

Notes

FIRST OBSERVARE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: International trends and Portugal's position

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The first International Conference of OBSERVARE, the International Relations Research Unit of *Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa* (UAL) was its greatest public scientific event to date. It was held on 16-18 November 2011 at the University headquarters and at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

The Conference was an important occasion for the confluence of Portuguese and foreign experts in International Relations, and focused on the topic "International Trends and Portugal's position. In addition to researchers from OBSERVARE and lecturers from UAL, the event was attended by several researchers from other universities, particularly those with which a partnership was agreed to that effect: The Carolina Foundation in Madrid, NOREF from Oslo, NICPRI from the University of Minho, IPRI from *Universidade Nova de Lisboa* (New University of Lisbon), *Instituto de Estudos Superiores Militares* (Institute for Higher Military Studies), *Instituto de Defesa Nacional* (National Defence Institute), *Instituto de Estudos Estratégicos Internacionais* (Institute of International Strategic Studies), *Rede Portuguesa de Estudos de Segurança* (Portuguese Network for Security Studies), and *Observatório Género e Violência Armada* (Gender and Armed Violence Observatory) of CES, of the University of Coimbra.

As Conference Coordinator, I made the opening and closing speeches. Both are recorded here, notwithstanding the fact that the complete texts can be accessed at <http://observare.ual.pt>.

Opening session (17 November 2011)

We meet at this Conference to discuss international trends and Portugal's position: this is a title that speaks for itself and does not require much explanation or additional justification. It is an initiative of



OBSERVARE, the International Relations Research Unit of *Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa*, in the tradition of the Observatory for External Relations, a study centre created in the distant year of 1996.

At the beginning of last year, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in post gave an important interview to a Lisbon newspaper, where he reflected on the situation of Portugal in the course of changes underway in the world. He recalled that Portuguese diplomacy had long centred on colonial issues, followed by a phase focused on Europe. He wondered whether this cycle was coming to an end, and if Portugal should rethink its position with regard to lusophone areas, the Americas, the Mediterranean, the new Asian powers, and so forth. Motivated by the stimulus of his point of view, we started research around the topic, trying to identify new international trends and alternatives for Portugal's foreign policy. The recent publication of our yearbook JANUS 2011-12 rightly notes the results of this study, for which reason we have distributed it to all conference delegates, as our meeting is a corollary of that research. The present conference is thus the culmination of a scientific path that aims to deepen our understanding of the main trends affecting the world today and, in addition, of the implications they have for a country like Portugal.

As we start this conference, I would like to first thank the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, which has put this excellent venue at our disposal, in the person of its Chairman of the Board of Directors. Dr. Rui Vilar has given us the honour of opening this session, and every time we listen to him, we are always surprised: we expected a speech typical of these occasions, and, instead, he offered us his deep and timely reflection on the topics that bring us here.

We extend our thanks to the other sponsors: *Banco Santander*, the Luso-American Foundation, the Orient Foundation, *EPAL – Empresa Portuguesa das Águas Livres* (Portuguese Water Company) –, *SPA – Sociedade Portuguesa de Autores* (Portuguese Authors Society) –, *Fundación* Carolina of Madrid, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, and particularly NOREF – Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center – whose collaboration must be highlighted. I take the opportunity to give a special welcome to the Ambassadors of Germany and Norway.

This event occurs at a particular gratifying occasion for us, as it closes down the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of *Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa*, which was set up by *Cooperativa de Ensino Universitário - C.E.U.* Hence a special greeting to the Rector of the University, to the Board of C.E.U., to all fellow lecturers and students of UAL, a university that aspires to be a school characterized by consistency and diversity and which is now recognized as a solid and dynamic institution.

This is an international conference, not just due to the issues it addresses, but also due to those taking part in it. I must underline the importance of foreign participation and the presence of delegates from Brazil, the U.S.A., Argentina, Spain, Germany, Uruguay, Angola, Cape Verde, and possibly from other countries. A special thanks too to our guest speakers, some of whom have travelled all the way from the U.S.A., others from Scandinavia and Central Europe. We are very much looking forward to benefitting from their knowledge, as they are renowned experts in the areas they will be addressing here.

