

REPORT

THE PORTUGUESE GOVERNMENT SOLUTION: THE “FOURTH WAY” TO SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC POLITICS?



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Dr. Ana Rita FERREIRA
Professor of Political Science, University of Beira Interior
February 2017

Report published by:

FEPS – Foundation for European Progressive Studies

Rue Montoyer, 40 – 1000 Brussels, Belgium

www.feps-europe.eu

FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES
FONDATION EUROPÉENNE
D'ÉTUDES PROGRESSISTES



Fundação Res Publica

Rua Duque de Palmela, 25 – 6th floor, 1250-097 Lisbon, Portugal

<http://www.fundacaorespublica.pt/>



Author:

Dr. Ana Rita FERREIRA

Ana Rita Ferreira has a Ph.D. degree in Political Science by the Institute of Political Studies of the Portuguese Catholic University and a BA in Communication Sciences (Journalism stream), by the Social and Human Sciences Faculty of the New University of Lisbon. She is advisor to the Secretary of State to the Prime Minister of Portugal (XXI Government), assistant professor of Political Science at the University of Beira Interior and researcher at *Labcom* in the same institution.

Responsible editors:

Dr. Ernst STETTER, Dr. Ania SKRZYPEK, Maria FREITAS

This report was produced with the financial support of the European Parliament.

With the support of the European Parliament



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Introduction

This report aims to describe the XXI and current Portuguese government solution. Since November 2015, Portugal has been governed by a “left-wing coalition”. In fact, the Socialist Party, the Portuguese centre-left party, runs the government with the parliamentary support of the three other left-wing parties in Parliament: the Left Bloc, the Portuguese Communist Party and the Ecologist Party-The Greens. It is the first time that this kind of political alliance has been formed in Portugal and the main measures that have been taken (and are being taken) by the socialist government assume a clear progressive line in a time when there is still a liberal-conservative ideological hegemony in place.

The Socialist Party government has been able to turn the page on austerity, reconstituting the incomes and social rights that had been cut by the previous right-wing executive. But it has done so by fulfilling, at the same time, the European rules for public finances – without adopting a radical discourse about the euro, the public debt or the role of the European Union (EU), but assuming a strong will to negotiate policies and targets within European institutions as equal partners with a critical spirit. The Portuguese experience could thus be inspiring for other socialist, social-democratic and labour parties in Europe, since it is proving that there is a way for these parties to reaffirm a left-wing agenda within the EU. In fact, the Portuguese experience is an inspiring story of progressivism for other countries because it shows that there is an alternative to the politics of austerity that have set out the country in a path of growth and stability in the last two years.

Before describing the core politics of the current socialist government, we should explain how the government solution came to be and how the previous right-wing government measures and results influenced all left-wing parties to agree on carrying out a common agenda, despite all the ideological divergences that still divide them. The social and economic situation in 2015 was so dramatic that other left-wing parties were brought around to supporting a centre-left government, since the Socialist Party demonstrated that it wanted to put an end to austerity and impoverishment.

The explanation of the agreements celebrated by the left-wing parties, the path followed until now, the measures that we can expect to be taken in the near future and the adherence of the electorate to the government’s conduct will allow us to understand how current politics, far from being radical, are moderate, following the traditional social-democratic ideology. However, without having a clear majority in Parliament, this political line could only be executed with a left-wing parliamentary coalition, namely because of the radicalization of the right in recent decades.

The Portuguese case – that we examine in this report – should be taken into consideration in the realisation of social-democratic politics in present times. In fact, the examination of the Portuguese government solution can help progressives at the European level to find new ways of pursuing the ideological route of the centre-left parties and, thus, enabling them to strengthen their traditional electoral position.

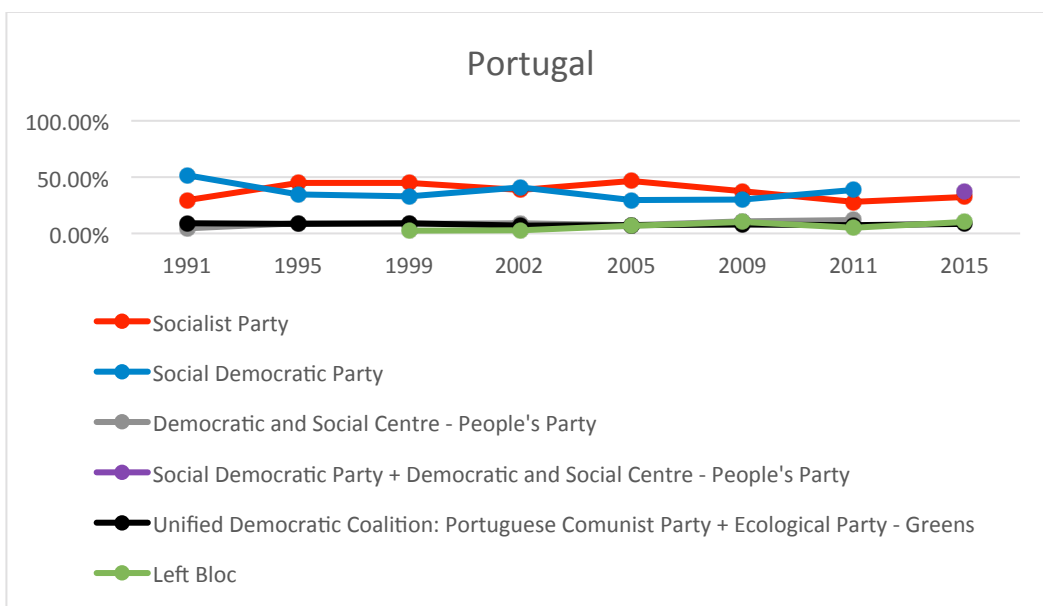
The Portuguese Government Solution

The 2015 Electoral Results and the Formation of a New Government

The Socialist Party – over time, since it has been able to maintain a high percentage of the vote share, winning elections or keeping the second place, without huge ups and downs, not only since the fall of Berlin Wall, but since the birth of the Portuguese democratic regime, after the Carnation Revolution of 1974. The Socialist Party won four of the eight national elections since 1991 (in 1995, 1999, 2005 and 2009), while losing three others (in 1991, 2002 and 2011) and has been in power 15 years out of the last 26 (see Figure 1 and Appendix I) – being in power now, in a single-party government that has the support of left-wing parties in Parliament, is the government solution that we will analyse here.

In addition, it should be noted, Portugal has experienced the growth of radical left-wing parties in recent years. One cannot detect a substantial fall in support for the historically important parties, but since the beginning of the century the Left Bloc has emerged and conquered a relevant percentage of the vote share, while the Communist Party has had the capacity to maintain its traditional electorate. If the left-wing parties that are positioned to the left of the Socialist Party had less than 10% in the beginning of the 90s, they got around 10% in the beginning of the 2000s and they even managed to obtain more than 18% in 2015.

Figure 1



Source: ParGov Database (<http://www.parlgov.org/>)

The graphic above allows us to understand that the Socialist Party has been able to keep its fundamental position in the Portuguese party system, while the parties on the left have increased their electoral weight. This context is important when we analyse the last Portuguese parliamentary election that took place on 4th October 2015 and the current government solution.

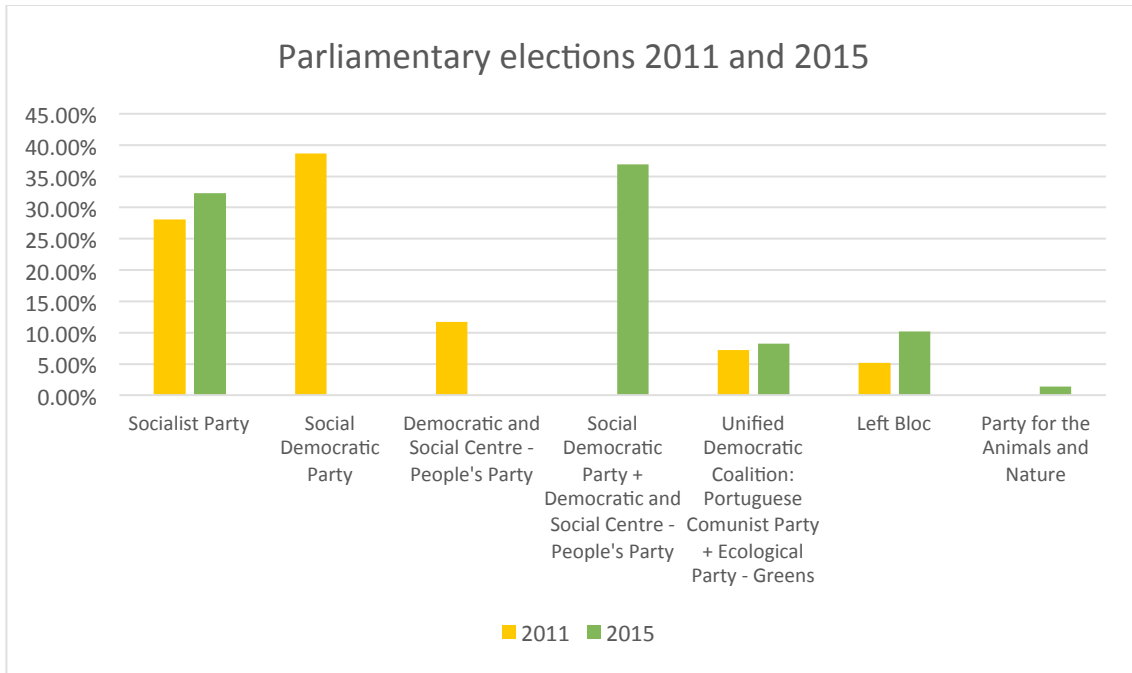
The incumbent government of the day was composed by the two right-wing parties with representation in Parliament: the Social Democratic Party (PSD) – one of the two major Portuguese political forces – and the Social and Democratic Centre-People’s Party (CDS-PP), both members of the European People’s Party (EPP). For this election, they ran united in a coalition – named “Portugal in the Front” – and, in spite of the social protests during their mandate, the coalition ended up being the political force with the most votes in the election, with 36,86% of the votes (see Figure 2 and Appendix II). Contrary to what was predicted on the basis of polling taken a few months before the election, the Socialist Party ended up in second place, with 32,31% of the votes, and was not that night’s electoral winner (<http://www.eleicoes.mai.gov.pt/legislativas2015/>).

