfur and to encourage cooperation among African countries on human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Mr CROWLEY also welcomed the results of the EU-Brazil summit, which addressed important questions such as renewable energy, multilateral trade and partnership with the developing world.

Ms FRASSONI (Verts/ALE, IT), for the Greens Group, first of all appealed to the Portuguese Presidency to resist pressure to unravel the agreement on the new treaty but remain open to any improvements, such as on climate change. She urged the Presidency to open the IGC to public debate and to the participation of the European Parliament, a close ally in the reform. On the Lisbon Strategy, Ms FRASSONI argued that it was necessary to combine the climate change agenda with the Lisbon Agenda; she urged the adoption of a Pact for Climate Change and Energy Security which included a sanctions mechanism similar to that of the Stability and Growth Pact. Finally, Ms FRASSONI expressed concern at the commitments entered into on biofuels at the EU-Brazil summit and also uttered a word of caution regarding EPAs currently being negotiated with ACP countries.

Ms FIGUEIREDO (GUE/NGL, PT), for the GUE/NGL Group, deplored the fact that yet another opportunity had been missed, with the adoption of the IGC mandate, to bring major social questions to the forefront of the debate.

Several individual speakers commented on the convening of an intergovernmental conference to draw up a reform treaty. While acknowledging the importance of a detailed mandate for the IGC, Ms ESTRELA (PSE, PT) and Mr BARON CRESPO (PSE, ES) anticipated difficult discussions ahead on the wording of the treaty, while Mr HÄNSCH (PSE, DE) pointed to the importance of completing the ratification process successfully. Mr KIRKHOPE (EPP-ED, UK) referred to an amendment tabled to the Parliament's draft opinion on the convening of the IGC, calling for the issue of the European Parliament's two seats to be included in the mandate. Mr LOUIS (IND/DEM, FR), Mr GOLLNISCH (ITS, FR) and Mr PORTAS (GUE/NGL, PT) deplored the leaders' doublespeak on the content and nature of the new treaty.

Members also commented on some other issues relating to the Portuguese Presidency's list of priorities, among them the EU-Africa summit to be organised in December 2007. Mr KIRKHOPE (EPP-ED, UK), Ms NEYTS-UYTTEBROECK (ALDE, NL), Mr FARAGE (IND/DEM, EN) all objected to Zimbabwe's president's attending the summit; Mr PINHHEIRO (EPP-ED, PT) hoped that that question would not divert attention from important issues.

In response to Members, Mr SÓCRATES expressed his satisfaction that the Parliament was united in its approval of the list of priorities presented by the Portuguese Presidency and especially welcomed the political consensus which had emerged regarding finalisation of the work on the new Treaty within the timetable envisaged. As to the question of ratification, Mr SÓCRATES emphasised that it lay within the Member States' competences; he noted with regret, however, the attempts to delegitimise parliamentary ratification as compared with ratification by referendum.

In his final address, Mr BARROSO urged resolution of the EU's institutional impasse at this moment of political and economic optimism, so that the European Union could take on its global roles and tackle the challenges facing it. In response to comments on the EU-Africa summit, Mr BARROSO pointed out that the EU's relations with the African continent must not be compromised by one dictator; and he also added that democracy and human rights would be addressed at the summit.

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**Speech of Prime Minister José SÓCRATES, President of the Council  
to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 11th July 2007**

Mr. President (Hans-Gert Pöttering),

Mr. President of the European Commission (José Manuel Durão Barroso),

Honourable members,

Distinguished guests,

***1. Greeting***

At the start of the six months of the Portuguese presidency, I want to reaffirm the central idea guiding us to you, the legitimate representatives of Europe's citizens: we want a stronger Europe for a better world!

We make a clear commitment to this large audience: we will do everything in our power to overcome the period of doubt and uncertainty about the path followed by the European project. And here, at the heart of European democracy, we ask all members to accompany us in this common goal!

