Agenda of the Portuguese EU Presidency (July-December 2007)

Portugal’s upcoming European Union presidency term (July-December 2007), which makes up one third of the Troika presidency with Germany and Slovenia, has concentrated its interest for its term in office on the issues of immigration, economic and trade issues, relations with Africa and sustainable energy policies.\(^1\) Though these three countries preside over the EU independently, each country, including Portugal, has planned an 18-month program of activities from early 2007 to mid-2008 in accordance with these goals.

Along with Slovenia, Portugal also hopes to focus on the debate of the EU’s constitution.\(^2\) Portugal has expressed an interest in speeding up negotiations, having the revised EU Constitution in place by 2009, seeing ratification before the scheduled European Parliament elections in June 2009.\(^3\) With the emphasis on revising a new EU Constitution, special attention must be placed on the potential omission of topics relating to children’s rights.

Outside of these main areas of interest for Portugal’s presidency, which mainly revolve around economics, Portugal has identified various secondary social goals for the EU while it holds the presidential seat. These objectives may affect children’s rights both directly and indirectly.\(^4\) They include:

1. **Strengthening citizens’ rights**, including in criminal proceedings, and to combat racism in the criminal justice systems of each country;
2. **Fighting illegal immigration** to prevent human smuggling into the EU, in which women are primary victims. Strengthening the area of freedom, security and justice with special emphasis on the trafficking of human beings;
3. **Intercultural dialogue** with a focus on integration of mixed cultures, specifically Muslims. Promotion of intercultural dialogue in order to foster mutual understanding between people of different background and cultures;
4. **Increasing legal predictability** for citizens, which could affect child custody issues;
5. **Education**, specifically to promote multiculturalism and integration of various cultures in the EU (Roma) and preparation for employment;
6. **Youth participation** in social decisions;
7. **Demographic changes** and better reconciliation between work, family and private life, adequate child-care infrastructure;
8. **Health issues**, including obesity, access to healthcare and food additives;
9. **Consumer protection**;
10. **Gender equality** and promoting girls’ and women’s roll in society.

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1. STRENGTHENING CITIZENS’ RIGHTS
The Portuguese presidency will focus on strengthening citizen’s rights, with a particular emphasis on defining minimum rights during criminal proceedings in all member states. This could potentially affect numerous children in the juvenile justice systems throughout the EU. The issue of institutionalizing children arises, as does providing proper defense counsel and protection of defendants’ rights. Criminal law standards vary greatly between the EU countries, so minimum levels of harmonization in the various criminal codes of the Member States will ensure greater consistency of basic standards of fairness.

These issues concerning justice have grown since the adoption of the Tampere Program in 1999, and The Hague Programme, and Portugal hopes to continue progress with this approach.

2. FIGHTING ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION AND HUMAN SMUGGLING
Portugal is determined to prevent human smugglers from benefiting from their victims. Portugal will hold a ministerial conference on migration issues in for November 2007 between the EU Member States and the Mediterranean states (EUROMED) to intensify dialogue with migrants’ countries of origin. The focus of this Global Approach to Migration will be on improving local living conditions, managing legal immigration and studying various labour conditions in the EU Member States, as well as rigorously fighting illegal immigration.

3. INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE
Portugal seeks to continue the battle against racism and xenophobia by developing an integration policy and by encouraging dialogue between cultures, and continue negotiations in the Framework Decision on racism and xenophobia. A particular emphasis will be placed on the 15 million Muslims living in Europe. This is so that the principle of mutual recognition can be defined in more precise terms.

Improving intercultural relations and dialogue is of particular significance to the Roma population of children, who regularly lack inclusion into the education and health care systems of their resident countries.

4. INCREASING LEGAL CERTAINTY FOR CITIZENS
The number of bi-national marriages and partnerships has increased, and the issue of which country’s law applies to the legal relationship often arises in the case of divorce. Portugal will seek to refine rules of international jurisdiction, recognition and enforcement of court decisions, as well as achieving uniformity in conflict-of-law situations. Which member state’s law is chosen to apply to a multi-national case is of particular significance where the child’s support, custody, and visitation rights are being decided. The troika supports the work on the Rome III Regulation on this issue.

5. EDUCATION AND PREPARATION FOR EMPLOYMENT
Portugal has recognized that education and training policies have a significant positive impact on the economic and social future of the EU. Portugal will continue working on and creating new initiatives in education and training. The Commission’s “Joint Interim Report of the Commission and the Council” regarding the implementation of the "Education and Training 2010" Work Programme will be prepared in 2007, to be submitted to the Spring European Council in 2008.

