



INSTITUTO PORTUGUÊS DE RELAÇÕES INTERNACIONAIS
UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA

WORKING PAPER 40

WEST GERMANY AND THE PORTUGUESE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY. AN INTRODUCTION

Ana Mónica Fonseca,

IPRI-UNL & ISCTE

monica.fonseca@ipri.pt

[Draft version, please don't quote]

Paper presented at the research seminar "Southern European Democracies: Legacies of the Past and International Constraints", 16-17 October 2008, Institute of Social Sciences (org: António Costa Pinto and Diogo Moreira)

Outubro 2008

In this paper I will analyse how the Federal Republic followed the events in Portugal in the first months after the «Revolution of the Carnations». I will focus on the period from April 25, 1974 to September, 28, 1974, when the General Antonio de Spínola, President of the Republic, resigned from his post. From this moment on, the revolutionary process entered in a new phase.

This paper is a reflection on the role FRG played on the Portuguese transition to democracy. In the next pages we will analyze the way the German government followed the political evolution in the first months of the Portuguese revolution. It is mostly the result of the research on the German Foreign Ministry. In addition, I will also use the sources already published in the *Akten der Aussenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (AABRD) and the documents of the Portuguese Foreign Ministry.

The Federal Republic of Germany and the *Estado Novo*

Since the Federal Republic became a member of NATO, in 1955, the path was open for the strengthening of the relations with Salazar's government. The most important element of these relations was the military cooperation that grew stronger during the 1960s. This military cooperation consisted on the use of the Beja air field, in southern Portugal, by the West German air force. The concession of this base was seen by the Portuguese government as way of possibly obtaining some military equipment as a compensation for the establishment of a potential target on its territory. Indeed, and despite all the international problems around the Portuguese colonial policy, the Beja Air Base allowed the Estado Novo to access to a vast range of armament, ammunitions and airplanes, which would have never been possible to buy without West German collaboration. The German position can be considered as dual, because at the same time it supported military the Portuguese Government (being one of the few Western allies to do so¹), it also tried to establish contacts with the newly independent African states, with the objective of bring them closer to the Western bloc².

Despite Bonn's efforts to protect itself, namely through a clause that stated that the military equipment sold to Portugal would be used "only in Portugal and to defend the interests of NATO", the military cooperation with the Estado Novo was affected by the critics of the Third World countries. This was particularly acute from 1966 onwards. In the

¹ Fonseca, Ana Mónica e Daniel Marcos. "French and German support to Portugal: the military survival of the «Estado Novo» (1958-1968)". In *Portuguese Studies Review*, Volume 15(1), Summer 2007.

² Engel, Ulf, *Die Afrikapolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949-1999: Rollen und Identitäten*. Leipzig: LIT, 2000.

December this year the German Social-Democrat Party (SPD) was called to form government with the CDU. From this year on, the intensity of the German-Portuguese relations decreased. However, the SPD, which had even established some contacts with some of the leaders of the nationalist movements while on the opposition, did not have enough political space to radically change the German foreign policy. Thus, the relations with Portugal were kept, although the military cooperation clearly faded³.

In 1969 the political situation in the Federal Republic changed dramatically. For the first time since the Republic of Weimar, the Social-democrats had elected Willy Brandt as Chancellor and were now entirely free to start their own policy. This shift was especially felt on the foreign policy. Quoting Walter Scheel, the minister of the Foreign Affairs between 1969 and 1974, it was a matter of “altering the *status quo* by recognizing that same *status quo*”⁴. This meant a totally new approach to the problem of the division of Germany. Bonn’s foreign policy so far could be characterized by the refusal to recognize the existence of «the other German state» and the belief that the Federal Republic of Germany was the solely representative of the German people. Willy Brandt decided to establish contacts not only with the German Democratic Republic, but also with the Soviet Union, with Poland and Czechoslovakia. Through the different agreements signed with these countries, Brandt obtained the recognition of the status quo and solved the problem of the Eastern border. Although these actions were embedded with the policy of détente followed by the Administration of Nixon and Kissinger, this was the “first demonstration of West German autonomy in international affairs”⁵. However, aware of the significance of its initiative, the West Germany government had to assure to the Western Allies that its compromise was with them. In this sense, parallel to the Ostpolitik was the reinforcement of the *Westpolitik*, namely by the strengthening of the European construction (the admission of Great-Britain and Denmark in 1973 and the institutionalization of the Community) and by keeping the Allies, especially the US, Great-Britain and France, constantly informed on the initiatives towards the Eastern Bloc⁶.

