



Speech delivered by
His Excellency the President of the Portuguese Republic
at the Welcoming Ceremony in Charles University

Prague, 16 April 2010

*Honourable Chancellor,
Madam Head Professor of the Department of Luso-Brazilian Studies
Members of the Faculty Staff of Charles University
Ladies and Gentlemen*

I wish to express my thanks for the kind words addressed to me by Your Excellency, Chancellor, and by Professor Sárka Grauová. Thank you, also, for the opportunity to meet with Czech youngsters who are studying the Portuguese language.

I was greatly pleased to accept the invitation to visit Charles University, one of the oldest and more prestigious in Europe.

The History of this University fully shows the longstanding cultural relations between our countries. Records reveal that already at the end of the XVI and beginning of the XVII centuries, Bento Pinhel, a Portuguese, lectured here on canon law.

Continuing this tradition, Charles University has significantly contributed towards the dissemination of Portuguese language and culture in the Czech Republic, through both lectureship and the Centre for Portuguese Language.

This extremely successful endeavour owes a great deal to the efforts and dedication of Your Excellency, Chancellor, and of those who daily contribute towards it, starting with the Head Professor of the Department of Luso-Brazilian Studies. To all of you, I want to express my deep gratitude and encouragement for the future.

The university cooperation, of which the Lectureship in Portuguese is an example, is paralleled in Portugal through the existing Protocol between Charles University and the University of Lisbon, which resulted in the setting up of a Czech language Lectureship in the Portuguese university.

The Chancellor of the University of Lisbon and the Professor who teaches the Czech language are here as members of my Delegation. Their presence is a sign of the importance I attach to the deepening of the relations between Universities, as a major vehicle for knowledge dissemination and closer ties amongst Peoples.

With us as well is Madame the Ambassador of the Czech Republic in Portugal, whose excellent knowledge of Portuguese enables her to participate in a fast growing group which I have sponsored, that of the Portuguese speaking Ambassadors in Lisbon.

Please allow me, Chancellor, to continue my speech now in the Portuguese language, addressing, in particular, those Czech students dedicated to its study.

Prior to anything else, I want to congratulate you on your choice.

The Portuguese language is, today, spoken by more than 250 million people spread over the five Continents. It is the third European language with the largest number of speakers in the World, and the fifth, or sixth world language – depending on the criteria – which in effect testifies its international projection.

In accordance with the most recent assessments, Portuguese is also one of the idioms showing greater expansion, due to the strong demographic growth in the countries and regions where Portuguese is the communicating language and to the growing interest shown by those who use it as a foreign language. Specialists estimate that, by 2050, the number of Portuguese speakers in countries where it is the official language will rise to 335 million, a number to which will be added all those who, just as yourselves, use it as a foreign language.

The knowledge of Portuguese is an extremely relevant source of enrichment, since it eases contacts with a large group of peoples, countries and regions with much diversified geographic and cultural realities.

But the Portuguese language is equally a very important professional tool, by easing contact with countries which record significant rates of economic growth and which assert themselves as primary regional and

international actors, such as is the case of Brazil, Angola, or even Mozambique.

Speaking Portuguese is thus an access portal for new business opportunities and professional valuation. This is particularly evident, for example, in a country such as China, where recent studies have shown that Portuguese is the language which guarantees immediate professional employment for foreign language students.

But Portuguese is also a language with an ever growing presence in modern communications networks. For instance, between 2000 and 2009, the number of people using Portuguese on the Internet has increased by 864 per cent and Portuguese is already the third most used language in the Twitter social network, after English and Japanese.

The promotion and dissemination of the Portuguese language is one of the general objectives established in the Founding Charter of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries, the CPLP, an organization which many of you will already have heard of and which groups eight sovereign States, located in Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia, which have Portuguese as their official language.

In 2008, CPLP member States took the decision to work jointly for Portuguese to be accepted as one of the official languages of the United Nations.

The International Conference which was held recently in Brasília, with many participants, to consider the Future of the Portuguese Language in the Universal System, resulted in an ambitious Action Plan which will be submitted to the approval of the CPLP Heads of State, at the Luanda Summit, expected to take place next July. A Summit where Angola will assume the rotating Presidency of this Organization, succeeding Portugal.

As stated in the Action Plan, “Portuguese is already used as an official language, for working and documentation purposes – in more than twenty multilateral or regional bodies”. However, the Action Plan recognizes that its international projection demands that we should aim much further, establishing as an initial objective the introduction of Portuguese as a “documentary language” within the United Nations.

The same Plan contains a chapter exclusively dedicated to the “Strengthening of the teaching of Portuguese as a foreign language”, in which measures are foreseen that should lead to an even greater dissemination of the Portuguese language.

One of our greater poets, Fernando Pessoa, said that his Fatherland was the Portuguese language. I am thus addressing you as a “countryman in language”. And it is in this quality that I ask you to disseminate and promote the Portuguese language. I congratulate you, once again, for having chosen the option that, I am certain, will prove to be culturally and professionally correct.

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I have intended, in this address, to highlight the advantages that result from investing in the study of Portuguese language and culture. A final note to express my gratitude, once again, for the work this University has done to make it possible.

Thank you very much.