

**"Portugal and the World  
at the Dawn of 2011"  
Report of a Listening Post  
held in January**



**Encouraging The Reflective Citizen**

**Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES**

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

**Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. We have identified the following themes:

- a. Economic crisis: Is it Real or a Fantasy?
- b. Insecurity as a consequence of the decision centres being felt as further from individuals than before
- c. Economic crisis felt as an opportunity or as having a paralysing and blocking effect
- d. Denial of reality
- e. Fear of death and fear of not surviving; fear of what we have to do to survive, the sacrifices we need to make
- f. Being at a crossroad between three 'empires' China, USA and Europe
- g. Loss of the idea of nations
- h. Are internal resources enough in a country without resources?
- i. Intolerance to death in society

**Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION**

In this part of the Listening Post members were working with the information resulting from Parts One and Two, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here the members were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world. Their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

In the Listening Post, the first theme to appear was regarding Portuguese present economic crisis, which seemed the inevitable the general worry in Portuguese society at the moment. During the listening post the topic of the global economic crisis and its Portuguese side seemed to be quite important as a topic, and most part of the discussion revolved around it. Some people expressed on this topic the idea that the crisis might also be seen as an opportunity, for some people the economic crisis works as a turning point and see other opportunities, while others just seem to 'crumble down' and get paralyzed. There was also a reference to the fact that the crisis might have existed for a long time before, but it just seems that it had a psychological effect whereby it is all over the media and everyone speaks about it currently in Portugal.

Another important issue that was referred to related to the fact that China was buying Portugal's external debt. A participant mentioned that this caused a strange feeling since when the Belgians and French were buying it we still felt like European, but now there seems to be a feeling that 'they' (China) are stealing our identity. Which was argued, leads to a confusion between 'having' and 'being'.

The participants also mentioned a general feeling in the population that we lack the basis to understand what the crisis is about and we are all scared with a problem that we do not even know if it is real or not. Some participants made an analogy with the swine flu where everyone was also very scared, with spent a lot of money and it turned out to be a flop. There was feeling that this sounded like mixed messages where on the one hand there is a discourse that says the crisis is an exaggerated alarm and at the same time that it might be very real. We get lost and we do not know where reality lays.

There was also a general discussion that after periods of wealth follows cycles of crisis that happened in various places and in various times. This also led the discussion to focus on what sort of crisis were we really speaking about? Societal, Consumerism, etc.?

A further discussion concerned health care and the fear of dying. The health services are higher and higher in terms of cost and it seems that every time we do more to prevent death, which is seen as a failure. It seems there is a greater intolerance to the idea of death and that if one has a sick child and his cure costs millions we, as a society, consider it immoral that for financial reasons the health services do not save him/her. Maybe, one argued, a good social value can lead to a damaging economic crisis.

### **Hypothesis 1**

In a certain way the loss of external structures which used to support us, and simultaneously the loss of our internal structures leaves us far more alone in the face of uncertainty. This uncertainty increases the sensation of unknown and crisis.

### **Hypothesis 2**

There is a problem of identity that appears as a reflection the way we see ourselves as Portuguese and European. There is a feeling that the power balance is rapidly changing and that before we can adjust to Europe as a reference we already have to adjust to other cultures. We constantly have to adjust which is contributing for a general feeling of being lost and always distant from the countries that seem to have impact and power over our country. But if we cannot relate and hold ourselves as a country, and we cannot relate to the notion of Europeans, how are we going to relate to China?

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