The maintenance of the relations with Portugal can be understood in this effort to show FRG’s commitment to the Western Alliance. However, and for the first time, it began to

³ Fonseca, Ana Mónica, *A Força das Armas: o apoio da RFA ao Estado Novo (1958-1968)*. Lisbon: Instituto Diplomático do Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros, 2007.

⁴ Bahr, Egon, *Willy Brandts europäische Aussenpolitik*. Berlin: Schriftenreihe der Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung, 3, 1999, p. 7.

⁵ Gaspar, Carlos, International Dimensions of the Portuguese Transition, paper presented to the Conference «The transition to democracy in Spain, Portugal and Greece: Thirty years after», Konstantinos G. Karamanlis Foundation, Greece, 22|Maio|2005 <http://www.ipri.pt/investigadores/artigo.php?idi=3&ida=130>

⁶ Lappenküper, Ulrich, *Die Aussenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. 1949 bis 1990*. Munich: Oldenburg Verlag, 2008, p. 28.

criticize publicly the colonial policy of the Estado Novo. When Marcelo Caetano was nominated Prime-minister, in September 1968, the Federal Republic, as many other countries, considered that the liberalization – and even, the democratization – of the Portuguese regime, was possible. This explains also why there were only few contacts with the democratic opposition, either the one in Lisbon or the one on exile. In the first years of Caetano's government, there was an effort to liberalise the regime. It seemed too risky for the West German government to jeopardize the good relations between the two countries by supporting the democratic opposition. But, when this moment of liberalization ended, the German Social-Democrats understood that the Estado Novo would not reform itself and started to do in Portugal what was already doing in Spain since the 1960s: support the democratic opposition, namely the one that was ideologically closer to the SPD, that is, the Socialist group led by Mario Soares⁷. In this sense, from 1970 onwards, contacts were established through the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and in 1972, the Portuguese Socialist Action (*Acção Socialista Portuguesa – ASP*) was admitted to the International Socialist. One year later, the ASP was transformed in the Portuguese Socialist Party (PS), at a meeting held at the Academy of the Foundation in Bad Münstereifel, near Bonn⁸.

The 25 April 1974: the first months, the first crises.

The first in-depth report on the Portuguese situation was sent to Bonn on the April 28, only three days after the revolution. The unexpectedness of the coup might have been, according to the German Ambassador in Lisbon, the reason for its success, which revealed “how disintegrating and without support” among the population the Estado Novo was. The Ambassador considered the leaders of the Junta de Salvação Nacional (JSN), Generals António de Spínola and Francisco da Costa Gomes, as trustworthy. He described Spínola as someone who had earned respect more for his “charismatic personality” than by the importance of the offices he had held. Costa Gomes, on the other hand, was someone who would not “steal the stage” from Spínola, but he would be important to moderate him, as a “backstage” character. Regarding the JSN program for the new Portugal, the ambassador thought it should be supported by the Federal Republic, although it could also be considered ambitious. Its major goals were: the decolonization,

⁷ Muñoz Sánchez, António, “Aportación al estudio de la influencia de los factores internacionales en la transición democrática española: La política de la Republica Federal de la Alemania hacia la península Ibérica en los años setenta” in *Memorana* (1), 1998, pp. 55-67.

⁸ There were already some contacts since mid-1960s, but were never very strong nor frequent because of the lack of organizational capacity of the democratic opposition. See Mühlen, Patrick von zur, *Die internationale Arbeit der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des Ost-West-Konflikts*. Bonn: Dietz Verlag, 2007, p. 201ff.

which included the immediate end of the colonial wars and the beginning of negotiations for the future self-determination of the colonies; the democratization, namely through elections that should be held in 1975 for a Constitutional Assembly, which then had twelve months to prepare the new constitution, and the establishment of relations with all the countries of the world, at the same time that it defended the maintenance of the traditional alliances of Portugal: with NATO and the Western bloc⁹.

In order to tranquilize the western allies and to gain their support to the new regime, Mario Soares was sent on a trip to Europe as a representative of the JSN, in the first days of May. Soares went to Paris, London, Bonn, Helsinki, Amsterdam, Brussels and Rome. With the exception of Paris and Rome, all these governments were led by socialists or social-democrats who already knew Mario Soares from the meetings of the International Socialist. Despite travelling as the leader of the Socialist Party of Portugal, Soares was received as the envoy of the General Spínola and the JSN, i.e., as a representative of the Portuguese political authorities – as if he was already the Foreign Minister of Portugal¹⁰.

