

# An Overview of the Portuguese Revolution and New Realities

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*Herald of Europe* together with the Library of Foreign Literature of Russia, and the Embassy of Portugal in Russia on 19-20 May 2004 held a conference on: *the Portuguese Revolution of April 1974, Democratisation Processes in Portugal, Russia on the Way to Democracy, Similarities and Differences.*

*The following speech was delivered by Mario Soares, the former President of Portugal, at the event and was kindly given for publication in our magazine.*

*Subjects announced and discussed at the conference included: Societies During Transitional Periods, the Difficulties of the Integration Processes, and Economic Problems and Solutions. All of the problems are current and we intend to address them within the framework of our magazine and in public discussions in the future.*

It is my honour and privilege to be back in Moscow to participate in this important Colloquium on the Portuguese Revolution of April 1974 and its similarities and differences with Russia's path towards democratisation.

You naturally understand that it is difficult for me to speak about Russia's situation. Although I have passionately followed its historical changes since 1989, I still do not have enough knowledge to issue opinions on the Russian experience.

This is none the less a highly stimulating Colloquium for me, as it undeniably comes at the right time and, in many aspects, plays a pioneering role. I therefore wish to congratulate its organisers – the Library of Foreign Languages and the Portuguese Embassy, Herald of Europe magazine. I am deeply grateful for their invitation.

Portuguese and foreign historians recognise that the Portuguese Revolution of 25 April 1974 was one of very few “successful revolutions”. In line with this view, I will quote U.S. historian and political scientist Samuel Huntington, who stated and demonstrated precisely this point in his book “The Third Wave”. Why? In my view, essentially for three reasons:

– the Revolution was peaceful and selfless, and without bloodshed; it fulfilled completely the three objectives of its Initial Programme, the Programme of the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) – i.e. de-colonisation, democratisation, and development – while radically severing the nation's links to a dictatorial past of 48 years;

– it positively influenced Spain’s “democratic transition” in 1976–1978 and somehow became the inspiring model for other “democratic transitions”, namely Iberian American States and particularly Brazil.

In order to understand the “Revolution of Carnations”, as it has been called, one needs to know the circumstances in which it took place. Allow me to briefly expound to you those circumstances.

Portugal is a small country situated on Europe’s most Westerly tip, with a long glorious history. It became an independent nation in 1140, more than eight centuries ago, while Spain, its single neighbour on the Iberian Peninsula, only constituted itself as a state in 1492, three and half centuries later. Portugal is a unitary Nation-State, having always kept the same continental borders, while Spain, which is five times larger, is a plural state – incorporating several nations.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, following the conquest of Ceuta in 1415, Portugal launched its enterprise of seafaring discoveries. First came the four major North-Atlantic archipelagos of the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands and Cape Verde – known as Macaronesia, followed by the Western and Eastern coasts of Africa and Brazil. Portugal was the first European country to travel to India by sea, and then to China and Japan. These maritime travels enabled Portugal to acquire its overseas possessions; of which numerous traces still remain today as well as interesting fortresses in many places throughout the world. Brazil, for example, once one of the gems of the Portuguese Crown, peacefully obtained its independence in 1822 by the hand of a Portuguese prince – Peter IV of Portugal, also Peter I of Brazil.

Like almost all European nations, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Portugal had a Liberal Revolution, in 1820. And, like Spain, it was invaded by Napoleon’s generals – although not directly by Napoleon, unlike Russia.

On the 5 October 1910, Portugal was the third country in Europe – following France and Switzerland – to install a Republic. Mainly with a view to securing its colonies in Africa – at a time when criticism against colonialism was not yet on the international agenda – Portugal became involved in World War I, siding with the Allies. But wartime significantly weakened Portugal, due to the loss of human lives (both in Flanders and Africa), as serious epidemics occurred simultaneously and the terrible economic and financial consequences of the conflict. Hence the agony of the 1<sup>st</sup> Republic (1910–1926) and the advent of military dictatorship, on the 28 May 1926.

