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The President

**European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils
Network 27th Annual Conference**

Opening Session | São Bento Palace, 18 September 2019

*Remarks by His Excellency the President of the Assembly of the Republic, Eduardo
Ferro Rodrigues*

Ladies and Gentleman,

Welcome to the Assembly of the Republic, the House of Portuguese Democracy.

Your initiative is very timely.

In a few days, in New York, António Guterres, United Nations Secretary General – who I had the pleasure of serving as Minister, between 1995 and 2001 –, will host a Summit on Climate Action, which will address the implementation of various Sustainable Development Goals.

By its nature, it will be an intergovernmental event, at the highest level, and barely needed, as climate change is more and more a pressing challenge.

By holding today's conference – especially taking into account that it takes place in the Portuguese Parliament –, we draw the attention to the role that Parliaments can and should play in order to meet the Sustainable Development Goals at national level.

This applies not only to the decision-making process but also to awareness-raising and enhancing and strengthening partnerships and cooperation.

Strands of work are multilayered: national and international and engaging the civil society.



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Here, I find deeply heartening the various positive examples in action as it is the case, just to single out two of the most renowned of them, the *Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation* or the *Aga Khan Foundation* (the latter in progressive transfer to our city of Lisbon).

Portugal is deeply committed to fully implement the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

We are also acting as Member of the European Union.

Latest available data details progress made by Portugal towards fulfilling Sustainable Development Goals, and more specifically, the ones that are of relevance to Portugal, on the whole 125 indicators.

Altogether, we are doing very well on 69 indicators and, in fact, we completed 80 per cent of the targets foreseen in a number of those goals:

- Goal 1: no poverty;
- Goal 5: gender equality;
- Goal 6: clean water and sanitation;
- Goal 7: affordable and clean energy;
- Goal 13: climate action;
- Goal 16: peace, justice and strong institutions;
- Goal 17: partnerships.

Let me illustrate just a few positive examples:

- Energy: renewables play now a pivotal role in our power grid and power supply (the contribution of renewable energy to national electrical production is over 50%).



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- The Oceans and the Blue Economy: Portugal is a maritime country, with a long coast and two archipelagoes, Azores and Madeira, and a large continental shelf.

Bearing in mind concerns with the Oceans, sea level and temperature rise, acidity, pollution, sustainability of fish stocks, it comes as no surprise the close interest we attach to Oceans' sustainability;

- Access to clean water and sanitation is a common good whose access is widespread in Portugal.

Yet, we should also bear in mind challenges arising from recurrent droughts, peak temperatures and irregular rain fall.

Their impact is obvious: in agriculture, in the ecological flow of our rivers, in wildfires.

- We also benefit from a National Health Service. Whatever its difficulties, the fact is that life expectancy in Portugal is above eighty years.

Yet, we need to keep improving the quality of life of elderly people.

- Also the percentage of our fellow citizens who are at the risk of poverty has steadily been decreasing.

According to the EUROSTAT, in 2018 it was reckoned at 21.6 per cent of the population, six points below 2014. Still very high, yet improving.

- One other area where we have advancing is the gender gap.

Certainly, there is scope for more, as the pay gap persists, yet progress made is remarkable, namely in what pertains to gender equality in leadership occupations.



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As we are all aware of, the seventeen agreed Sustainable Development Goals are interrelated.

It is just impossible to address one of them in isolation of others.

Two weeks ago I attended an inter-parliamentary conference in Bali – the *3rd World Parliamentary Forum on Sustainable Development*, hosted by my Indonesian counterpart, which emphasis was on the role financial inclusion in eradicating poverty.

In my speech, on the theme "*How infrastructure and industrial innovation can foster equal opportunities*", I had the opportunity to focus precisely on this cross-analysis.

It just suffices a brief glance at statistics annex included in the United Nations Human Development Report to figure out how destitute hundreds of millions of men and women still live, how fragile their living conditions are.

They will be among the first to suffer the consequences of inaction in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

It is just appalling to look at such indicators; be they the Gross National Income per capita, life expectancy, or children's mortality rate.

To address those cruel imbalances we need more resilient and cohesive economies, more education and skills, more ownership – and, also, peace, stability and good government.

This is an ambitious undertaking – and it requires abiding by international agreed commitments, upholding international law and avoiding unilateral acts, whether in trade, environment, climate action or peace and security.

Unless we act concertedly it will be much more difficult to attain those goals – and failing in implementing them means imperiling our common future.



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The challenge ahead of us is plain and simple: to act, and to act bearing in mind that we all live in a global village, where barriers, walls and unilateral measures, are just as effective as Lilliput ropes were in tying up Gulliver.

We live in one world and we have to act in one world.

Thank you for your attention, and, once again, for your presence in the Portuguese Parliament.