However, although the two right-wing parties had more votes united, they were not able to renew the absolute majority they had achieved in the previous election. In 2011, the PSD obtained 38,65% of the votes and the CDS 11,70% (see Figure 2 and Appendix II), which allowed them to have more than a half of the deputies in the Parliament altogether. The PSD had 108 deputies and the CDS 24, so when combined they achieved a sum of 132 deputies out of a total of 230. They could therefore build a government that had strong support in Parliament. Nevertheless, in 2015, only 107 right-wing deputies were elected (89 of the PSD and 18 of the CDS-PP), far from the required “half + one” threshold of representatives in Parliament (which should be at least 116 deputies) that would have allowed them to rebuild the same government solution (www.parlamento.pt). This meant that the PSD and the CDS could not govern in the long term without another party’s support – or, at least, without another party’s abstention on fundamental laws, like the national budget. But this also meant that the left-wing parties, all together, had an absolute majority in Parliament.

In fact, if the Socialist Party got 32,31% of the votes in 2015 – growing from 28,01% in 2011 –, the coalition that traditionally reunites the Portuguese Communist Party and the Ecologist Party-The Greens also had a slight rise to 8,25% from the 7,91% they had achieved in 2011 – and particularly the Left Bloc almost doubled its previous result, obtaining 10,19% in 2015, while it had only been able of keeping 5,17% in 2011 (see Figure 2 and Appendix II). These results translate the following Parliamentary representation for each left party: the PS has 86 deputies, the Left Bloc 19, the Communist Party 15 and The Greens 2, totalling 122

(www.parlamento.pt)¹. The left-wing parties were then able to make up an absolute majority in Parliament, even though the Socialist Party had not been the political party with the most votes.

Figure 2



Source: Ministry of Internal Administration (<http://www.eleicoes.mai.gov.pt/legislativas2015/>)

There were, however, two apparent problems that almost all analysts and political agents considered unsurpassable at that time. First, during 40 years of democracy, the Portuguese left had never governed in a coalition. It was not the first time that the left, all together, had achieved more than 50% of the deputies, but on all those previous occasions the Socialist Party had governed alone, mostly counting on right-wing parties support or abstention in major legislative acts when needed. There was still a barrier to be overcome in Portugal in order to have the centre-left and the radical left negotiating a government solution, since there was a historical cleavage formed immediately after the democratic revolution that opposed the socialists and the communists – who defended the implementation of different types of political regimes at that time – and this lasted for more than 40 years. Somehow it was taken as a given fact that the Communist Party, the Left Bloc and The Greens were excluded – if not excluded themselves – from executive power. So, a

¹ The Party for the Nature and Animals was able to elect his first deputy, obtaining 1,39% of the votes, although it presents itself neither at the left or right of the political spectrum.

government solution that could reunite the Socialist Party and those on its left was seen as unachievable. The second aspect that was generally seen as an obstacle was the fact that the Socialist Party had “lost” that election – not only having fewer votes than the right-wing coalition but also being only the second most voted-for party in Parliament, since it had less representatives than the PSD alone. In Portuguese democratic life, a party that had not won the election had never been previously invited to form the government.

Indeed, at first, conveying this political “tradition”, but also arguing that the so called radical left parties could never constitute a stable base for a government, the President of the Republic at that time (himself a former leader of the PSD) designated the PSD leader, as the most voted-for party, to present a government solution. Of course, Pedro Passos Coelho, who was still the Prime-Minister, presented the same solution that had been used in the previous legislature and that had been proposed in the joint ticket for the election: a coalition government composed by the two right-wing parties. The President appointed this government, although he knew that this coalition had lost the majority of the seats in Parliament and all left-wing parties, including the socialists, strongly opposed the formation of such government and the policies that had been carried out in the preceding four years – and that were still proposed for the new legislature. It is true that on the night of the election, the leader of the Socialist Party, António Costa, had said that the socialists would not vote to overthrow the right-wing government if they didn’t have an alternative government solution to present. But, at the time the new government was appointed, it was clear that the negotiations between the Socialist Party, the Communists, the Left Bloc and the Greens could effectively lead to that alternative solution. So, the unthinkable happened: after being appointed by the President, the new right-wing government presented its programme to the Parliament and all the left-wing parties voted against it; the government automatically fell, just a few days after starting its mandate. The left was then ready to present its own government solution, after almost two months of successive conversations.

This government solution had never been tested before: a government of the Socialist Party with the parliamentary support of the other three left-wing parties. Nevertheless, it was a minority government, since it was a single party executive with no absolute majority on its own in the Parliament. The parliamentary majority, where the potential stability (and durability) of this government resided, came from the sum of socialists, communists, “bloquists” and greens². This solution – and this support from the left – was based on formal

² This government solution has been called “Geringonça” (“Contraption”) in the beginning, by right-wing chronicle writers and politicians, in a pejorative way. However, the name has been more or less generalized and is now used even by its supporters. The name tried to demonstrate how this union could never work properly, but, as the Prime-Minister once said, answering to a question from the right in Parliament, “É geringonça, mas funciona!” (“It is a contraption, but it works!”)

agreements that the Socialist Party signed with each party on its left. These documents (whose content will be seen below) do not give a “blank check” to a future socialist government, but provided a solid foundation upon which to form a government. Despite the strong opposition of the former President of the Republic, as the Parliament was in its first six months of mandate, he could not dissolve it and call for new elections. He was forced to appoint the new socialist government on the 26th November 2015.

This new government solution put an end to an historical gridlock in Portuguese politics, and thus left-wing parties finally proved they were capable of a constructive dialogue. Of course, left coalitions have already been tried in some European countries since the fall of the Berlin Wall – Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Spain and Sweden (Freire, 2017: 68-69) – and, more than that, several empirical studies had proved that, in Portugal, the electorates of left-wing parties had a positive position through the idea of a left coalition. A 2012 survey, for instance, showed that 86,7% of the Left Bloc voters, 83,4% of the Communist and The Greens voters and 76,3% of Socialist Party voters agreed with the idea that “similarly to what happens with right-wing parties in Portugal, left-wing parties should make agreements in order to generate stable government alternatives” (Freire, 1917: 99). However, a “left-wing coalition government” – in practice, a socialist government with the parliamentary support of other left-wing parties – has only been made possible in Portugal under the particular political circumstances which presented themselves in 2015. One should then ask what happened in 2015 that made all these parties understand that they should put aside what divides them in order to concentrate more on what unites them. To answer this question we should look at the context that involved the right-wing government since 2011.

The Previous Context: The Right-Wing Government (2011-2015)

As we have seen above, in 2011, the Portuguese parliamentary elections ended with the victory of the PSD, which formed a coalition government with the other right-wing party in the Portuguese political system, the CDS-PP, both members of the EPP.

These parties’ electoral manifestos showed a gradual ideological approximation in recent years, since the PSD moved from centre-right to the right in social and economic issues (Ferreira, 2016). They both take a liberal position, believing that the State should have a minimal intervention in the economic field (namely with regards to maintaining strategic sectors in public hands and promoting economic growth through public financing and stimulus on the demand side) and in social services (considering that social security and health must be individually ensured by private insurances, limiting the State’s role to granting a mere safety

net to the worst-off). The CDS-PP takes a more conservative point of view in what one usually calls the moral issues – abortion, gay marriage, drug liberalization – since it opposed these advances more strongly.