Still, more than being international, this conference is, above all, an inter-university event. The content that will be presented over the next days is the result of the work



conducted by OBSERVARE researchers, and, particularly, of the projects resulting from the multiple partnerships with other higher education or research institutions. I have already mentioned NOREF and *Fundación Carolina*, and now I add the centres from the Universities of Coimbra, Minho, Nova, the National Defence Institute, the Institute for Higher Military Studies, and the Institute of International Strategic Studies, whose involvement is truly decisive for the success of this event. However, beyond these more formal partnerships, the truth is that the authors of the scientific papers that will be presented, an impressive number of eighty, come from no less than sixteen Portuguese universities, in addition to eight research centres or higher institutes, eight foreign universities or institutions, just to mention the ones presenting papers. To this we should add the considerable number of delegates.

This conference favours a multidimensional approach to international relations and world politics. It departs from the reductive classical view and from the concept that limits international life to inter-state relations, either through diplomacy or through war, and to arm-wrestling between the dominant powers. In contrast to this view, we favour the multiplicity of interpretations, and consider the various fields involved, studying the political, strategic, economic, demographic, cultural, social, environmental, and communication aspects. It is undeniable that most papers focus on the fields of geopolitics and security, and there are fewer papers on environmental, social, and, above all, economic issues. This shows the road ahead for International Relations Studies in order to fully incorporate these other areas.

This conference also emphasizes the importance of an interdisciplinary approach. The areas we are addressing here take input from distinct fields of knowledge, such as political science, economics, history, sociology, and law. However, such a variety of contents in no way affects our strong belief that international relations is an area of science in itself, which is specific and different from other scientific areas, which is not without consequences for the institutional framework of the study cycles in this field. Our explicit objective is to affirm that the study of international relations is, I repeat, a specific field in itself, an area that is increasingly consolidated in Portuguese university communities and which is increasingly becoming independent of other branches of knowledge, including political science.

This conference is intentionally open to theoretical and ideological pluralism, since autonomous and critical thinking is the very condition for validating our practice of doing science. Indeed, what unites us is the will that our gathering together is an occasion for the advancement of knowledge, so that we may have the most refined intellectual tools to better interpret our world.

Ultimately, we would like this conference to be an act of human density and positive interaction among us, which is far from being indifferent for accessing knowledge. We know the value of human relationships and their significance for our own reflection process. The pace of our work seeks to respond to that belief, hence the decision to allow time for open debate, and also for those moments of conviviality, breaks, meals, hallway talks, and bilateral meetings...

The conference folder contains a significant number of supporting documents, with emphasis on the book of abstracts and the small guide detailing activity over the next days. I hope you will find them useful and that they contribute to the success of this event. The texts have been carefully prepared, as well as all the organizational aspects.



Therefore, we must thank the Conference Organizing Committee and all those who collaborated with us on this occasion, particularly the speakers and those who prepared papers for presentation, our guests, and all participants.

Closing session (18 November 2011)

Throughout this First OBSERVARE International Conference, we listened to seven major conferences in plenary and no less than eighty presentations in four sessions. Despite the time constraints, our debates were long and fruitful. We have reasons to believe that we achieved our goal of advancing scientific knowledge in the area of International Relations. We went through various knowledge paths believing in the fertile nature of interdisciplinarity and in the benefit of pluralism of paradigms and approaches. Perhaps we have not gone as far as we desired in developing alternative thinking, perhaps more in line with the changes that are taking place under our very eyes, and with the new forms of analysis that the current situation seems to impose. However, that is a time consuming task and we know we have to persevere.

In any case, at the end of three days of work, we are in a position to consider the subject of our discussions and to jot down some thoughts which have been raised.