It is well known that Portugal was not one of the founding countries of the European Communities. But when we re-established democracy in our country in 1974 after a forty-year dictatorship, our main aim was precisely that of adhesion to the European Communities. This was achieved in 1986. On taking the presidency of the Union's Council of Ministers for the third time, I want to reassert before you all the Portuguese government's determination and commitment to defend and further the values of peace, freedom, solidarity and prosperity that inspired the founding countries in 1957. The now twenty seven member states, with almost 500 million citizens, all reaffirmed these values together in Berlin last March.

I am confident that the following six months will mark the end of the deadlocks and blockages that have held the European project back too long. The example of the European integration project motivates many populations and countries from the four corners of the globe who, in fact, find it difficult to understand our deadlocks and are the first to ask to play a more predominant role in the European Union.

I have always believed that the European project is one of the most important and generous political projects of our times. The construction of Europe is important to the European economy, to the promotion of European values and to European citizens. But it is equally important to face global challenges, to take advantage of the opportunities of these times of change and to build a more stable world, that is able to face up to global challenges and take advantage of the opportunities of these times of change. It is not only European people that need a strong Europe. It is the world that needs a Europe with a more audible voice.

The success of a presidency depends clearly on the clarity of its programme. Our priorities have been identified: the reform of the Treaties; an agenda for modernising European economies and societies, and the strengthening of Europe's role in the world.

## *2. The reform of the Treaties*

Mr. President, Honourable members,

The main challenge of these six months is clearly that of picking up the Treaty reform process, based on the mandate adopted at the last European Council. I am delighted to underline and praise the strategy and negotiation carried out by the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel. I would equally like to thank this Parliament for the clear position taken in the Resolution voted on the basis of the Baron Crespo Brok Report, in order to reach an agreement between the Member states that continued to believe in the importance of a Constitutional Treaty and that that came to terms with the signs from the referenda in France and the Netherlands.

The advance made in the last European Council was only possible due to the impetus of the European Parliament that was able to define a strong, coherent and constructive position on this matter instead of resigning themselves to deadlock.

The agreement reached in the European Council on 21st and 22nd June gives a clear and precise mandate, as always considered necessary by Portugal. We are now in a position to move forward.

However, I have no doubts: the decisive step was taken in October 2005, when the Heads of Government of the three countries forming the trio of presidencies – Germany, Portugal and Slovenia – agreed to include the resolution of the institutional deadlock as a top priority. At the time few believed that this objective could be met. In fact, this goal is now within our reach.

We are starting out confidently. It is our job to finish this task: to turn the mandate into a new Treaty.

I am well aware that the negotiation and coordination that lies ahead will be difficult. But I know that we can do it. One thing is clear to me. Our mandate is not to change the mandate, but to turn the mandate into a Treaty. It is clear from this mandate has been abandoned from the former Constitutional Treaty, what has been taken from it in the Reforming Treaty and what has been added in innovative terms to the Treaty of Nice.

It is best to take advantage of the political momentum. We are moving fast. I have decided to convene the Intergovernmental Conference, beginning on 23rd July, back to back with the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council. That same day we shall distribute a draft Treaty drawn up on the basis of the detailed instructions set out in the mandate.

During that same week, we will convene meetings of legal experts to analyse the texts and identify possible difficulties. The informal meeting of the Foreign Ministers on 7th and 8th September will provide the opportunity for a situation report of the work. We intend to work actively to obtain an agreement on the Treaty during the informal European Council of 18th and 19th October in Lisbon.

I believe that this calendar best corresponds to the spirit and will of all the European institutions and best serves the Union's interest.

And I am counting on the European Parliament so as to meet this objective. This is why I defended that there should be three representatives of the European Parliament at the Intergovernmental Conference, thereby assuring that this house is better represented.

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I know that I can rely on the collaboration of all the institutions. I would like to thank the European Commission and the European Central Bank for rapidly issuing their indispensable expert opinions.

