



ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC  
OF PORTUGAL TO THE CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF EU  
PARLIAMENTS  
WARSAW

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**The crisis of the European unity, what shall we do?**

Madam President of the Polish Diet,  
Mr President of the Polish Senate,  
Mr Prime Minister Donald Tusk,  
Messrs Speakers of the European Union Parliaments,

I would like to express my greetings to all of you and my gratitude for such kind welcome, in this city of Warsaw.

1. This is a time of difficulty, a time of crisis for the European Union.

The capacities of our national democratic institutions and the fabric of our long-lasting European project towards political and economic unity are being submitted to a severe test.

The crisis even reaches peaks of such uncertainty regarding the future, that it has already awakened the spectre of the non survival of the Euro zone and, even, of the non survival of the European Union.

One thing is certain. Our destiny, the peace and the success of each of us can only be built in a dynamic and strong European Union based on a widespread vision of the world and on a coherent political and moral strategy. The painful memories of the history of the country that welcomes us make us understand exactly that. Therefore, I bring to the debate several topics to promote an urgent and in-depth reflection:

**2.** Firstly, the true nature of our current crisis cannot be simply described as “sovereign debt crisis”. The crisis is systemic. That is why we need to look into it with critical and systemic eyes.

The crisis is not just the result of a flawed fiscal and budgetary management of some Member States, and it cannot be blamed only upon a group of governments. The current crisis is the result of several complex and intertwined causes:

- a. The ill-designed architecture of the Economic Monetary Union (EMU), since its own birth in the realm of the Maastricht Treaty;
- b. The lack of a coherent political basis for that architecture;
- c. The separate strategy of the EU governments as regards essential matters such as energy;
- d. The lack of unity concerning foreign policy;
- e. Europe's inability to look at the world through its soft power window, exercising its fundamental rights in the World Trade Organisation;
- f. The absence of a virtuous connection of free trade to social rights and environmental sustainability.

So many problems that threaten our future and challenge us to take action in order to create, and I quote H. Arendt, “something entirely new”. This challenge is also a coherence challenge. As once, in 1991, Helmut Kohl said to the Bundestag: “building an economic and monetary union, without a political union that can stand as its basis and support, would be a perilous endeavour carrying serious menaces into the future”.

**3.** The crisis is also the result of the collapse of a shared responsibility, in what should be the financial regulation and supervision by both national and European institutions. Likewise, the crisis is the result of the non-compliance – immediately in the first years of the entering into force of the Euro as our common currency – with the “Growth and Stability Pact” (1997) by the majority of European governments.

The new “Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union” will not bring the crisis to a definite end. It is true that financial discipline is part of a winning strategy. But to reduce the crisis to

this question is giving a wrong diagnosis. Europe needs ambition in all fronts. It needs jobs and sustainable development policies. It needs to build up European-scale countercyclical policies directed against negative social and economic impacts of austerity. Because austerity has inevitable negative social and economic impacts. That is why we need urgent political and economic reforms that could bring back the trust both to markets and citizens.

Politics as a programming power has this virtual capacity of multiplying good and evil. If we do not realise the reasons that connect us, if we do not set in motion the exercise of a moral willingness of unity, the consequences will be devastating for all.

Because the crisis, financial and economic, is now a crisis of quality of life, a crisis of trust in the institutions, particularly, in the European institutions, plunging us into increasing feelings of democratic shortcomings.

It is here that we can contextualise the role of national Parliaments; in the formal plan of political communication, in accordance with the provisions of the treaties; but also in the republican and informal plan of political communication, as receivers and generators of a truly European political opinion. In fact, the crisis always carries the emotional and trust element that all can be done or undone. As Mr Radek Sikorski, the Polish Foreign Minister, very well reminded in the speech he delivered in Berlin in late November 2011:

“The inevitable conclusion is that this crisis is not only about debt, but primarily about confidence and, more precisely, credibility”.

