

INTRODUCTORY NOTE¹

THE 25 APRIL AS SEEN FROM ABROAD

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The 50th anniversary of the 25 April has been commemorated in 2024. This special issue of the journal *Relações Internacionais* evokes this event, bringing together a collection of texts presenting different perspectives and approaches on how the events in Portugal were welcomed in various countries.

The military coup carried out by mid-level officers of the Portuguese Armed Forces, who had by then been engaged in a long and exhausting armed conflict in three African territories, had multiple repercussions, not only domestically but also internationally. In addition to paving the way for the last major decolonization process of the 20th century and the creation of new states, the fall of the longest-lasting authoritarian regime in Western Europe initiated a turbulent political-military process that left its mark not only on the country but also on Europe, a sensitive region in a changing international system.

In the 1970s, the Cold War had entered a new phase, the *détente*, in which the leading power of the Western bloc, the United States, paralyzed by a combination of internal and external factors, had granted increased autonomy to its European allies, especially the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), which was set on approaching the Eastern Bloc. This was reciprocated on the other side of the Iron Curtain by the Soviet Union, which, in addition to seeking recognition for its sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe, saw strengthened commercial relations with the West as an opportunity to tackle its own economic and financial problems.

Willy Brandt's rise to power allowed the leader of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) of the FRG to implement the desired *Ostpolitik*, aiming to promote changes in the Cold War status quo that would, in the long run, peacefully undermine the foundations of the Soviet bloc² and enable the reunification of Germany, led by Bonn.³ Aware of Willy Brandt's intentions, the Soviets were, however, confident that they could maintain and strengthen their influence in Central and Eastern Europe. Both France and the United Kingdom, which shared with the United States a level of distrust regarding an *Ostpolitik* implemented solely by the FRG, were in favour of holding a conference

to establish the basis for an understanding on European security and cooperation within the broader framework of East-West relations.⁴

This strong commitment of the FRG propelled the holding of a conference dedicated to European security, something that Moscow had sought since the post-war period as a way to obtain formal recognition of the borders established following Second World War, which the Americans had delayed for this reason.⁵

Multilateral meetings began in July 1973 in Helsinki and continued for two more years in Geneva. In the summer of 1975, 33 European countries, the United States, and Canada were preparing to sign the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in the Finnish capital. This act enshrined principles such as respect for territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders, non-intervention in internal affairs, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

However, these rapprochement efforts between the two blocs were threatened by the political situation in a country at the western edge of Europe. The months leading up to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act were marked by a swift deterioration of the political-military situation in Portugal, which called into question the country's full integration into the Western bloc. Following the successful military coup, a period of uncertainty and confrontation between various alternatives ensued and competing with the prospect of a transition to democracy, the idea of a transition to socialism began to take shape and gain strength. Although the elections for the formation of the Constituent Assembly, held in April 1975, showed majority support for parties that did not challenge the country's international alignment (Portugal was a founding member of NATO) and advocated for the establishment of a pluralistic and representative democracy, the political and military forces committed to promoting profound changes – not only politically but also economically and socially – and seeking to experiment with new orientations in foreign policy, did not abandon their goals.

Portugal then became the stage for a political-ideological dispute that attracted the attention of intellectuals, artists, journalists, activists, and politicians from various parts of the world, interested in following, closely and in real time, a process of change that opened new perspectives and was viewed with anticipation and enthusiasm by some, and with apprehension and fear by others. While the authority of the State was being challenged by one of its chief mainstays, the Armed Forces, Portugal entered a process of social revolution that would leave lasting marks⁶ and threatened to inspire changes in other Western European countries, especially in the south of the old continent where the exclusion of communist parties from governments, practised since the post-war period, was beginning to be questioned by the Common Program of the Left in France and the 'historic compromise' in Italy.

Despite the influence these understandings had in Portugal, the leadership of the Socialist Party (PS), which had promoted an approach to the most significant opposition party to the authoritarian regime, the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), managed to trans-

form his party into the main political force capable of countering the new authoritarian threat, now coming from the opposite end of the political spectrum. Encouraged by the Portuguese socialists, several European social-democratic leaders began advocating to the American administration that the socialists led by Mário Soares were the force worth supporting, and banded together to demonstrate that the success of the *détente* might be compromised if Portugal moved away from the prevailing political models in Western Europe. Additionally, they coordinated positions and prepared a swift, pragmatic, and effective action to support the civil and military forces that did not identify with a furthering of the revolutionary path at the expense of democratically sanctioned electoral legitimacy.

INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS TO 25 APRIL

This special issue of *Relações Internacionais* focuses on how the profound and quick political, social, and economic changes were followed at various levels in different Western bloc countries.

Víctor Gavín's article examines the initial reactions of the American administration to the events in Portugal after the coup, describing the detachment of the United States authorities regarding the actions of the military who overthrew Estado Novo. Using United States diplomatic archives, Gavín sets out by describing the weeks leading up to the uprising, marked by the failed coup attempt on 16 March 1974, and the publishing of the book *Portugal and the Future* by then Vice-Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff, António de Spínola, highlighting the aloofness of the State Department towards the increasingly clear signs of discontent within the Armed Forces regarding the Portuguese regime's colonial policy. The relative disinterest with which American diplomacy followed the political events in Portugal, evident in the fact that the ambassador kept in his agenda a planned absence from his post in the days following the coup, would change only with the hastily confirmed prospect of communists entering the provisional government. According to the author, the intransigence of then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger only shifted at the end of 1974 when the United States finally showed their willingness to grant an aid program to Portugal. This was a first step in a long learning process about the new Portuguese reality, which would be encouraged and stimulated by the new American ambassador in Lisbon.

Oscar J. Martín García's article investigates how the British government followed up the regime change and the ensuing revolutionary process, then led by Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson. The new prime minister, who was opposition leader when Marcelo Caetano made an official visit to London in July 1973 to commemorate the sixth centenary of the Anglo-Portuguese alliance and who came to power with a very critical stance on the Conservative government's complacency towards existing dictatorships in Southern Europe and Portuguese colonial policy, would play an important role in supporting the political forces committed to a successful transition to democracy.

The good relations with the socialist leader, the focus on cultural aspects, concerns about the acceleration of the revolutionary dynamics, and the importance given to the elections for the Constituent Assembly, whose results were received with both enthusiasm and concern, are analyzed using British diplomatic sources. Particularly interesting is the description of how the British government sought to counteract the revolutionary drift, which was criticized both by conservatives, who considered it too meek, and by more radical sectors of the Labour Party, who saw the PS as a counter-revolutionary party aligned with the United States. Despite the difficulties, the British government eventually played a significant role in supporting the Portuguese moderates, highlighted by the meeting of Socialist International leaders in London in early September 1975, which formalized the creation of the Committee of Friendship and Solidarity for Democracy in Portugal. Besides demonstrating the strong commitment of various European countries to the Portuguese transition, this initiative contributed to the political-military clarification of 25 November 1975.

Also focusing on diplomatic action (or inaction), Victor Pereira examines how France accompanied the events in Portugal. Based on a thorough research carried out at the Quai d'Orsay archives, the Franco-Portuguese historian describes how Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and the Paris government moved from enthusiasm to growing concern over the radicalization of the revolutionary process and the increasing influence of the PCP. He starts by highlighting the good relations between Oliveira Salazar's regime and Charles de Gaulle's governments, the support given by the French authorities to the war effort in Africa, and the growth of French investments in Portugal recorded from the late 1960s to 1974. Pereira notes a gradual distancing between Paris and Lisbon due to Marcelo Caetano's inability to implement changes in Portuguese colonial policy, showing that the French embassy in Lisbon was not completely caught off guard by the outbreak of the military movement. He also notes that both the choice of Spínola to lead the country's destiny and Mário Soares to conduct Portugal's foreign policy were well-received in France. However, a few weeks after the coup, when a social revolution began to emerge, and there was news of the inclusion of including communist ministers in the provisional government, doubts and concerns began to arise. The fall of Prime Minister Palma Carlos and General Spínola, the increasing assertion of the Armed Forces Movement's influence, and the events of 11 March 1975, confirmed the misgivings and fears of the French authorities, who believed that the elections for the Constituent Assembly would be decisive. The undervaluing of the elections and the conflict between revolutionary and democratic legitimacy were also followed with concern. The official visit of Costa Gomes to France in June 1975 was intended to anchor Portugal to Western Europe, but French officials warned that any concrete bilateral support should only be granted after the replacement of Vasco Gonçalves as head of the government. This position also justified the French veto when the European Economic Community debated sending emergency financial aid to Portugal. On the other hand, the

