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PORTUGUESA

PRIMEIRO-MINISTRO

Speech by the Prime Minister Luís Montenegro

Portuguese Government taking office

2 April 2024

Your Excellency, the President of the Republic,

Your Excellency, the President of Parliament,

Mr Prime Minister, on your way out,

Messrs Presidents of the Supreme Court of Justice, the Constitutional Court, and the Administrative Supreme Court,

Messrs Ministers, sworn in,

Mr Mayor of Lisbon,

Madam Chief Prosecutor,

Mr General Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces

Madam Justice Ombudsman,

Messrs Representatives of the Republic in the Autonomous Regions,

Messrs Presidents of the Legislative Assemblies of the Autonomous Regions,

Messrs Presidents of the Regional Governments of the Azores and Madeira,

Heads and representatives of the parties with seats in Parliament,

It is with great honour and a sense of duty that I take office as Prime Minister.

I wish to greet every Portuguese person, every child, every youth, every self-employed or employed person, every pensioner, every woman and man who lives in Portugal or abroad and holds a Portuguese nationality.

I extend that greeting to our community in the name of our President of the Republic, the legitimate and foremost representative of what is Portuguese.

The people, the history, the culture, national identity.

The elections held on 10 March showed the Portuguese people's willingness to take part in politics, to change politics.

Our purpose is therefore to respect and implement that change.

Our democracy, which celebrates 50 years this April, is alive. Let us honour the "dawn" Sophia expected and let us know how to construe the "full and clean day" she imagined, so that "free we may inhabit the substance of time".



It is up to all politicians today to show their maturity and their level of commitment to the Portuguese people's desires.

From the Government's part, as promised we shall be focused essentially on solving people's problems and fostering national interest.

In this context, we shall concentrate on fulfilling our programme, the best way of granting prestige to our institutions and offering dignity to the noble task of caring for what belongs to all of us.

Dear Mr President,

From the Government's side you can count on an unwavering conduct of positive collaboration and institutional cooperation which will naturally extend to all other sovereign bodies.

After having had two Governments interrupted in two years, at a time when we have two war zones so close to us, where we stand the challenge of undertaking the greatest investment plan since we joined the European Union, where we are faced with high levels of poverty in practically half of our population and at a time when the State does not suitably respond to the citizens in terms of access to essential goods such as health, education, or housing, it would be unforgivable if politics were to worsen problems, rather than offer a solution to them.

This will require humility from all of us.

This will demand a patriotic spirit and capacity to engage in dialogue.

From the part of the Government, we shall ensure this humility, the patriotic spirit and the capacity to engage in dialogue.

And that is what is expected from the opposition, also.

I want to be very clear with the Portuguese:

This Government is here to rule for the four years of its term in office.

It is here to launch a structural transformation of the economy and State, because this is the only path to create more wealth, pay better wages and retain our youths and talent.

We are not interested in word plays or sterile political pettiness.

If this Government, as I hope and know is the Portuguese people's desire, has parliamentary approval and takes on its powers in full, it will start right away to carry out structural reforms that change the country and place it on a path of prosperity, modernity, well-being, economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

This Government is not here on a shift, nor would we take on this mission with that aim.

Nor are we here to do what's "easier", even if this "easier" is ironically considered so by those who did not have the capacity or willingness to carry it out.

Parliamentary approval in these circumstances can only stand to mean that the opposition will respect the principle of letting us do our job and execute the Government's Programme.

It is not about joining the programme, rather knowing if there is an impediment to its execution.

Not rejecting the Government's Programme in Parliament does not mean just allowing the start of governance. It means allowing its execution until the end of our term in office, or, at most, until a motion of censure is approved.

Not rejecting the Government's Programme certainly does not mean a blank cheque, but it cannot mean a bounced cheque either.

Especially the Socialist Party, which has governed for 22 years over the last 28, despite its legitimacy to be the Government's action watchdog and as a future alternative, which we understand in full democratic respect, must be clear and authentic as to the attitude it will take: to be a democratic opposition or a democratic blockage.

This, Mr President, will be said when we discuss the Government's Programme in Parliament.

Yet in honesty of principles and institutional loyalty, it must be said here in this solemn act, as it holds the responsibility everyone is willing to assume.

Dear Mr President,

Dear Portuguese women and men,

This Government begins by looking at the future with confidence and hope.

It trusts people's capacity, public administration's capacity, companies' capacity, and the institutions' capacity.

The hope of achieving targets, goals, and results.

We will not govern for the sake of propaganda; we will govern for the sake of results.

We want less poverty and more economic growth.