When the two parties formed the government coalition in 2011, the country was already undergoing an assistance programme, negotiated with the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund – the *troika* – by the socialist former government, but also signed by the PSD and the CDS. However, unlike the Socialist Party, the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the People’s Party (CDS) were deeply in tune with the *troika*’s general view and policies. In fact, their four years in government were marked by a will to “go beyond the *troika*” (in the words of the former Prime-Minister, Pedro Passos Coelho), trying to do even more than the international institutions had required. The government adopted a blame narrative, repeating that the Portuguese people “had lived beyond their means” and had to pass through a generalized impoverishment process. The path they followed can easily be summed up as follows: cuts in public servants salaries, current pensions and social benefits; divestment in social services; tax rises over private consumption and incomes (a “huge tax increase” in 2012, as the Finance Minister at the time described it); deregulation of labour market laws; privatization of some of the most important public enterprises (the national electricity company, postal mail service and national airline company, etc.). Of course, the main objectives were the reduction of public deficit – returning to a level under 3% of GDP, following the European rule – and public debt.

Nevertheless, this political line did not solve those problems in the public finances. Whilst it may be the case that the public deficit was reduced between 2010 and 2015, it is also true that the government was incapable of achieving the 3% deficit goal or any other of the initial targets set by the *troika*. In 2015, the deficit was still 4,4% of GDP, in spite of all the cuts in public expenditure and all the measures implemented to increase revenues during those years. Consequently, Portugal is still under an Excessive Deficit Procedure and, because of that, in 2016 it was still at risk of suffering sanctions by the European institutions. The state of the public debt was even worse: instead of declining as planned, the deficit did not stop rising throughout these years, reaching 12,9% in 2015.

However, if the right-wing government’s macro numbers were not good, the economic and social situation became tragic during the *troika* years. On the one hand, the economic growth declined for three successive years: after a 1,9% GDP, in 2010, Portugal registered -1,8% in 2011, -4% in 2012 and -1,1% in 2013. There was a slight recovery in subsequent years, but still far from the pre-crisis years, since we are only talking about a growth of 0,9% and 1,6% in 2014 and 2015 respectively (www.ine.pt). Naturally, one can notice the exact same

tendency in the job market: unemployment increased exponentially during the right-wing government's mandate and the slight decline in its last year did not compensate the preceding rise. The unemployment rate was 11,9% in 2010 and it grew until 16,5% in 2013, a rate that had never been reached in Portugal before (after climbing to 12,8% in 2011 and 15,8% in 2012). The situation could only get worst from here, even if high levels continued: the unemployment rate was 14,1% in 2014 and 12,5% in 2015, still above the 2010 level (www.ine.pt).

On the other hand, the social situation was also tragic. Inequality and poverty grew between 2011 and 2015, after several years of gradual reduction. The S90/S10 and the S95/S5 Indexes show how the gap between the best-off and the worst-off deepened during those years: the S90/S10 was 9.4 in 2010, but 10.6 in 2014; the S95/S5 was 15 in 2010, but 18.7 in 2014 (Rodrigues, Figueira and Junqueira, 2016: 36). The poverty risk rate also climbed during these years – from 18% in 2010 to 19,5% in 2014, meaning that the number of poor people increased – and, what is more, the intensity of poverty also rose – from 23,2% in 2010 to 26% in 2014, meaning that poor people became poorer following this period (www.pordata.pt). One statistic that is particularly worrying is that of child poverty, because, in 2014, a quarter of people under 18 years old (24,9%) were in poverty risk (when the rate was 21,8% in 2011). Another indicator that is of most importance to understand the social and economic situation in Portugal during the right-wing government is related with emigration: between 2011 and 2015, more than 100.000 people left the country every year, i.e., almost 600.000 people emigrated in these five years (www.pordata.pt).

The right-wing government's austerity policies did not solve Portuguese imbalances and inequalities and, on the contrary, deepened old problems and provoked new ones. The ideological radicalism of the executive had profound consequences, both in economic and social terms. And if the coalition of both right-wing parties was the most voted-for political force in 2015, the majority of the electorate clearly voted for other parties, therefore voting for a political change. Knowing that the country was dealing with such a dramatic situation, the four left-wing parties represented in Parliament have been more pragmatic than ever and understood that, this time, they had to negotiate with each other in order to respond to the will of the majority (expressed in the electoral act) and change the political path that had been pursued in the past.

The Agreements between the Socialist Party and the other Left-Wing Parties

After the severe austerity measures taken by the right between 2011 and 2015 and the devastating consequences on the Portuguese economy and society, it would be impossible for the Socialist Party to support a government whose programme was to continue implementing exactly the same policies. The socialists had strongly opposed that political line and in 2015 their electoral manifesto presented an alternative way to get out of the crises. The main idea was to “turn the page on austerity”, resetting incomes (that had been cut), re-launching labour and social rights (that had been retrenched), downgrading taxes that hit particularly the middle class and the poor (that had been risen), stimulating private economic initiative through the execution of European funds (that had been stopped) and to reverse the (unfinished) privatizations of public transport companies, keeping the European commitment. These politics correspond to the traditional social-democratic ideology, far from representing a break in Socialist Party’s historic line. On the contrary, the diagnosis about the country’s situation and the recipe to restore better living standards was absolutely in accordance with what centre-left parties defended in the last century. This ideological positioning could only be considered as “radical left” after such a period of radicalization of the right. Of course, in this particular historical moment, these policies could only be taken with support from other left-wing parties, often seen as ideologically distant from the Socialist Party – not only because they are more collectivist in economic issues, but also because they are critics of the European integration process, defenders of a debt renegotiation and opponents to the participation of Portugal in NATO. Despite these differences, all parties understood the need of a (kind of) coalition. This was the reason why, after almost two months of negotiation, they agreed to the current government solution.

The socialist government with the parliamentary support of the Left Bloc, the Communist Party and the Ecologist Party-The Greens, was based on the three agreements (or “joint positions”), which the Socialist Party signed with each one of the other parties. Although these documents have their own particularities, they all have a common ground that we should focus on. They all attest that the electoral results mean a loss for the right and show a will for political change from the electorate; they all indicate that the left considered that they had the duty to interrupt that trajectory and build a stable and lasting majority in Parliament in order to sustain a new government. In fact, for the Socialist Party, it was vital that the agreements stated clearly that the other parties would refuse any initiative undertaken by the right to block the new socialist government (that was to say, they would counteract the attempt by the right to vote down the new Programme of Government or any motion of no-

confidence), but, what is more, that they were committed to this solution in “the perspective of a legislature”, i.e., for four years (PS-BE 2015; PS-PEV 2015; PS-PCP 2015).

The three agreements, wherein these guidelines were enunciated, recognized the existence of programmatic differences between the Socialist Party and each party that signed the respective document. However, they also affirmed that, despite all divergences, the parties knew that there were several points of convergence in terms of their shared commitment to giving a quick answer to people’s aspirations. As the joint positions say, people wanted income recovery, the restitution of rights, improvement in social services, better living standards, more growth and more jobs – the four parties agreed to these aims and agreed upon a set of pragmatic and immediate solutions (PS-BE 2015; PS-PEV 2015; PS-PCP 2015).

As we said above, this “stable and lasting solution” did not provide the government with a blank cheque. The three joint positions enumerated several measures that the new executive should take in order for this support to last. The main ones were:

- the reconstitution of public servants’ integral salaries in 2016;
- the rise of the minimum salary to 600€ until 2019;
- the thawing of pensions (that had been frozen for the last few years);
- the return to the 35 hour working week for public servants (that had been replaced by a 40 hour regime by the right-wing government without any salary increase);
- the reinstatement of the four holidays (that the previous government had removed);
- the unlocking of the promotions in public administration careers (that had also been frozen for the last few years);
- the fight against precarious jobs (whose several mechanisms have been disseminated in recent years, undermining labour security and rights), in the private sector, but also in the public one;
- the end of the “mobility/requalification” regime in public administration (since it was an instrument designed to make public servants redundant in the long run);
- the elimination of the surcharge on income tax (create by the previous government);
- the reduction of restaurants’ VAT to 13% (the previous government had increased it to 23%, with huge consequences for employment and tourism, which is an important economic sector in Portugal);
- the introduction of a clause that prevents the real estate tax to rise above 75€ from one year to the next;
- the protection of family homes in the case of fiscal debts or bank credit payment difficulties (during the *troika* years, many families lost their houses, because of the income

- breaks they suffered that did not allow them to keep up with their taxes and credit payments);
- the increase of the progressivity of income tax (the “enormous taxes rises” of the previous government were based mostly on the reduction of IRS steps, which made this tax much more regressive, harming the middle class);
 - the enlargement of access to social benefits and the increase of the amounts given (that had been reduced, because of the hardening of the “means tests”);
 - the automation of what is known as the social energy tariff, that allows the unemployed and people who receive other social benefits to have access to a discount on electricity and gas bills (the automation – which was made possible by the transmission of Social Security information to the energy companies with the compulsory order to enforce the discount – had never been put into practice by the previous government, barring many potential beneficiaries from this social benefit);
 - the gradual introduction of free text books for students until the end of high school;
 - the universalization, until 2019, of kindergarten for children over three years old;
 - the reinforcement of National Health Service (NHS) capacity, namely assuring a primary care doctor for every citizen;
 - the elimination of some NHS moderation payments;
 - the reversal of the privatization of urban transport companies (that had been started by the right-wing government, but were not finished yet) and the guarantee of non-privatization to any other public company (PS-BE 2015; PS-PEV 2015; PS-PCP 2015).

