

Portugal in the European Union

Assessing twenty-five years of integration
experience

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Part I

Twenty-five years' experience

The evolution of Portuguese politics,
economics and society

1 Portuguese exceptionalism and the return to Europe

The April 25, 1974 coup and democratization (1974–2010)¹

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Napoleon is said to have once quipped that “Africa begins at the Pyrenees” or “Europe ends at the Pyrenees,” given the Moorish conquest and their 700-year rule of the Iberian Peninsula. This notion of Spanish and Portuguese exceptionalism resonated with the European political and economic elite for some two hundred years. There was a widespread belief that Portuguese society and government existed outside of European understandings of society, politics and authority relations. This belief could draw some support from the fact that even at the start of the twentieth century, the political views still dominating Portuguese political discourse involved a rejection of the democratic and liberal revolutions of the modern era (see Payne 1976, Robinson 1979, Manuel 2002, Royo and Manuel 2003). In the 1960s some social science scholars even wondered if the Roman Catholic country could ever become democratic, because its hierarchical political culture rejected the fundamental Enlightenment values of equality, individualism and the general will (see Almond and Verba 1965). Portugal was accordingly viewed among the European political and economic elite as existing at the outer orbit of the European existential space, trapped in the historical and philosophical vacuum of overseas exploration and lusotropicalism² (see Freyre 1942, Martins 1969, Birmingham 1993).

Portugal’s return to Europe was complex, multi-dimensional, and featured a wide variety of players. During the turbulent days following the Carnation Revolution of April 25, 1974, one political slogan particularly resonated with the hopes and dreams of the Portuguese people: *A Europa Connosco* (Europe is with us). This slogan – coined by the Socialist Party to help gain electoral support in the 1975 and 1976 elections – spoke to both a generalized hope to end the country’s historical isolation from the rest of Europe, and a European future of peace and prosperity for Portugal. In many ways, Portugal’s successful transition to democracy, and its subsequent adhesion to the European Union, were two concrete steps that helped to fulfill the existential hopes pregnant in that slogan.

Perhaps the starting point of the process took place on April 28, 1974 when Socialist leader Mário Soares arrived in Lisbon from his long political exile in Paris, on what he called the *comboio da liberdade*, or the liberty train. He knew that a dramatic change had occurred when he was greeted by huge crowds at each train stop – at one stop, the train driver even waited for Soares to tell him

when it was time to depart (Soares 1976: 24). Lisbon was full of admirers who looked to Soares with great hope and anticipation. Arguably, more than any other single individual, Mário Soares's articulated vision of a socialist and European Portugal eventually captured the imagination of most Portuguese, and helped propel his party to electoral success over the Communists and other rivals in the following years. He subsequently made relevant policy decisions as Prime Minister and as President, which deepened the democratization and the Europeanization process of the country, and resulted in its economic integration into the European Union (Manuel 1996a: 17–70).

Democratic waves

Placing democratic development on a timeline, Samuel Huntington has usefully noted that there have been three main periods of democratic expansion since the eighteenth century, which he refers to as “waves.” Huntington's first long wave lasted some ninety-eight years, from 1828 to 1926, and includes the development of democratic regimes in Britain, France, Italy, the United States, and Argentina. This first wave suffered a setback in the period 1922 to 1942, when several formerly democratic countries adopted fascist governments, including Portugal, Spain, Italy, Germany, and Argentina. For the most part, these were elite-driven, fragile, democratic institutions, with little connection to, or support from, civil sectors. Yet, the democratic procedures they introduced into policy-making processes – limited as they were – were a marked improvement on the authoritarian governmental structures that preceded, and followed, this democratic interlude. After World War II, Huntington notes the development of a second democratic wave. This short wave lasted from 1945 until 1962 and includes Japan, West Germany, Italy, and India. This wave was reversed for a second time, and from 1958 to 1975 several countries abandoned democratic forms of government in favor of military regimes, including Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. The third wave started in 1974 with the creation of new democracies in Portugal, Spain, Greece, then moving on to Latin America in the 1980s, and to Eastern Europe after the events of 1989 (Huntington 1993: 13–26).