Antonio de Oliveira Salazar was appointed Finance Minister in 1928 and became Prime Minister and absolute dictator four years later, in 1932. He benefited from the support of both the Church and the monarchists at home, and from the rise of Nazism and Fascism and Franco’s victory in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), which he actively supported. At that time Salazar was clearly a fascist, establishing two armed militias – the *Legião Portuguesa* (Portuguese Legion) and the *Mocidade Portuguesa* (Portuguese Youth). He had Mussolini’s portrait on his writing desk and had no problem in saluting in the fascist manner in public.

As World War II unfolded, Salazar grew wiser and gradually approached the English and then the Americans – whom he granted a military base in the Azores, which they still hold today under NATO. At the end of war, the two Iberian dictators – Salazar and Franco – were saved by the great betrayal of Western democracies, who let both Iberian dictators remain in power in spite of their friendliness with the Axis. By then, the fear of Communism and the emerging Cold War prompted them to consider other priorities.

In spite of the decolonisation movement that appeared after World War II, Salazar and his successor Marcelo Caetano (1968–1974) thought they could resist this trend and deceive the United Nations, and decided to make plain cosmetic changes – for example, changing the name “colonies” to “overseas provinces”. That was the greatest error – perhaps the crime – of both dictators, resulting in 13 years of bloody colonial wars in Angola, Guinea and Mozambique. War led Portugal to a situation of serious economic, political and moral crisis, becoming totally isolated in political and diplomatic terms. The United Nations also condemned the country on several instances and had it expelled from a number of UN specialised organisations.

At the beginning, the 25 April 1974 Revolution was a military rebellion of low-rank officers – the so-called “April Captains”, put an end to the dictatorship of Salazar and Caetano. All the officers knew that no military solution could be found for the colonial wars and that the dictatorial government had proven unable to find a “political solution”. This could only be reached by negotiating with the African nationalistic movements engaged in war.

But on the 25 April, when the tanks led by Captain Salgueiro Maia entered Lisbon and placed themselves in front of the Carmo headquarters, where dictator Caetano had sought refuge with some of his ministers, the people crowded the streets to hail the Revolution, mingling with the rebellious soldiers and encouraging them to fight for freedom. From that moment on, the military rebellion gradually became a true Revolution.

The pace of events sped up after the dictator Caetano stepped down and handed the power over to general Antynio Spínola, one of only two generals who, on that day, gave their political support to the “rebellion of the captains”. From then on, the fascists collapsed like a rotten apple, without resistance. Troops that had remained loyal to the dictatorship surrendered. The three main pillars of the dictatorship – the political police, censorship and the single party – were dismantled, as well as the Corporative State, the Portuguese Legion and Portuguese Youth. The people directly took the release of political prisoners into their own hands. Underground parties – the Portuguese Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the Maoist organisations – immediately rushed to the streets and began to demonstrate in freedom. Exiles started to make their way back to Portugal... On the 1 May 1974, only five days after the Revolution, there was a real celebration of fraternity in Lisbon, where more than one million people from all over the country gathered. In only five days, Portugal had changed beyond recognition. It looked a different country altogether, a land of freedom, freed from the oppression of a long-lasting dictatorship...

The government was temporarily assigned to the National Salvation Board (Junta de Salvacao Nacional), composed of generals from the three bodies of the Armed Forces, waiting for a new President of the Republic to be appointed – eventually general Antynio Spinola. Then an interim government was also selected, composed of civilians representing political parties and independent personalities.

Then the “April Captains” who had overthrown the dictatorship appointed the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), aimed at counterbalancing the generals’ Junta. They solemnly promised to hold “free elections” for a Constitutional Parliament, within no more than one year. A promise which they honoured.

The first serious problems of governance began to arise. Very briefly, the main ones were the following:

- How could peace be secured, while rapidly putting an end to “colonial wars”? (Everyday the public, especially young people, held demonstrations on the street proclaiming “no more soldiers for the colonies”);
- What to do with the Revolution and how to organise political power? (In other words, how would Portuguese democracy be shaped?)
- How to meet the people’s social requirements, claimed by the public, which began to demonstrate their views out loud?
- How to secure the sustained economic and financial development of Portugal – a country seriously affected by the terrible oil crisis of 1973, the burden of military expenditure and the unbearable effort of colonial wars?

