



## ASSEMBLEIA DA REPÚBLICA

### Gabinete do Vice-Presidente

#### **Mr Chairman, Presidents of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen**

The topic of this debate is particularly relevant and current. This discussion is important, in the context of our meeting, because although some people believe that the issue of the crisis of democratic systems is an ever-present matter, which derives from democracy itself ('the worst form of government, except all those other forms...'), many others, including me, see today's problems of democracies, especially European democracies, not simply as more of the same, but as more serious and harder to address.

At the same time as somewhere in the world, in great powers and small countries from Asia to North Africa and the Middle East, not to mention Latin America, the democratic ambition is being voiced although sometimes in a chaotic way, in west Europe, crisis is forging ahead, dangerously. We not only have a high abstention rate, but citizens are actually turning their backs on the civic participation in parties and other basic democratic institutions; we not only have some aggressive media that make any politician a target, but a significant part of public opinion is showing its animosity towards what is inappropriately called the 'political class...'; it is now not only on the fringes of the political system that we hear xenophobic, anti-European and populist attitudes being expressed and supported, it is within the democratic system, and sometimes actually inside governments or parliamentary majorities that these positions are being strengthened and spread.

The essential aspects that define this crisis of the democratic system lie in the lack of trust the public has in its representatives. The inability to solve people's basic problems, the inability to create positive expectations and solid responses to such expectations, the ever-widening gulf between the elected and electors (fed by the action of some who could be mediators but who end up by being tools of separation), the divorce between some and others, are all phenomena that have grown because the general environment of European democratic life is encouraging it.

The advance of globalisation was, for many peoples and countries, an opportunity to be grasped for improving living standards (which were extremely low, at the outset) and even for developing democratic ideas, associated with crossing the threshold of mere survival; but for the more developed nations it was linked to a weakening of States in relation to the markets (particularly the capital markets) and a progressive erosion of ability to answer the problems of their citizens.

The hegemony of the rationale of deregulation, privatisation and liberalisation had the downside of bolstering the idea that the basic issues for people's lives could not be tackled by governments, since the context is one of fiscal dumping, tax havens, and giving up the notion of protecting the weaker parties in labour relations and in social relations generally.

The great global crisis that has now almost lasted as long as the World Wars has played a major part in weakening confidence in democratic institutions.

When, in many democracies, the consequence of a crisis that was started by excesses of deregulated financial capital is an explosion of unemployment and taking the losses of the financial system into public ownership, then the reasons for mistrust are multiplied and become even hard to tackle.

In this context the European ideal could play a crucial part, since representative democracy is constitutive and inherent to this ideal.

But replacing this strategic ideal for a game of punishments and prizes, with the absurd, sole, concern for matters of public finance only serves to nourish this democratic crisis. People do not understand that the defence of Europe is achieved by destroying the essential facets of the social model that differentiate us, that the diet of the state can take place against a backdrop of enforced recession and exponential unemployment, and the ruthless worsening of injustice in the distribution of the wealth created. Consolidation of the budget, essential in several countries, is simply unattainable in a recessionary spiral. Without economic growth it is not possible to achieve public debt control.

Increasingly negative expectations for entire families are the dominant scenario in several countries today.

Last week, we had positive news at European and national levels. But in some countries impressive crowds expressed their hunger, distrust and despair.

Only democrats can uphold democracy. The leaders of Europe's parliaments have an irreplaceable role to play here. Separate from governments, it is up to us to motivate participation, responsibility, democracy, and a new social and financial deal in Europe

So that this crisis does not become, in some countries as in the past, a threat to freedom, equal opportunities and solidarity.

Eduardo Ferro Rodrigues

Vice President of the Portuguese Parliament

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