

Portugal Parliamentary Elections: The loss of the rightwing majority and the rise of the Left Bloc

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The Portuguese right wing coalition has lost its absolute majority in parliament, but remains the main political force in Sunday's election. The Left Bloc made a spectacular comeback with the best result ever, almost doubling its voters and more than doubling the number of elected MPs.

The loss of the rightwing majority in Parliament was the main decision of the 5.37 million voters in the Portuguese legislative elections. The two parties of the ruling coalition lost around 727 thousand votes since the last election in 2011, a few weeks after signing the troika memorandum, and obtained 38.55% of the votes (including the results in Madeira and Açores, where they stood in separate lists).

The harsh austerity imposed on the Portuguese people has sent almost half a million voters into emigration did not have the opportunity chance to vote this Sunday. The Socialist Party was not able to gather the remaining protest vote and increased its score (32.38%) only by 200 thousand votes. The fact that the former prime-minister José Sócrates has been in custody since last year on suspicions of corruption (he was sent home under police surveillance at the beginning of the electoral campaign and there are still no charges against him) and last year's takeover of the leadership by António Costa, forcing party elections just after the short victory of the SP in the European elections, during which it was led by an opponent of Sócrates, helped to divide and demobilize its electorate.

In the anti-austerity forces, the Communist Party did not manage to capitalize on the revolt expressed in the streets during the "troika years" and kept its electorate of the last elections, increasing its score by only around 3400 votes and one MP (8.27% of the votes, 17 MPs).

The only political force that succeeded in attracting the discontented voters was clearly the Left Bloc. With 549 thousand votes (261 thousand more than in 2011) and 10.22% of the votes and 19 MPs, the Left Bloc managed to win seats from the rightwing coalition in several districts and is now a national force, electing MPs in ten different districts. One of them is an historic mark in 40 years of democracy: for the first time, the Madeira archipelago has elected a radical left MP. Three of the newly elected MPs are independents, including one long time disabled rights activist, this will now force the Parliament to build access for his wheelchair to the benches and the speaker's tribune.

This result was built mostly on the performance of the new Left Bloc leadership after the November 2014 national convention of the party. The spokeswoman Catarina Martins had a widely-applauded victory in every face-to-face tv debate with the prime-minister, the vice-prime-minister and the SP leader and gathered the biggest popular support on street campaign in all Left Bloc's history. The electoral result confirmed this warm reception on the streets in every corner of the country for the

last two months. And the two parties that were formed by dissidents of the Bloc with widespread media coverage (Livre and Agir) were now doomed to political irrelevance, obtaining 0.72% and 0.38% respectively. The only small party to enter the Parliament is PAN, which has an animal rights agenda and it is ready to support any government.

With a left-wing majority in parliament, the moment has come for the SP to assume its responsibility and try to negotiate a governmental alternative that could be supported (or not objected) by the Left Bloc and the Communist Party. But the first reaction of Antonio Costa on the electoral night, saying the SP will not put obstacles to the parliamentary approval of the rightwing governmental programme (LB and PCP already said they will reject it) opens the space for a big coalition of the 3 parties that signed the troika agreement and support the European Budget Treaty.

In practical terms, any additional austerity measure that the PSD/CDS government will try to impose (namely the 600 million euro cut in pensions that already promised to Brussels) must have the agreement of the SP to pass in parliament. The hypothesis of the fall of this government and new elections soon is not viable according to Portuguese law: there is a presidential election in January and the current president cannot dissolve the parliament in the last six months of his mandate, and neither can parliament be dissolved in the first six months of its mandate.

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* <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4245>