

# **UACES 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**

**London, 5-7 September 2016**

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# The Left and the Crisis: the Portuguese case

Draft paper presented to the  
UACES: 46th Annual Conference, 5-7 September 2016, London  
Panel 'The Left and the Financial Crisis'

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**Abstract:** For years, Portugal has been living under the constraints of the 'crisis', a financial, economic and sovereign debt crisis. Especially because of the latter, the crisis has pushed into the public space the debate on European integration, notably the European Monetary Union. The bailout of the Portuguese State by the European institutions and the IMF, back in 2011, made austerity measures unavoidable and has shown the other face of European integration – keywords in the public discourse switched from 'modernisation' and 'funding' to 'austerity' and 'poverty'. Political impacts were twofold. Initially the left of centre party in government (PS) was blamed for the crisis and experienced substantial losses in public support, in favour of a centre-right pro-austerity coalition (CDS and PSD). Yet, four years after, discontent has grown and electoral results in October 2015 were rather split. This enabled a first time ever, in the recent history of Portuguese democracy, convergence between centre-left (PS) and radical left parties (PCP-PEV and BE) thus enabling the socialist PS to govern. Underlying this process there seems to be some reshaping of political attitudes and of political alignments, resulting from the strong socio-economic impacts of austerity, one that may be reshaping the role of the left in southern Europe. This is the core question, the paper seeks to debate.

## Introduction (provisional)

For years, Portugal has been living under the constraints of the 'crisis', a financial, economic and sovereign debt crisis. Especially because of the latter, the crisis has pushed into the public space the debate on European integration, notably the European Monetary Union (EMU). The bailout of the Portuguese State by the European institutions and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), back in 2011, made austerity measures unavoidable and has shown the other face of European integration – keywords in the public discourse switched from 'modernisation' and 'funding' to 'austerity' and 'poverty'.

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## 1. The structure of the Left in Portugal

Understanding present days Portuguese Left implies going back to the seventies and the context of the 1974 revolution and its follow up. On 25 April 1974 Portugal exited a dictatorship that had by then lasted for forty-eight years.

The regime typified as right wing authoritarianism (Linz, 2015; Pinto, 1995) had not been able to cope with smooth transition into democracy, most notably because the colonial war still kept running in the colonies, and thus the regime ended at the hands of a *coup d'état* led by the military (Pinto, 2001). The following years were troublesome, not least because overall political reconstruction was necessary. Political parties either re-emerged from clandestinity (as was the case of the communist party) or were then created.

As a reaction to the fact that the dictatorship was perceived as right wing, the majority of the parties emerging in the aftermath of the revolution shown a tendency to lean towards the left (Tavares (2015) calls this *sinistrismo*). In 1975, many of the parties running for the first general election (CNE, 2016) adopted a socialist stance or even radical left wing standpoints. The Portuguese party system thus started being drawn within this tendency.

The regime stemming from the revolution therefore adopted the socialist 'flag', as stated in the preamble of the 1976 Constitution:

The Constituent Assembly affirms the Portuguese people's decision to defend national independence, guarantee citizens' fundamental rights, establish the basic principles of democracy, ensure the primacy of a democratic state based on the rule of law and open up a path towards a socialist society, with respect for the will of the Portuguese people and with a view to the construction of a country that is freer, more just and more fraternal. (CRP, n.d.).

Subsequent constitutional amendments lessened that ideological imprint. In 1982, the economic system was made more flexible and the military 'Council of the Revolution' abolished, while the Constitutional Court was created. In 1989, the principle of the 'irreversibility of the nationalisations' that had happened in the immediate sequence of the revolution was withdrawn from the Constitution (Assembleia da República, n.d.a). Furthermore, the accession to the European Communities, in 1986, brought with unconditional adhesion to market economy.

One of the outstanding characteristics of the Portuguese party system<sup>1</sup> is its stability, the most voted parties of the seventies having managed to survive up until the present, alongside few successful newcomers (Jalali, 2007; Lisi, 2015). On the contrary, the creation of new parties has seldom been a thriving initiative<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On the Portuguese party system cf. among others Jalali, 2007; Lisi, 2011, 2015; Ramos e Vila Maior, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> The parties regularly represented in parliament were registered in 1974 (PCP), 1975 (CDS, PSD and PS), 1982 (PEV) and 1999 (BE). Ever since 1974, twenty seven smaller parties were extinguished, although

The four main parties in the Portuguese party system are therefore the same as in 1975 and are as follows, from right to left: the CDS-PP, *Centro Democrático Social-Partido Popular* (Democratic and Social Centre-Popular Party), the PSD, *Partido Social Democrata* (Social Democratic Party), the PS, *Partido Socialista* (Socialist Party) and the PCP, *Partido Comunista Português* (Portuguese Communist Party). From 1983 onwards under a pre-electoral coalition with the PCP, the PEV, *Partido Ecologista “Os Verdes”* (Ecologist Party, The ‘Green’) has also been regularly represented in Parliament. In 1999, the BE, *Bloco de Esquerda* (Left Bloc) entered for the first time the Portuguese parliament and has managed to win seats ever since (fig. 1).

Smaller parties, on the right but mostly on the left side of the political spectrum kept running for the elections, but have seldom won seats, so the present study will concentrate on the cases mentioned above, for their parliamentary representation, and also their presence in the European Parliament.