Of course, these agreements do not cover any anti-euro, anti-EU or anti-NATO proposals, since they could never have been accepted by the Socialist Party. There are no direct criticisms of the capitalist system – typical from radical left parties –, because the socialists continue to defend the market economy, with public intervention mitigating capitalism’s failures – as their political family has done since the 19th century. One cannot even find proclamations about the debt renegotiation or the non-compliance with the EU’s requirement to keep a low public deficit, as the other left-wing parties would probably be keen to make. On the contrary, there were several measures that aimed to deepen the *Beveridgean* State model that the socialists have always strongly defended, being its greatest historical success. In fact, none of these measures were imposed on the Socialist Party: they already featured prominently in the socialist manifesto, preceding these agreements, and they are included in Government’s Programme. One of the biggest differences that we can notice, when we compare the parties’ electoral proposals and the measures found in the ‘joint positions’, is more related to the speed stipulated for the implementation of the measures,

than to the measures themselves³. However, these have been the socialist party's main proposals in the past and they would be put into practice with left-wing support in the present. And they all concur with fulfilling the triple commitment of the Socialist Party, both in electoral campaign and in government: to achieve bigger growth, better employment and more equality.

Putting the Agreements into Practice

After the signing of the joint positions and the new socialist government's assumption of power, the four parties started learning how to deal with each other in this new scenario of cooperation. There were a few symbolic measures, approved in Parliament in the first days of this new political solution – the reconstitution of four public holidays, the approval of adoption by gay couples and artificial insemination by all women (and not only heterosexual and married ones) or the abolition of school exams for 10 and 12 year old children (that the previous government had introduced), for example – that were important in signalling the union of the left. Also the first rise in the minimum salary, the elimination of some NHS payments, the reversal of the privatization of public transport companies (including TAP, the country's main airline company), and the enlargement of access to social benefits, were decided by the government in the beginning of its mandate and were important to reinforce the political will for change with respect to the recent political past.

Nevertheless, the biggest set of actions was taken in the 2016 Budget. In fact, the reconstitution of public servants' salaries, the reduction of restaurants' VAT, the preventive clause on patrimony tax, the elimination of the surcharge on income for the lowest incomes, the automation of the social energy tariff, the introduction of free text books for students in the first year of school, for example, have been some of the joint positions' measures that have been taken within this Budget. Also during 2016, we saw the return to the 35-hour working week for public servants, the end of the "requalification" system in public administration, the enlargement of kindergarten and the highest number of medical doctors entering the NHS. This means that a huge proportion of the agreements between the Socialist Party and its new partners were fulfilled by the end of the first year.

Even so, there was still a lot to do and that is why the 2017 Budget was another important piece in this policy. For instance, pensions have been raised (the lowest one above inflation), the minimum salary suffered a new increase, the strategy against job insecurity in

³ For instance, Socialist Party wanted the restitution of public servants' salaries to be gradual, for two years (2016 and 2017), as the other parties wanted it to be immediate. So, the latter consented on a progressive devolution, while the former accepted to reset the integral salaries' amounts only in one year.

public sector is now being designed, the surcharge over income is going to be eliminated throughout the year (for those taxpayers that are still paying it), school books will be free for the first four years, primary care doctors will cover 500 thousand citizens more, which in turn means that 97% of the population will be covered by the end of the year. The 2017 Budget also allowed the concretization of several policies that were not shaped in the joint positions, but were part of the Government's Programme and meant the deepening of this path on turning the page on austerity. For example, it has reintroduced the child allowance for poor families that were not covered in the last few years (this social benefit had been cut for all families but those in the first income bracket; now, the two next income brackets have become covered again) and the biggest payment, which was being paid to children up to 1 year old, has been extended to cover children up to 3 years old. Another example: this year the single handicap benefit is going to be created, to ensure better living standards and autonomy for disabled people. Another case of an important measure taken in the 2017 Budget, that was in the socialist manifesto and in the Government's Programme, although it was not in the parties' agreements, was the additional tax to the real estate tax for patrimony above 600.000 €. This is a strong step towards fiscal justice and it has been negotiated "outside the agreements".

In the beginning of 2017, we also saw, for instance, the reopening of 20 local courts (that had been closed by the previous government), the launch of a new adult education programme (to guarantee equality of opportunity for all and to fight against the qualification deficit that is one of the biggest social and economic problems in Portugal), the presentation of new plans to incentivize the cooperation between research centres and enterprises and to promote the digitalization of traditional companies. All these actions, taken by the socialist government, fit into the objectives of economic growth, employment and equality – three goals that could be defended and have been defended by all social democrats throughout the ages.

Of course, despite all the convergences, this government solution has had its moments of tension between the Socialist Party government and its partners. The most significant criticism from the Left Bloc and the Communist Party is related to these parties' belief that Portuguese debt levels prevent the pursuit of a real strategy to promote growth – and consequently jobs and better living standards. To these parties, public investment to accelerate the economy is still insufficient and that is due to the considerable amounts that the State has to spend paying off debt and interest rates. In their opinion, the renegotiation of the debt could not be avoided and should be taken as a priority. Of course, that is not the Socialist Party's opinion, since it has always said that the country could never enter unilaterally into such a process. Therefore, the issue continues to generate some divergence among the

partners. In the same way, “bloquists” and communists think that investment should take priority over the compliance with a 3% deficit – that is to say, the European rule should not be fulfilled if it is preventing governments from acting with respect to their economy. Once again, the Socialist Party accepts the European deficit rule and has affirmed, since the electoral campaign, its commitment to attaining a public deficit under that limit. This also remains a point of divergence between the parties, but it did not affect executive action.

There were also other disputes on specific issues. For example, in terms of labour legislation, the parties to the socialists’ left want to go further and, although the government could agree on several points, the Socialist Party (and the right) have already stopped in Parliament the increase of holidays proposed by the left. On the contrary, for instance, the Government wanted to implement a “means tests” on non-contributory pensions, but the partners did not agree with that change and kept the universal scheme on those low pensions. There was also some Government legislation whose evaluation in Parliament has been required by the left-wing parties when trying to introduce some changes. The most famous case has been the decree that instituted a transitory benefit over social security tax for employees that pay the minimum wage, as a compensation for the increase in that salary. This benefit had been negotiated with employers’ associations and trade unions (only the union that is close to the Communist Party did not agree with it). “Bloquists” and communists asked for parliamentary evaluation and voted against it. It would not be problematic at all, since that is their historic position and all political agents knew that would happen. In 2017, the PSD, however, decided to vote with the “radical left”, against their own values and previous proposals, to try to sow division among the government solution’s partners. All together, they stopped that decree and the social security benefit was not implemented. The Government did not see it as a difficulty and on the very same day presented another benefit – there is an anticipated payment of the tax over profits, which has been reduced for all companies, independently of whether or not they pay the minimum wage. The division did not emerge.

Another important case was the one of Lisbon’s and Oporto’s bus companies, whose privatizations were stopped. The four parties agreed on that, but the communists opposed the solution found by the Government for those companies: to give them back to city councils, instead of keeping them in the central State’s hands. They asked for an evaluation in Parliament, but hearing the contestation from those companies’ unions to their solution, they stepped back and decided not to ask for the reversal of this municipalisation of the transport companies. In normal times, they could have kept the proposal, knowing that it would not be approved. But with the centre-right party affirming that it would vote against any Government

proposal, even if they agreed with it, the left-wing parties understood they could not take that risk – they certainly became more pragmatic.

Naturally, all parties want to keep their own identities – and their traditional electorates – in this new political equilibrium. This means that sometimes they have to underline their differences and the issues they disagree on. However, at the same time, they know they cannot go too far in bringing their disagreements to light, since it would weaken the government solution in the eyes of public opinion. In practice, the issues that are not included in the joint positions are discussed between the Government and each of the support parties. Every day, there are several meetings taking place in the office of the Secretary of State for Parliamentary Affairs, the member of the government who assumes this pivotal role of transmitting information and conducting the majority of negotiations. When more problematic themes are to be discussed, the appropriate Minister is present at those meetings, usually to present the government's proposal. This means that, even when there are some public disagreements, the parties have already expressed them in private. It is rare for the government to be confronted with unexpected opposition from the partners to a particular measure, just as it is rare for the left-wing parties that support the government to be taken by surprise about a government proposal that they did not know about beforehand. Of course, this permanent dialogue between parties is one of the keys to the stability that this government solution demonstrates.

What About Now?

