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Homage of the current Portuguese Judge at the Court of Justice of the European Union

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It is my great pleasure to join this Colloquium whereby the University of Minho, through its Law School and CEDU (Centre of Studies in European Union Law), and on the initiative of Professor Alessandra Silveira, pays tribute to Judge José Narciso da Cunha Rodrigues. A well-deserved honour!

The Portuguese tend at times to overlook, or to minimize, the remarkable services that some of them among the best have rendered to the common interest. Cunha Rodrigues has developed an outstanding career in the service of his country and of the European judiciary. He has accomplished the most significant and delicate missions with independence, sense of balance and commitment to public service.

Fortunately, he will continue to carry out, for many good years, prominent functions within the European judiciary – now in the sports arena!

Cunha Rodrigues put his stamp on the case law of the Court of Justice in areas which are crucial today to Europe's social cohesion, to the protection of fundamental rights in an Union of Law, and to the feeling of being an European citizen belonging to one and the same community, without which it would hardly be possible to refer to integration, and even less to an Union.

I have in mind, in particular, the areas which have very appropriately been chosen as core subjects of discussion in this Colloquium: European citizenship and fundamental rights, judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters and the completion of the internal market. As way of background, it ought to be pointed out the key aim of both the Treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam towards the creation of an area of freedom, security and justice, within which all Europeans may freely move, without suffering discrimination, confident of being protected against external and internal threats that could undermine the peaceful understanding and cooperation amongst them all.

Throughout the Colloquium, references will most certainly be made to the case law of the Court of Justice in the aforementioned areas and to the way Cunha Rodrigues has helped to shape it during the 12 years he held office as a member of that Court. I am proud to have him as my predecessor in the exercise of these functions. I am addressing you from his former office. He kept it extremely well organized, with absolutely no backlog, which very much facilitated the prompt entry into functions of my team (which for the most part is his previous team). For that, I am grateful to him.

The challenges which the European judiciary currently faces stand at the same level, and mirror, the tremendous obstacles which a Europe in economic decline is struggling with: loss of global influence, loosening of solidarity links, and desperately searching for new standards of institutional organisation which may help to strengthen the common currency whilst avoiding some of the fatal errors that have been made in the past!

Notwithstanding, it is widely recognised that the European judiciary proved to be up to the challenges it has to face. It has never emerged as a blockage or an unjust cost for society; on the contrary, it has always taken the initiative to reform both its structures and working methods and has always promoted a dynamic and progressive application of the law, with the view to meeting the goals set forth by the Treaties and aiming at reinforcing a Union of Law.

I congratulate the organisers of this Colloquium for the choice of its general topic! That is precisely what distinguishes the European venture from other projects of a purely economic or commercial integration!

With my wishes of a fruitful and stimulating Colloquium, I take this opportunity to join you in the celebration of the 20th anniversary of, if I may, our Law School of my city of Braga.

To my friend and colleague Judge Cunha Rodrigues I address my sincere tribute for his culture, intelligence and method, which he put at the service of the great causes of Justice, and wish him a long career, good health and good humour and a new and accrued availability for his family and friends.