Portugal was very slow in accepting democratic values, institutions, and procedures during the first wave; in 1910, towards the end of this wave, the Portuguese First Republic was finally established by reformers. Although problematic, the reformers sought to effectuate political and economic reforms in line with Enlightenment and democratic principles (see Wheeler 1978). The First Republic unfortunately suffered through years of governmental instability, economic hardships, and the burden of World War I, and was overthrown by a military coup on May 28, 1926. The military sought to restore political order and economic stability, and eventually established the anti-modern, anti-European *Estado Novo* regime, under the leadership of António de Oliveira Salazar (see Kay 1970 and Figueiredo 1976).

Under Salazar, Portugal maintained some of the vestiges of the First Republic. He held the title of Prime Minister, and regularly scheduled elections for the

National Assembly and the Presidency were held throughout his rule. But this was not a democracy: this was a corporative system of government, which limited the actual impact of elections (Manuel 1995: 21–23). For instance, voter registration procedures kept the electorate small, and members of the National Assembly were not allowed to influence public policy significantly. Yet, officially recognized political parties were allowed some measure of free speech to debate policies during the brief period leading up to the election (see Georget 1985).

The most contested election during the Salazar era took place in 1958, when General Humberto Delgado, known as the *General sem medo* (General without fear) ran a robust campaign against the Salazar-backed candidate, Admiral Américo Tomás. Delgado was a feisty candidate, and even promised to dismiss Prime Minister Salazar if elected. Delgado basked in the huge anti-Salazar election rallies he held around the country. He was finally defeated in what may have been a rigged election.³ Following this electoral challenge, Salazar decided to do away with the system of direct presidential elections. Delgado continued his anti-Salazar movement, and attempted to overthrow the regime by military coup on a few occasions. He was killed in 1965 by members of Salazar's secret police (Marques 1976: 212–235).

Salazar was finally removed from office in 1968 when he slipped into a coma after having fallen in his bathroom. His successor, Marcelo Caetano, was overthrown on April 25, 1974 by young military officers – an event that marks the commencement of Huntington's third wave. Portugal appeared finally to be on the brink of adopting and consolidating institutional reforms consistent with the democratic and liberal revolutions of post-1789 Europe.

The revolution of April 25, 1974

Juan Linz has insightfully observed that the Portuguese transition to democracy involved a rupture (*ruptura*), or break from the fascist past, compared with the gradual reform process (*reforma*) that took place in Spain in the 1970s. Whereas various sectors of Spanish political and civil society engaged in a gradual transition punctuated by a series of pacts, or agreements, among the various players, junior military officers in Portugal, calling themselves the Armed Forces Movement (MLA) simply overthrew the dictatorship on April 25, 1974. This military action led to the quick eradication of the former regime, a rupture from the past, and required that a new regime be made from scratch (Linz 1977: 237–296).

The development of the MLA is a complicated story (Bandeira 1976: 1–56). In brief, the prolonged and seemingly interminable colonial struggle in Africa put great strains on the Portuguese military, especially the junior officers. Many had been forced to spend ten or more years in Africa, which disrupted their families and careers. The formation of the Armed Forces Movement started principally in response to the professional grievances of junior officers, notably their demand for the repeal of Decree Law 373–73 (which allowed the *milicianos*, or conscripted officers, to count all of their service toward seniority, moving ahead

of professional junior officers). When the Caetano administration appeared both disinterested and antagonistic toward their demands, the MFA decided that regime change was the only way to repeal Decree Law 373–73, end the colonial war, and offer a new political model for Portugal. The officers responsible for the planning and execution of the April 25, 1974 Carnation Revolution, known as the “April Captains,” promised the Portuguese people a political program known as the three “Ds,” meaning democracy, development and decolonization (Bruneau 1974).⁴ However, the members of the Armed Forces Movement themselves could not agree as to the content of these terms (Manuel 1995: 26–37).

During the 1974–1976 revolutionary process, known as the PREC (or the *Processo Revolucionário em Curso*), the MFA divided into four main ideological factions, one in favor of the creation of a West European Social Democratic state, another advancing an Eastern Bloc Communist model, a third group preferring the establishment of a Cuban-style socialist state, and a traditionalist vision seeking gradually to reform the pre-existing authoritarian model. This internal MFA conflict controlled the final outcome; the victorious faction was able to shape the new form of social and political organization. All of the players sought to implement the “three Ds,” but the actual policy preferences varied considerably, depending on their proposed political model (Manuel 1995: 55–83; also see Maxwell 1997).

