

## Swearing-In Speech

**Professor António Sampaio da Nóvoa**  
**Chancellor of the University of Lisbon**

**May 21st 2009**

I thank you for your presence here at this Aula Magna on this “great day” for the University of Lisbon. Today is the end of a hard and excessively long phase of debates and statutes. We are proud of the contribution we have given as a university towards creating dynamics for change, even when the law and habits invited us to leave almost everything as it was.

I owe a word of thanks to the members of the Consultative Council and to the several different statutory assemblies, to the members of the governing bodies of the faculties and to the chancellery team, to all those who loyally and thinking only about the common good have help us to get through a difficult period in the life of our institution.

“What makes a university are not things – it is the people” – recalled Chancellor Marcello Caetano at the inauguration of this building in 1961, adding that it stood in front of the fields of Alvalade, where once the Holy Queen Isabel had managed to avoid a civil war. The legend deserves to be true, because it holds a principle of concord that is so necessary to the life of the university.

The history that interests me is not the one that closes (that closes us) but rather the one that opens up to new possibilities. What has been done is done – it is about the future, and only the future, that I wish to talk to you. The *homo viator* rests only the time necessary, as it is in travelling that he finds himself and gives meaning to his action.

Let us journey, then! Opening up horizons. Not letting ourselves be overcome by the difficulties, but rather finding in them the strength, the creativity and the imagination that are so needed by us.

There can be only one question: What can *I* do, what can *we* do, to build a better university, a university up to the standard of its history, a university that fully fulfils its mission?

This is the question we have to answer and according to which we have to be accounted. “As life is only that which we make it, (and it is only one)” – as Alexandre O’Neil writes.

Our **first commitment** is based on a new concept of public service, of public responsibility. On the international and national level.

Internationalization is the outline that distinguishes the Programme of Action of this chancellorship. Without the amazement and admiration for great means – “A Parisian doesn’t admire Paris, he loves Paris” (Fernando Pessoa) – but with the conviction that the strong marks of thought, art and culture always go beyond national borders.

The best aspect about a university is its opening up to the world. And this opening starts straight away in the defence of the Portuguese language, of our culture. And this is also where one builds the internationalization that will deepen our ties with Africa and Brazil, with Europe and the USA, with China and India; and that will bring these countries into intellectual and human coexistence.

A cooperation that must be made between universities, certainly with the support of the official entities, but without governmentalising international agreements and partnerships.

Our projection in the world is organized starting from our presence in Lisbon: everything connects us to this city, which we wish to be more and more a university city, a city of knowledge, an Erasmus city.

To this end we have worked with the Municipal Council, with the other universities in Lisbon, with the Polytechnic Institute, who are partners in this project to re-thing the higher education network in the capital. We want the university dimension to be central to life in Lisbon, in its culture, its art, its housing, its leisure activity and in the way that people feel and live in the city. This is the aim of the major European capitals. And it is the future of Lisbon.

A **second commitment** – more than a commitment – the *raison d'être* of a university is its students. Our greatest responsibility is to a general humanistic and scientific education, a higher education that includes learning participation, cooperation and dialogue. There is no university with association activity, without artistic experiences, without sports and cultural activities.

We have the duty to provide everyone with a rich and stimulating environment. Because our university years are a period of our lives that leaves a mark. And it can't be wasted time. In each person's ambition, the project of all.

I am proud to see former students at the university in this room. They are men and women who have stood out in Portuguese society. Your reputation, your prestige, are ours. because – as the Chancellor of Harvard says – the most important obligation we have is to the future, to the quality of the higher education we are able to provide for all students.

The strategic areas form the main new element in the Statutes of the University of Lisbon. They will allow us to go beyond rigid frontiers and base academic work on the major areas of knowledge. And thus inscribe the arts, the humanities and the sciences as irreplaceable dimensions in university training. But the strategic areas will also be the embryo for the “doctorate schools”, the post-graduate course of excellence that we are starting to stimulate in collaboration with our national and international partners.

The **third commitment** is to scientific creation. We need more science at the university, and more university in science. We need to put an end to a dual logic, which has harmed the development of strong universities, centred on research.