This negotiation culture has to be maintained in order to make this “left government” sustainable. As we saw, most of the agreements' measures have already been approved. Many analysts consider that, because of that, the several parties involved in this alliance will no longer be interested in making this government last. It is speculated that they would prefer to break with each other while they can still claim the credit for playing a fundamental role in implementing good decisions, without having to become involved in more difficult ones further down the line. However, the four parties do not seem to be following this path. On the one hand, the agreements they signed are still far from being fulfilled in their entirety. On the other hand, the results of the new policy that has been carried out are very positive, so it would be difficult to understand an end of this government solution for merely tactical or electoral motives.

In fact, the joint positions are not over yet and all parties recently agreed that there is still a lot to do. The plan for fighting precarious jobs, for instance, is going to be implemented

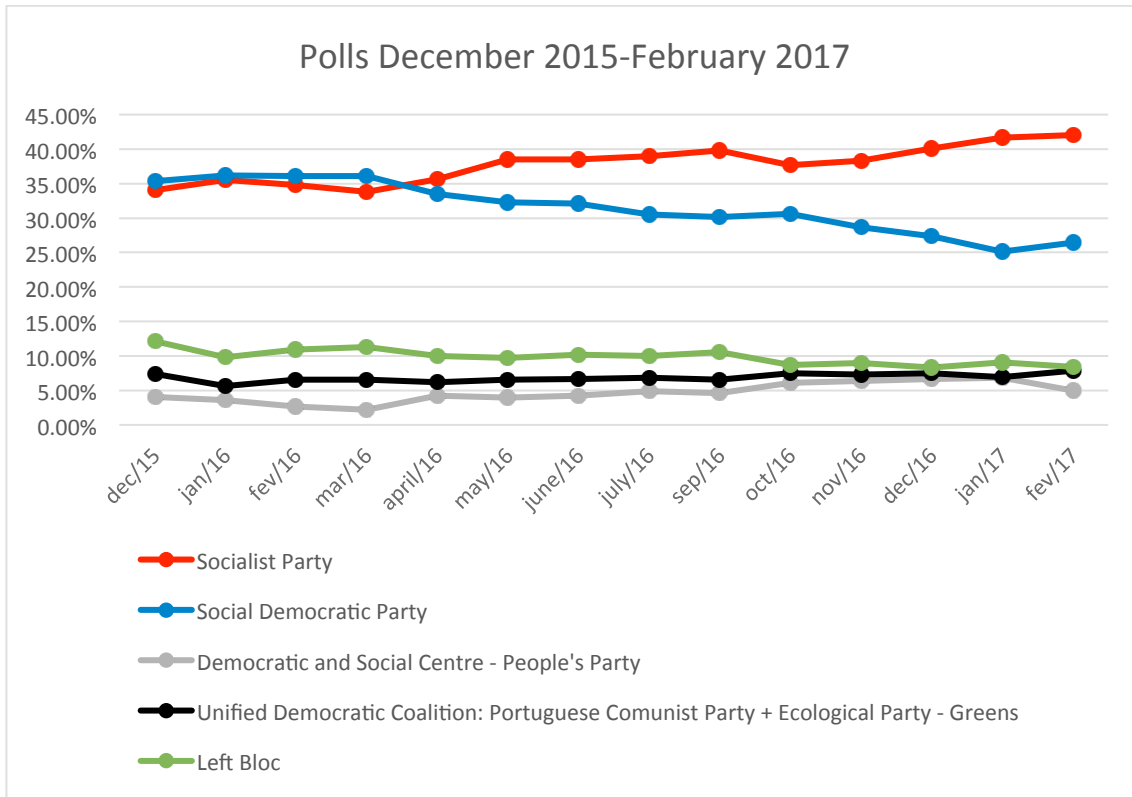
by the end of October, but it will only be finished – and the workers will have permanent contracts – by the end of 2018. There are also several measures that are assumed to be gradual: the increase in the minimum wage, the universalization of kindergarten, the provision of free text books for all students, the guarantee of primary care doctors for all citizens, etc., have been started, but they will be implemented over the four years. Moreover – and probably most significantly – there are some important measures that have not been started yet and it is expected that they integrate the next Budget, for 2018. There are two main measures that we should emphasize: the resumption of the promotions in public administration careers and the reintroduction of more progressivity on income tax (probably through the creation of new degrees that distinguish between the different “middle classes”). As we said above, these two measures will have a huge impact in terms of families’ incomes that will certainly increase, particularly those of middle class and those of public servants that have been particularly affected during the crisis. But, more than that, these measures will signify another reconstitution of fiscal and social justice. It would be difficult thus to break this government solution before seeing such important measures being taken. These two measures inclusion into the programme of income restoration and reconstitution of rights has provided the glue holding this government solution together – and it would make no sense not to see this through to its full fruition. Even in electoral terms, the losses for those that break the agreement too soon will probably stop any potential intention to do so. All the parties agree that there is a lot to do within the joint positions and they also stress that there is much more could be done, even if it is not written in these documents, as it has been done so far. The political signs indicate that this government solution could prove to be more stable than everybody expects, upon approval of its third Budget in October.

Nevertheless, this stability is also a result of the good results that were achieved in 2016. We should notice that the biggest criticism that the socialist government faced through its first year was related to the typical right-wing idea – that was generalized in the media and in most European institutions – that this strategy could only lead Portugal to a catastrophic situation. There could be no growth, no deficit under 3% of GDP, no job creation, no private investment, with this alternative politics. But the results proved that this new political path leads to better results than the previous strategy, which was based on impoverishment, on economic deregulation and low salaries, on social rights reductions and a vision of a smaller role for the State. Opposing all these ideas – that were taken as self-evident before – and taking the kind of measures that we described above, the socialist government achieved good economic results. Portuguese GDP was set at 1,4% in 2016 (reaching 2% in the last quarter, showing an acceleration of the economy, growing more than the Eurozone medium – 1,7% –

and obtaining the third best rate of the Eurozone) and the unemployment rate at 11,2% (10,5% in the last quarter, the lowest rate since April 2009, and only 10,2% in December, presenting a sustainable and progressive reduction over the year). There were 73.500 fewer people unemployed by the end of 2016 compared with the end of 2015 and there were 100.000 new jobs created in that year. Consumer confidence reached, last January, its highest level since 2000, after five uninterrupted months on the increase. The positive prospects with regard to employment, the country's economic situation and family finances contributed to that. Also in January, the economic environment index rose in all economic sectors – the manufacturing industry, construction, trade and services – after a year that showed several rises. And last (but certainly not least), the Socialist Party government was capable of obtaining a 2,1% deficit in 2016. That is to say that the government fulfilled the European rule, which is something that the right-wing government never accomplished and all analysts considered impossible to be done. And, more than that, this government achieved the lowest public deficit in Portuguese democratic history, at the same time that it was taking those measures that gave incomes back to families and invested in public services. As promised, the government did “turn the page of austerity”, whilst keeping the European budget commitments.

The polls are unanimous in reflecting the support of the electorate for the government solution. Since the beginning of the mandate, the voting intentions on the Socialist Party show a gradual, but unequivocal, growth (see Appendix III and Figure 3). If in December of 2015, the party got 34% of voting intentions in the poll we selected, in June they already got 38,5%, in last December 40,1% and in February they reached 42% of voting intentions. On the contrary, the main right-wing opponent, the Social-Democratic Party, is obtaining less and less voting intentions: they started with 35,3% in December of 2015, 32,1% six months later, 27,4% one year later and 26,4% in February this year. These results reinforce how more and more people are adhering to the governments' measures.

Figure 3



Source: Aximage

We can see that the Left Bloc lost a small part of their voting intentions, but the coalition that unites the Communist Party and The Greens maintains its voters in the polls (see Appendix III and Figure 3) – which probably can be accounted for having a more loyal electorate and a more predictable performance. It is possible to say that, among the several parties that compose this government solution, the Socialist Party, which is alone in government, is the one that is improving more its own particular position. However, the other parties do not seem to be threatened by the support they decided to give to the government. On the contrary, the moments when the Left Bloc had those small losses in the polls were those when tensions among the parties emerged.