Elation in the early days of freedom soon gave way to an increasingly chaotic situation, with the People out on the streets demanding virtually everything. Moreover the military power suffered from internal splits and the civilian power from lack of election-based legitimacy, as the military had appointed it.

General Spinola, appointed President of the Republic, clashed with the MFA Coordinating Committee – the representative of the captains who had overthrown the dictatorship. Political parties represented in the 1<sup>st</sup> Interim Government, still unaware of their relative impact on the electorate, tried to influence or even manipulate the military power. Hence a series of crises, followed which several consecutive cabinets sought to respond to. Having lost his authority, general Spinola stepped down from office as President of the Republic at the end of 1974 and was replaced by Francisco da Costa Gomes, the other general who had also supported the “Captains’ Movement”.

A divide between two clearly opposite ideas gradually emerged, as to which should be the path of the “ongoing revolutionary process” (known by the acronym PREC). On the one hand, there were those who wished to consolidate a Western-type pluralistic democracy, which, after decolonisation, would eventually join the European Economic Community (EEC), then composed of only nine member

states, before Greece's accession). On the other hand, there were those who wanted to "speed up the revolution" – as they said – and move directly from the rightist dictatorship of Salazar and Caetano to a type of "people's democracy", establishing in Portugal a kind of "European Cuba".

This divide materialised for the first time in major political, social and street confrontations between the Socialist Party (and their allies from the Centre, the Right and, oddly enough, the extreme Left) and the Communist Party (and their leftist and anarchist-populist allies). These took place during the so-called "hot summer" of 1975, after the first elections for the Constitutional Parliament held on 25 April 1975, one year after the Revolution – which established the Socialist Party (PS) as the most important Portuguese political party. It should be noted, however, that the divide was only finally overcome after the revolutionary coup of 25 November 1975. This attempt to install a so-called "popular power," launched by the anarchist-populist left, failed completely. Such an unrealistic attempt looked rather like "a getaway to the Moon"...

Contrary to the explanation proposed by the communist left later on, the 25 November did not mark the end of the Revolution – let alone a counter-revolution. Rather, it aimed to drive the Revolution back to its primitive track, which had always been democratic and pluralist. Had it not been for the 25 November, a victory for the moderate (military and civilian) Left, today Portugal would not be a pluralist, Western regime, fully integrated into the European Union. And a terrible civil war would most likely have taken place.

This complex period from 11 March 1975 (Spinola's flight abroad and the "speeding up of the Revolution") to 25 November 1975 was marked by the large scale nationalisation of the main sectors of the economy, the confrontations of the so-called "hot summer", occupation of houses, land and enterprises, the Communist "land reform", the "single trade union" movement, the case of the *Republica* newspaper, and soon. As shown by the international press of that time, both Europe and the two rival political and ideological blocks closely monitored this evolution, which deteriorated the then existing detente situation – achieved in the Helsinki Agreements, signed at that time.

As the convulsions listed above affected the Portuguese government, negotiations aimed at granting the right to self-determination and independence to the Portuguese colonies, in line with UN decisions, continued. More or less indirectly, the major powers became involved in this process, which partly explains the difficult situation faced by the former African colonies following their independence – especially Angola.

It is a well-known fact that Henry Kissinger, the then US Secretary of State, proposed that his famous "theory of vaccination" should apply to Portugal. According to such a theory, if Portugal became a "European Cuba" – a situation he thought inevitable – then this could be used as a vaccination against communism in Europe, and beyond. It was at that time – in a meeting we had in Washington D.C. – that Kissinger called me "the Portuguese Kerensky" and encouraged me to stay in the USA, promising me a job at the University. In his view, "Portugal was lost to

democracy”. You know – he insisted – “when a communist party makes so much progress in controlling government as the Portuguese has, there is no chance of them ever going back”. Fortunately he was wrong. It was also at that time that Andre Malraux declared to *L'Express*: “the Portuguese socialists have proved that the Menshevik can beat the Bolshevik”...