The discourse of the “Portuguese specificity” is always used to protect interests or to justify that which has no justification. Let us adopt the usual practices throughout Europe. Without tricks. With no artifice. Universities ought to be held responsible for the totality of the means and resources that are made available to them in teaching and research.

There are certainly different profiles of research-teacher and teacher-researcher. We must cultivate the diversity of missions and vocations. And respect autonomy and capacity for initiative. But there are no universities, on the one hand, and research

institutes on the other. No. The university institution is one in its diversity and undividable in its mission.

It is thus worthwhile to recall the sixty years of the noble prize awarded to Professor Egas Moniz. His example helps us to project a science based on discovery, which lives on the frontiers of knowledge, which is organized in persistent work, which feeds off boldness and imagination. It is in the symbiosis between science and teaching that the future of the university is defined.

The modernisation of management is the **fourth commitment**. Nothing will be like before. We will respect the dynamic of the statutes that has achieved important guidelines in this matter, namely in relation to a unified system of information and the creation of a Common Resources Centre and Shared Services.

These are measures that will make management of the university more efficient, allowing those responsible for the faculties and their teachers and researchers to be released to deal with the tasks that are their own, deepening an autonomy that should be carried out fundamentally on the scientific and pedagogical level. And all of this within a strict framework of evaluation and guarantee of quality, an indispensable condition for bringing about the processes of change.

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These are the main commitments of the Programme of Action I will carry out along with the colleagues who have accepted to participate with me on the direction of the university. I thank you for your confidence and solidarity. I also intend to nominate a Vice-Chancellor for the economic and management areas, and two Pro-Chancellors who will bring the experience of students and non-teaching staff to the governing of the university, dealing with “student issues” in one case and “common resources centre” in the other.

Needless to say, my thanks to the chancellery team is extensive; to the Senate, to the new Deans and governing bodies of the faculties, to all members of the university community that in one way or another are accepting institutional responsibilities in this new phase in the life of the university.

It is thanks to your work, to your dedication and competence, that it will be possible to reinforce the presence of the University of Lisbon in Portuguese society and in the field of European higher education, in the city of Lisbon and in international science.

A special word for the General Council, which elected me after an exemplary process and which has now unanimously approved my **Plan of Action for the 2009|2013 Four-Year Period**. I know that I can count on your support and your dedication to the university cause. In the words that were addressed to me today by the President of the General Council, Dr. Henrique Granadeiro, I find the strength and encouragement to begin a “new life”, the new life that we need so much at the University of Lisbon.

What can I do, what can we do in order to make a better university? This is the question that I have tried to answer for you, for the Senior Professor, for the Chancellors who came before me on this mission (and who have always distinguished me with friendly words and advice).

We know that our **future present** will not be easy. But it is in the difficult moments that the best of each of us emerges, that the best of societies emerges. We cannot be naive. But denouncing illusions does not mean renouncing hope.

“Hope breaks out in my chest | So lucid, so alive, and so blessed” – so stated the late António Botto, who died fifty years ago.

The country can count on the University of Lisbon. On its vivaciousness. On the power of its ideas, hoping that they might influence the ideas of the powers that be. On freedom and independence, with a critical spirit, which is the best thing we have to give Portuguese society at a time when everything needs to be rethought and reinvented.

The country knows that the University of Lisbon fully accepts its public responsibilities. To prove this, there is the **UL 2009 –Social Awareness** programme

that we have just launched this week and in which we are asking for everyone's collaboration.

**“What makes a university are not things – it is the people”.**

We want to convoke the citizens to a world that is economically more just, politically more democratic and ecologically more sustainable (Frei Betto). Portugal needs strong and credible institutions that will help the country to think and to open up paths that seem blocked today.

I look at the future with confidence. I have no certainties. *“Those who are not confused run the risk of being wrong, worse, of fooling themselves”* (Pedro Paixão). But I have convictions. And above all I have the determination of someone who doesn't want to waste any more time.

The universities need a profound change. But that change will only take place, consistently, if the institutions are reinforced in their autonomy, in their capacity for transformation, in their leadership. Because without strong and innovating universities Portugal has no future.

Here you have me, my heart and body fully at the service of the University.

Let us do it ...