Medford, June 26th 2013

Subject: Statement request for “No Objection” J-1 Waiver

Dear Members of the Executive Committee of Fulbright Portugal,

In 2005 I was awarded a Fulbright-FLAD scholarship for Doctoral Studies in the United States for the academic year 2006-2007. Fulbright Portugal worked with me on my applications and was instrumental in my acceptance in two renowned PhD programs in Biological Sciences. I ended up selecting the University of Rhode Island, where I started my PhD program in August 2006. Fulbright Portugal contributed monetarily to my tuition, fees and living expenses by awarding me 10,000 USD for the academic year of 2006-2007 and 10,000 USD for the AY of 2007-2008. In 2007 I was also awarded the PhD scholarship from the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), which financed the rest of my PhD program. In August 2011 I successfully concluded my PhD in August 2011 on the “Functional morphology of shark dorsal fins during steady swimming and maneuvering”, which received the award for best dissertation at the University of Rhode Island in the STEM field in 2011.

After concluding my PhD, I looked for opportunities in Portugal and around Europe. Since I did not find any openings in Portugal, I contacted a former Professor at the University of Lisbon. Prof. Paulo Fonseca showed interest in my new lines of work and we drafted a project proposal to submit to FCT for funding on the multimodal integration of sensory information in the Lusitanian toadfish. At the same time I applied for a FCT postdoctoral fellowship with the same project. The project was praised by the international evaluation committee but unfortunately it was not funded, even after an appeal. Meanwhile my postdoctoral fellowship from FCT was awarded but I was informed I wouldn’t be able to start until January 2012. In addition, Prof. Paulo Fonseca told me that without the funding of the project proposal, he had no funds available for the project. I decided instead to take the other offer I had, a visiting postdoctoral fellowship from FWO (Flanders Foundation of Research) to spend a year at Ghent University. There I was to lend my expertise in kinematics to a project on seahorse tail prehension, as a prospective bioinspired design. This visiting fellow position also allowed me to keep my permanent residence in Portugal during that year in Belgium.

Meanwhile, I applied to various positions in Portugal, including a Assistant Professor position at University of Azores, where my application was rejected on the basis that I did not have experience as a lecture course coordinator. I also applied to a postdoctoral position at the Department of Fisheries at the University of Azores (DOP Açores), where I was selected for an interview and accepted. However the funding was only available for the same time I had the fellowship in Belgium (January to September 2012) and since I had already started in Belgium (the interview took place in December) I decided against interrupting my fellowship.

In 2012 we resubmitted the project proposal to FCT on the Lusitanian toadfish, which despite excellent reviews, was again not funded. I found myself then in a tough situation and I ended up accepting a postdoctoral position at Tufts University, which I started on October 28 2012. At Tufts I have been working on the impact of turbines in fish swimming. Around the time I moved back to the United States, I started applying to tenure-track positions in Europe, Canada and the United States and ended up getting an interview at Eastern Illinois University. In April of 2013 they offered me a position and upon review of my credentials and my previous DS-2019 forms they informed me that the University was willing to sponsor my H1B without at J-1 waiver. I am now aware that this was a mistake on their part and that a J-1 waiver is required in my case since I did not complete two years of stay in Portugal after the end of my PhD. I have consulted with an immigration attorney that is helping with the submission of a “No Objection” J-1 waiver as well as a “Interest of a US Organization” J-1 waiver. Meanwhile Eastern Illinois University is working to transfer my current J-1 visa as a temporary solution. The University has already order equipment for my laboratory in the amount of 65,000 USD and will work with my attorney to find the best solution.

I would like to request Fulbright Portugal (as I have also requested to FCT) a statement of no objection of my permanency in the United States. I would like to point out my commitment to strengthen the relationships between Portugal and the United States and to contribute to the scientific and economy advance of Portugal without the need for my physical presence.

In 2008, I became a member of the Portuguese American Postgraduate Society and founded the Rhode Island chapter. That same year I started working with the executive committee to prepare the X PAPS Forum in Los Angeles, where Prof. António Damásio and the Artist Joana Vasconcelos were among our speakers. That same year I was elected as President which gave me the opportunity to further strengthen the relationships with the Portuguese Embassy in Washington, with PALCUS, PARSUK and with strategic partners in Portugal, namely Leadership and Beta-i. In 2010, we hosted the XI PAPS Forum in collaboration with the program Carnegie-Mellon University – Portugal in Pittsburg, marked by the presence of the then Portuguese Minister for Science and Technology Prof. Mariano Gago. In the following year I kept my ties with PAPS as the President of the General Assembly and helped the new executive committees learning the ropes of the Society. I still participate in the local and regional activities and the forums whenever possible and I have also helped the formation of the two sister societies PARSUK in the UK and AGRAFr in France. I also strive to maintain contact and collaborations with researchers in Portugal, as evidenced by invited presentations at the University of Lisbon and joint publications.

As a Professor at Eastern Illinois University (EIU), I hope to continue to collaborate with Portuguese institutions, namely with the Oceanography Institute at the University of Lisbon with projects in the area of climate change (Dr. Catarina Vinagre) and with CIMAR in University of Porto with projects on metabolic activity of fishes (Dr. Jon Svendsen and Dr. Jonathan Wilson). I have also already discussed with my Department Chair the possibility of establishing a summer program between EIU and a Portuguese University to cater to students that want to increase their knowledge of marine ecosystems.

In light of my statements, I hope you can approve my request and I thank you in advance for your time and attention. I am available to provide additional documents to support my statements upon request.

Sincerely,

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