Mário Soares was the leading civilian political leader advancing a West European style social democratic model, while Communist Party leader Álvaro Cunhal supported the Eastern Bloc Communist system of government. Of note, these two leaders had known each other for a very long time. In his youth, Soares studied at the Colégio Moderno in Lisbon, founded by his father. Álvaro Cunhal was employed as a teacher at the Colégio, and actually taught geography to the young Soares. They both opposed the dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar, and were each imprisoned and exiled (Soares in Paris, Cunhal in Moscow). Soares subsequently became a political opponent of Cunhal (Manuel 1996a: 4–6).

The eyes of Europe were upon Portugal during the PREC. Jean-Paul Sartre, the great French existential philosopher, visited Portugal in the spring of 1975. Sartre was given a very warm welcome by hoards of young university students. At one of his press conferences, Sartre told the students that he considered the Portuguese revolution to be one of the most important events in post-war Europe, and called upon them to build West Europe’s first socialist state (Sartre *et al.* 1975: 32–34). Another development of European-wide consequence took place on November 6, 1975. Appearing on a French television station, Álvaro Cunhal and Mário Soares debated the future of Portugal for almost four hours. During this robust back-and-forth, Cunhal praised the equality of the Eastern bloc countries, and suggested that their political system would be a good model for Portugal. Soares countered by arguing that the person of Joseph Stalin separated the Communists from the Socialists, not Karl Marx and/or Vladimir Lenin. Soares railed against a “socialism of misery” common to the East. Citing the examples of Germany and Sweden, Soares instead proposed a democratic, prosperous and equitable political, social and economic system for Portugal.

What is perhaps most interesting is that this Communist–Socialist debate was very current in the 1970s, when the reform communist ideology of Eurocommunism was gaining electoral strength throughout Europe, and especially in Italy.⁵ The political dynamic in Portugal served to illustrate larger issues for all Europeans. The decision to appear on French television – hence a window to a greater European audience – was a dramatic break from the isolation of the Salazar/Caetano years, and opened the floodgate to deeper and more European interest and investment into Portugal. The April 25, 1974 Revolution clearly represented a significant break from the past and to new possibilities with Europe (see Gallagher 1983).⁶

The six provisional governments in office from 1974 to 1976 tried to strike a balance between macroeconomic challenges and the immediate needs of the Portuguese. The continuing political instability and regional actions for social revolution precluded stable economic growth; causing great anguish and turmoil among the population (see Bermeo 1986). With each new austerity measure taken by the regime in Lisbon, young militants would take direct action against the policy. In the end, rather than bringing law, order, and progress, the MFA’s own internal divisions became a source of the political, economic, and social upheaval (Manuel 1995: 55–130).

By the spring of 1976, Prime Minister General Vasco Gonçalves, who had been in favor of the construction of a East European communist state with Álvaro Cunhal, and Major Otelio Saraiva de Carvalho, who had been in favor of the creation of an MFA–*Povo* (MFA–People) alliance, had been politically outmaneuvered and discredited by the MFA moderate group known as the “Group of Nine.” These moderate officers had gained control of the Council of the Revolution by July of 1976, and enjoyed the widespread support of political society, including Mário Soares’s Portuguese Socialist Party, the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) led by Francisco Sá Carneiro, and Freitas do Amaral’s Party of the Social Democratic Centre (CDS). Only the Communist Party, which enjoyed about 10 percent of electoral support, regretted this turn of events, but it too eventually accepted the new democratic rules and institutions. In time, all of the more militant and leftist anti-democratic elements were forced out of the political process.

