

President Barroso,
Antonio and Maria-Elisa Vasconcelos,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me begin by saying what a great honour it is to have been invited to say a few words here today about Diogo Vasconcelos, my friend and colleague.

“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.” So wrote the seventeenth century English poet, John Donne. I am sure that Diogo would have concurred with this sentiment. He had an astounding capacity for building bridges and for creating international networks.

What immediately struck me about Diogo when I first met him was his boundless enthusiasm,

his untiring optimism and his constant drive to find ways of making life better. He was directly involved in many of the projects that I was associated with after first coming to Brussels in 2005 when I started working in my capacity as an adviser to President Barroso.

Of the many ideas that influenced me, Diogo came to persuade me of the real advantages of social innovation at a time when no-one else was speaking of this concept. We organised a conference, which President Barroso attended, around this theme. The idea snowballed and culminated in the incorporation of social innovation principles into many EU policies and programmes.

Diogo's brain was constantly churning with new ideas. Most recently, based in London, he would think nothing of hopping across the channel

to bounce ideas off me here in Brussels during an animated and highly stimulating dinner.

Diogo had a wonderful ability to see the bright side of things and to bring out the best in people. You finished a conversation with Diogo with an optimistic sense that there was real progress to be made in the world and that you – personally – could actually make a difference.

President Barroso has already touched on Diogo's many roles. To this already lengthy list, I should like to mention his central role in the development of SIX. SIX is the social innovation exchange whose Louise Pulford has prepared the brief homage to Diogo that we shall shortly be watching.

The short video concentrates on Diogo's role in the development of the HIRIKO electric car. The car is testimony to his ability to transform ideas into actions, to generate the momentum that would take an idea from its first germination to a tangible but also mould-breaking existence of its own.

On the Eighth of July 2011, Diogo Vasconcelos unexpectedly left us. As John Donne went on to say in his memorable meditation: “any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind.” Our loss is also a loss for all those that benefited from Diogo' enormous energy and generosity. I – along with his innumerable friends – am filled with deep sorrow at his untimely loss.

Could I now invite you to watch the short video in homage to Diogo.