Although this text addresses the Left in Portugal the overall political spectrum requires some explanation. Indeed, the names (and the initial party programmes) of the parties to the right provide some evidence for the argument presented above, on *sinistrismo*. Back in 1975 the CDS was born as a ‘centre’ party, close to Christian democrat stances. The PSD (initially called PPD, *Partido Popular Democrático* (Democratic Popular Party) later changed its name into Social-Democratic Party. However, its founding fathers had sought the merger of three tendencies (social, liberal and Christian-democrat) and quite early the party became an effective ‘catch-all’, in the Portuguese political system (Jalali, 2007; Lisi, 2011). The space of democratic socialism/social-democracy (the Nordic countries were at the time a pattern often invoked) had yet to be discussed with the neighbouring PS, the Socialists, on the political and parliamentary left of the PSD (Lobo and Magalhães, 2004). Later on, within European integration (Lobo, 2007; Ramos and Vila Maior, 2011) the three parties have shared the broad pro-integration political centre (with the exception of the early 90’s for CDS, when it bordered euro-scepticism) but the PSD reinforced its liberal and centre-right characteristics to the detriment of its social-democratic matrix. This becomes even more evident if we consider the parties’ insertion in the European Parliament (EP) groups (fig 2). At present, the CDS and the PSD are together members of the EPP (Group of the European People’s Party).

The Portuguese left wing parties in the EP split between the S&D (Group of the Socialists and Democrats) and the GUE-NGL (European United Left/Nordic Green Left). The PS seats with the first, whereas the coalition PCP/PEV and the BE both integrate the second (fig 2).

A more detailed note on the profile of each of the main Portuguese left parties is here necessary.

The PS was founded in 1973 (in Germany, as an evolution of ASP, *Acção Socialista Portuguesa*, a former socialist political movement), therefore some time before the revolution and as a gatherer of external support. Its leading figure was for many years Mário Soares, who was then in exile and was to become prime minister several times after 1974 and twice president of the

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some of them reappeared under different names or integrated new parties. The Constitutional Court registers at present twenty one active political parties (Tribunal Constitucional, n.d.).

republic (cf. Lisi, 2009). The party initially played a two chessboard game: its openly socialist discourse was able to mobilise a part of the labour class left wing prone voters; at the same time and despite some internal dispute, the leadership was quite aware of the importance of democratic socialism and social democracy in western European countries and was therefore aiming at establishing a modern western type democracy under that pattern. So, on one side the party had to define its space as against the communist party that had by then a long history of resistance to the dictatorship, well rooted membership and mobilisation capacity, namely with the trade unions gathered under CGTP (*Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses*) a trade unions' confederation with strong socialist and communist affiliation (CGTP-IN, n.d.). On the other side, the party played a sort of elbow to elbow game with the PSD, in order to win the left of centre political space – both parties actually favoured the emergence of an alternative trade unions federation, the UGT (*União Geral de Trabalhadores*), closer to the social-democratic imprint (UGT, n.d.). Electoral results (fig 1) actually show that the PS strategy proved effective, for the number of electoral victories and the push into opposition of the communist party, which, in the aftermath of the revolution, seemed to be able to win relevant support (cf. Jalali, 2007; Lisi, 2011, 2015).

The party also won international recognition by being affiliated with the International Socialist (which its predecessor, ASP, had joined in 1972). It was also when the PS was in government that the Portuguese application to the European Communities was put forward, the party having made of it one of its flags and being ever since openly pro-integration and, at least in the mouth of some of its leaders, even somehow federalist. It became a member of the Party of European Socialists and its standpoints on European affairs are normally in line with mainstream socialist/social-democratic/labour parties of the European Union member states.

From past to present, the PS has been alternating in government with either the PSD or PSD-CDS coalitions. That combined with the pro-European stance has made of PS a fairly 'mainstream' socialist party, the 'third way' also having echoed in its standpoints but most of all in its governmental practice (Lobo and Magalhães, 2004). The PS was in government when the 2008 crisis hit Portugal and this could therefore be at no cost for the party.

The PCP is the oldest extant political party in Portugal. It was founded in 1921. Throughout the dictatorship the party had to remain clandestine but it was nevertheless one of the major gatherers of the opposition to the regime. By 1974, the party was under the leadership of Álvaro Cunhal and remained so until 1992. The party programme was in line with Marxist-Leninist standpoints and the USSR support was well known. It was therefore a fairly orthodox communist party. Unlike other European parties, it never made major programmatic adaptations, even after the fall of the Berlin wall, although it had to face some internal dissent, in the nineties, which led relevant members to leave the party both towards the right (the PS and even the PSD) and into smaller parties on the left, from which competition had always come. With reference to European integration, the party has conducted a long term rather coherent policy of Euroscepticism and has indeed voted against all of the European treaties' ratifications in the national parliament. Except for an initial period after the revolution, the party never managed to be back to government after 1976. It has therefore developed a strong opposition role, one that is often also anti-system, especially from the point of view of

the system's affiliation with capitalism (Jalali, 2007; Lisi, 2011, 2015; March, L. and Freire, A., 2012).

One of the outstanding characteristics of the party is its resilience. Electoral results are not as significant as in the seventies or eighties (fig. 1), but it managed to keep represented in parliament, and has gathered some new electors, among the younger generations (Lisi, 2011:115). The party has indeed maintained a strong youth structure and internal indoctrination seems to still produce some effective mobilisation.