In the conversations he had in Bonn, with the Chancellor Willy Brandt and with Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Soares explained the situation in Portugal. The PS supported the General Spínola, but recognized that there were some divergences regarding the decolonization. The PS wanted an immediate independence of the colonies, whereas General Spínola, recognized the right of self-determination, but the future evolution of the colonies was to be decided by the population of the territories, through a referendum. Nevertheless, these differences “were minimal and would eventually disappear as the revolutionary process would progress”. On the other hand, one of Soares’ objectives to this mission was to gain some support to his own party, the PS. In this sense, he was very careful in explaining to the German leader the real weight of the Communists in Portugal. Despite being much better organized and with much more money than the Socialists, the Communist Party did not have the support of the population. Soares believed that the Communists ought to be in the provisional government in order to share its successes and failures, and to avoid its constitution as the opposition voice, that would obviously attack the PS. Therefore, for the German government the PS presented itself as the best positioned party to lead the country towards a democratic regime.

Another problem that greatly concerned the Germans was the economic problem. In the words of Soares, the situation was “catastrophic” and Portugal would need the western Allies support. In Bonn, he heard from the Chancellor that the Federal Republic was very

⁹ Report from the German Embassy in Lisbon, 28.04.1974, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amt (PAAA), 101436.

¹⁰ Avillez, Maria João, *Soares: Ditadura e Revolução*. Lisbon: Público, 2006, p. 290.

interested and worried with the developments in Portugal, special with the economic difficulties the country would feel. In this sense, Brandt suggested the creation of a bilateral expert's commission to define the future cooperation at the economic and financial level between Portugal and the FRG¹¹. The conditions were thus created for a closer cooperation between the governments of Portugal and the FRG.

Three weeks after the coup, the composition of the first provisional government in Lisbon was known¹². It was constituted by ministers of all the political trends, with Mario Soares as Foreign Minister, the leaders of the PC, Álvaro Cunhal, and of the Popular-Democratic Party (Partido Popular Democrata – PPD), Francisco Sá Carneiro, as ministers without portfolio, and by a great number of independents. The information sent to Bonn was this was a “very balanced government”, having in mind the “actual political situation in Portugal”. Its “biggest handicap” seemed to be that the majority – if not the totality – of the ministers had no experience in government. The new Portuguese sovereign institutions were the government, the President of the Republic (Spínola), the JSN, the Counsel of State, the future Constitutional Assembly and the courts. The frontiers of power between these institutions were not clear, but it seemed obvious that the effective political power remained with the President Spínola and the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), which could originate “some limitations to the political development” of Portugal¹³.

Indeed, it was precisely the differences of opinion between the group around General Spínola, which included the Prime-Minister, Palma Carlos, and the MFA that caused the first governmental crisis, especially regarding decolonization and Portugal's future economic path. In the beginning of July, the President proposed the reinforcement of the powers of the Prime-Minister, a referendum to elect the President of the Republic (himself) and to approve a new constitution. Feeling that this meant a reduction of its own power, the MFA and the majority of the government refused the proposal. On July 9, 1974, the Prime Minister renounced and with him went four ministers (including the representatives of the PPD, Sá Carneiro and Magalhães Mota). Spínola was forced by the circumstances to nominate a man of the MFA, Vasco Gonçalves, as Prime-minister and his political weakness explained also the approval of the Law 7/74. This Law, of July 27, accepted the independence of the former colonies and the beginning of negotiations with

¹¹ Report from the Federal Chancellery of Chancellor's conversation with Mario Soares, 03.05.1974 – PAAA, 101437.

¹² The first provisional government in Portugal took office on the same day as the new government of Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. Willy Brandt was forced to resign to the Chancellery in 6 May after the detection of an East-German spy among his closest advisors. This scandal became know as the Guillaume-affair.

¹³ Telegram 103 to the Foreign Ministry from the FRG Embassy in Lisbon, 16.05.1974 – PAAA, 101434.

the nationalist movements. This was an absolute defeat for the General, who believed that a federative solution for the Portuguese empire was still possible.

Despite all these political developments, the main concern of Bonn was still its economic situation. In fact, it seemed like “whole energy of the Portuguese government was set on the resolution of the colonial problem”. Issues like “long term conceptions of economic policy” or the future of the relations with the EC had not yet been discussed and it seemed like it was “a controversial subject in the government coalition”. The changes brought by the revolution had caused fear on the investors and disorder to the working environment. On the bilateral level, the Federal Republic could help Portugal either with financial or technical support. The Foreign Ministry suggested that a grant of 50 to 70 Million DM should be given during 1975. Following the suggestion of Willy Brandt, the Bilateral Commission for the Economic Relations, an organ that was created in the 1960s to coordinate the economic cooperation between Bonn and Lisbon, should be reactivated, but only when the issues of the German position towards the financial support to Portugal, and the Portuguese relations to the EC were clarified.