The defeat of both leftist and rightist anti-democratic elements facilitated the Europeanization of the political regime (Linz 1977: 237–296). That is, in spite of the serious differences of opinion among those who survived the transition, there were no significant anti-democratic political forces in Portugal after 1976. Those remaining political forces represented a narrow ideological spectrum, and subsequent party formation followed the overall European model (Corkill 1993 and Manuel 1996a: 10–11). The pro-European victors adopted the classical ideas of social democracy, abandoning Marxist ideology and supporting the liberalization of the economy and integration with Europe.⁷

There are currently six major ideological expressions among political society in Portugal. On the left, there are three organizations: the Portuguese Communist Party, (PCP, *Partido Comunista Português*), the Left Bloc (BE, *Bloco de*

Esquerda), and the Green Party (PEV, *Partido Ecologista* or “*Os Verdes*”). The center-left is occupied by the Socialist Party (PS, *Partido Socialista*). The center-right is taken by the Social Democratic Party (PSD, *Partido Social Democrata*), and the Centrist Social Democrat Party, also called the People’s Party, is on the right (*Centro Democrático e Social/Partido Popular*) (Manuel 1996a: 4–6).

Of these six political parties, only two have governed since 1976: the Socialist Party and the Social Democratic party. Together, they comprise the center-left and center-right sides of the political spectrum, and combined they represent a more moderate, centrist elements of the population. The Social Democrat Party (PSD) is very strong in the central and northern regions of the country, representing a more conservative electorate. The Socialist Party (PS) enjoys strong support in the cities and in the central and southern regions. The PS essentially supports a reformist capitalist agenda, not an anti-capitalist one, and is significantly more progressive on cultural issues than the PSD. We can identify similar patterns throughout Europe. In Spain, for instance, the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) on the left, and the Popular Party (PP), on the right, function similarly to the PS and PSD in Portugal. The same general pattern of ideological and political party formation holds in Italy and France as well.

Key institutional elements of Portuguese democracy

The Portuguese Constitution of 1976, and its subsequent revisions of 1982 and 1989, created a dual-executive, or semi-presidential regime in Portugal. The dual-executive institutional arrangement contains elements from both presidential and parliamentary systems. This system was first designed by French President Charles de Gaulle, with the creation of the Fifth Republic Constitution in 1958. In contrast to the well-known French system of approximate constitutional parity between the President and Prime Minister in many areas, the Portuguese dual-executive model can be better described as a parliamentary system with a separately elected, presiding executive officer. In Portugal, the law-making function is under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister and the National Assembly. Portugal has a unicameral legislature, called the *Assembleia da República*. Small and homogeneous unitary nation-states frequently prefer one legislative body to two, such as Sweden and Greece – whereas a bicameral legislature exists in Spain. There is a 230-seat parliament, with four-year terms, and twenty-two multi-seat constituencies.⁸

The constitution grants the President independent authority and legitimacy outside of the National Assembly. He is expected to monitor the activities of the government, and has veto power. In the event of a serious deadlock in the National Assembly, the President has the constitutional power to ensure governmental balance and accountability. The President may dismiss the Prime Minister, appoint a new Prime Minister or call for new elections. He also serves as the Commander-in-Chief. The President is elected by universal suffrage to a five-year term, and no president may serve more than two consecutive terms.

Any President is also permitted to run for a third and final term, as long as it is not consecutive with the previous terms (*Constituição da República Portuguesa* 1990: 228–231). Although these powers seem to provide the Portuguese President with substantial leverage, his or her actual power is somewhat less than what it may seem.⁹

Like many European democracies, Portugal functions under a multi-member constituency, proportional representation system for the election of members to the National Assembly. Legislative seats are allocated in proportion to the votes received by each party, based the d’Hondt method.¹⁰ Proportional representation systems encourage the formation of coalition governments among the various political parties, especially if no single party enjoys an absolute majority of seats. A coalition among political parties is a solution to this problem, when two or more parties agree to a common legislative program (Manuel and Cammisa 1998: 26–35).

Five milestones on the road to Portuguese democratization

The development of democratic institutional norms has taken time. Portugal has had to pass several milestones – or significant events – on the road towards the consolidation of its democratic regime. These are, namely, the issues of getting the new dual-executive arrangement up and running, establishing civilian control of the military, achieving integration into the European Economic Community, building electoral alliances across ideological differences, and the peaceful alternation of power. Let us now turn to each of these five milestones, in chronological order.