We want budgetary discipline and efficient public services.

We are aware that we are not a rich country just because we had a budgetary surplus.

This notion raises several issues, of which I highlight three:

First, this notion can be considered offensive for millions of Portuguese who live in extreme difficulty due to low wages or pensions, for drowning in taxes, or not being able to have a decent home, access to healthcare or even quality education.

Secondly, the theory of the "full coffers" leads to excessive and uncontrolled claims for unsustainable expenses.



Thirdly, the idea that we are living in abundance leads to country to believe there is no need to structurally change our economy and our State because it seems that everything is fine, after all.

This idea is dangerous, wrong, and even irresponsible.

Dear Portuguese women and men,

This Government is here to think about each and everyone's life. The ones who are here and the ones who will follow. We will keep our promises of tax unbundening, rising wages and pensions, restructuring public services, and modernising the State.

Yet we shall do this not under the illusion of a surplus, rather anchored on a more productive and competitive economy, and a renewed and efficient State.

To have an economy growing along with the best in Europe, we will invest with exigency and thoroughness on increasing the Portuguese people's qualifications.

We shall reward work, merit, and productivity and shall boost our scientific and innovation capabilities to create more added value.

At the same time, we will rescue public services and provide a timely and quality response to citizens in health, education, housing, transports, justice, and safety and security.

We shall invest in environmental sustainability and the State and economy's digital and technological modernisation in a balanced and integrated manner.

We shall foster serious, transparent governance that fights corruption with credible institutions and a strong, tolerant, and solidary civil society.

The results we wish to achieve are ambitious, albeit realistic.

They can be achieved with courage and the capacity for transformation.

Dear Portuguese women and men,

Lowering taxes is not a gift from Government.

Lowering taxes is an economic policy and social justice measure.

High taxes are a hinderance on the economy, productivity and feeling of justice.

We shall lower income tax, especially for the middle classes and youths, and we shall exempt any productivity bonuses from tax up to the ceiling of one salary.

At the same time, we shall lower corporate income tax from 21% to 15% over three years.

The goals are clear: value work, retain youths and encourage investment attraction.

In housing, exemption from paying property transfer tax when purchasing a first home, and a cut in taxes in the sector, together with a cut in red tape and costs on State property



licensing and use are policies that will increase supply, moderate prices, and assist with demand.

In Health, the Government will not cease to implement a structural reform that will boost and protect the NHS as the system's basis, yet which harnesses the installed capacity in the social and private sectors, without useless ideological notions and with a single concern in mind: the citizen.

As we promised, we will draft an Emergency Programme that will be presented on 2 June.

In Education, it is urgent that we guarantee true equality of opportunity for all in a public school system that places the social lever at work again and that attracts and retains teachers, valuing their career.

Investing in human capital, culture, and science boosts the potential to generate the country's wealth and with it create better jobs and have higher wages and have young people settle in Portugal.

One of the greatest challenges faced by Portugal is the demographic crisis. If we do nothing, there will be many less of us in a few decades with terrible impacts on the economy and society.

We want a policy that renews the main barriers on birth rates with public incentive policies, with free kindergarten and pre-schools, with tax benefits for large families and improvements in labour laws.

Immigration is another important vector. It must be regulated, attractive to qualified professionals, proactive with young students and capable of reuniting families, improving their integration in our community.

We want a humane and welcoming country whose doors are neither shut nor ajar.

The Portuguese people also wish us to care for their security and safety and that of their assets. We shall strengthen prevention, proximity, and cybersecurity.

Here also, as in other areas of public administration, it is necessary for us to value those who daily fulfil their mission with pride and honour.

As happens also with the teams in firefighting and civil protection.

In Justice, swifter and simplified proceedings are fundamental pillars to give the citizens, institutions, and economic agents trust.

We need justice that runs at the pace of people and companies, rather than all of us following slow justice.

In foreign policy and national defence, we shall continue with our European integration, strengthening relations with Portuguese-speaking countries and Portugal's Atlantic and maritime vocation.



In the European Union, we shall advocate enlargement and pay privileged and permanent attention to the institutional and financial reform.

In the CPLP (Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries) we shall do everything we can to project our community of brotherly countries further on a global scale.

In NATO, we shall honour with unwavering solidarity our commitment as founders.

In a world at war, a Europe at war, we reiterate our condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and shall continue to offer our full support to Ukraine under the European Union and NATO framework.

In the international community, and the United Nations especially, we shall continue to be uncompromising advocates of peace, democracy, human rights, and humanitarian assistance.

