

Colóquio Internacional

“A UE e as suas fronteiras externas: governação e organização política”

Universidade dos Açores – Anfiteatro B

26 de Abril de 2012

Sessão de Abertura – 9h30

On behalf of the President of the Government of the Azores and President of the Conference of the Outermost Regions of the European Union, Carlos César, I obviously start by greeting all participants in this Seminar.

I also would like to express to the University of the Azores, and specially to the coordinator of this project, Prof Carlos Amaral, the appreciation of the Government of the Azores for this initiative and the main theme of it, that is so significant to the Azores and, particularly, during the period of our presidency of the Conference of the Outermost Regions.

Thus, it was with great pleasure that we've supported this event, in order to be possible to have this moment of common reflection on European borders and governance in the Azores, an Outermost Region of Europe, also as a celebration of the spirit and diversity – territorial, but also political - of Europe.

Never before has it been so important to underline and, above all, to ensure the prevalence of the fundamental values of Europe - such as solidarity, cohesion and diversity – and to underline the role of boarder regions of Europe in its global dialogue and projection.

EU boarder territories and those associated with the Union are all part of the great European family. This means that we are an active part of a unique process in history, founded on the will of citizens and of their territories.

EU, as we all know, is a generational project based on solidarity and cohesion which aims to achieve a smart and inclusive sustainable development. Above all, we, boarder regions, are part of a process that is grounded – and this is the only way for future success – in freedom, in diversity and in dialogue between territories and also between different levels of power and political status.

The global projection of Europe, of its values and of its development model is without doubt crucial to this process; a dimension that cannot be separated from its most isolated and boarder territories.

Allow me, so, to focus my speech on the most peripheral and distant boarder territories of Europe: - The Outermost Regions – part and fully integrated in the European Union, with a special status – and the Overseas Countries and Territories – associated to the Union – two cases that are, without exception, examples of the relevance and global affirmation of the European values and dialogue.

In fact, notwithstanding the different legal and constitutional statutes of these territories, it is not difficult to find similarities among the eight Outermost Regions (as you know, the Portuguese regions of Azores and Madeira, the Spanish region of Canarias and the French territories of

Martinique, Guadelupe, Saint Martin, Guyanne and La Reunion) and the twenty six Overseas Countries and Territories.

Although with different levels and degrees, all these territories are isolated and distant from the centre of Europe and from the Member States. They are mostly islands, quite often constrained by adverse geography and climate, with small and fragmented markets, with few alternatives to traditional products, and with a duality that is common:

On one hand, they are part of extra-European geographical areas and, on the other hand, they have an institutional and political proximity to the EU and its Member States.

Furthermore, OR and OCT have a vast and valuable biodiversity (on land and sea), they are natural laboratories for scientific observation (namely for climate-change) and for research (in oceanography, volcanology, aerospace technology, biotechnology, or renewable energies).

In short, as a result of their territorial features and geostrategic position, the OR and the OCT are also an “asset” for the European Union, a word that, by becoming part of the European lexicon, highlights the change in paradigm in the way how Europe regards both realities.

Actually, the possibility granted by the Treaty of Lisbon to change the statute of the OCTs of France, Denmark and the Netherlands to Outermost Regions (as Mayotte will do in 2014) and also of making the opposite change (as St. Bartholomew did in the beginning of 2012) provides us with

a clear picture of the proximity between the territorial features of the two statutes.

Consequently, the challenges – though framed in different legal and constitutional contexts at the national and European levels – are also similar.

All of these factors only advise a deeper proximity, more dialogue and better cooperation between the OCTs and the Outermost Regions.

In current the discussions of the EU policies for the 2014-2020 period, there is therefore an opportunity not only to affirm this need, but above all for the European institutions to embrace this potential.

Thus, we were pleased by the Commission's proposals that include measures to strengthen the socio-economic cooperation between the Outermost Regions and the OCTs, including the Caribbean, West Africa and Indian Ocean, especially the provisions to reinforce the allocations of the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) for Territorial Cooperation.

But, on the other hand, we also consider that the proposals for territorial cooperation are not adapted to the geographical environment of the Outermost Regions (particularly to provide an equal access of all OMR to territorial cooperation) nor there is a coordination mechanism conceived on a realist manner that will guarantee the implementation of a meaningful regional insertion and cooperation .

For instance, the maintaining of a 150 km criteria for maritime frontiers excludes the Azores and Madeira from the cross-border cooperation, wish access would definitely boost the potential of our cooperation with our closest neighbors to the west: the United States.

This is the reason why the Conference has requested that new implementation measures are put in place to develop, with efficacy and equal treatment, joint cooperation projects between the Outermost Regions and Third countries, namely the so-called ACP.

So, the inadequability and inoperability of the territorial cooperation regulations severely jeopardizes the use of the proposed amounts by the Outermost Regions and allows for a discrepancy between regions that should be treated in a joint and equitable manner.

But, as we know and it has already been stressed, 2012 is a year of utmost importance, with the discussions on the EU financial framework and sectorial policies.

The ORs have carefully prepared this moment in advance, particularly through two cross-cutting documents that aimed to contribute to the renewal of the Union's partnership with the ORs in light of the new guidelines and, in particular, of the Europe 2020 Strategy: - The Memorandum "ORs in the 2020 Horizon", signed by the Presidents of the Outermost Regions in 2009, and the Memorandum "A Renewed Vision of the European Strategy for Outermost Regions", signed in May 2010 by the Outermost Regions and the States of Portugal, Spain and France.

In these and other sectorial documents – such as the joint contribution “For the Regional Integration of the ORs” from October 2010 - regional cooperation is a decisive issue for the development of this partnership between the European Union and our Regions, and we certainly hope that this issue will be developed in the new Communication from the Commission on the Outermost Regions, which will be adopted during the first semester of this year.

We all know that the current context is not favourable. Quite the contrary.

But Europe will not overcome the current crisis – which is global, European, but also regional – unless it deepens its integration and, for what concerns us here, Europe will never be able to affirm itself globally without dialogue, stability, and the development of its strategic partners.

Despite the different statutes, Outermost Regions, Overseas Countries and Territories or continental boarder regions are true assets whose potential has to be embraced for the benefit of the European projection throughout the world.

I wish you all a fruitful work and a very pleasant stay in the Azores.

Rodrigo Oliveira
Regional Undersecretary for European Affairs and External Cooperation
of the Government of the Autonomous Region of the Azores