And I would also like to thank the European Parliament for its opinion so that it can be approved today, thus concluding everything necessary for the opening of the Intergovernmental Conference.

I am relying on the determination and commitment of all the Member States. This is a moment of convergence in which all the institutions join together so that a rapid decision on the Treaty can serve as a clear sign of Europe's confidence and determination to advance with its Union project.

### *3. An Agenda to modernise the European economy and society*

But the reform of the Treaties, albeit important, is just a part of the Union's task in the coming months. In fact, in addition to institutional matters, European citizens demand answers to questions which directly affect their everyday lives and where they recognise that Europe can produce concrete results that make a difference and contribute to improving their living conditions.

Just over seven years ago, the then Prime Minister of Portugal, António Guterres, came to this House to present the Lisbon Strategy which has been the roadmap for the modernisation of the European economy and society.

It is therefore with a special sense of satisfaction that I tell you that the "Lisbon Strategy" will, yet again, be at the forefront of our concerns. The strategy defined in 2000 to strengthen competitiveness with social cohesion, through pledging in knowledge and innovation, remains the right path to follow and holds the support of the main European political forces.

The results of economic reforms are not always immediately apparent. But they are now becoming clearly visible in a more consistent trend of growth in the European space. It is necessary to strengthen its implementation, with a better conjugation of all the new instruments adopted in 2005, from the national reform programmes to the community programmes and the structural funds.

We are going to actively contribute to a new cycle of the Lisbon Agenda, which will be approved in spring 2008 during the Slovenian presidency. But as we prepare this new cycle, we are maintaining the balance between the three dimensions of the Agenda: economic, social and environmental.

The revision of the internal market will enable us to place emphasis on companies' competitiveness, on the opening of markets and on the elimination of context costs (with special attention given to the contribution of e-government) as well as on the role cultural industries can play in terms of job creations, economic growth and innovation.

The next six months will also be especially relevant for the choice of energy and environment policy. Here, Europe must have just one goal: to maintain its leadership in the environmental field and, in particular, in the fight against climate change.

From the outset, we will meet the aims of fostering the debate on a new technological action plan regarding energy, focusing especially on energy efficiency; we will also underline the role of bio-fuels more specifically in the framework of the relations that resulted from the first EU-Brazil Summit.



We shall also place the questions of **water shortage** and **drought situations** on the European agenda and go forward with preparations of the Union's position for the conference to debate the **Post-Kyoto reference framework**. We will also launch the debate for the construction of the foundations for an effective **European maritime policy**.

We also intend to **give the social dimension of the "Lisbon Strategy" the relevance and visibility it deserves**. Ten years after the launch of the "European Employment Strategy", we believe it is vital to further debate on the best ways to **coordinate employment policies with a view to fostering the creation of sustainable work posts in the current context of global competition**. This line of action of the Portuguese presidency will be closely articulated with the qualification of human resources, the conciliation of work and family life, the fight against poverty and exclusion.

The European Social model, in its recognized diversity, requires joint reflection on the sustainability of the retirement pension systems, as well as the identification of the reforms necessary in the labour market and in the protection systems given the social risks. In this context the debate on the so-called flexi-security should be guided by the search for comprehensive and balanced solutions, translated into general and common principles common at European level, which take into account the diversity of the social realities in the different member states of the EU.

For the Portuguese presidency, one of the structuring values of the European project is that of the freedom-security interface as inseparable elements. In this context, the **strengthening of police and judicial cooperation in the fight against terrorism and organised crime is also a priority of this Presidency**.

Terrorism continues to be one of the biggest threats to international peace and security, as well as to democracy and fundamental rights. But democracy does not fear terrorism and know how to be firm in the face of this threat.

A good example of this firm position is that of the British government last week and I would like to express the solidarity of all the countries of the Union with them.

The fight against terrorism should therefore remain a common aim among all member states. Because only European cooperation allows us to prevent, protect and pursue terrorism.