Dear Mr President,

Dear Portuguese women and men,

We can and should have a diversified economy that harnesses our tourism's competitiveness, innovation in industry, the potential of our trade and services, but we will be a poor country if we lay to waste our agriculture and fisheries strategic value.

We are committed to giving them the attention they deserve.

But economic and social development must be sustainable, starting with the environment.

It is possible and necessary to do more and better in the fight against climate change, for the energy transition, and for enhancing ecosystems.

Notwithstanding, this must be done with economic rationale, protecting our consumers and our companies' competitiveness.

It is fundamental to increase public and private investment in water systems for human consumption, for agriculture, and in waste treatment.

Water management is detrimental, as a significant part of our territory is facing serious water shortages, which affects people, agriculture, and tourism. We must invest in multiple solutions, boost supply reserves, reduce losses and improve water efficiency in human behaviour.

Speaking of investments, reference must be made to the RRF.

The RRF, as other funds, cannot be another opportunity to cheapen public money. It must be an opportunity for reproductive investment that will support a strong and resilient economy.

Culture is essential to our identity, our cohesion, and our human, economic, and social development.



We shall foster the creation and teaching of art and encourage cultural consumption by all Portuguese people of all ages and conditions.

Dear Mr President,

Dear Portuguese women and men,

Two final areas I wish to mention on this occasion.

The first one is the fight against corruption.

This fight must be on a national level. It must mobilise everyone. The Government, as is publicly known and clear from the electoral programme chosen by the Portuguese, has bold and innovative proposals in this area. Yet it is important to acknowledge that there are proposals put forward by various parties in parliament that deserve to be likewise studied, discussed, and taken into account. No one holds a monopoly over the best solutions. Everyone's input is essential.

In this sense, I wish to announce today that I shall propose to all the parties with a seat in Parliament the opening of a dialogue with a view to setting an ambitious, effective, and consensual agenda to fight corruption.

The aim is to have a synthesis of proposals, measures, and initiatives within two months that we can agree on and have consensus after its consistency, credibility, and feasibility being duly tested.

From then on, we shall move forward with the approval of the respective laws, whether by Government proposal or Parliament initiative.

The Minister of Justice will intervene from the Government's state, taking the initiative to, after Parliamentary approval, contacting the various parties and initiating this dialogue process. We expect everyone's openness and availability in the name of a strong willingness to seek consensus in a crucial area.

In the fifty years from 25 April, this consensus effort will be a good way of celebrating democracy.

The second area is youth and fighting bureaucracy.

I took the initiative of setting up a new ministry to treat these two subjects in a way that cuts across Government.

Fighting bureaucracy is an imperative of State efficiency in its relations with citizens, as well as an element of economic competitiveness and an anti-corruption policy.

State modernisation must mean that the effects of simplification, digitalisation, and cutting red tape are felt in all ministries, in all decisions.

The State must communicate better and more effectively with citizens and companies, and it must also communicate better and more effectively within itself. Regardless of the



area. The idea is that the entire State will run at the same pace and with the same instruments.

Lastly, youth.

I will not accommodate, let us not settle for the situation we have in Portugal. Our young people are qualifying as they never have, yet around a third move abroad in search of an opportunity.

This is a family, social, and economic plight.

We cannot simply look away and neglect this reality.

We need to act in a concerted and transversal way to tell our youths they can believe in their country, that there is room for them to be happy by their families and friends, that we need them to have a prosperous future.

From taxation to education, from health to housing, from transports to the environment, from labour laws to housing, from culture to sports, all public policy must safeguard the goal of settling our talent and capacity to work in Portugal.

If we continue to lose some many youths to other countries, we shall compromise not only their future, but all of ours, too.

Dear Mr President, Dear Portuguese women and men,

We are counting on all of you.

As Pope Francis said, “everyone, everyone, everyone”.

We are counting on the political parties.

We are counting on the local governments and the autonomous regions.

We are counting on our social partners and social dialogue.

We are counting on the social institutions and associations.

We are counting on our European Union partners and NATO allies.

We are counting on our Portuguese-speaking brothers.

We are counting on all, all, all the Portuguese. Those who live here and, in the communities abroad spread throughout the world.

We are counting on the Portuguese soul, which our poet hero and figure of the Portuguese National Day, laid eternal.

Luis Vaz de Camões, born 500 years ago, who will be duly celebrated this year, wrote in the 1<sup>st</sup> canto of “The Lusiads”:

“May the Government last for a long time (...)

The people are lost and hard at work.





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PRIMEIRO-MINISTRO

It seems proper that  
the new land they desire is shown to them.”

Everyone, everyone, everyone for Portugal!