The first milestone involved getting the new Constitutional dual-executive system to actually function. As in France, the dual-executive arrangement embodied in the post 1976 Portuguese Constitutional regime was complicated, and there was some potential for serious institutional deadlock should the Prime Minister not accept the directives of the President. Following the June 1976 Presidential elections, President Ramalho Eanes, a military hero of the transition, and the leader of the now defunct *Partido Renovador Democrático* (Democratic Renewal Party, or PRD) was elected President. Mário Soares was elected as the first Constitutional Prime Minister, presiding over a minority Socialist government. The two executives needed to figure out how their constitutional roles would interact, as their actions were establishing the very foundation of the new democracy.

In the National Assembly, Prime Minister Soares had to deal with frequent challenges from the opposition to his legislative initiatives. Each time his government stalemated with the other parties, overall power and authority shifted to the President. After two years of Socialist minority rule and general governmental instability, President Eanes became widely perceived as the savior of the democratic system from the political parties.

Throughout this period, Soares did not seek to block Eanes from intervening in parliamentary affairs. Rather, he used his considerable political skill to build confidence in the workings of the new constitutional regime during this period of

economic hardship (Manuel 1996a: 25). The frequently tense – but overall functional – working relationship between the President and Prime Minister at the dawn of the new constitutional arrangement was absolutely critical for the institutionalization of new democratic norms. Their success at developing their respective constitutional roles represents the accomplishment of the first milestone.

The second milestone dealt with the removal of the military from the political equation. When the *Movimento das Forças Armadas* (MFA) left active politics in 1976, they sought to institutionalize their revolutionary role with the creation of a non-elected body known as the Council of Revolution, which was granted the constitutional power to veto any law passed by the legislature that it alone determined to be anti-revolutionary. The Council was composed solely of military officers, chosen by the military, which stood over the elected politicians. The Council was charged with protecting the revolution, and in particular, defending the constitutional language, which set the overall goal of the democratic regime to create a classless society. This situation was entirely undemocratic, and was eventually remedied with the 1982 Constitutional amendment abolishing the Council.

In the 1979 parliamentary elections Portuguese voters opted for the conservative Democratic Alliance platform of Francisco Sá Carneiro, the leader of the PSD, who had formed a conservative alliance with the CDS. Sá Carneiro became Prime Minister in January 1980, and immediately sought to implement reforms to liberalize the economy, and move Portugal away from socialism. However, before he could get much accomplished, Sá Carneiro died in a plane crash in 1980, and Francisco Pinto Balsemão, also from the PSD, became Prime Minister.¹¹

Balsemão reached out to Mário Soares, and gained his support to amend the 1976 Constitution significantly. Soares had frequently been frustrated by President Eanes's role during the first constitutional government, and was very much in favor of enhancing the constitutional powers of the Prime Minister. In 1982, with the support of the CDS, the PSD and the PS, the National Assembly amended the Constitution by abolishing the Council of the Revolution. This amendment also limited the President's ability to veto legislation or dissolve parliament. The overall goal of creating a classless society was finally eliminated in the 1989 Constitutional revision (Manuel 1996a: 37–50, 64).

To their credit, the members of the Council of the Revolution accepted this amendment, and left politics for good (Graham 1993: 82–88). They subsequently formed themselves into an old officers' club, known as the "Association of April 25."¹² The removal of the military from the political equation, and the associated assertion of the supremacy of civilian rule, were clearly necessary steps for the creation of a genuine democracy. The 1982 Constitutional amendment was a vital step in the Europeanization of the new Portuguese political regime.

The third milestone was reached when Portugal finally joined the European Economic Community, now called the European Union, on January 1, 1986. Portugal had been a marginal player in Europe for the first six decades of the twentieth century. Of course, it was a member of the North Atlantic Treaty

Organization, given the regime's strong anti-communist stance, and the strategic importance of Lajes Air force base in the Azores. Portugal also joined the European Free Trade Association in 1959. Yet, to all intents and purposes, the country was essentially blocked from any meaningful dialog by the leading European states, given their displeasure with Portuguese authoritarianism. The European Economic Community only allowed democratic states to become members – a requirement which kept the Salazar/Caetano regime out of the European organization. Following the events of April 25, 1974, and the subsequent transition to, and consolidation of, democracy in Portugal, all of this changed, and membership in the EEC became a possibility. The new financial resources that became available after 1986 both stabilized the economy and led to the creation of a modern infrastructure. These funds represented 3.3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in Portugal from 1994 to 1999. Political will was clearly an essential ingredient for the establishment of democracy in Portugal. Subsequent European economic support significantly aided the successful consolidation of the new democratic regime (Manuel and Royo 2004: 1–31).