Concerning the political situation in Portugal, the extreme-left showed an “overwhelming activity”, in particular the Communist Party. But, surprisingly, in Lisbon “no one seem[ed] to worry, either in the government, or on the Centre and conservative parties”. Spínola continued to have a great prestige on the population but his influence on the MFA was beginning to diminish. Because of this, an alliance of the military with the Left should not be excluded. The position of the Portuguese political forces was not clear regarding the relations between Portugal and the European Community. The leading men, especially Mario Soares, had already showed to be willing to be closer to the EC, but such a decision could only be made by a parliamentary legitimized government. The only concrete statement of the Portuguese government on this was its interest on the improvement of the relations with the EC within the agreement already in force (from 1973). There were several alternatives to make possible the adhesion of Portugal to the EC, but they were all based on the precondition of a democratic consolidation. The decision was to wait and see what Portugal would choose to do¹⁴.

But the divergences between Spínola and the MFA were becoming unsurpassable and in the September they reached their peak. Trying once again to defeat the MFA and the left-wing, Spínola called for a demonstration of the “silent majority” (*Maioria Silenciosa*), that would force the Prime-Minister to resign and the MFA to go back to the barracks. The population, with the encouragement of the PCP and other extreme-left organizations,

¹⁴ Report to the Minister on the relations with Portugal, 21 August 1974 – PAAA, 101436.

raised barricades around Lisbon on September 28, thus blocking the entrance on the capital of the participants on the demonstration pro-Spínola. After some negotiations with the government, the Counsel of State and the JSN, the President withdrew from his position and resigned from the Presidency, publicly announcing it to the media on September 30¹⁵.

The West German government considered that these events had definitely showed that the “progressive forces” were the winners in the fight with Spínola. An immediate consequence to the September 28 would be the dismissal or resignation of the members of government that were close to Spínola, namely the Defense and the Information Ministers. The nomination of General Francisco da Costa Gomes to the Presidency, who immediately re-conducted Vasco Gonçalves as the prime-minister, made it clear that the political developments in Portugal were towards a “progressive objective”. But the total dimension of this objective and how far it would go, “only time would say”¹⁶.

As an immediate reaction to the events of September, the Iberian desk of the Foreign Affairs Ministry prepared a memorandum on Portugal to be discussed on a meeting of the parliamentary commission on Foreign Affairs. The situation in Portugal was described as “tense”, but an escalation of the conflicts was not expected, because “the winners, with the support of the PCP and their trade-unions, controlled the streets”. The balance of power favored now the left and extreme-left. The role of the new President would be securing the stability of the government, at the same time that the Prime-minister saw his powers reinforced. This government could have better conditions to establish a long term definition for its economic and social policies, particularly on what regarded the future relations with the EEC. In addition, the decolonization policy was now, with the withdrawal of Spínola, more defined on what was called in Bonn the “Soares Line”, that is, the delivery of power to the nationalist movements. This could bring a civil war to some of the former colonies, especially in Angola, where three movements had fought the Portuguese¹⁷.

Conclusion

Despite some contacts with the democratic opposition to the Estado Novo in the last years of the regime, the government of the Federal Republic of Germany believed, as in many

¹⁵ Obviously, this is only a short version of the events that led to the dismissal of Spínola on the end of September 1974. For a more detailed version, see Telo, António José, *História Contemporânea de Portugal – do 25 de Abril à Actualidade*. Volume I. Lisbon: Presença, 2007.

¹⁶ Telegram 244 from the Embassy of the FRG in Lisbon, 30.09.1974 – PAAA, 101434.

¹⁷ Memorandum, 08.10.1974 – PAAA, 101435

other countries, that the regime would still last longer. That is why the first reaction to the coup of April 25 1974 is of surprise. But the first declarations of the new leaders, particularly the maintenance of the international agreements – NATO, Azores agreement with the USA – assured the German government, as well the others western countries.

The visit of Mário Soares to Bonn, as part of a European trip, was probably one of the most important moments for the definition of the FRG's position towards the developments in Portugal. Presenting himself as the leader of the Portuguese Socialist Party, but who was simultaneously an envoy of Spínola and the JSN to explain to the European allies the purposes of the revolution of April 25, Soares had the opportunity to gain the support of the German government. And this support was both for Portugal, especially at the economic level, but also in an informal level, towards the PS and its leader.

The developments in Portugal went towards the dispute of power between the General Spínola and the MFA. The way the German government followed the events of the summer of 1974 indicates that it had very accurate understanding of the situation in Portugal. The resignation of Spínola and the gradual empowerment of the Left did not caused any panic in Bonn. In fact, it was even expected that, after the resolution of the conflict between Spínola and the MFA, the necessary stability for the establishment of an economic and social policy would arrive. In this sense, the events of September, 28, 1974 had brought the necessary definition of the political situation in Portugal.