decision regarding aid for the evacuation of Portuguese settlers from Angola was provided without any quid pro quo. Besides the external dimension, the article alludes to the impact of the Portuguese transition process on French domestic politics. The support of the French Communist Party for its Portuguese counterpart and the support of the French Socialist Party (PSF) under Mitterrand for the Portuguese socialists caused shockwaves in France. If, on one hand, the stance of the French communists called into question their democratic credentials, of respect for pluralism and freedom of expression, on the other, the distancing between the Portuguese socialists and communists constituted a serious setback to the implementation of the Common Program envisioned by the French socialist leader. The increasing tension in Portugal led French authorities to schedule an evacuation plan for their citizens, but the replacement of Vasco Gonçalves by Pinheiro de Azevedo and the dismantling of radical forces at the end of November 1975 dispelled the darkest scenarios. The path was finally open for a deepening of relations between the two countries, which, however, would prove difficult to implement. Despite the 800 thousand Portuguese residents in France, the distancing and cautious policy adopted by the right-wing government during the revolutionary process had an impact not only on bilateral relations but also on the affirmation of parties to the right of the PS, which ended up not receiving the same type of support from their European counterparts as those provided and channelled by the Socialist International.

Alan Granadino's article does not focus on how a country followed the Portuguese revolution but rather on how the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) monitored the events in the neighbouring country, its impact on the Spanish socialists' strategy, and on the international relations of the party led by Felipe González from October 1974. Based on writings published in PSOE's official organ, the newspaper *El Socialista*, the historical archive of PSOE, the British National Archives, and the Jean-Jaurès Foundation archives, Granadino argues that, in 1974, PSOE advocated for a profound transformation of Spanish society and a break with the capitalist system. This approach aligned with the proposals advocated by Mitterrand's French Socialist Party (PSF), which, unlike Willy Brandt's SPD, distanced itself from the classic social-democratic model, advocated for the union of leftist forces, particularly between socialists and communists, and the introduction of alternative business management systems that entailed strengthening workers' power (self-management). Granadino posits that between 1972 and 1976, the SPD and PSF sought to replicate their models in the Iberian Peninsula. The German social democrats ultimately succeeded in asserting their strategy, which PSOE adopted by the late 1970s when it defined itself as a social-democratic party. The events in Portugal between 1974 and 1975 significantly contributed to this evolution. Granadino begins by identifying the similarities and differences between the two Iberian countries on the eve of 25 April and the enthusiasm with which Spanish socialists followed the first months after the fall of the Portuguese authoritarian regime. He recalls the tension

at the PS's first congress in December 1974, during which the Portuguese socialist leader Mário Soares invited the leader of the Spanish Communist Party, Santiago Carrillo, to speak and enthusiastically welcomed the leader of the rival socialist party, the Popular Socialist Party, led by Enrique Tierno Galván, an old friend of Soares. The distancing between socialists and communists was not well received by the party led by González, which progressively eschewed the Portuguese experience as a model to follow. However, the results of the 1975 elections paved the way for strengthening bilateral relations between the two parties. The Portuguese experience had revealed that polarization favoured a 'Cold War' dynamic, prompting Spanish socialists to advocate for avoiding excessive radicalization. This supports the well-known thesis that the transition through a rupture in Portugal stimulated a transition through a transaction in Spain, achieved through the Spanish socialists' self-moderation. Additionally, Granadino argues that the solidarity network forged to provide various supports to Portugal through the Socialist International during the critical period of the revolutionary process was later directed to PSOE, which would end up benefitting from the Portuguese experience and receiving strong support ensuring its prominent position in the future political landscape of democratic Spain.