The fourth milestone involved coalition-formation and alliance-building across the ideological spectrum. This was accomplished during the 1986 Presidential election, which was the first presidential election since 1976 without an important military candidate. There were four major candidates competing in that election. A coalition of center-right forces (CDS and PSD) supported Diogo Freitas do Amaral, the founder and leader of the CDS. Amaral pledged a return to conservative and reformist policies, and essentially to roll back the progressive policies adopted under the Socialist regimes, and adopt the policies of economic liberalization inspired by Prime Minister Thatcher's economic reforms in the United Kingdom. The united right confronted a divided left: Mário Soares, former Prime Minister Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo and Francisco Salgado Zenha, all Socialists, sought the Presidency. Of note, Zenha was viewed as an anti-Soares candidate, and enjoyed the support of both outgoing President Eanes and the Communist Party.

The first round of voting took place on February 6, 1986, and produced a stunning result: Freitas do Amaral came within three points of an outright victory, with 47 percent of the total votes cast. Soares came in a distant second (25 percent), followed by Zenha (21 percent) and Pintasilgo (7 percent). Portugal uses a two-ballot procedure for its presidential election, which means that if no candidate wins over 50 percent of the vote on the first ballot, a second ballot is held between the two most popular candidates. In the run-off election on February 16, 1986, Soares emerged victorious with 51 percent of the vote. (Manuel 1996a: 60–64). A united coalition of left-wing forces barely defeated the united coalition of right-wing forces. The slight margin of victory has been partially credited to a belief among voters that Soares' connections could help Portugal deepen its relationship with Europe and the wider world. In this regard, the International Socialist Movement afforded the Socialist Party a strategic advantage in the elections. Mário Soares had well known friendships with many European Socialist leaders, including Harold Wilson of the United Kingdom,

Olof Palme of Sweden, François Mitterrand of France and Willy Brandt of Germany. The Socialist Party argued that these connections would help bring Portugal back into a European framework.

The 1986 Portuguese election also fits into a larger European dynamic. The 2002 French Presidential elections is a case in point. Like Portugal, France also uses a two-ballot electoral system. Among the sixteen political parties presenting presidential candidates in 2002, the two candidates expected to face off in the second round of voting were incumbent President Jacques Chirac of the conservative Rally for the Republic party, and his erstwhile rival, Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. As expected, Chirac did obtain the most votes in the first round of voting, with 19.88 percent of the vote. However, Jospin, with 16.18 percent, finished just behind the far right-wing candidate, Jean-Marie Le Pen of the National Front Party, who received 16.86 percent of the ballots.

The surprising electoral strength of Le Pen stunned even the most seasoned political observers. Indeed, his third-place finish behind Le Pen humiliated socialist Lionel Jospin, who immediately decided to resign from politics, stating, "I assume full responsibility for this defeat and I will consequently retire from politics after the end of the presidential elections."¹³

In 2002, Jacques Chirac faced Jean-Marie Le Pen in the second round of voting. Running on a law-and-order platform, Le Pen tapped into the fears and anxieties of a significant percentage of the French electorate. Among his promises, Le Pen sought to curb immigration into France, place a ban on the building of mosques, and build more prisons. The prospects of an elected French government closing its borders to the outside world, rounding up thousands of immigrants, and curtailing the free expression of religion, all in the name of law and order, disturbed lovers of democracy everywhere. Many French citizens wondered how they could ever adopt such xenophobic policies in the land that offered the world the universalistic and democratic principles of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* during their revolution of 1789.