Other issues within education to be addressed include lifelong learning (pre-primary and school education, teacher training, adult education and languages), the development of indicators and the promotion of research in the field of education and training.

A special emphasis on the promotion of multiculturalism and integration within the EU’s education systems action will take place within the framework of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.
(2008). Special attention will be placed on multilingualism in fostering multicultural understanding and communication. This will be of particular significance to the Roma children and other victims of discrimination within the education system.

Portugal’s presidency will explore ways to strengthen the social dimension of the revised Employment Strategy. They seek to address, among other issues, the Youth Pact, where young people’s transition from school to work is emphasized. Dialogue on the integration of young and older people in the labour market will also occur.

6. Youth Participation
The implementation of the European Pact for Youth and the Commission Communication on European policies concerning youth of June 2005 will be the main bases for developing initiatives and policies for young people. The 2007 and 2008 Spring European Councils will take stock of the implementing measures and provide future orientations for the Youth Pact.

The Presidencies will promote the social participation and professional integration of young people. For the implementation of this priority, they will work on questions related to the equal opportunities for all young people, fostering their entrepreneurship and promoting diversity as well as intercultural dialogue among young people. In these areas, the exchange of good practices and a better knowledge and understanding of youth are crucial. The evaluation of the results of the Youth Programme 2000-2006 and the successful launch of the new "Youth in Action" Programme (2007-2013) will be of major importance for further developing a European Youth Policy.

7. Demographic Changes
With the growing elderly population and shrinking birth rates around the EU, the Portuguese presidency seeks to better reconcile the balance of work, family and private life for EU citizens. They will focus on creating adequate child-care infrastructure and implement minimum standards of family friendly policies in the EU, which the Troika regards as a priority. Because family policies are typically a national issue, they vary widely in the European Union. Portugal seeks in particular to have Member States learn from the policies of other Member states on this issue.

It is important that in its creation of family policies that the presidency consider not only the best interest of the child standard, but also consider having children participate in the creation of policies. See also “10. Gender Equality”.

8. Health
With rising obesity rates throughout the European Union, the Portuguese presidency will continue the work of the Troika of encouraging a high standard of health for EU citizens. The focus will be on health promotion, disease prevention, innovation in healthcare and access to healthcare. Access to healthcare will focus primarily on migrant citizens and gender inequality. A new Public Health Programme could be achieved in the first half of 2007 and debate on new European Health Strategy will be initiated as soon as the Commission has submitted its Communication.

Specific health issues, including mental health, alcohol abuse, alcohol related harm, injury prevention, healthcare associated infections and promotion of healthy diets and physical activity, in particular for children and adolescents, will be the main focus. This will be of particular importance to the children of the EU, who have been experiencing fast growing obesity rates and who may be targeted as future smokers and alcohol consumers.

Continuing the fight against HIV/AIDS will also remain a priority.
9. **CONSUMER PROTECTION**  
The Portuguese presidency seeks to implement the new programme of Community action in the field of consumer policy (2007-2013) and to continue the debate on the EU Consumer Policy Strategy, expected to be submitted by the Commission in the first half of 2007. They will focus on increasing the safety of new technologies, strengthening cross-border consumer rights and improving market transparency and consumer information, as well as strengthening European consumer protection law. The troika plans to conclude work on the proposal for the Directive on consumer credit.

Issues of children’s safety and advertising for children arise in this context.

10. **GENDER EQUALITY**  
Portugal will continue work on gender equality and removing structural inequalities between women and men, specifically by assisting to balance work and family life in order to improve the opportunity for more women in the workplace.

The European Pact for Gender Equality will seek to be implemented on a European level, as well as on a national level. The three Presidencies will pay particular attention to achieving greater participation of men in family life and better participation of women in working life by eliminating the gender pay gap, increasing women’s employment rates, increasing participation of women in top decision-making positions and eliminating gender stereotypes. Promoting girls and young women in society and protecting vulnerable categories such as migrant women and girls against discrimination and enabling them to better participate in social, professional and political life are also goals of the Portuguese presidency. Implementing gender mainstreaming will be a priority.

In this respect, it is important to ensure that the best interest of the child standard is used while laws affecting the family life are created, which will primarily focus on the mothers. Following up to the Beijing Platform for Action, the German Presidency will address "women and education" and prepare relevant indicators, the Portuguese Presidency will tackle the issue of the "feminisation of poverty", and the Slovenian Presidency will prepare indicators with a focus on the situation of girls and young women in society.