The Portuguese presidency will work towards the implementation of the initiatives underway in the ambit of the European Union's Strategy against Terrorism, to comply with the Action Plan for the Fight against Terrorism and to continue applying the strategy against the radicalisation and recruitment of terrorists, which will be revised over the next six months.

We therefore consider it urgent to replace Mr. DeVries and to define the means and mandate which will enable him to fulfil his mission effectively.

There can be no freedom without safety. This is the lesson we learn from history. The Union's security policy is therefore vital to preserve the openness and tolerance of European societies.

So I do not hide my pride in saying that it was Portugal that proposed the technological solution (SIS-ONE4ALL) which was conceived by a Portuguese company, so that the new member states could adhere fully to the Schengen space and so that the borders with these countries could disappear by the end of the Portuguese presidency.

In this way, Europe achieves one of its greatest wishes: the free movement of people in Europe.

But I would also like to say a word about immigration policy. Special attention will be devoted to this issue during our presidency. Europe today receives millions of immigrants who come to live here, work here, raise their children here and whose contribution to the economic growth of Europe is indispensable. We must therefore construct a European immigration policy based on fighting illegal immigration, with a policy of inclusion and integration of legal immigrants; there must be effective cooperation with the countries of origin so that the migratory flows can be managed to the mutual benefit.

Only a policy that is active in the origin and destination country, in the causes and the effects, will be able to deal with the size of this phenomenon and in harmony with our values and our responsibilities.

#### ***4. Strengthening Europe's role in the world***

Mr. President

Honourable members

The current international situation requires that the European Union assumes special responsibilities. European citizens make a clear demand for active international protagonism based on the values of international rights, dialogue and coordination. They are equally clear about their expectations of the international community regarding the Union's determined and cohesive involvement in the key international issues.

**In the second half of 2007 unavoidable decisions must be taken about delicate questions on the global agenda** - the future of Kosovo; to the Iran nuclear dossier; to the humanitarian crisis in Darfur – with a number of particularly relevant **bilateral summits: India, China, Russia and Ukraine**. The relationship with the United States, in the framework defined by the Washington Summit during the German presidency, will be closely monitored and requires the strategic relevance of **transatlantic relations**.

Nevertheless, we assume the responsibilities required of the presidency of close articulation with the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Javier Solana, and with the European Commission.

**There are three initiatives to which we are linked that merit special emphasis: the Summit with Brazil, the Summit with Africa and the Euro-Mediterranean conferences (in the areas of migration, energy, foreign affairs and ecofin/trade).**

**In the first week of the presidency we have already held the summit with Brazil with a view to take our relations to a higher level of mutual knowledge and close cooperation in every way. This initiative is particularly dear to us, the Portuguese, as we share the same language and much of our culture and history with Brazil. We therefore want to create the political conditions, so that, just as with other emerging economic powers, a relationship will be formally established that is mutually beneficial to Europe and Brazil, and in this way also contribute to enhancing general relations with the whole of Latin America.**

The closer relations with Brazils will also have concrete results in the response to global challenges. The summit last week with President Lula da Silva enabled a window of opportunity to be kept open and which it is important to exploit in the Doha Round negotiations. I am among those who believe that the “Doha Round” negotiations are important to the regulation of globalisation and the presidency continues to be concerned about their positive conclusion.

The **EUROMED inter-ministerial meetings** also come under the priority we have decided to give to cooperation with the South, in the framework of the Barcelona Process and the New Neighborhood Policy. They emphasise the importance we give to the **re-launching of an in-depth political debate with our partners on the southern margins of the Mediterranean**, We share common concerns and are faced with challenges of development and social cohesion that underline the growing interdependence of the two margins of the Mediterranean and we are convinced that we can contribute to overcoming some of the blockages in fundamental areas such as the management of migratory flows and the contribution the diaspora can make to the development of the countries of origin, with the support and commitment of European countries and relevant international institutions.

