



Meetup at ZILS | Sines Tech: EU-Atlantic Data Gateway Platform

11/01/2022

Dear CEO of AICEP Global Parques, Filipe Costa

Dear President of Port of Sines, José Luis Cacho

Illustrious leaders of the connectivity industry,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to thank ADRAL and AICEP for organizing this conference on international connectivity and technological infrastructure. It is an honor to have the opportunity to share with you our views on this topic.

We live in challenging times; the world is constantly changing, and it does so at a pace that no one could predict a couple of years ago. With the Covid-19 pandemic, suddenly people could not meet in person, could not share the same room, could not shake hands. Someone had the terrible idea of calling this “social distancing” – but it stuck.

But what happened afterwards was not “social distancing” whatsoever. The correct term is “physical distancing”. We managed to interact miles away from each other, but “social distancing” proper never happened, because electronic communications kept us in constant contact.

The “social” - meaning interaction, communication, interdependence, symbolic entanglement - never disappeared; it was simply reshaped and reinvented, and we are still living through that reshaping and reinvention ever since the beginning of the pandemic.



The point is: with the impact of Covid-19, our reliance or, should I say, dependence on electronic communications and sophisticated machines intensified enormously.

In Portugal, data traffic more than doubled during lockdowns; e-commerce grew strongly; and we all got used to a new way of working and living, between videoconferences with colleagues and family members.

Behind all this lies, of course, infrastructure. No matter how “dematerialized”, “virtual” or “flat” this new world seems to be, it still depends, to function properly, on old-fashioned hardware.

Just like we need people in flesh and bone to perform in videoconferences, we need real antennas hanging on top of buildings and cables crossing lands and oceans to bring us home the experience of the virtual world.

Lands and oceans – specially oceans. In fact, international submarine cable network is critical for global connectivity, as it is currently estimated that 97% of global communications are carried by the circa 400 existing cable systems.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The topic of international connectivity is a key topic in the Digital Decade targets for 2030 set by the European Commission - and during the Portuguese Presidency, last year, we made our best to give special attention to it.

Today, it is well known that Europe’s digital autonomy and global competitiveness depends on strong internal and external connectivity - and leveraging both dimensions is a prerequisite for the European Union to become what it ambitions to be: “the most attractive, most secure and most dynamic data-agile economy in the world”.

It is true that Europe has a very real potential to become a world-class data hub - if it is able to make the best of its legal framework, its internal infrastructure and, of course, its geography. The European continent has excellent conditions, as it is surrounded by sea to the North, West and South, thus facilitating direct access through submarine cables to all coastal Atlantic countries from North, Central and South Americas, from Africa as well as from the Near and Middle East, and being possible to be connected to Asia without being dependent on transits in third countries.

Therefore, European Union has all the conditions to assert itself as a global zone dedicated to premium data storage and processing with excellent interconnection infrastructure, both within the EU and through to other Continents and regions through submarine cables.

With this in mind, the EU Ministerial Declaration on EU Data Gateway Platforms, signed in Lisbon during the Portuguese Presidency, established four platforms covering the following areas:

- *The EU-Atlantic;*
- *the EU-Mediterranean;*
- *the EU-North Sea & Arctic;*
- *and the EU-Baltic-to-Black Sea.*

These platforms should complement one another by promoting the location in their respective areas of data storage and landing of submarine cables, providing interconnection to terrestrial transmission systems.

It is expected that personal and industrial data flows and international trade volumes in digital services will, most likely, grow exponentially, and competition and scale will bring down costs, with higher quality and increased security and privacy.



Improving international connectivity is a pre-condition for the EU and EU-based companies to become more competitive in the world market. The greater the diversity of the EU's international accesses, the higher the independence and higher the critical mass that will enable EU to obtain better conditions in terms of quality of service and security.

Now, in the context of the European continent, Portugal is known to be a peripheral country. This is a longstanding problem for the Portuguese economy, because we know how to change the location of factories and workers and relocate them close to the core markets, but we don't know yet how to literally take a country from the periphery of Europe and put in its center.

So, Portugal is, undoubtedly, a prisoner of its own geography. But we also know from history that prisoners must develop new strategies and to learn new skills to escape their particular "prison". That's what Portuguese sailors did six centuries ago, and their success managed to turn Portugal into a core connectivity "operator" between Europe and other continents through ocean navigation routes, trading spices, textiles and other valuable goods, taking advantage of country's peculiar geographical position.

Of course, we still trade various goods, first kept in warehouses, through the use of modern ships. But nowadays, apart from goods, we also trade "data"; apart from ships, we also use "data cables"; and apart from warehouses, we also have the need for "datacenters".

As time passed, Portugal learned to explore the unique advantages given by its geographical position, which allows privileged access to both the North-South Atlantic axis - from the North Atlantic to Africa and South America -, and the East-West axis, across Europe and the Mediterranean.



The Portuguese history of landing Submarine Cables started 150 years ago with the telegraph cables, then coaxial cables, and now digital cables contributing to the connection between the Member States of the EU and from the EU in general to other parts of the world.

So, Portugal is undoubtedly very well positioned to play a key role in the new EU-Atlantic Data-Gateway Platform. Portugal has excellent conditions for landing submarine cables because there is a large variety of sandy coasts with abrupt slopes reaching deep sea quickly, which facilitates the installation and subsequent operation of submarine cables. Portugal mainland has several areas for cable landing stations, located in the axis Carcavelos-Seixal-Sesimbra-Sines, and all Azores and Madeira Islands have access to submarine cables.

In fact, being placed in the westernmost region of the European continent and through the Azores and Madeira Islands, Portugal allows the EU's entry-and-exit gates to be relocated 1500 kilometers west and 1000 kilometers south.

The terrestrial interconnections to cable landing stations are facilitated and are being improved so that there is a timely response to anticipated needs for an easy access to submarine cables, data centres and edge computing platforms. So we are in great conditions to help Europe to become the geostrategic hub of the data economy.

Following ELLALINK, there are some more international submarine cables preparing their landing in Portugal in the next 3 years: "Equiano" from Google, "2Africa" from Facebook and "Medusa" from Afr-Ix - and some others are considering it. In terms of domestic submarine cables the new CAM Ring will strengthen communications between mainland Portugal and Azores and Madeira Islands and promote the territorial cohesion by integrating the islands in international data routes.



We are also very happy with the relevant investments already committed to the installation of data centers in Portugal, namely the biggest datacenter in Europe powered with green energy that will be built in Sines in the coming years, and is known as START – Sines Transatlantic Renewable & Technology Campus.

To keep the flow of foreign investment in this area, we have to keep improving Portugal's competitiveness. That is why the government has been engaged in simplifying and making more transparent the licensing process for submarine cables crossing its Exclusive Economic Zone – namely, by concentrating all the information in one “digital portal” through which the investors and all the stakeholders can easily interact with the relevant authorities.

We believe that, with these improvements, Portugal will be able to explore more effectively its unique position and to contribute to the EU Atlantic Data-Gateway Platform.

I hope all the speakers help us to make Portugal having better conditions for locating submarine cables and installing data centres – so companies can choose our country to operate, create qualified jobs and improve technological and digital services, while boosting and diversifying the national and local economy.

Because, at the end of the day, that's why need submarine cables and data centers and green energy: to strengthen our economy and to improve the living conditions of our people.

Thank you all and good work.