

PWYLLGOR AR FATERION EWROPEAIDD**Date:** Thursday, 9th March**Time:** 9.30 am**Place:** Committee Room ?, National Assembly Building**Title: Portugal's Presidency of the European Union**

This paper has been submitted by Catherine Eva, Head of the European Commission's Representation in Wales, for the information of Committee Members.

PORTUGUESE PRESIDENCY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The **Council of the European Union** is one of the principal European institutions which exercise both legislative and decision-making powers. It is also the forum in which Member States of the European Union can assert their interests and try to reach compromises. The Council is composed of one representative at ministerial level from each Member State according to the subject discussed. For example, Ministers responsible for economic and financial affairs meet as the Economic and Financial Affairs Council.

The Council is presided over for a period of six months by each Member State in turn, in accordance with a pre-established rota. The Presidency plays a vital role in the organisation of the work of the Council throughout the period. Portugal hold the Presidency for the first half of 2000 (France for the second half) culminating in a special European Summit which will be held in Lisbon 23-24 March on Employment, Economic Reform and Social Cohesion – towards a Europe of Innovation and knowledge. The Presidency summit is scheduled for 19-20 June.

The Presidency has outlined its priorities, which will cover enlargement, economic reform and social cohesion, the common foreign and security policy, a European area of freedom, security and justice, public health and food safety.

Presidency priorities

Six priorities have been identified by the Presidency for their term of office:

1. **Enlargement** where negotiations already underway with Cyprus, Hungary, Poland, Estonia, the Czech Republic and Slovenia will continue and negotiations with Bulgaria, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Malta will commence. Portugal is committed to developing institutional relations with Turkey, in accordance with the conclusions of the Helsinki European Council, so that as a candidate State, it can join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate countries.

2. A new **Inter-Government Conference** will be launched during the Presidency, to be concluded by the end of 2000 – looking at such matters as the dimension and composition of the Commission, the voting system in the Council, etc. With a view to greater transparency and optimal decision-making, the Presidency wishes to associate more the European Parliament and civil society with the IGC, and the candidate countries. All contributions for the European Charter of Fundamental Rights will be examined.
3. **Employment**, where the special summit is to be organised in March in Lisbon. A redefinition of the employment strategy for Europe is envisaged. Special attention is to be paid to the information society and social exclusion.
4. A **Common European Policy on Security and Defence** will be examined in the light of the Helsinki decisions. Portugal, as President simultaneously of the Western European Union (WEU), will be in a particularly strong position to reinforce the coherence of the European dimension of defence.
5. A further preoccupation of the Presidency will be to develop Europe as a free, secure and just **society**, paying attention to migration matters, crime prevention and combating organised crime.
6. A final priority is **public health and food safety**, based on the White Paper launched by the Commission during 1999 and culminating in a progress report to the Feira European Council in June.

Visit the Portuguese Presidency web site on:
<http://www.portugal.eu-2000>.

CATHERINE EVA
Head of Representation