The conference followed an easily identifiable script. We discussed the major issues of the day, ranging from the inflexions in the globalization process to the uncertainties of social and economic evolution, including the emergence of new powers and the "technology" of conflict resolution. And, wherever possible, we have taken into account Portugal's viewpoint as to its position in the international arena. In turn, the content of our work in the sections followed the three topics addressed by the reflection subgroups: geopolitics and security; economy and ecology; transnational social issues.

The reference to the three major levels that coexist and intersect in the international system is implicit in this triangle. Briefly, let us say that it refers to three levels; the inter-state system, the world economy, and the diversity of identities and cultures. Or, to use an even briefer formula, we find the well-known trilogy state/market/society. Political powers, production and distribution activities, peoples in their uniqueness and in their openness.

These three levels overlap and interact with each other. The first, the inter-state system, is the area of formal sovereignty and of the international community, and its players are the forms of political organization which we call states and multilateral entities. The second, that we have designated world- economy in the line of Braudel, is the space that tends to be identified with the world economy in the form of market economy or capitalism. The third level, which is cultural, is the ground where languages, religions, traditions, and values delimit social realities, but also where societies are crossed by multiple interactions. And, as we well know, interdependence is currently the hallmark of these multiple processes.

Large-scale turmoil can be found within the sphere of the inter-state system, and we are witnessing a tectonic plate movement where the new powers are asserting themselves, and where the epicentres seem to shift. Being as it is at the mercy of demographic imbalances, environmental threats, or of new strategic data, the international situation has become unclear and of an uncertain evolution. However, within this unpredictability, some constants have been expressed, such as the blurring of borders as delimitation lines, and the worrying fact with regard to a certain



evaporation of power as a result of the erosion of the centres of political power, hamstrung by other little or not at all controlled non-elected powers, which introduce factors of crisis in the independence of sovereign nations and perhaps even more so in the democratic legitimacy of implemented policies.

Viewed from our European periphery, we are fully aware of the reconfigurations that are underway in this area. The emptying of European treaties coexists with the assertiveness of the Franco-German condominium, or even the mere German hegemony, and the corresponding uncertainty about the future of the Union. By its side stands another condominium agreed in 2010, of a political-military type, formed by the British and the French. It foreshadows the possible demise of NATO or at least the slowing down of U.S. protection, undermines the so-called European Security and Defence Policy and confirms France and the United Kingdom as expeditionary powers ready to undertake future military operations, like their recent intervention in Libya. In the eastern Mediterranean, the attraction to the Turkish model prevails, along with the spread of moderate Islamism, predicting a meaningful future for the Muslim Brotherhood and its various ramifications. And Israel's isolation, now compounded by the inflections of post-Mubarak Egypt and of Erdogan's Turkey, and by the debate on the recognition of the Palestinian State, could result in increased temptation to reach Iran's nuclear facilities, an act that, if confirmed, would threaten global security.

These political and strategic developments, briefly exemplified here, occur at an historical moment when military power faces a persistent difficulty in imposing the political will of its holders, and perhaps this accounts for the rarity of war. In this light, the objective of the zero option on nuclear weapons proclaimed by the U.S. President deserves to be followed with interest. It is a goal that probably will not serve our generation but which should not be erased from our minds. These facts seem to make the ambition to abolish the use of armed violence in international relations a little less utopian.

If disturbances of this kind occur in the inter-state system, others, not smaller in size, affect the globalized world-economy. The societies that until recently were advanced capitalism ones are going through a particularly difficult phase. After the miracle, we witness stagnation in Japan, one of the four economies which grew the least in the first decade of this century, along with Haiti, Italy and Portugal. It is worth recalling the critical situation the Eurozone is facing, particularly in the peripheries of the European Union, which are the target of the offensive of large international banks. Even the U.S. economy shows many worrying signs, starting with the excessive concentration of wealth in one percent of the most powerful at the expense of the distributive policies that generate broad prosperity. One would say that end of the industrial society as we have known it for over a century brings with it the traumatic reduction of the working classes and now the sudden impoverishment of the middle classes in areas where economic growth does not mean job creation, and where the multitude of the jobless reaches alarming proportions.