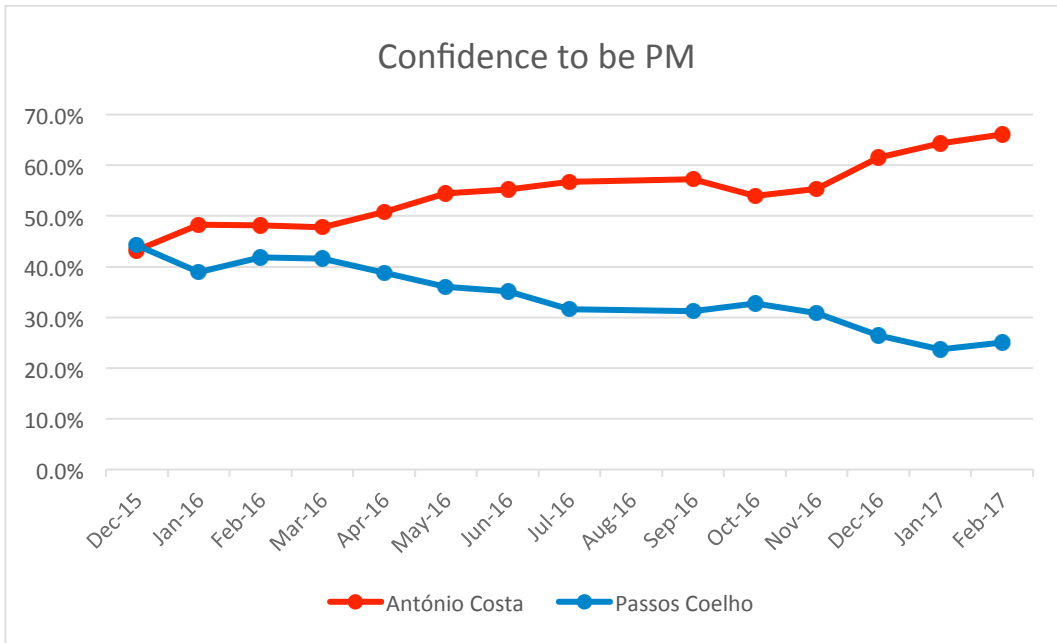
The levels of confidence in the leader of the Socialist Party and current Prime-Minister, António Costa, and in the former Prime-Minister and current leader of opposition, Pedro Passos Coelho, to lead the executive also show how there is a growing positive evaluation of the government (see Appendix III and Figure 4). In fact, in December of 2015, immediately after the beginning of the new government, António Costa got 43,2% and Passos Coelho still got a little bit more - 44,3% - in confidence evaluation as Prime-Minister (PM). However, as

time went by, the current socialist PM rose exponentially (and we should not forget that Passos Coelho has been in this role before, so the comparison is fair because voters are able to make a verifiable comparison based on their lived experience). In June of 2016, Costa had 55,2% and Passos Coelho 35,2% - a difference of 20 percentage points. In December of 2016, they already got 61,6% and 26,5% respectively. In last February, António Costa reached 66,1% and Passos Coelho fell to 25% in terms of confidence that he could fulfil the role of Prime Minister – they thus have a difference of more than 30 percentage points separating them.

The Expectation in Government Index reinforces this idea that there are gradually more people supporting the socialist government (see Appendix III and Figure 5). In December of 2015, the expectation was only 9% (it used to be negative during the right-wing government), in June of 2016 it was already 41%, in last December it increased to 47% and in February of 2017 it reached 54%.

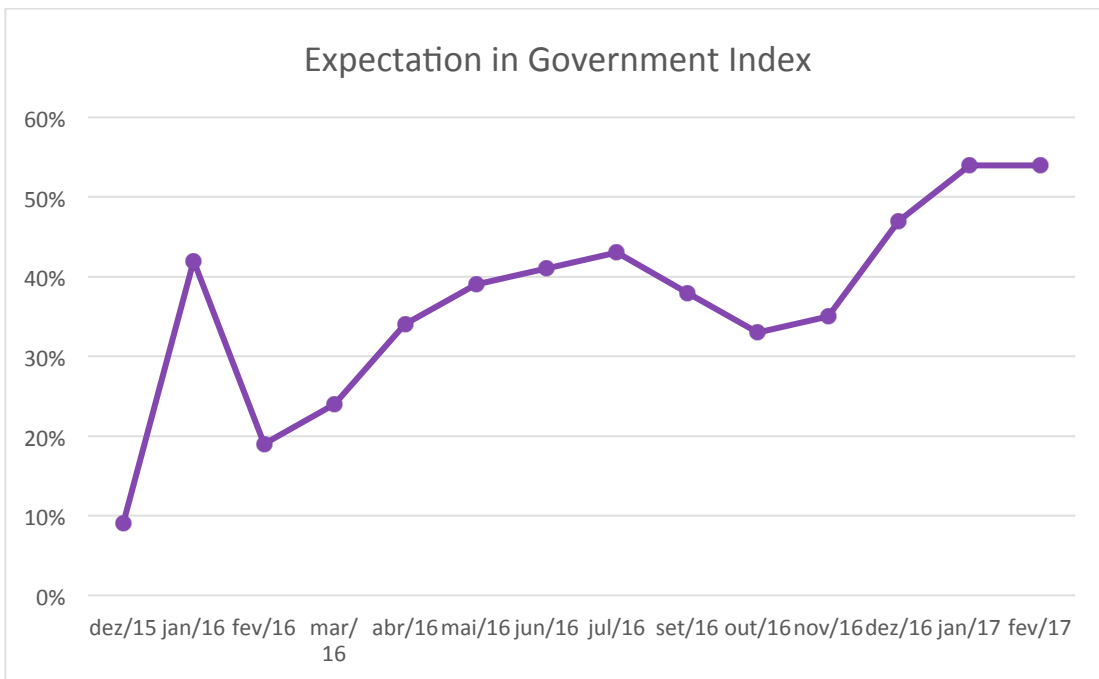
All this tells us that, if the new government solution is demonstrating an “internal” stability, it also has the “external” approval of the majority of the electorate – and a growing majority of the electorate. If Portugal were to have new parliamentary elections today, the Socialist Party would probably improve its 2015 results. All left-parties, considered all together, would obtain an even stronger political base, but the polls show that the socialists would be close to an absolute majority. In the beginning of this government, some analysts thought that the Socialist Party would suffer a loss of votes in the future because of entering into this new political solution. One can now see that does not fit with the reality. People approve of the socialist government and party in the context of this solution.

Figure 4



Source: Aximage

Figure 5



Source: Aximage

Conclusion

The Portuguese Government Solution: The Fourth Way to Social-Democratic Politics?

The first conclusion that we should point out is that the current Portuguese political experience shows that a political path focused on economic growth, employment and on the fight against inequalities is compatible with European budgetary rules. Despite some constraints, it is thus possible to take a social-democratic way in the EU nowadays.

The Portuguese government solution – a government led by the Socialist Party with the parliamentary support of the Portuguese Communist Party, the Left Bloc and the Ecologist Party-The Greens – has been a way of implementing this social-democratic policy. In a time when the so perceived “death” of social democracy is proclaimed by several analysts, it is important to analyse this narrative on a case by case basis, and especially when such cases as the Portuguese one clearly proves that there are exceptions to be made. And as we have seen above, the measures that have been taken by this government and approved by its supporters correspond to what the moderate centre-left has defended for a century – at least until the advent of the Third Way. If they are classified as radical (sometimes and by some) that is only because of the existence of an ideological hegemony that makes people believe there is only a single political path (or: only one legitimate political path).

In fact, the liberal-conservative political forces have been strong enough to disseminate their political views and even to colonize some socialist, social democrats and labour parties. The need for a minimal Welfare State, for less public intervention and even economic deregulation, for a labour market with more flexibility and less security have been accepted as self-evident truths by many. Traditional social democracy opposed these ideas, and all that the current socialist government in Portugal is doing is to combat them, in keeping with its historic heritage, with no ideological ruptures.

As we pointed out, some of the actions of this left-wing majority simply consist in reversing the right-wing government’s measures. The dismantling (as far as the Constitution allowed) of the Welfare State, the lack of social concern for the worst-off, the impoverishment of the middle-class, the generalized privatization of public companies – all brought about by the right-wing government – had social and political consequences. The 2015 electoral results showed that the majority of the electorate did not support those policies. In that context, the choice for alternative politics could only be led by the Socialist Party. And, of course, a change of politics was impossible with the parties that had taken the country down that path and were

still advocating the continuation of those policies. This means that, when we have a radicalized right in social and economic terms, it is impossible for a centre-left party, not only to support their policies, but also to carry out a change with them. In this situation, the cleavage between left and right becomes so deep, that centrist coalitions become unimaginable. And, in the same way, the different lefts can converge and find common ground. That is what happened in Portugal: the several left-wing parties understood that, in this moment, there were more things uniting them than separating them.

The Portuguese experience shows that social-democratic politics is possible to execute. And we know that sometimes socialist, social democrats and labour parties have to search for new means to achieve their political ends. In times like this, coalitions with other left parties – which are not common in most EU countries yet – are more likely to permit the implementation of social-democratic politics. With the electorate having moved away from the Third Way – the one that was located between “old social-democracy” and “neoliberalism” (Giddens, 1998) –, maybe this is a kind of fourth way to social-democratic politics, assuming that it is closer to the traditional ideological line. Of course, the Portuguese government solution is not “exportable” to all national political contexts. But it can be seen as an option (that can be chosen among other options) to be considered by centre-left parties, particularly nowadays, since other left-wing parties are winning electoral ground as we saw above.