Having elected MPs for the EP ever since 1987, the party has long been represented in the European Parliament, where, as aforementioned, its deputies joined the GUE-NGL.

The PEV was founded in 1982 and soon entered CDU *Coligação Democrática Unitária*) a pre-electoral coalition with the PCP. This eventually accounts for a certain lack of political autonomy and public visibility of the political green left in Portugal, which is often perceived as merged with the communist party. Still, in parliament, the party has its own group and often stands for causes that are crucial from a green ideology perspective (Jalali, 2007; Lisi, 2015; March, L. and Freire, A., 2012). A major criticism is often heard, which is that no one exactly knows how many votes the *Verdes* would gather, if they run alone for the legislative elections. Eventually they would not be able to win seats in parliament. For EP elections they also run together with PCP but never a member of the party was actually elected for the EP.

The BE is a different case. It is the result of a merger, in 1999, of several left wing smaller parties and tendencies, which enabled otherwise scattered votes to come together under a common radical left wing party. Electoral results proved the strategy was good and it has been represented in parliament ever since the 1999 election (fig. 1). It has developed a strong anti-system discourse; it is often mimetic with social movements and thus adopts causes that will mobilise a lot of protest politics. The party therefore became very popular among parts of the young urban population (Lisi, 2011:115; March, L. and Freire, A., 2012; Tsakatika and Lisi, 2014).

It has also regularly elected representatives to the European Parliament, although its standpoints are opposed to mainstream European integration, the leit motiv 'another Europe is possible' often being heard. It integrates the GUE-NGL parliamentary group.

Other smaller parties to the left have been present, ever since 1974, but never managed to gain much support and only episodically were able to elect deputies. Recently, in the context of the crisis, some new parties emerged (fig. 3) some of them adopting left wing standpoints (eg. PTP, MAS, L-TDA), while others are ideologically hybrid, or even undetermined, and thus resemble social movements. Yet, none of those explicitly on the left was able to elect representatives in recent elections. Both cases account for a tendency that has been present among Portuguese radical left and which only the BE to date was able to contradict: a high level of division and poor electoral results (Lisi, 2015; Ramos, 2015).

With reference to fig. 1, which shows the long term electoral results of the main Portuguese parties in legislative elections, and applying a simple (although arguable<sup>3</sup>) right-left dividing line (therefore the PS, the PCP/CDU and the BE on the left) it is easy to understand that at times the left has won the majority of votes (if all the parties on the left are summed), but only once did the socialist party win an absolute majority for supporting government (i.e. more than 115 MPs), in 2005. The PSD alone or in coalition with the CDS has done it four times. Other than those cases, governments have been more unstable, sometimes depending on post electoral coalitions, but never to the left.

Therefore, there has been a clear cut dividing line across 'the left': the left of centre PS, often in government, and the radical left, regularly in the opposition. It is therefore problematic to define common grounds for the Portuguese left (Freire, 2004, 2012; Lisi, 2011, 2015).

At the same time, and although centre coalitions happened only twice (PS with CDS in 1978, and PS with PSD in 1983) there has been an obvious continuity between the right of centre and the left of centre (Jalali, 2012; Lisi, 2011, 2015). This is partly the result of some original ideological common grounds, partly the result of the centripetal forces exerted by alternating in government which will as a rule account for some continuity, and partly the result of European integration, where CDS, PSD and PS have been convergent. Stemming from the latter, an obvious tendency to convergence at the pro-European centre has emerged, even generating some amount of juxtaposition of the political programmes, considering the feasible policies within the increasingly tight framework defined by the European treaties and in particular the European Monetary Union (EMU) (Ramos, 2013). From this point of view and given a substantial liberal imprint of EMU, it is also possible to argue that it was the PS that was pushed rightwards, i.e. from the social to the liberal side.

Therefore, until recently, party competition in Portugal was very much marked by the inverted U pattern (Ramos and Vila Maior, 2011), with a large pro-European convergent centre and opposing radical left wing forces. However, the far right has been absent in the Portuguese political spectrum – there is a minor political party (PNR, *Partido Nacional Renovador*) that never won seats in parliament and has scarce public support. Episodically it has promoted campaigns that touch xenophobic themes (PNR, 2016), but Portugal, unlike other EU countries, has not been under the pressure of immigration.

Portugal has a proportional electoral system which accounts for the diversification of parliamentary representation (Law nº 14/79 of 16 May). Proportional electoral systems tend to be associated with more governmental instability than majority systems. Portugal is no exception (Freire, Moreira and Meirinho, 2010; Pasquino, 2005). Only once did a minority government reach the term of office (1995-1999 under PM A. Guterres). Some governmental coalitions have seen the day but not all of them lasted through the entire legislature. One party or pre-electoral coalitions' absolute majorities happened five times in the recent

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<sup>3</sup> For the conceptualisation on the left-right divide and its use for the Portuguese case, cf. Freire, 2004. Cf. also *Bússola*.... For divisions inside of the broad left see March and Freire, 2012.

democratic history of Portugal. However, the left, divided between the centre and radical left, bears no tradition of governmental coalitions.