**Finally, we propose convening the second EU-Africa summit in December, having played a fundamental part in the previous summit in Cairo in 2000. Without overlooking some problems that must be overcome, we believe that nothing can justify the lack of any kind of high level meeting during the last seven years, considering that what is in question is the relations between two continents which are both historically close and very interdependent in our world today.**

Portugal is particularly well positioned to assume this responsibility and is relying strongly on the contribution of the African Union and all African and European countries so as to enable this summit to relaunch dialogue and cooperation on important subjects of interest to both. We recognize the need to define a new strategic partnership between the EU and Africa, so as to develop sustainable growth, guarantee peace, combat endemic disease and achieve a balanced and mutually advantageous management of migratory flows.

### ***5. Building consensus for the European project to move forward***

Mr. President

Honourable members

We are aware of the fact that we are assuming the presidency at a delicate moment in the international stage and that we have been ambitious in the definition of our goals that I have just outlined to you. We know that presidencies in themselves do not resolve all the problems raised; but they can make a difference if they assume clear goals, show humility in the pursuit of these goals and a will to foster the necessary consensus.

We are firmly resolved to do this.

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**Speech by Mr José Manuel BARROSO, President of the European Commission  
before the European Parliament  
Strasbourg, 11 July 2007**

First of all I would like to mark the start of the Portuguese Presidency by giving a very special welcome to the Prime Minister of Portugal. The programme of the Portuguese Presidency is ambitious and demanding. The Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) will of course take centre stage, especially between now and the October European Council. But the Portuguese Presidency is not just about the Treaty. External relations (with important summits to be held with many of our partners), the Lisbon Agenda and innovation are also key issues.

**1. (The IGC and the Reform Treaty)**

Yesterday the Commission adopted its Opinion for the IGC. As I have already told this House, the IGC that is about to get under way will be very different from those that have gone before it. First of all, the mandate is unprecedented in its detail. In some areas it adopts the texts of the 2004 IGC, while in others it uses highly sophisticated legal and technical language. Because of this level of detail, the central political question is not the substance but rather remaining faithful to the content of the mandate. Let me make it as clear as I possibly can that the Commission will defend the mandate in its entirety and does not want to see it reopened.

The task is to transform the mandate into a Treaty. It is not to create a new mandate. It would be a very negative step to go back on what has already been agreed. It would betray a serious lack of trust to try now to renegotiate a mandate which everyone has agreed. If there is no trust in the worth of the promises that have been made, we cannot build a strong European Union.

It is true that the mandate is neither ideal nor perfect. The Commission does not think so either. In many areas we would have been more ambitious. But the mandate is not ideal for anyone. That is how the EU works and has always worked. Since 1957 it has always moved forward by finding political compromises rather than ideal solutions. Once again that is how it will be. And let us not forget that the agreement in the European Council was difficult to reach and rests on a delicate political compromise. Our responsibility is to keep that compromise intact until the Treaty has been ratified by all.

The Commission fully supports Portugal's plan to hold a short and quick IGC. It will begin on 23 July and, if all goes well, it will be brought to a conclusion at the informal European Council in October. Nevertheless, the Commission reserves the right to express its opinion on the Member States' positions and proposals during the IGC and, in particular, to check that the mandate is being adhered to. If today we are defending the whole mandate, even against those who are more ambitious, over the next three months we shall continue to defend it against those who are intent on watering it down.

## **2. Lisbon Agenda and innovation**

It can be said that the Strategy for Growth and Employment, which we relaunched together in 2005, is delivering fairly positive results. Unemployment in the EU has fallen from 10% in the mid-1990s to 7% in June. What is more, our analyses and studies show that structural unemployment is also falling, which is a positive sign for Europe in the medium and long term. Our figures also show that employment growth for women is 50%. These facts are very encouraging for our vision of a more just and equal Europe. Economic growth is also reaching its highest levels since 2000, against a background of further potential growth in the European economy. This suggests that the recent growth is structural, not cyclical.