This kind of left-wing coalition can have another important consequence for political systems: to make radical left-wing parties more pragmatic and more accountable about their proposals and positions in the countries where they have never contributed to government solutions and assumed a protest role. In Portugal, the Communist Party, the Left Bloc and The Greens were excluded from decision-making processes for 40 years. That fact impoverished Portuguese democracy, since it meant keeping more than 10% of the electorate (sometimes close to 20%) apart from governance. Only the right or the Socialist Party (alone or in short-term coalitions with the right) have occupied power since the first parliamentary elections. Now, democracy has been enlarged and empowered with the other left-wing parties contributing with solutions for the country’s problems. That has a huge importance for the future of the political system – and that would be valid for any country where radical left parties have always been outside of government.

In the same way, the Portuguese experience is also a good example of how the centre-left and the radical left can start negotiating with each other – despite a political history that kept them apart for years – and how that new culture of dialogue can be translated into a stable political situation – despite all the prognoses saying the opposite in the beginning of the mandate.

Of course, the Portuguese government solution, which permits the implementation of social-democratic politics, has thus far obtained very good results. The reconstitution of incomes to families, the revalorization and deepening of the universal Welfare State, the measures to dignify work and those to give an economic stimulus, at the same time that European rules on public finances were abided by, proved that another political path was possible. Portuguese growth, employment and deficit numbers in 2016 prove that the TINA (“there is no alternative”) was false and that social democracy is still a very good way of solving social and economic problems. Socialist, social democrats and labour parties should thus try to find the best conditions to propose their agenda to the electorate and the best partners to execute it.

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- Instituto Nacional de Estatística (National Stats Institute): www.ine.pt
- Jornal de Negócios*: www.jornaldenegocios.pt
- Ministério da Administração Interna (Ministry of Interior Administration): <http://www.eleicoes.mai.gov.pt/legislativas2015/>
- Parliaments and Governments Database: <http://www.parlgov.org/>
- Party of European Socialists: <https://www.pes.eu/oc/en/>
- Pordata: www.pordata.pt

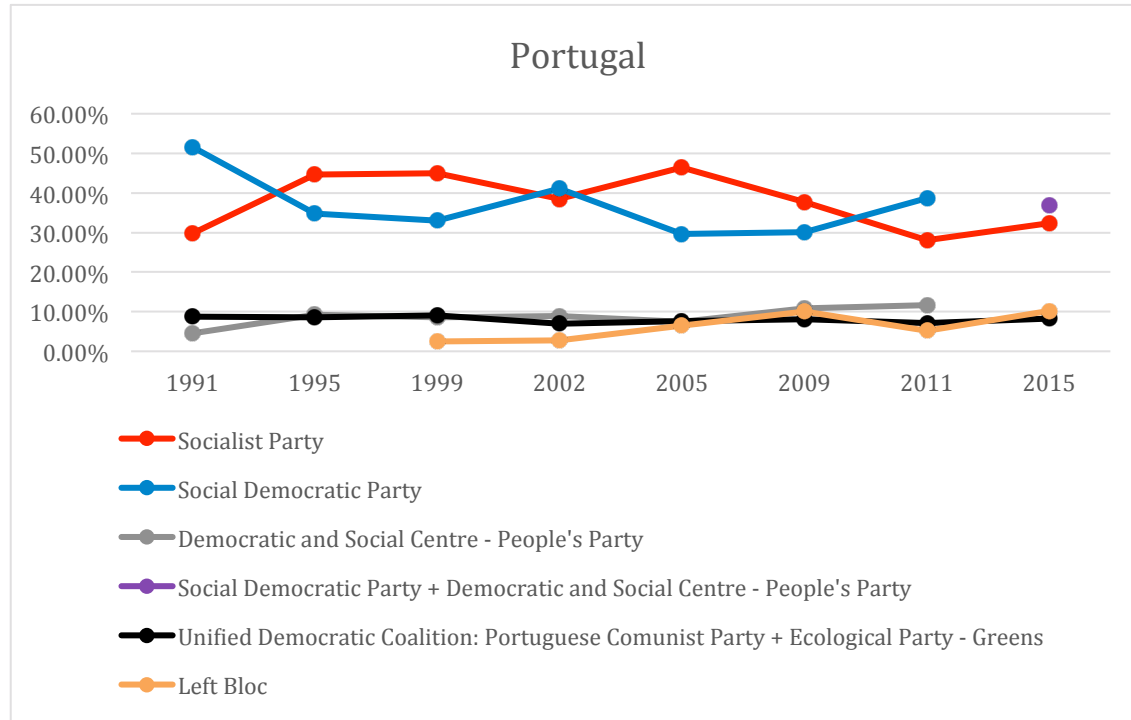
APPENDIXES

APPENDIX I

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN PORTUGAL SINCE 1990*

* The results are part of the "ParlGov" database, an academic research on Parliaments Governments that gathers all the data of national and European parliament elections in 37 countries (all the EU countries and most OCDE democracies), and can be checked at <http://parlgov.org/>.

| Portugal | 1991 | 1995 | 1999 | 2002 | 2005 | 2009 | 2011 | 2015 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Socialist Party | 29,70% | 44,61% | 44,96% | 38,55% | 46,40% | 37,73% | 28,06% | 32,31% |
| Social Democratic Party | 51,60% | 34,78% | 32,98% | 41,01% | 29,64% | 30,04% | 38,65% | |
| Democratic and Social Centre - People's Party | 4,52% | 9,23% | 8,51% | 8,90% | 7,46% | 10,77% | 11,70% | |
| Social Democratic Party + Democratic and Social Centre - People's Party | | | | | | | | 36,86% |
| Unified Democratic Coalition: Portuguese Communist Party + Ecological Party - Greens | 8,80% | 8,57% | 8,99% | 6,94% | 7,54% | 8,15% | 7,21% | 8,25% |
| Left Bloc | | | 2,49% | 2,79% | 6,54% | 10,12% | 5,17% | 10,19% |

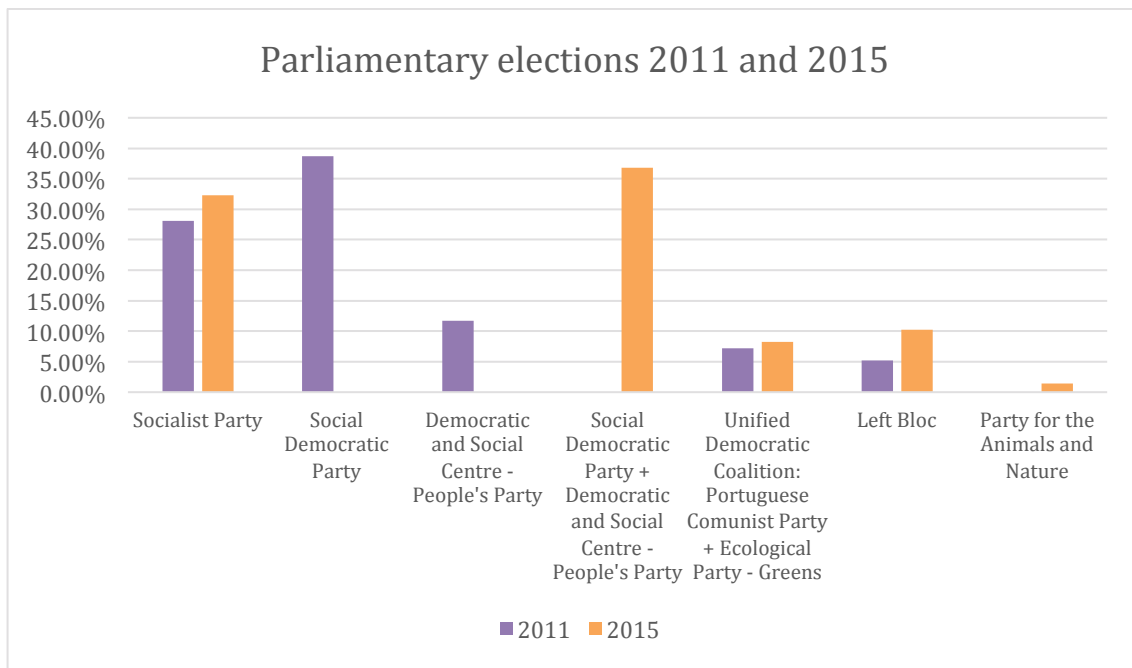


APPENDIX II

PORTUGUESE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN 2011 AND 2015**

** Besides the "ParlGov" Database, the results presented here have also been checked in the Ministry of Internal Administration official website: <http://www.eleicoes.mai.gov.pt/legislativas2015/>.

| Portugal | 2011 | 2015 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Socialist Party | 28,06% | 32,31% |
| Social Democratic Party | 38,65% | |
| Democratic and Social Centre - People's Party | 11,70% | |
| Social Democratic Party + Democratic and Social Centre - People's Party | | 36,86% |
| Unified Democratic Coalition: Portuguese Communist Party + Ecological Party - Greens | 7,21% | 8,25% |
| Left Bloc | 5,17% | 10,19% |
| Party for the Animals and Nature | | 1,39% |