Discontent with democracy has also grown in Portugal, but its expression seems to be more visible in the decreasing turnouts (fig. 1) than in effective renovation of the party system, which has, as aforementioned, remained very stable (Freire and Magalhães, 2002; Freire, Magalhães and Lobo, 2007). In the framework of the crisis (i.e. from 2008 onwards) ten new parties emerged, but only one of them managed to elect one MP in the 2015 election – PAN, *Pessoas, Animais, Natureza* (People, Animals, Nature) (fig. 4). Besides, internal divide in the BE had given origin to new parties, and yet the BE ameliorated its results rather than worsened them.

## **2. The Left and the crisis: the facts**

The socialist party was in government when the crisis struck Portugal. The party had won the 2005 legislative elections with its first-ever absolute majority. In 2009 it faced legislative elections again. Although it did not make a second majority it remained in government, a government backed in parliament by the socialist party only. In 2009, there were three electoral acts: the legislative election, the election for the European Parliament and the local election. State expenditure throughout that year rose substantially (Ramos, 2013).

By early 2011 the financial situation of the Portuguese state was becoming critical. After a series of attempts to adopt measures that would correct the financial imbalance (internally known as PEC, *Programa de Estabilidade e Crescimento*, i.e. stability and growth programmes), that were regularly negotiated with the European institutions, when the fourth of these plans (República Portuguesa, 2011) was rejected in parliament, the government finally came to the conclusion that formal external intervention from the European institutions and the IMF was necessary. It was negotiated and signed on 17 May, 2011, by Prime-Minister José Sócrates of the socialist party, who had by then already resigned, and was to stay in office only until the new election in July (Alexandre, Conraria and Bação, 2016; Ramos, 2013). Among others, the national banking sector had exerted pressure on the PM to seek external aid (Público, 2012). In subsequent years, several of the Portuguese private banking institutions were to collapse. At the time, only two of them (BPN, *Banco Português de Negócios* and BPP, *Banco Privado Português*) had collapsed. BPN was nationalised in 2008, and then sold in 2011, with substantial losses for the state and therefore the taxpayers (Alexandre, Conraria and Bação, 2016).

Meanwhile the 2011 election (Magalhães, 2014a, 2014b) was won by the PSD (fig 1) that entered a post-electoral coalition with the CDS in order to make a government viable. Both PSD and PS had run for the election with substantial parts of their electoral programmes actually ‘copying’ the ‘solutions’ put forward in the ‘Memoranda of Understanding’ (Governo de Portugal, 2015) previously signed with the international *troika*. CDS did not make it so

obvious in the programme, but indeed awareness about the compulsory nature of the agreement was general (Ramos, 2013).

On the left, voters were less and once again split (fig 1). The socialist party lost twenty three seats in parliament (comparing with 2009); the communist party won one; and the left bloc, for reasons having to do with internal divide shrunk from sixteen MPs to eight. From the political point of view, however, it makes no sense to sum up the votes/seats for these three parties, given that at the time their programmes were substantially different – crucially, while the socialist party was backing the European approach to the Portuguese problem, the other two were criticising it outright and had always been against the agreement (Ramos, 2013).

Hence, from 2011 to 2015 the right of centre government led the austerity plan as designed with the external partners. The plan sometimes presented as successful was nevertheless internally painful and generated a lot of popular discontent (Alexandre, Conraria and Bação, 2016; Portugal, 2015). Initially, the government counted with substantial support (not least because it had been elected for that specific purpose) but ever increasing taxes, cuts in social expenditure and pensions, the reduction of labour costs, starting with civil servants but spreading to other sectors (the idea was that cutting down labour costs would increase national competitiveness), ever growing unemployment rates, notably among the youths, qualified youth migration, all accounted for internal difficulties and mounting dissatisfaction<sup>4</sup> (Sousa, Magalhães and Amaral, 2014; Popstar, 2016). Besides, while the state budget deficit went down, the external debt went higher throughout the entire period, raising increased doubts as to its sustainability<sup>5</sup>.

The defeated socialist party elected a new leader in 2011, António Seguro, who kept backing the pro-European choices of the party, what kept opposition to government at a relatively low profile. He was defeated in direct elections for the leadership in 2014, when António Costa was elected. Soon after, the former socialist PM, José Sócrates was arrested for questioning, on allegations of corruption, money laundering and tax evasion, a judicial process which has not yet ended. These were therefore troubled times for the socialists and yet they reached the 2015 election with a new leader and a programme that was in many ways challenging a strict interpretation of austerity and therefore of the European treaties.

The PS's programme states that, against austerity, a short term solution for fostering Portuguese economic growth is to be sought by augmenting families' income (internal market); that way increasing the number of jobs and fighting precarious work; and promoting efficient financing of the Portuguese companies, the lack of which is a major obstacle to growth. On European Union governance, the programme affirms that a 'smart' interpretation of budgetary discipline is to be adopted and advocates the use of 'flexibility' on the stability and growth pact enforcement (actually in line with the Commission's guidance document

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<sup>4</sup> Unemployment rates: 2001: 4.0% (...); 2011: 12.7%; 2012: 15.5%; 2013: 16.2%; 2014: 13.9%; 2015: 12.4% (PORDATA, 2016). Net migration (thousands): 2011: -24.3; 2012: -37.3; 2013: -36.2; 2014: -30.1; 2015: -10.5 (PORDATA, 2015); Growth rate of GDP (constant prices): 2007: 2.49; 2008: 0.20; 2009: -2.98; 2010: 1.9; 2011: -1.83; 2012: -4.03; 2013: -1.6; 2014: 0.91; 2015: 1.46 (PORDATA, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> State budget deficit: 2009: 10%; 2010: 11%; 2011: 7.2%; 2012: 5.6%; 2013: 5.2%; 2014: 3.6%; 2015: 3.2% (Alexandre, Conraria and Bação, 2016...). External debt (%GDP): 2009: 83.7%; 2010: 96.2%; 2011: 111.4%; 2012: 126.2%; 2013: 129%; 2014: 130%; 2015: 129% (PORDATA, 2016...).

