

In Portugal, absolute majorities are also falling

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Overnight, following an investigation by the Public Prosecutor's Office into suspected corruption, Prime Minister António Costa of the PS resigned. Portugal goes to the polls on 10 March 2024.



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Portugal woke up on 7 November to the news that searches were underway in 42 locations, including several ministries and the office of the prime minister, António Costa. The operation was aimed at clarifying suspicions of favouritism towards private individuals concerning the installation of two lithium mines in the north of the country, a computer data centre and a “green” hydrogen project, both in Sines, in the south of the country.

RESIGNATION OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND NEW ELECTIONS

After a bewildering morning, five people, including the prime minister's chief of staff and a businessman considered to be his “best friend”, were arrested; the infrastructure minister, João Galamba, was named as the accused. In the afternoon, police found €75,800 in cash hidden in the office of the Prime Minister's First Secretary. At the same time, the Public Prosecutor's Office announced that António Costa was the subject of an independent investigation on suspicion of having acted to facilitate procedures relating to lithium mines and green hydrogen plants.

Earlier this afternoon, the Prime Minister resigned, which was accepted by the President of the Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa.

This puts an unexpected end to a government that appeared to be solid, given that the Socialist Party alone has a majority of deputies in the Assembly of the Republic. António Costa has resigned after almost eight years as Prime Minister.

On accepting his resignation, the President of the Republic had two options: either he asked the SP to appoint another Prime Minister, or he dissolved the Assembly of the Republic and called early elections. The latter option was chosen by Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, much to the dismay of the PS, which had proposed Mário Centeno, President of the Bank of Portugal and former President of the Eurogroup, as Costa's successor.

PROMISCUITY BETWEEN LEADERS AND BUSINESS

However, the Public Prosecutor's investigation is notable for its lack of transparency. As is unfortunately customary, the only source of information on the process is press articles based on leaks.

The Left Bloc, demanding clarification from the Attorney General of the Republic on the extent and nature of the suspicions motivating the investigation into António Costa, considers that, whatever the conclusions presented, the facts revealed so far are another example of the ease and speed with which the most influential interests - treated as "national interest" - are satisfied and the slowness and restraint with which the social needs of the majority are met. This abysmal difference reflects the promiscuity between politics and business.

The Bloc never tires of denouncing the career path of people like Lacerda Machado (the "best friend" that Costa involved as an external consultant in several government processes), who willingly move from public positions to private consultancies that hire them because of their good connections in the sphere of government. The Bloc has given no respite to the eternal followers of these revolving doors.

"This is not the Left", says Mariana Mortágua, coordinator of the Bloc. "There is a trustworthy Left that has always fought against the promiscuity between politics and business. A left that has also fought against the increasing budget cuts imposed by the government that are destroying the National Health Service, against the private benefits policy that has created the biggest housing crisis in memory in the country. This left will fight to strengthen itself in the elections on 10 March.

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