4. The price in human suffering, deriving from economic and social disruption, will be staggering. No single State is in conditions to face alone the challenges ahead of us in the future. From climate change, to energy scarcity, from environmental degradation to military defence, or sustainable development of companies and jobs. Only a strong and integrated Europe oriented towards a strong political integration will find the right scale to an honourable existence.

I would also like to remind you of the recent proposals of the German Council of Economic Experts (*Sachverständigenrat zur Begutachtung der gesamtwirtschaftlichen Entwicklung*), particularly the suggestion of an

integrated strategy to tackle the sovereign debt problem. Through a Redemption Pact (*Schuldentilgungspakt*) curiously based on the experience of US federalism under the George Washington's government.

5. We, representatives of the peoples of Europe, have the political and moral obligation of showing the effects of the powers vested in us by the Treaty of Lisbon – but also in times of crisis, we should even assume the implicit powers, which result from our legitimacy and can give meaning to rules such as the provisions of Article 13 of the Budgetary Treaty (involvement in the debate on budgetary policies).

In this moment we are asked for a developed interpretation of the role of national Parliaments. National Parliaments are not only the guardians of subsidiarity they are above all the guardians of the European values. What is asked of their fundamental legitimacy is a commitment to a human, progressive and integrated Europe. National Parliaments should create more opportunities to issue institutional opinions addressed to the European political centre and the general public.

I acknowledge receipt of the questions presented in the working text that the Polish Presidency has prepared on this theme. And I would like to add a few others:

1. Should the recent measures against the crisis be connected to a perspective of revising the Treaties? Whether or not should we give an outlook to occasional measures?
2. What should be the main priorities in a long run process aimed to a full revision of the Treaties? Are we dealing with a risk of treaty fragmentation and even the risk of conflict between the new treaties (the Fiscal Treaty and the European Stability Mechanism) and the Treaty of Lisbon?
3. Does Europe need to create a new European institutional architecture?
4. How will we tackle the problems of functional capacity of our large-scale democracy? How to best use new technologies, how to try forms of decentralisation?
5. How can we improve the quality of democratic governance in European institutions and European procedures?

6. How to enhance parliamentary scrutiny of the European Council and the Council of Ministers?
7. How can we, national Parliaments, contribute to the preservation of the EU leading role as peace force, as democratic power, and able to tackle (within the principles of the rule of law) the global challenges such as climate change and the virtuous connection of free trade to the defence of human rights and environmental sustainability?
8. How can we develop a unitary strategy for the defence of common resources within the framework of a foreign relation with the world, notably in what concerns the emerging economic powers? This topic makes us resume the crisis of the European unity.

By way of conclusion, I would like to make some other considerations.

- We must try a harmonisation of rules and an economy of means. And avoid the Ptolemaic confusion of a regulatory system with overlapping circles. We must encourage hope instead of fear. Even if that requires amending our Constitutions. The best way to solve the problems is not to ignore them. We must try here a pragmatic approach. The fundamental legitimacy of national Parliaments gives them possibilities to broaden an extensive role.

- In the relation between national Parliaments, their majorities and the governments. If we properly fulfil our duties, governments will not be left alone at the European centre to decide for us.

- Our constitutional power. Europe is founded upon a constitutional convergence. Europe can be led to greater integration, if needed, through constitutional action.

- We are the first opinion makers. We must adopt institutional standpoints, in meetings such as this one, concerning the strongest European challenges. The impetus for Europe's leap forward is, first of all, upon its leaderships. Here the generals are the ones who win the battles. The national Parliaments have to overcome a limited national perspective and gain a wide European perspective.

Sometimes, sovereignty seems to be nothing but the collective expression of selfishness. But selfishness will get us nowhere. We, Europeans, live an original contradiction, because the interest of individuals can only be overcome by the

exercise of the moral resolve for justice for all.

The path towards a union of peoples is the basis to create our horizontal humanity; the path that broadened our enlightened thought that was inherited in our values.

In Europe, freedom has proven to be insufficient. This is the decisive hour of our lives.

Maria da Assunção A. Esteves