



Dear Cláudia,

Portugal has been severely hit by the financial crisis since 2008. We don't seem to see, however, the emergence of strong alternatives to the traditional parties, such as Podemos in Spain or Syriza in Greece. What are the explanations for this difference?



Actually, ten new parties have emerged since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008. Already in previous decades, new parties were founded as the result of dissidence inside of the main political parties or as entirely new political projects, but few of them were sustainable or strong enough gain one of the 230 seats in the *Assembleia da República*.

As a result, the four main parties dating from the 'Carnation Revolution' in 1974-75 are still dominant. Despite losing some of their past relevance, their resilience is apparently still going to ensure them the top four positions next Sunday. These main parties include the CDS-PP (*CDS-Partido Popular*), the PSD (*Partido Social Democrata*), the PS (*Partido Socialista*) and the PCP (*Partido Comunista Português*), since 1983 in a regular pre-electoral coalition with the 'green' PEV (*Partido Ecologista 'Os Verdes'*).

Since 1999, the BE (*Bloco de Esquerda*), resulting from the convergence of several smaller radical left wing parties/movements has managed to be regularly represented in the Parliament, too.

From 1976 onwards Portugal has always been governed either by the PSD or the PS, at times in coalition with the CDS. The three of them have thus been substantially involved with, and in favour of, EU integration and EU politics, contrary to the opposition parties.

The current government coalition, formed by the CDS and the PSD, which is running for re-election seems to be drifting to the socio-economic right, favouring economic liberalisation, downsizing social policies and reducing the role of the state. This may be due to the imprint of EU policies, which are generally more prone to liberalisation, especially within the Eurozone.

No wonder in Portugal, as elsewhere, there is strong disenchantment with politics and representative democracy. This is visible in survey results and elections turnouts. The crisis has only fostered this tendency, and citizens' movements have become popular alternatives to traditional parties. Some of them have resulted in new parties in order to be allowed to run for the national elections, but their respective programmes mainly emphasises discontent and contestation rather than precise political ideas.

The leftists from BE also have played this role of 'plebeian tribune' from their very beginnings, and their strategy has proven reasonably effective in terms of election results. The BE has presented itself as the Portuguese sister of Syriza, despite some criticism of the recent outcome of the negotiations between Greece and the EU.

At the same time, BE suffers from the emergence of dissidents within its ranks, inspired by Podemos from Spain and with the same academic background, such as in the new movement called 'L/TdA', which translates as 'Free/Time to go forward'. Obviously, the very large number of small leftist groups weakens the left as a block.

A major difference with Greece is that the wounds of the crisis are not as serious (or at least do not seem so) and that the government keeps repeating the 'We are not Greece' mantra.

Overall, Spain is a different political reality from Portugal, not least for its political history and the tensions resulting from independence claims like in Catalonia, which Portugal does not have. Still, in the 2013 local elections in Portugal, the result for the government parties was poor (ca. 27% of the votes) and a new tendency emerged in the successful candidacy of independent candidates' lists (outside the parties' framework, which is possible at the local level). This created a new space for another type of political participation, closer to the citizens.

Portugal has had a mostly pro-European history over the last 30 years and, until the crisis, integration has been perceived as beneficial by a significant number of the population. On the contrary, Euroscepticism has been a minority standpoint. But the parties at the centre no longer reap the benefits from EU policies, and the fragmentation of Portuguese politics makes the scenario of an absolute majority highly unlikely in the forthcoming election.

All the best,

Cláudia

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