On 2 April 1976, the Constitutional Parliament adopted the Constitution of the Republic, which instituted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic and is still today the political matrix of Portuguese democracy.

Pursuant to the new Constitution, a new President of the Republic – General Antynio Ramalho Eanes (one of the military heads of 25 November) – was universally elected by the People and shortly after the 1st Legislative Parliament was also elected. The first constitutional government (a minority Socialist Party cabinet) emerging from this election took office in July 1976, secured the normal democratic functioning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic and, at the last minute, rescued Portugal from almost certain bankruptcy.

Years later, the Constitution was amended on several occasions. The first revision, in 1982, when Francisco Pinto Balsemao was Prime Minister, released the Constitution from the military supervision of the Council of the Revolution. The second revision, in 1989, when Anibal Cavaco Silva was Prime Minister, revoke the principle of the “irreversibility of nationalisation”, paving the way for the so-called “privatisations”; the other two revision processes had less structural implications.

In March 1977, negotiations for Portugal’s accession to the EEC began, leading to the signing of the Accession Treaty on 12 June 1985 – signed on the same day in Lisbon and Madrid, in two consecutive ceremonies.

Portugal’s integration into the EEC turned out to be highly advantageous for our country, boosting an unprecedented cycle of expansion and development in Portuguese contemporary history. It was the indispensable counterweight to decolonisation. Now that so many years have elapsed, this integration is deemed indisputable and highly fortunate, even by political parties – and personalities – who disputed it at that time.

Today Portugal faces many problems, like many other countries in the European Union. The EU is obviously at a crossroads, having embarked on an enlargement to 25 member states and dealing with a draft Constitution pending approval. Moreover the Union is still in the middle of an uneasy situation of economic and social recession, as no-one has yet defined who is going to pay for the enlargement and how, without letting down the hopes of the new member states.

Portugal’s current problems are very different than they were before accession to the EEC. Today the country is undeniably at a much higher level of development, having joined the Euro and the Schengen space at the right moment, without any major difficulties.

On a different note, it should be noted that Portugal's decision to join the EEC was not incompatible – on the contrary, rather complementary with the long-standing relations and experience built and preserved by the nation in Africa, Latin America, particularly in Brazil, and other regions on the planet – such as Timor and Macao. That is why today Portugal is actively involved in the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Nations (CPLP), formed by eight independent countries committed to preserving and strengthening the bonds of solidarity that unite Portuguese-speaking nations – an expanding language currently spoken by more than two-hundred million human beings.

I have tried to give you an overview, which I believe is objective and non-partisan, of the Portuguese Revolution and its consequences, while explaining what it represented in the European and world context of that time.

Nevertheless, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the collapse of the communist universe that ensued, radically changed the planet and gave rise to an increasingly complex global reality. A bipolar world, precariously balanced by UN-defined multilateral guidelines, was replaced by the unilateral practice of the American Empire – which aspires to be hegemonic. The crisis in the Middle East and the escalating conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians, aggravated by the war against Iraq, are now proving that this new international political framework we live in, both ambiguous and contradictory, has many weaknesses. The world has become too insecure and fearsome. Terrorism is a terrible scourge, but it must be countered using the weapons of intelligence – not only with sheer force.

I speak on my behalf and have no-one's mandate to speak of. I speak as a humanist and a socialist, an ordinary Portuguese and European citizen, who firmly believes in the irreplaceable value of International Law and in the absolute necessity of respecting Human Rights and the dignity of human beings – irrespective of birthplace, ethnic background or skin colour.

Without serious international ethical and political regulation, the free market and the “new economy” cannot, on their own, help to solve the appalling problems of the world population – two thirds of which live, in different regions of the planet, below the threshold of poverty. This has been the main mistake – and the historical blunder – of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, still prevalent in these early days of the 21st Century.

Peace and democracy require sustained development, with an ecological and social dimension. Inequities among people and nations must be consistently and courageously combated. This task is within reach for Mankind, provided that the cult of money and the major economic interests remain subordinated to the universal values stated in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which owe so much to the great humanism of Russian culture.