



STOPOVEREUROPE.EU

26. Februar 2020

MEP Maria da Graça Carvalho about Brexit,
the future of the European Union and the
image of the EU in Portugal



1) Please introduce yourself. What are your main objectives in your work as an MEP?

I trained and worked as an engineer, becoming full professor at the University of Lisbon in the fields of Energy, Environment, Climate Change and Sustainable Development. This background always influenced my priorities as a politician. Before returning to the European Parliament, I was senior advisor to the Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, Carlos Moedas, from November 2014 to December 2015. Previously, as mentioned, I was a member of the European Parliament, from July 2009 to May 2014. In that capacity, I was one of the rapporteurs of Horizon 2020. I was also Principal Adviser to President Barroso in the fields of Science, Higher Education, Innovation, Research Policy, Energy, Environment and Climate Change from 2006 to 2009. Finally, I served as Minister of Science and Higher Education of the XV Constitutional Government of Portugal and Minister of Science, Innovation and Higher Education of the XVI Constitutional Government.

I am currently a full member and EPP deputy coordinator at ITRE committee, where I am responsible for a report on the Strategic Agenda for the European Institute of Technology (EIT). I am also a substitute member at IMCO and FEMM committees, where I am working on a report about the engagement of women in Digital Economy and an opinion on the use of Artificial Intelligence in Education and Culture, also with a focus on the role of women. I have identified five major priorities for this term in the European Parliament: Science and Innovation, Energy and Climate, Digitization, Consumer Rights and Women's Rights.

2) Could you give us an insight into the political atmosphere towards the EU in your country (political and public opinion)?

The two major political parties in Portugal - PSD and PS - are very euro friendly, as is the center right CDS party. Among them, they represent nearly 70% of the electorate. The majority of the Portuguese population also has a positive opinion about the European Union and does not believe that the country would have a better future outside the union. The financial crisis years were very challenging for the population but they did not result in feelings of resentment towards the EU. However, there is also a certain lack of interest about European issues and institutions, reflecting in low participation levels in the last elections for the European Parliament.

3) BREXIT is going to have a crucial impact on the EU. In your opinion, how should the future relationship between the EU and the UK look like?

The UK was a very important member of the European Union, not only for the role it played in the balance of powers within the Union but also as one of its main drivers of development. This was particularly true in regards to Science and Innovation. The future relationship should reflect this importance.

There is always a price to pay, and we must not fool ourselves into believing that everything will remain the same. When you leave the EU, you are not just getting away from the obligations you had as a member: you are also forfeiting many of the rights that came with it. Nevertheless, a strong, close, relationship will be of mutual interest.

4) What do you think are the main challenges and opportunities for the EU in the next 12 months, apart from BREXIT consequences?

The European Green Deal is both our major challenge and opportunity. The next twelve months will tell us a lot about our chances of meeting the goals set forth by the European Commission. It will be a long and difficult journey but I am confident that we will not fail, because everyone knows that our future on this planet is at stake. We know we have to change many things if we are to achieve our CO2 emissions goals, namely our dependence on fossil fuels. I believe that solutions will come from science and innovation, not just through the increased use of known green energy technologies but also from disruptive innovation. We need new, better solutions, if we want to achieve our climate goals while protecting our way of life and the leadership and competitiveness of our Industry.