APPENDIX III

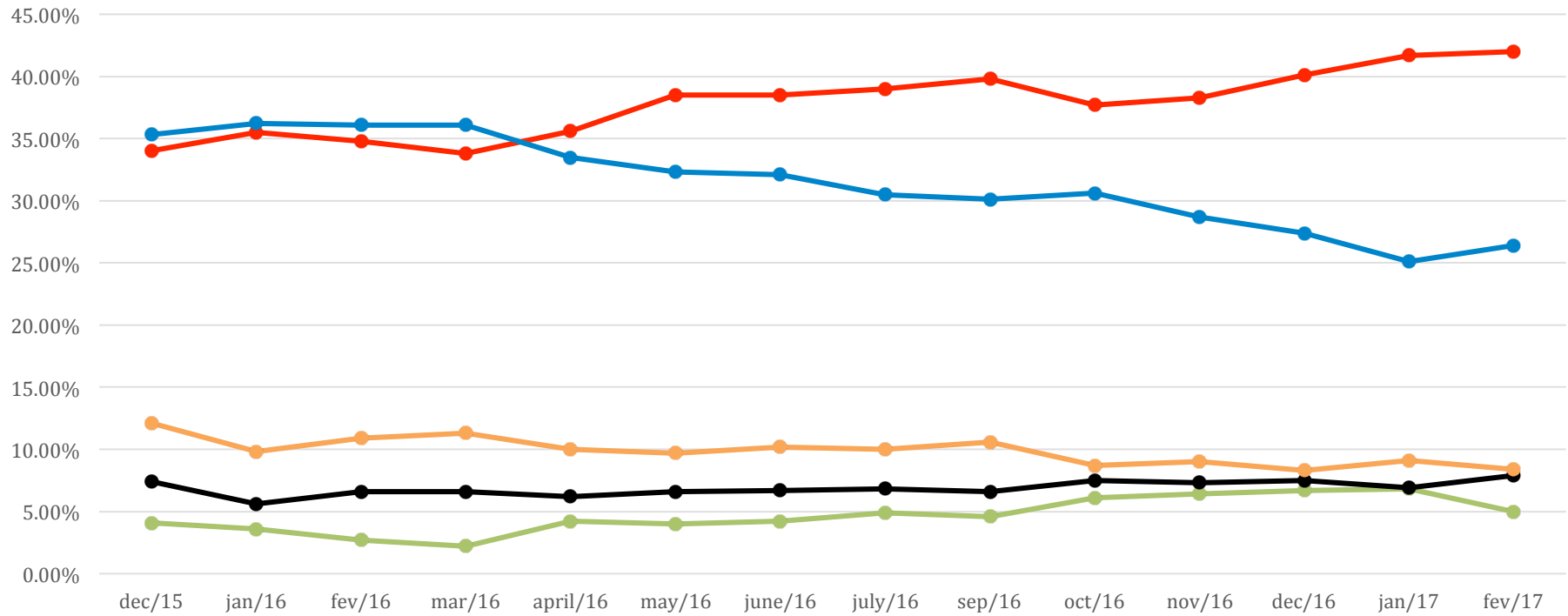
PORTUGUESE POLLS FROM DECEMBER 2015 UNTIL FEBRUARY 2017***

*** The polls presented were done by Aximage for several media. They can be accessed, for instance, in Jornal de Negócios (an economic daily newspaper) website: <http://jornaldenegocios.pt/>.

| | dec/15 | jan/16 | fev/16 | mar/16 | april/16 | may/16 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Socialist Party | 34,00% | 35,50% | 34,80% | 33,80% | 35,60% | 38,50% |
| Social Democratic Party | 35,30% | 36,20% | 36,10% | 36,10% | 33,50% | 32,30% |
| Democratic and Social Centre - People's Party | 4,10% | 3,60% | 2,70% | 2,20% | 4,20% | 4,00% |
| Unified Democratic Coalition: Portuguese Communist Party + Ecological Party - Greens | 7,40% | 5,60% | 6,60% | 6,60% | 6,20% | 6,60% |
| Left Bloc | 12,10% | 9,80% | 10,90% | 11,30% | 10,00% | 9,70% |

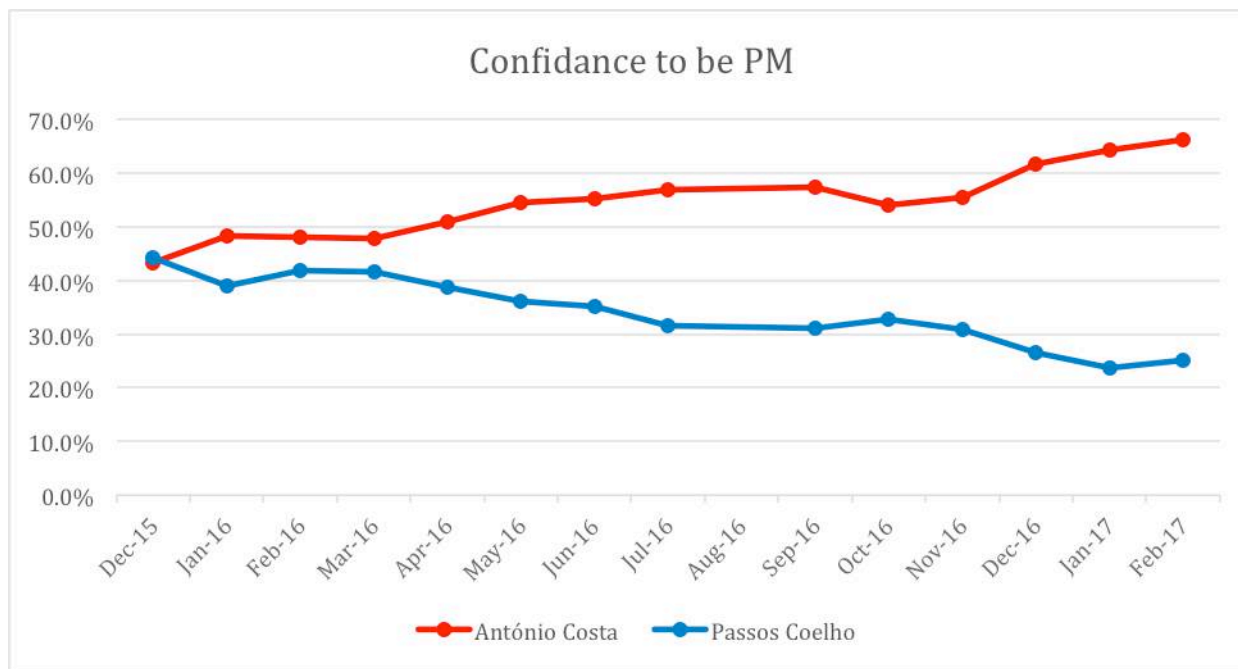
| june/16 | july/16 | sep/16 | oct/16 | nov/16 | dec/16 | jan/17 | fev/17 |
|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 38,50% | 39,00% | 39,80% | 37,70% | 38,30% | 40,10% | 41,70% | 42,00% |
| 32,10% | 30,50% | 30,10% | 30,60% | 28,70% | 27,40% | 25,10% | 26,40% |
| 4,20% | 4,90% | 4,60% | 6,10% | 6,40% | 6,70% | 6,80% | 5,00% |
| 6,70% | 6,80% | 6,60% | 7,50% | 7,30% | 7,50% | 6,90% | 7,90% |
| 10,20% | 10,00% | 10,60% | 8,70% | 9,00% | 8,30% | 9,10% | 8,40% |

Polls December 2015-February 2017



- Socialist Party
- Social Democratic Party
- Democratic and Social Centre - People's Party
- Unified Democratic Coalition: Portuguese Communist Party + Ecological Party - Greens
- Left Bloc

| | António Costa | Passos Coelho |
|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| dez/15 | 43,2% | 44,3% |
| jan/16 | 48,3% | 38,9% |
| fev/16 | 48,1% | 41,9% |
| mar/16 | 47,8% | 41,6% |
| abr/16 | 50,8% | 38,8% |
| mai/16 | 54,5% | 36,1% |
| jun/16 | 55,2% | 35,2% |
| jul/16 | 56,8% | 31,6% |
| set/16 | 57,3% | 31,2% |
| out/16 | 54,0% | 32,8% |
| nov/16 | 55,4% | 30,8% |
| dez/16 | 61,6% | 26,5% |
| jan/17 | 64,3% | 23,7% |
| fev/17 | 66,1% | 25,0% |



| | Expectation in Government Index |
|---------------|----------------------------------------|
| dez/15 | 9% |
| jan/16 | 42% |
| fev/16 | 19% |
| mar/16 | 24% |
| abr/16 | 34% |
| mai/16 | 39% |
| jun/16 | 41% |
| jul/16 | 43% |
| set/16 | 38% |
| out/16 | 33% |
| nov/16 | 35% |
| dez/16 | 47% |
| jan/17 | 54% |
| fev/17 | 54% |