(COM(2015) 12 final provisional) of 13.1.2015). A concern with asymmetric effects of EMU is expressed and so is the necessity to correct them. The social dimension of Europe is highlighted. Internally, the role of the state is emphasised, under the title: 'a strong, smart and modern state' (PS, 2015a).

Throughout this period the BE also underwent a series of leadership changes, after its historic leader Francisco Louçã's decision to leave the lead (BE, 2014). This process shown internal fractures and fuelled the emergence of some divergent groups that were then to run for the 2015 election as new parties, as aforementioned.

Nevertheless, from the political point of view, the party kept fairly visible in campaigning against the *troika* agreements and regularly claimed against austerity and for public debt renegotiation. The party has also shown regular support to its Greek twin, Syriza. All these ideas were to be included in its electoral programme for 2015 (BE, 2015).

The PCP and the Verdes also kept their strong anti-system voice throughout the entire period of the external intervention and rejected the MoU policies. The PCP has even often argued that leaving the eurozone is a perspective the Portuguese should foresee and prepare, as expressed in their electoral programme for 2015 (PCP, 2015a).

Other small left wing parties, some of them created between 2011 and 2015 (fig. 3), tried to capitalise on the dissatisfaction the crisis had created and the street movements that had emerged from it. Their echo was only to be measured in the 2015 general elections, because the CDS-PSD government, having a majority in parliament, managed to survive till the end of the legislature.

Electoral results in other elections throughout the 2011-2015 period also show the evolution of popular attitudes towards the incumbent government (fig. 4). Although different in nature, the different elections show that as soon as 2013 the left, particularly the socialist party, was already recovering some of its traditional space. The election of 2015 was therefore surrounded by great expectations, not least because of other international cases (from Greece to Germany) where forming governments had required coalition efforts.

Nearing the election, the surveys estimated that (Popstar, 2016) the PS might win with a tiny margin, but the governmental coalition's resilience (CDS and PSD running together as PaF) was also expected, given that their governance, although painful, was perceived as reasonably successful, at least from the point of view of the fulfilment of the *troika* plan. By then, the virtues vs. hindrances of austerity policies were at the core of political debates.

The result of the election was not unexpected – the coalition in government won with a small margin – but forming a government would now imply some kind of agreement with other parties. The PS came second, the PCP slightly reinforced its result, while, to the surprise of many, the BE, instead of losing voters to the emergent new left parties reinforced its results (fig. 4). Eventually this was partly connected with female leadership, a new feature in Portuguese politics.

Unlike what might have looked probable, given the common grounds on European politics, the PS refused to enter a governing coalition with the PSD. The President of the Republic then

appointed former PM and PSD's leader, Passos Coelho, for leading the new government – but this minority government fell in parliament when its programme was presented (DAR I Série n.º 4, 11.11.2015). The next step was the invitation to the second most voted party to form government – and, first time ever, the socialist party led by António Costa put forward a series of agreements (pre)negotiated with the PCP, the BE and the *Verdes* that made viable a socialist party minority government backed in parliament under the terms of those written agreements with the other three parties to the left (Ramos and EU-Asia Institute, 2015).

The agreements (PCP, 2015b; PEV, 2015; PS, 2015b) detail some policy measures and implied some changes to the socialist party programme (PS, 2015a) as it had been presented to the electors. The key question was always austerity and therefore concessions had to be made as to measures to be taken, so that the support of radical left could be gathered. In general, it can be said that there was a shift favourable to labour force, pensioners and social policies. It also means that the specific measures being negotiated entail undoing a lot of what had been done by the previous government, at the level of state expenditure cuts and exceptional taxes. It may seem a 'squaring the circle' exercise, given that the socialist party kept its pro-European integration orientation. Yet, its leader and PM ever since November 2015 has often criticised narrow interpretations of the TSCG (RTP, 2016)<sup>6</sup>.

From the political point of view, the agreements, highly unlikely if the history and standpoints of all the parties involved are considered, were made possible, among other things, by the negotiation capacity with the left that António Costa had shown before, while president of Lisbon city council, where he had also reached agreements to the left. The new government, ironically named *geringonça* ('contraption') in parliament by the Vice-Prime Minister of the former government, remains nevertheless in office (DAR I Série n.º 4, 11.11.2015, p. 32).

### 3. The impact of the crisis on the Left

The evolution of left wing in Portugal may introduce a nuance to the hypothesised losses of social democratic left to the advantage of radical left. Electoral results considered, especially for 2015, voters' transference towards radical left does not seem highly significant, although as a whole there was a reinforcement of the left. At the same time, centre electors who will have voted for PSD or CDS in the previous election may have shown their discontent also by voting PS or eventually for other left wing parties (fig. 4). This is different from the Greek or the Spanish case (Magalhães, 2015). The socialist party may have benefited from the fact that social disruption was not as profound as in Greece, and therefore political radicalisation was minor.