This presidential election did indeed make history: for the first time in modern French politics, communist, socialist and other leftists joined the Gaullists and others on the right in an anti-National Front alliance. Many simply voted against Le Pen, and found Chirac acceptable because his policies functioned within the French democratic tradition of universal rights. Some left-wing voters actually wore clothes-pegs on their noses in the voting booth as a protest against the "stench" of having to choose, in their view, a lesser evil. Arguably, at the end of the day, the good sense of the majority acted as a check to the fears of the minority: the broad-based electoral coalition enabled Chirac to win re-election by an impressive margin (82.21 percent compared with 17.79 percent). In his victory speech, the President reaffirmed France's commitment to its democratic and universalistic principles:

We have lived through a time of grave concern for the nation, but tonight, in a massive surge, France has reaffirmed its attachment to the values of the republic. I hail France, true to itself, true to its lofty ideals, true to its universal and humanist mission.¹⁴

Combined, the 1986 Portuguese Presidential Elections and the 2002 French Presidential elections offer us a revealing window into the perils and possibilities of a political system predicated on the rule by the people. In order for the system to work sometimes, individuals and groups with very different ideological views must cooperate. Coalition-formation among competing ideological factions for a greater goal is an essential milestone in the consolidation of democracy in any country, especially those functioning under the d'Hondt method of allocating parliamentary seats.

The fifth milestone involves the peaceful alternation of power among competing political parties. The new Portuguese democracy has performed well in this area. The office of the presidency has provided both stability and accountability since 1976. There have been four different presidents from three different parties elected to office in the past thirty-four years; namely President Ramalho Eanes (1976–1985) of the PRD; President Mário Soares (1986–1996) of the PS; President Jorge Sampaio (1996–2006) of the PS; and President Aníbal Cavaco Silva, of the PSD, who was elected in 2006 and remains in office at the time of writing (2012).

There has been similar success in the National Assembly, where Portugal's two leading parties – the PS and the PSD – have alternated power since 1976. In the most recent elections in 2009, Prime Minister José Sócrates and his Socialist Party garnished 36.6 percent of the vote, down from 45 percent in the previous elections in 2005, giving the party ninety-six seats in the 230-seat parliament, from their previous total of 121 seats. Under the leadership of Manuela Ferreira Leite, the PSD won seventy-eight legislative seats in 2009, up from seventy-five seats in 2005, with 29.1 percent of the vote. Smaller parties at both ends of the ideological spectrum have also won some electoral support, and parliamentary seats as well. In 2011, the PSD reclaimed a majority in the National Assembly. Pedro Passos Coelho led the PSD to victory over the incumbent Prime Minister José Sócrates and the Socialist Party, with 108 seats and 38.7 percent of the vote. To form a governing majority, the PSD joined forces with the People's Party, led by Paulo Portas, who had won twenty-four legislative seats with 11.7 percent of the 2011 vote. President Aníbal Cavaco Silva, also a member of the PSD, was also elected to a second term in 2011.¹⁵

These five accomplished milestones have resulted in the creation of the new democratic state in Portugal. Following Joseph Schumpeter's minimalist institutional definition of democracy, we can realistically refer to the contemporary political regime in Portugal as a functioning democracy in the larger European tradition because it has both adopted and then institutionalized three foundational criteria: first, free and fair elections, in which adult citizens have been included, have been held on a regular basis since 1976; second, these elections have been open for all offices, including the highest and most powerful political roles; and third, basic civil and political rights are respected in Portugal (see Schumpeter 1943, reprinted 2008). Civil society has developed robust democratic structures in the years since 1974, and the prospects for continuing democratic governance are excellent (Hamann and Manuel 1999: 71–99).

To be sure, democracy is practiced imperfectly in Portugal as well as in most of the countries that fulfill these three criteria. Even so, Schumpeter's minimalist institutional definition captures the political essence of what a democracy does, and as such, is a useful way to understand Portuguese democracy. These criteria – which have become the standard of the West European democratic regimes – eluded Portuguese politics throughout the forty-eight year Salazar/Caetano regime, and indeed, had never been formally part of the Portuguese body politic before April 25, 1974.