All this is happening at a time when the financial system has become autonomous and appears to fly over the reality as a non-material form, disconnected from the real economy, in the hands of speculative priorities, inhibiting the leeway of the centres of political decision. Concomitantly, an aggressive market economy burst into new



latitudes, leaving open the great question of development sustainability and rendering unknown the question concerning the depletion of the earth's resources.

These political-strategic disorders and economic-environmental disturbances go hand in hand with social and cultural instabilities. Sociologists have diagnosed the decay of our societies, largely caused by the dematerialization of the economy and by the hegemony of the financial sector. This has led to the dismantling of collective life institutions, families, political parties, trade unions, democratic representation, and of the classic social movements and organizational formations they have segregated over decades. And the cultural entities of people now live attracted by opposite forces: on one side lies the standardization of values and lifestyles, on the other stand the assertions of identity, often exacerbated, if not violent.

We, the scholars of international relations, thus face a deeply troubled situation at the three levels of politics, economy and social culture. The raw material of our study, the international configuration in its various forms, has acquired a high profile, is on all types of media, and is now perceived by public opinion. However, understanding it has become difficult and subject to many distortions. This means that our scientific work faces a major responsibility. In our role of interpreting international affairs, we know that we must redouble our rigour and critical stance.

We have had to create new mental categories to address the unforeseen events that we have had to deal with. We came up with different words, sometimes sophisticated ones, to describe the innovations that the current situation imposes on us. We talk, for instance, of postnational constellation, cosmocracy, biopolitics, planetary macroethics, or global governance, in our attempts, not always successful, to better interpret the present state of affairs.

Along the way, we have discovered new and unsuspected contradictions that run through present times. We talk of globalization and of its opposite, which is fragmentation, and even of its sub-product, which is exclusion: a more globalized world has been the cause of large-scale exclusion. We talk of the aforementioned contrast between the financial system and real economy, with the disruptive consequences we are familiar with. We see the contradiction between a truly exorbitant over-armament and the frequent failure of the use of violence in the relations among peoples and within countries. We have the feeling that sometimes the old logic of Clausewitz is inverted and that politics seems to be the continuation of war by other means. And as we are so used to reflect about international relations from the standpoint of power, of its games and traps, we are caught by surprise when we see peoples stand up and make history with their own hands, like in the "Arab Spring", and perhaps also in Wall Street or in *Puerta del Sol*.

In the exercise of our profession, in addition to being social scientists and scholars of the internationalization of collective processes, we are also cosmopolitan citizens. As such, we are often constrained between the roar of the crowds and the pride of the powerful, knowing that we are not allowed to remain insensitive to this antagonism. We almost feel the need for a new world social contract where we would impose upon ourselves the undeniable respect for human rights, the correction of imbalances in the distribution of wealth for the sake of a fairer planet, the elimination of violence in international relations, the assurance of a sustainable development respecting the



ecosystem, a relationship of parity and partnership between men and women, and the responsible use of scientific and technological innovation.

All the wealth of the contents of this conference cannot finish with the end of this final session. The product of our studies has to stay behind, like a depository of knowledge available to all who wish to access it. We hope you will send us your texts in their final version so that we can publish the Conference Proceedings, preferably in English and Portuguese. The proceedings will record the most important part of what we brought here, and will showcase the inter-university nature of the initiative. We cannot but praise the openness shown by the various academic communities in this joint work, continuing the collaboration we have become accustomed to, in the form of the joint organization of research projects, scientific meetings, roundtables, and workshops, making this area of International Relations a particularly dynamic one.

To conclude, I would like to once more express my thanks to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation for the opportunity to use these excellent facilities, as well as to the other sponsors who helped this conference to come into being. Special thanks are due to the tireless organizing committee, as well as to the interpreters who provided the simultaneous translation. We thank our foreign guests for the wealth of knowledge they have shared with us, as well as the speakers, and all delegates in general. I leave you with a promise: we will meet again!

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