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<sup>6</sup> On 14.07.2016 he affirmed: "I am ever more convinced that with the continuity of this European policy and this Pact, Europe will hardly turn its economic trajectory and hardly find a robust path for economic growth" (RTP, 2016; translated).

Besides, unlike the hypothesis of a 'merger' of the pro-European 'centre', which would be more costly for the parties of a social democratic tradition pushed into liberal options, the argument put forward by the socialist party (but not only) is that it was actually the right of centre that moved further to the right, thus leaving the traditional centre, with its 'social' imprint, free for the socialists.

At the same time it could be argued that the crisis re-introduced a strong socio-economic focus in the political debate, therefore reinforcing the left-right axis of political alignments. Labour issues and poverty are strongly back to the daily debate, in a sort of post-post materialist politics (Ramos and EU-Asia Institute, 2015). The emphasis on internal devaluation as macroeconomic strategy in the conditionality agreements and its, at least partial, lack of success may be one part of the underlying explanation for the emergence of an agreement to the left. Socio-economic problems gained the fore, while middle class was vanishing away. Therefore, some voters changed their voting behaviour. This created a certain amount of dispersion in the electoral results, but the final scenario was not, unlike in Spain, lack of agreement on the left in order to make a government viable.

Meanwhile, the socialist party has kept its openly pro-European discourse, but the PM, as aforementioned, has not refrained from criticising the recent austerity policies and narrow budgetary aims, as inscribed in EU's guidelines. Without disagreeing with the aims, it is rather the means and the schedule for convergence in the framework of EMU that are often criticised.

Yet, matching the aim of keeping up the European compromise with satisfying the agreements with the radical left (which are likely to be costly, in terms of the state budget) is no easy task. A lot of public attention and media coverage have been devoted to moments such as the preparation of the annual state budget, its submission to the European Commission, or the more recent debate on the possibility of sanctions being applied to Portugal, in the framework of the excessive debt procedure, with reference to 2015 (European Commission, 2016a).

At the same time, and unlike in the past, the radical left has at times (but not always) 'softened' its anti-system discourse and has been cooperating with the government, in the framework of the agreements. Comparison with Greece may here be interesting.

The success of this new balance is yet to be proven and the Achilles heel, in the Portuguese case, is still there: economic structural imbalances coupled with excessive state expenditure, problems of excessive public and private debt, a fragile productive sector tied to weaknesses in the banking sector (Alexandre, Conraria and Bação, 2016; Portugal, 2015). As a whole, the problem was not overcome with the measures to face the crisis as defined in the MoU – austerity as pathway to structural reforms. Yet, anti-austerity measures will also have to prove their validity.

Two main circumstances may be favouring the 'new political deal' on the Portuguese left. The first is the fact that the conditionality agreements are now over and therefore there is more

room for manoeuvre for whoever is in government. The second is a change in leadership that cannot be undermined. The attitude is now more 'political'. International indicators on democracy signal the loss of democratic quality whenever, under external intervention, a state is limited in its autonomous decision capacity (eg. The Economist, 2015). Internal public perception of such fact is also damaging for those who are governing. Such mechanism may have affected the previous government and may now be favouring the incumbent (Eurosondagem, 2016; Popstar, 2016).

Unlike it, the new government has, at least from the rhetorical point of view, substantially changed and does not perform as the 'good pupil' or the 'obeying and obliged member'. The case of the possible sanctions under the excessive debt procedure, with relation to the 2015 state deficit (European Commission, 2016a) was apparently surrounded by extensive dialogue with the European institutions, namely the Commission. Yet, the letter addressed by the Portuguese Prime Minister resorted far more to political arguments than to technical ones, notably arguing that the Portuguese reaction to austerity has so far been moderate rather than radical, and that the Portuguese bailout was often presented in the EU as a successful case (República Portuguesa, 2016a)<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, the Portuguese PM made it public that, if sanctions were to be applied, the government would appeal to the European Court of Justice against the Council decision, on grounds of proportionality (Público, 2016). However, the transnational framework of this debate cannot be undermined – Spain was equally a possible target of sanctions, and an election was to be held there soon after the Commission issued its recommendation (European Commission, 2016b). The political negotiation is therefore multi-level and complex in nature.

A more confrontational strategy with the European institutions may be risky (the recent case of Greece is well known) unless it is grounded on sound capacity of standing alone and away from EU's support. Eventually, a more consistent strategy of dialogue and networking at the European level is already being adopted. Eventually also, the social democratic/socialist networks are also aware that the problems the European Union faces have common grounds and thus need common solutions<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> The core arguments were: "(...) In this context, we strongly argue against the possibility of the Commission presenting a proposal to impose sanctions for the following reasons: - **it would be unfair** to punish a Member State that is on the right path to correct its excessive deficit and just when it is about to achieve it; - **it would be counterproductive**, as it would make it harder for Portugal to ensure fiscal consolidation by increasing our public expenditure and potentially causing us a major reputation damage in the international financial markets, possibly triggering negative rating actions; - **it would not be understood** by the Portuguese people, who have gone through a harsh economic recession and suffered "austerity" measures, and would thus risk fostering an anti-European mood. In addition to these reasons, the result of the United Kingdom referendum and the systemic implications it has and will continue to have in the European Union deserve an enhanced political consideration of the effects that such a decision could have. (...)" (República Portuguesa, 2016a: 2).

