



ASSEMBLEIA DA REPÚBLICA

The President

Address by Eduardo Ferro Rodrigues following his re-election as President of the Assembly of the Republic - 14th Legislature

25 October 2019 | Session Chamber, São Bento Palace

Honourable Members of the Assembly of the Republic,

I am extremely honoured to have been re-elected President of the Assembly of the Republic today.

Thank you for your renewed trust, which I reciprocate, seeking to remain the President of all Members of the Assembly of the Republic every single day.

I am the third President of the Assembly of the Republic to be reappointed to these functions that give me so much responsibility and make me so proud. I look forward to continuing to learn from their examples: the late António de Almeida Santos, who unfortunately left us during this Legislature which now ends, and also President Jaime Gama.

I wish to maintain exemplary institutional and personal relations with the officeholders at other bodies that exercise sovereign power, the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, and the Presidents of Higher Courts.



ASSEMBLEIA DA REPÚBLICA

The President

Always upholding the autonomy and constitutional powers of the Assembly of the Republic. Bearing in mind that we are representing every Portuguese citizen in this House of Democracy.

On 6 October, Portuguese citizens very clearly valued the centrality attained by the Parliament in the Portuguese system of government throughout the previous legislature.

As we know, new powers always mean new responsibilities.

Ten Parties are currently represented in the Assembly of the Republic. And while the presence of the governing party has been strengthened, there is no absolute majority for a single party.

Portuguese citizens did not seek an absolute majority because they understood in the previous legislature that this is not the only path to political stability. And they still want to believe that to be the case.

Everyone will have to live up to their responsibilities, as well as to the mandate they were given by the Portuguese people. No one should exclude themselves from the culture of dialogue, be it for the adoption of laws or in the debate of strategic challenges faced by Portugal.

Portuguese citizens expect this openness from the Government and the parties represented in the Assembly of the Republic: a culture of strategic dialogue and



ASSEMBLEIA DA REPÚBLICA

The President

institutional loyalty that goes hand in hand with a culture of scrutinising executive action, which is essential for the functioning of democracy.

In a democracy, it is as important to be in the Government as it is to be in the opposition, and the better the scrutiny activity and the alternative of opposition, the better government action will be.

The worst-case scenario for Portuguese democracy would be to see this work of own scrutiny by parliamentary opposition be carried out by factual or inorganic powers, out of which no political alternative or democratic benefit would arise.

Honourable Members of the Assembly of the Republic,

This responsibility is required by the international context itself. We are not living in isolation. Portugal is a society that is open to the world.

We will have to do our homework to address the economic and social risks posed by trade wars, the economic slowdown of our partners or *Brexit*.

Portugal will certainly find a challenging environment when taking up the Presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2021.

The European Union is too often a scapegoat for the shortcomings and choices of national governments.



ASSEMBLEIA DA REPÚBLICA

The President

We should definitely look at what needs to change in Europe – first of all, I would say that achieving the European Pillar of Social Rights should increasingly be a priority. Because tolerance for the increase in social inequalities is close to zero.

In addition, we should also look at the European Union's contribution to peace and development in our Continent. Despite all its shortcomings, despite signs of social distress, economic insecurity and political instability, the European Union remains a reference to the world in terms of a social state and, in general, regarding rights, freedoms and guarantees.

On the other hand, we must not forget the impairments and inadequacies, the deaths in the Mediterranean or in killer trucks.

I read a statement by Timothy Garton Ash the other day, which seems to me to be very accurate and timely, and went something like this: *We should not only think of what the EU has to offer us, we should also think of what we have to offer the EU.* And what we have to offer is a contribution to change. In particular, we should consider how to move the Union towards a Europe of humanism, tolerance, and solidarity.

Honourable Members of the Assembly of the Republic,

In the year following the Presidency of the European Union, we will mark 200 years of the adoption of the 1822 Constitution, a milestone in the development of civil and political rights in Portugal, to which we are still indebted today.



ASSEMBLEIA DA REPÚBLICA

The President

Portuguese Democracy will be 48 years old on that year. After 48 years of bad memories, we will then have 48 years of good memories — and we must keep these good memories alive.

Good memories, but political, economic, social, environmental and cultural shortcomings nonetheless. There is a lot to be done in Portugal, and this House of Democracy will have a very important role to play in that regard.

Valuing historical memory is an exercise that we cannot afford to give up. Looking forward, but always learning from the past. I would like to recall the wise words of former President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Richard von Weizsäcker: “(...) *From our own history we learn what man is capable of. For that reason, we must not imagine that we are now quite different and have become better*”.

Therefore, according to him, the memory of our own history should remain “(...) a *guideline*” for our behaviour now and in tackling the unresolved problems that lie ahead.

Reaffirming values and recognising those who upheld them at different times.

Honourable Members of the Assembly of the Republic,

Among the problems we need to address today and in the future, there is one emerging in an unavoidable way: Climate.



ASSEMBLEIA DA REPÚBLICA

The President

There is now a strong consensus in Portuguese society on the urgency of fighting climate change.

Please allow me to share one last quote. Because this famous statement by Albert Camus has never been truer than it is today: “(...) *Each generation undoubtedly feels called upon to reform the world. Mine knows that it will not reform it, but its task is perhaps even greater. It consists in preventing the world from destroying itself*”.

This is what we mean when we talk about the climate threat: We are talking about an existential threat.

This is not simply a matter of governmental organisation. This is a cause which is relevant to everyone and for which all of us are summoned.

The Assembly of the Republic will also have a say on this issue. At a legislative level, of course. But also, in mobilising Portuguese society for what undoubtedly is the greatest challenge of our time.

In due time, I will be submitting a programme of initiatives on this topic for the whole legislature to the consideration of the Conference of Leaders, in dialogue with the relevant parliamentary committee.

Honourable Members of the Assembly of the Republic,

It is up to us, as Members of the Assembly of the Republic, to advance democracy.

Our respect for Democracy is a fundamental part of the respect we have for ourselves.



ASSEMBLEIA DA REPÚBLICA

The President

All of us are required to respect the Constitution, the Law and the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of the Republic.

We will continue to contribute to the evolution of this Parliament.

I would like to thank the outgoing Vice-President, Jorge Lacão, for the major role he played in the legislature which now comes to an end.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge all those present: Guests, Journalists, and Parliamentary Staff, wishing you four years of personal and professional accomplishments.

To the Honourable Members arriving here for the first time: welcome. To those who were re-elected: welcome back.

As officeholders at a body that exercises sovereign power, as representatives of the will of the people, I can only wish you all every success and every happiness.

The success of this legislature will surely be the success of Democracy, the success of Portugal and of the Portuguese people.

Thank you very much!

Eduardo Ferro Rodrigues

President of the Assembly of the Republic