Lastly, Antonio Muñoz Sánchez's article describes how the West German press followed the events in Portugal between April 1974 and November 1975, disclosing the evolution of the different perspectives, which varied according to the ideological orientation of each analysed media outlet and its impact on German public opinion. The actions of the Portuguese military attracted many special envoys to Lisbon, who arrived in a little-known country, described by various media as the 'poorhouse of Europe'. The image of destitute, despondent, and illiterate people gave way in the days following the fall of the Estado Novo to descriptions of a festive atmosphere and hope for the future. However, the problems related to the country's economic backwardness, the absence of a strong middle class, the weakness of civil society, and the concentration of economic power in a few monopolistic groups were soon identified as obstacles to Portugal's development and economic growth. Doubts regarding these issues intensified with Spínola's resignation and the rise of the socializing path, which, nevertheless, was viewed favourably by the leftist press, which saw the wave of nationalizations sweeping the country after 11 March not as part of a communist strategy to seize power but as a decisive step towards creating a welfare state. The German press also highlighted the importance of the elections for the Constituent Assembly. It was only when it became clear that, despite the victory of the moderate parties, radical leftist civil and military forces continued to push for a path unsupported by most of the Portuguese population, that the plurality of viewpoints on the situation in Portugal gave way to an almost unanimous criticism of the ongoing revolutionary process (PREC). Both the press that sympathized with the changes in the far west of Europe and those that had been sceptical from the outset united around the idea that it was essential to establish a liberal

democracy in Portugal. Once this threat was averted, Portugal quickly disappeared from the German press spotlight and returned to its traditional obscurity.

The reading of these five texts, all based on primary source research, reinforces the idea of the deep intertwining between the internal and external dimensions of the Portuguese transition and the twofold nature of external influences. Authors such as Lawrence Whitehead and Geoffrey Pridham⁷ have highlighted the importance of the international context in their pioneering works in political science and so-called transitology. It was not a case, however, of Portugal alone being influenced by the international context. The events unfolding in the country also had an impact beyond its borders at various levels: they challenged the international system, contributed to strengthening transnational networks and the role of the European Economic Community as an international actor, and halted the development of dynamics that challenged the traditional options of European social democracy, thereby also influencing domestic politics in several European countries.

The illustration chosen for the cover of this special issue is *A Difficult Problem*, drawn in 1975 by the Portuguese artist João Abel Manta. This famous artwork precisely captures the challenge of framing the Portuguese revolution within theoretical models, highlighting its original and unpredictable character. 

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■ ■ ■ ENDNOTES

¹ A previous version of this introductory note was published in Portuguese in the journal *Relações Internacionais*, No. 81, March 2024.

² NIEDHART, Gottfried – ‘Ostpolitik and its impact on the Federal Republic’s relationship with the West’. In LOTH, Wilfried; SOUTOU, Georges-Henri – *The Making of Détente: Eastern and Western Europe in the Cold War, 1965-75*. New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 119.

³ HANHIMÄKI, Jussi M. – ‘Détente in Europe, 1962-1975’. In LEFFER, Melvin; WESTAD, Odd Arne, eds. – *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, vol. II, *Crises and Détente*, p. 211.

⁴ HAMILTON, Keith – ‘Cold War by other means: British diplomacy and the Confer-

ence on Security and Co-operation in Europe, 1972-1975’. In LOTH, Wilfried; SOUTOU, Georges-Henri – *The Making of Détente...*, pp. 168-82.

⁵ BERNARDINI, Giovanni – ‘Forced to cooperate: the Brandt Government and the Nixon administration in the road to Helsinki’. In VILLAUME, Poul; WESTAD, Odd Arne, eds. – *Perforating the Iron Curtain: European Détente, Transatlantic Relations, and the Cold War, 1965-1985*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2010, p. 94; KIENINGER, Stephan – ‘Transformation versus status quo: the survival of the transformation strategy during the Nixon years’. In VILLAUME, Poul; WESTAD, Odd Arne, eds. – *Perforating the Iron Curtain...*, p. 102.

⁶ FISHMAN, Robert M. – ‘Rethinking state and regime: southern Europe’s transi-

tion to democracy’. In *World Politics*. Vol. 42, No. 3, 1990, pp. 422-40; FISHMAN, Robert M. – *Democratic Practice: Origins of the Iberian Divide in Political Inclusion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

⁷ WHITEHEAD, Lawrence – ‘International aspects of democratization’. In O’DONNELL, Guillermo; SCHMITTER, Philippe, eds. – *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Uncertain Conclusions*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, pp. 3-46; PRIDHAM, Geoffrey – *Encouraging Democracy: The International Context of Regime Transition in Southern Europe*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991.

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