<sup>8</sup> On 21.06.2016, the President of the PES wrote: "Media reports of a decline of left wing socialist parties across Europe are well wide of the mark. Purely on a statistical basis, parties from the European Party of Socialists are either in power alone or in coalition in at least half of the governments in the European Union. That is not the sign of a political left in serious decline. Admittedly, right wing governments do hold the balance of power in the EU right now. But this can be an opportunity for the left as they are making a mess of things with a short-sighted obsession with austerity." (PES, 2016).

Unlike the previous government, that made every effort not to identify the Portuguese problem with the Greek, preferring instead to be associated with Ireland, for obvious reasons, the present government has shown its solidarity to Greece. The PM actually visited Athens in April (República Portuguesa, 2016b) and a common declaration was issued (MNE, 2016)<sup>9</sup>. From the strategic point of view again, this may in the long run mean identifying the common roots of the southern European problems (cf. Pinto and Morlino, 2013) and eventually mobilising partners for voting in the Council.

Leadership was also a relevant factor for the negotiation with radical left. A wall truly fell between the PS and the PCP when the agreement was signed. Jerónimo de Sousa, PCP's leader since 2004, is a historical member of the party, a former worker in a steel factory and a long term MP for his party (Assembleia da República, n.d.b). In his political life he won himself a reputation of being a tractable person, capable of dialoguing also with his political opponents. Catarina Martins (Assembleia da República, n.d.c), the spokeswoman of BE and a sharp voice is a new figure in Portuguese politics. A young female actress is far from a common profile in Portuguese political leadership, but it seems those differences were also relevant in making way for the good result the party made in the 2015 election.

## **Conclusion (provisional)**

In a recent visit to Portugal former leader of the socialist party A. Guterres stated that he has been an enthusiastic Europeanist; and that the present state of things made him a frustrated Europeanist (Observador, 2016). The many problems ravaging Europe these days account for the disappointment.

However, the core problem facing the European Union is indeed how to cope 'social Europe', as crafted in the past by Christian democrats and social democrats, with the tides of globalisation: the people, the workers, the immigrants, the markets, the remaining space for the welfare state, liberties and democracy. From that point of view, the pressures associated with globalisation are undermining the original consensus upon which the Union had been founded, i.e. they are striking the political centre, where that consensus used to seat.

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<sup>9</sup> "(...) We, as Prime Ministers of two countries with a similar policy experience in the context of their respective adjustment programs, share the conviction that austerity-only policies are wrong and insufficient to overcome the existing challenges. Six years after the first bailout program in Europe, we can safely confirm that austerity alone is failing in its own terms and has had social and economic impact that has gone far from what was anticipated. These policies should be reviewed. (...) Europe has to change course. Instead of merely adjusting to self-defeating competitiveness and austerity measures, our two countries take the decision to closely cooperate at all levels, bilateral and European, to put forward a progressive program of democratic Eurozone Governance, economic revival, employment creation, centered on quality jobs, and socially just and environmentally responsible growth in Europe and in our countries. This program should be launched without further delays." (MNE, 2016: 2, 4).

Furthermore, the eurozone, with its centripetal effect based upon strict rules of monetary and economic convergence has made economic and political internal dividing lines more evident. To the point that those affect negatively the lives of ordinary citizens, they will most probably react by adapting their voting choices. Languages of protest and populism may prove very effective in this game and dissatisfaction with the left of centre is even more likely than with the right of centre, given the social and redistributive nature of social democracy, particularly endangered in this process.

The choice for democratic left seems indeed narrow, since abiding by extant rules substantially limits the role of the states, especially those carrying structural imbalances as is the Portuguese case.

The pathway the Portuguese government has chosen is one that accepts the aims of further European integration, but one that discusses the means and the pace adopted. To be able to do so with success it will need external allies. The calendar and the results of elections in the EU member states are therefore becoming more important than ever, not only for each of the states, but also for decision making in the European institutions. From this point of view, trans-European party politics is gaining relevance and the question on democratic socialism is also to be answered by the Party of European Socialists and the S&D in the European Parliament. Eventually, the EPP is already aware of this networking necessity.

From the Portuguese socialist party political point of view, what happened in Portugal seems fairly strategic. Survival, for the PS, means avoiding the undifferentiated pro-European centre and leaning instead towards the left, where it can vindicate an identity apart from that of PSD or CDS. On the contrary, leaning towards these two would mean persisting in ignoring that the political centre, as it used to be, is undergoing a crisis. At the same time, attempts to squeeze those two opponents far to the right broaden the political space at the centre, for the PS. Besides, further to the right there is no substantial protest vote, hence no partners for coalitions with the PSD and the CDS. Therefore, covering the socialist-democratic centre while mobilising the support of radical 'left', against the 'right', is a way of guaranteeing an increased number of supporters. But this also requires radical left to compromise.

As a whole, it seems that 'politics' (as opposed to the TINA argument so often paradoxically put forward on the liberal side) are back and that left/right divides matter a lot again. Eventually, it means also that António Costa has seen the opportunity that any socialist politician in a democracy should be able to recognise at first glimpse: if the number of the poor raises, then the way the poor and the impoverished vote, matters a lot! Yet, redistributive policies require financial resources and financial resources require a solid economy. This is yet the circle the socialist government will have to square. Its success, or not, will dictate the future of the left in Portugal.