To a large extent this progress is a result of the reforms inspired by the renewed Lisbon Agenda. Nevertheless, there is much still to be done to make Europe's economy more competitive and European societies more just. In particular, innovation must make a bigger contribution to economic growth. I know that that is one of the priorities of the Portuguese Presidency and I welcome this.

Innovation is central to the triptych formed by the Energy Technology Plan, the European Institute of Technology and the first Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) dedicated to energy and the climate, which we want to see launched during the Portuguese Presidency. Education, scientific research and innovation are the building blocks of the European societies we want to create in order to tackle the most pressing concerns and challenges of the 21st century.

To achieve the objectives proposed under the European Energy and Climate Policy, we have devised an ambitious and coherent strategy to guarantee sustainability, supply security and European competitiveness. The success of this strategy will, however, require greater efforts in the areas of scientific research, technological development and innovation. The Technology Plan in the field of clean energy technologies is a key component of our strategy. The setting up of the European Institute of Technology (EIT) will help increase Europe's competitiveness through integrated activity in the fields covered by the knowledge triangle.

## **3. (The European Union in the world)**

As affirmed by the Commission in the Opinion approved yesterday, the Reform Treaty will strengthen the EU's capacity to act in external relations. It is highly symbolic that two of the central pillars of the Portuguese Presidency are in the very areas of institutional reform and the EU's external relations. The active cooperation between the Presidency and the Commission in the latter field is plain to see. Last week, Prime Minister Sócrates and myself went to Accra, to the final session of the African Union Summit, and the next day we attended the first Summit between the EU and Brazil.

With Brazil, our most recent strategic partner, we share an ambitious agenda that takes in energy (chiefly biofuels), climate change and trade relations. As regards international trade, I urged President Lula to strive for an agreement in the Doha negotiations. The Commission stresses the crucial importance of Doha because trade is the driving force of growth and economic development. It has lifted millions of people out of poverty in Asia and can continue to do so, not only in the Asian countries but also in South America and Africa. International trade must nevertheless be based on rules and multilateral institutions, and the EU has a key part to play in the consolidation of the rules of international governance.

I should like to take this opportunity to stress the Commission's central role in the Doha Round in particular and in external trade relations in general, resolutely defending as it does European interests. In the last 50 years the Community, the EU and the Member States have benefited to an extraordinary degree from free trade. The EU is the biggest trade bloc in the world and can only gain from trade liberalisation. The Commission has always simultaneously defended the promotion of free trade and the protection of European interests, and will continue to do so.

Turning to Africa, the strategic partnership between that continent and Europe is vital for international stability. The EU is the biggest donor of financial and economic assistance to Africa. Europe is Africa's biggest trade partner, importing more than the rest of the G8 countries. The Commission over which I have the honour of presiding has, since the beginning of its term, made relations with Africa one of its priorities. For example, for the first time in the history of the EU the Commission met as a College outside Europe, in Addis Ababa with the AU Commission.

Nevertheless, much remains to be done as regards relations between Europeans and Africans. The next EU-Africa Summit, to be held under the Portuguese Presidency, is a unique opportunity to set an ambitious agenda, covering energy, migration, climate change and human rights. We have political and diplomatic problems to resolve, but these problems - whose relevance we must recognise - cannot and should not be made into obstacles to a strategic partnership that is vital for the future of globalisation. I have said on various occasions that the EU has a vocation for the 21st century: to promote justice, freedom and solidarity across the globe. The EU must be a force for reform and stability in the world. The African continent is certainly a region that requires all our support and commitment.

Before I conclude, I should like to wish the Portuguese Government every success and to reaffirm the Commission's readiness to work with the Presidency. Never have Lisbon, Brussels and Strasbourg been as close as they are today. Mr Prime Minister, your successes and those of your Government will be triumphs for Europe and for us all.