

SUMMARY

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Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa is the main favourite in the presidential election taking place on 24th January in Portugal

Abstract:

9.7 million Portuguese are being called to ballot on 24th January next to appoint the successor to Anibal Cavaco Silva (Social Democratic Party PSD), President of the Portuguese Republic since 9th March 2006. Article 123 of the Constitution prohibits the outgoing Head of State from standing for a third consecutive mandate. This presidential election is of special importance in a country that is only just recovering from a serious economic and political crisis.

If none of the 10 candidates running wins the absolute majority in the first round of voting on 24th January, a second round will be organised on 14th February.

THE PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE

The President of the Portuguese Republic is elected every five years by direct universal suffrage. Anyone who wants to run for the supreme office must be at least 35 years old and has to have collated the signature of a minimum of 7,500 voters, which then have to be validated by the Constitutional Court.

The function of Head of State is many honorary. A moral authority, the President of the Republic, enjoys two main powers: he appoints the Prime Minister (recently we witnessed the importance of this) and he can also dissolve parliament (article 172 of the Constitution) 6 months after he has entered office; a dissolution which automatically leads to general elections.

The President of the Republic is the head of the armies, whose chief-of-staff he appoints. On the government's proposal he appoints the ambassadors. He can declare a state of emergency or siege, and even war in the event of a real or imminent attack. He signs the laws and decrees approved by parliament over which he enjoys the right of veto. On the government's or parliament's proposal he can decide the organisation of a referendum.

10 people are officially running for the supreme office in Portugal which is a record number for the country:

- Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, former Social Democratic Party leader (1996-1999), supported by the PSD and the People's Party, former Parliamentary Affairs Minister (1982-1983), Professor in Law;
- Maria de Belem, former Socialist Party leader (2011-2014), former Minister for Equality (1999-2000) and Health (1995-1999). She is standing as an independent candidate;
- Antonio de Sampaio da Novoa, supported by LIVRE/Tempo de Avançar (L/TDA) and the Communist Workers' Party (PCTP/MRPP), former rector of the University of Lisbon (2006-2013), professor of psychology and educational science;
- Edgar Silva (Communist Party, PCP), MP in the Legislative Assembly of Madeira;
- Marisa Matias (Left Bloc, BE), MEP;
- Paulo de Morais, independent, former Mayor of Porto (2002-2005);
- Henrique Neto (PS), former MP;
- Candido Ferreira, independent;
- Jorge Sequeira, independent, teacher/researcher and psychologist;
- Vitorino Silva, better known under the name of Tino de Rans, independent.

THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN PORTUGAL

The right-wing forces came out ahead in the general elections on 4th October 2015 but they did not win an absolute majority: the coalition *Portugal a frente* (Forwards Portugal), led by outgoing Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho, which rallies the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the People's Party (PP), won 36.86% of the vote and 102 of the 230 seats in the Assembly of the Republic, the only chamber of parliament. Anibal Cavaco Silva, President of the Republic renewed the mandate of Pedro Passos Coelho on 23rd October. On 10th November a vote of no-confidence brought down the minority government he had formed (123 votes against 107).

On 23rd November Anibal Cavaco Silva presented the Socialist leader Antonio Costa 6 conditions before appointing him Prime Minister: that he must ask Parliament for a vote of confidence, that the 2016 budget be adopted, that he respects the commitments resulting from Portugal's participation in the euro zone, the up-keep of the country in NATO, the guarantee that the country's financial stability be protected likewise the role of the Social Consultation Council. On 24th November Antonio Costa was asked to form a new government. The Socialist leader won the support (without participation) of the parties on the far left: the Unified Democratic Coalition (CDU) and the Left Bloc (BE). The government he formed won parliament's approval on 3rd December, 122 votes in support, 107 against and 1 abstention. The three left-wing parties came to agreement on several points: the end of retirement pension freezes, the progressive increase of the minimum wage and also

the respect of the European budgetary framework. The socialist government is still weak however.

According to the most recent survey by Eurosondagem undertaken between 16th and 21st December, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa might win in the first round of voting – an almost traditional occurrence in the presidential election in Portugal – with 52.50% of the vote. Far behind him comes Maria de Belem, who is due to win 18.10% of the vote and Antonio de Sampaio da Novoa, who is due to win 16.90% of the vote. All other candidates are due to win under 5% of the vote.

Victory by Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa would be bad news for the Prime Minister. For the time being the right-wing candidate is vague about the relations he might entertain with the socialist government. Although the President of the Republic can dissolve parliament after six months in office, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa has said that he is “*against having general elections every six months.*”

For their part, supporters on the left and notably the socialists, seem divided between Maria de Belem and Antonio de Sampaio da Novoa. The Socialist Party has also said that it will support none of the candidates before the second round.

The presidential election is always a question of personality in Portugal. Voters often opt more for a candidate rather than a political party even though, paradoxically the heads of State are always major figures within their own political party.

The next head of State will be the 7th since the Carnation Revolution in April 1974. He will officially enter office at the end of March.

Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa wins the presidential election in Portugal in the first round

Results

Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, former leader of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) (1996-1999), supported by the PSD and the People's Party (PP) became President of the Portuguese Republic in the first round of the election that took place on 24th January with 52% of the vote. Antonio de Sampaio da Novoa, supported by LIVRE/Tempo de Avançar (Free/Time to move forward) (L/TDA) and the Communist Workers' Party (PCTP/MRPP), came second with 22.89% of the vote. Third place went to MEP Marisa Matias (Left Bloc, BE), who won 10.13% of the vote. She was followed by Maria de Belem, former leader of the Socialist Party (2011-2014), who was standing as an independent candidate; she won 4.24% of the vote. The other six candidates won under 4% of the vote.

Turnout was slightly higher (+2.32 points) than election on 23rd January 2011, lying at 48.84% in the first round of the previous presidential

Results of the first round of the presidential election on 24th January in Portugal

Turnout: 48,84%

Candidates	Number of votes won	% of votes won
Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa (Social Democratic Party/People's Party, PSD/PP)	2 410 170	52
Antonio de Sampaio da Novoa	1 060 773	22,89
Marisa Matias (Left Bloc, BE)	469 310	10,13
Maria de Belem (independent)	196 585	4,24
Edgar Silva (Portuguese Communist Party, PCP)	182 906	3,95
Vitorino Silva (independent)	152 045	3,28
Paulo de Moraes (independent)	99 881	2,15
Henrique Neto (PS)	38 910	0,84
Jorge Sequeira (independent)	13 756	0,30
Candido Ferreira (independent)	10 570	0,23

Source : <http://www.presidenciais2016.mai.gov.pt/>

Presidential election in Portugal 24th January 2016

Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa did not therefore counter tradition in Portugal which deems that the President of the Republic be elected in the first round. Mr de Sousa, a professor in law, former Parliamentary Affairs Minister (1982-1983) and former commentator on the TV channel TVI, who stands on the "left of the right", undertook a consensual campaign that focused on social justice and the country's financial balance, constantly promoting the non-partisan side of his character. *"I shall be the president of no party,"* he declared promising to *"be a referee above the crowd"*, *"a free, independent president of the Republic"* *"He sought consensus away from his political camp with the aim of winning both votes on the left and right,"* indicated José Antonio Passos Palmeira, a political expert.

Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa was also conciliatory regarding Prime Minister Antonio Costa (Socialist Party, PS) and said that he wanted to overcome divisions in Portugal, a country that has been torn apart since the general elections on 4th October last, which were won by the PSD but without an absolute majority. On 24th November the President of the Republic Antonio Cavaco Silva (PSD) had to appoint Antonio Costa as head of government. The latter won the support (without participation) of the parties on the radical left: the United Democratic Coalition (CDU) and the Left Bloc (BE). According to Antonio Costa Pinto, a political expert, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa *"will not be the political enemy of the socialist government."*

"The president of the Republic must not challenge the government in office. I shall do everything to guarantee its duration," declared Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, who deemed *"it absolutely absurd"* to think that he would dissolve parliament as soon as he came into office. *"Stability is vital, we have to avoid having governments that only last six months or a year,"* he maintained, adding *"the priority is to strengthen political stability, the vital entente to govern. It is not the time for division."* *"I want to re-establish national unity as our country is emerging from a deep economic and social crisis,"* declared Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa. He said that he would use his influence with the socialist government to

prevent any further downturn in the Portuguese economy.

The head of State can dissolve parliament six months after his entry into office via article 172 of the Constitution – which automatically leads to new general elections. Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa would not be able to invoke this article before the month of April next.

Supporters of the left, and notably the socialists, were divided between several candidates Maria de Belem, Antonio de Sampaio de Nova and Henrique Neto. The Socialist Party chose not to support any of the candidates in the first round of the election, which evidently was to the advantage of Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa. In spite of his commitments the victory of the Social Democratic candidate is bad news for the socialist Prime Minister.

67 year-old Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, is a graduate in law from the University of Lisbon. He was a professor of law before becoming a journalist. He founded and managed the weekly *Expresso* in 1973. After the Carnation Revolution in April 1974 and when democracy returned to Portugal, he was one of the founders of the PSD and was elected MP of the Assembly of the Republic, the only chamber of parliament, without relinquishing his academic career.

In 1981 he became Secretary of State for the Presidency of the Council in Francisco Pinto Balsemao's government (PSD). In 1982 he was appointed Minister for Parliamentary Affairs. In 1989, he failed in his bid to take Lisbon's town hall, and was beaten in the local election by Jorge Sampaio (PS). In 1996, he was elected Chair of the PSD, a post from which he resigned three years later after the failure of his project to form a coalition with the People's Party.

For a long time Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa hosted a programme on the TV channel TV1 before giving this up to work on the presidential campaign.

During the presidential election the Portuguese usually try to appoint an arbiter of the political playing field rather than a partisan head of State.

This election is therefore more personalised even though paradoxically, the Portuguese heads of State have always been important within their own political party. The Portuguese are not afraid of political co-habitation either. Twice (in 1987 and in 2006 for example), they elected a president from the opposite end of the political scale from the parliamentary majority that they had brought to office just a few months previously.

Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa will be sworn in on 9th March next.

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