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Fig. 1 Electoral results for major political parties in Portuguese legislative elections (1975-2015)

	CDS-PP		PPD/PSD		PS		PCP/CDU		BE		Abstention %
	%	seats	%	seats	%	seats	%	seats	%	seats	
1975	7.61	16	26.39	81	387.87	116	12.46	30	--	--	8.34
1976	16	42	24.38	73	34.87	107	14.35	40	--	--	14.36
1979	42.54 – 121 <sup>1</sup>				27.33	74	18.80 <sup>1</sup>	47	--	--	17.13
1980	44.91 – 126 <sup>1</sup>				26.65 <sup>2</sup>	71	16.75 <sup>1</sup>	41	--	--	16.06
1983	12.56	30	27.24	75	35.86	101	18.07 <sup>1</sup>	44	--	--	22.21
1985	9.96	22	29.87	88	20.77	55	15.49 <sup>1</sup>	38	--	--	25.84
1987	4.44	4	50.22	148	22.24	60	12.14 <sup>1</sup>	31	--	--	28.43
1991	4.43	5	50.60	135	29.13	72	8.82 <sup>1</sup>	17	--	--	32.22
1995	9.05	15	34.12	88	43.76	112	8.572 <sup>1</sup>	15	--	--	33.70
1999	8.34	15	32.32	81	44.06	115	8.99 <sup>1</sup>	17	2.44	2	38.91
2002	8.72	14	40.21	105	37.79	96	6.94 <sup>1</sup>	12	2.74	3	38.52
2005	7.24	12	28.77	75	45.03	121	7.54	14	6.35	8	35.74
2009	10.43	21	29.11	81	36.56	97	7.86	15	9.81	16	40.32
2011	11.71	24	38.66	108	28.05	74	7.90	16	5.17	8	41.97
2015	38.30 – 107				33.60	86	8.60	17	10.6	19	44.10

<sup>1</sup> Pre-electoral coalition

Absolute majority

Winner

Source: FFMS (n.d.)

**Fig. 2 Main Portuguese parties in European Parliament groups**

CDS-PP	PPD/PSD	PS	CDU	BE
EPP Group of the European People's Party		S&D Group of the Socialists and Democrats	GUE-NGL European United Left/Nordic Green Left	

Fig. 3 New parties registered since 2008

NEW PARTY (registr. date) *	Main IDEOLOGICAL characteristics and LEFT/RIGHT standpoint **	ELECTORAL RESULTS (%) ***						
		2009 EP	2009 Local	2009 AR	2011 AR	2013 Local	2014 EP	2015 AR ****
<b>PLD (2008) (ex-MMS)</b>	- liberalism - centrism	0.61	0.03	0.3	—	—	—	—
<b>PTP (2009)</b>	- democratic socialism/ social-democracy - reformism - europeism - left of centre	—	—	0.09	0.3	0.17	0.69	0.38 (with MAS)
<b>PPV/CDC (2009)</b>	- Christian-democracy: Catholic church social doctrine - pro-life movement - principles and values - [Europe] - citizens movement	—	—	0.15	0.15	0.02	0.37	0.05
<b>PAN (2011)</b>	- animals & nature & people - Earth Charter (1994) - decentralization - [Europe] - grassroots participation	—	—	—	1.04	0.32	1.72	1.39 (1 MP)
<b>MAS (2013)</b>	- dissident group from BE - left wing: mass revolutionism - anti-europeism: anti-austerity	—	—	—	—	—	0.38	0.38 (with PTP)
<b>L/TDA (2014)</b>	- liberty, equality, fraternity' - socialism - ecologism - europeism - 'in the middle of left'	—	—	—	—	—	2.18	0.73
<b>JPP (2015)</b>	- matrix: social, grassroots, plural - liberalism - social - participatory democracy - europeism: non-technocratic - (-): left/right	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.26
<b>PDR (2015)</b>	- economic, social and political democracy - representative and participatory democracy - republicanism - pro EU integration	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.14
<b>NC (2015)</b>	- 'Portugal' - anti-corruption - electoral system reform: accountability - Europe but also nationality - Europe: social model - citizenship party	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.40
<b>PURP (2015)</b>	- free, equal and solidary society - non-discrimination: rights of retirees and pensioners - equal rights for the peoples of Europe	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.26

\* TC (n.d.); \*\* Parties' websites; \*\*\* FFMS (n.d.); \*\*\*\* MAI (n.d.)

Source : Ramos (2015).

**Fig. 4 Election results for the parties represented in Parliament (2011-2015)**

Election results*	CDS-PP	PSD	Coalition: CDS/PSD	PS	PCP/PEV	BE	Abstention %
<b>2011 National Parliament</b>	11.71 a)	38.66 a)	—	28.05	7.90	5.17	41.97
<b>2013 Local</b>	3.04	16.70	7.59	36.26	11.06	2.42	47.4
<b>2014 European Parliament</b>	—	—	27.71	31.46	12.68	4.56	66.2
<b>2015 National Parliament</b>	—	—	38.30	33.60	8.6	10.6	44.10

\* For local elections the results of coalitions with smaller parties were not added

\*\* Estimated results combining different surveys.

Coalition in government 2011-2015 bbb

Winners

Right 2015

Left 2015

Sources: CNE (2016); FFMS (n.d.).