Conclusion

Portuguese exceptionalism is no more. The return to Europe and the associated democratization of the Portuguese political system can be understood as a much-needed corrective to both Portuguese authoritarianism and its associated notions of lusotropicalism: that is, democracy and Europe have replaced corporatism and the Portuguese overseas empire as two of the key defining elements of contemporary Portuguese identity.¹⁶ In the thirty-five years since the April 25, 1974 Carnation Revolution, the Portuguese political system has developed new mechanisms for debate, elections, and policy adoption. Portugal is currently completely integrated into Europe as a member of the European Union, with a democratic government and a developing economy. Whatever the merits or faults of the current democratic system in Portugal, it is certainly time to place the old adages that “Africa begins at the Pyrenees,” or that “Europe ends at the Pyrenees” in the rubbish bin for good.

Notes

- 1 The author wishes to thank Andrew Martin of the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard University for his very useful comments to a draft version of this chapter.
- 2 The term “lusotropicalism” was coined by the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre. It describes the belief that the Portuguese had a singular civilizing mission in the Portuguese Empire. The Salazar regime used this theory as a justification for waging the colonial wars. For more information see Gilberto Freyre (1942).
- 3 A. H. de Oliveira Marques notes:

Although no guarantees of electoral freedom were granted, and no poll control by the opposition was accepted, Delgado decided to fight to the end. Official figures gave him one-fourth of the vote (he won in several places, including a number of towns in Mozambique), but he always claimed to be the real winner.

(Marques 1976: 222)

- 4 The Carnation Revolution (*Revolução dos Cravos*) was a largely bloodless military action, best known for a photo of a young child placing a carnation into the gun of a soldier. Some Portuguese people will still wear carnations on April 25 to celebrate the event.
- 5 The Eurocommunism movement in the 1970s was inspired by the writings of Italian Socialist Antonio Gramsci. This movement supported West European democratic institutions and criticized the human rights abuses of Soviet communism.

- 6 The November 1975 Soares–Cunhal debate is available on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gen8NmL5g70 and www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYbEUMyjts&feature=related (accessed 13 March 2011).
- 7 In spite of regularly scheduled elections, Portugal was clearly not democratic under the Salazar/Caetano regime. For the purposes of this chapter, we will adopt Joseph Schumpeter's minimalist institutional definition: to be considered a functioning democracy, a regime must hold regularly scheduled free and fair elections, in which all adult citizens have been included; these elections must be for all political offices, including the highest; and a country must respect the basic civil and political rights of its citizens (see Schumpeter 1943, reprinted 2008). If these conditions are met, then one could safely refer to a political regime as democratic.
- 8 There are eighteen districts on the continent, one for the Azores, one for Madeira, one for Portuguese living in Europe and one Portuguese living elsewhere.
- 9 President Sampaio removed the wayward government of Pedro Santana Lopes in 2004, and called for new elections, even though Santana Lopes enjoyed an absolute majority in the National Assembly. So this power is used; but it is not a frequent occurrence.
- 10 Variations of this system are used in many countries, including Austria, Belgium, Finland, Portugal, and Spain.
- 11 The circumstances of the plane crash have led to speculation that Sá Carneiro was killed by the remaining far left-wing elements of the MFA, but nothing has even been conclusively proven.
- 12 Associação 25 De Abril, at <http://www.25abril.org/a25abril/> (accessed October 1, 2013).
- 13 Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/europe/newsid_1899000/1899029.stm (accessed September 30, 2013). Also see http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/europe/newsid_1943000/1943193.stm (accessed March 13, 2011).
- 14 Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/europe/newsid_1899000/1899029.stm (accessed March 13, 2011).
- 15 This overall pattern is similar to Spain. The Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE, or the Socialist Workers Party) and the Partido Popular (or People's Party, PP) have dominated Spanish politics since the 1976 democratic transition. Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero of the PSOE was first elected in 2004, and was re-elected in 2008. The People's Party, led by Mariano Rajoy, regained a legislative majority with their victory in the 2011 elections, with 186 seats and 44.6 percent of the vote. Spanish civil society has since become accustomed to democratic procedures (see Pérez-Díaz 1993).
- 16 “Fátima, fado, and football” arguably remain as three other defining characteristics of what it means to be Portuguese today: *Fátima* refers to the believed apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to three shepherd children at Fátima in 1917; *fado* is a Portuguese musical form characterized by sad, soulful sounds and lyrics; *football* refers to the national pastime of soccer.

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