

DOSSIER - THE CARNATION REVOLUTION: PERSPECTIVES AND LEGACIES

Studying the April Revolution, 50 years on

Filipe Guimarães da Silva, Pedro Marques Gomes



The Public Security Police accept the authority of Captain Fernando Salgueiro Maia, one of the officers leading the Carnation Revolution, in Lisbon in the early hours of 25 April 1974.

Photo: Alfredo Cunha (through the Mário Soares and Maria Barroso Foundation)

On 25 April 1974, the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) occupied strategic locations in the city of Lisbon and staged a coup d'état that, in less than 24 hours, toppled the long-lasting Portuguese dictatorship. The population, which was following the events through the MFA's radio bulletins, took to the streets to quickly join the military and celebrated with euphoria the success of the Regime End operation and the conquest of freedom.

At that time, Portugal was an "anachronistic" country, as the historian António Reis recalls. Condemned by the United Nations, the war in Africa against the liberation movements had been dragging on since 1961 and heightened the country's international isolation. "The oldest of the last three dictatorships in non-Communist Europe saw that its economy was increasingly dependent on European markets", to which was added "a social dynamic that was difficult to reconcile with the conservative traditionalism of rigidly authoritarian and repressive institutions". [1] The 25th of April and the revolutionary process that followed it marked a profound break with this reality.

A forerunner of the "third wave" of democratisation, [2] Portugal has attracted particular interest in academic circles, especially from a comparative perspective: after 48 years of dictatorship, the Portuguese transition came about through a rupture. A number of studies

have sought to analyse the structural conditions and the role played by different agents to account for the regime transition processes. António Costa Pinto highlights this aspect when he says: “While toppling the Estado Novo was part of a cycle in which the southern European dictatorships were eradicated, the ‘revolutionary period’ had certain specific features that defined the very nature of the Portuguese ‘defascistisation’ movement.” [3]

On the occasion of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Portuguese Revolution of 1974-1975, within this special issue of the IDEES magazine, we present a special dossier with eight reflections which, from different viewpoints and adding an international dimension, offer analytic tools and help us improve our understanding of the revolutionary process, its main agents and legacies. The topics covered include the Revolution’s international and geopolitical context ([Ana Mónica Fonseca](#), [Irene Flunser Pimentel](#), [Rafael Duran Muñoz](#)), its international impact ([Gabriel Magalhães](#), [Pedro Ponte e Sousa](#)), electoral behaviour and political attitudes during the first free elections ([José Santana Pereira](#) and [Filipa Raimundo](#)), Mário Soares’ diplomacy during the Revolution ([Pedro Marques Gomes](#)), and the legacies of the transition towards democracy ([António Costa Pinto](#)).

Today, democracies face complex challenges. The latest Democracy Report, published in 2024 by the V-Dem Institute, [4] paints a global picture of marked erosion of democracy, coupled with a dominant trend towards autocratisation: (i) the level of democracy of the average world citizen fell in 2023 to levels not seen since 1985; (ii) 71% of the world’s population lives in autocracies; and (iii) the level of democracy measured with respect to the relative size of the economy is below the level recorded in 1973, before the Portuguese Revolution.

More than 60 countries will be holding elections during 2024, and in almost half of them, the levels of democracy have worsened. [5] Reflection on the challenges that democracies are facing today, proposed in this IDEES magazine special issue, is inseparable from an understanding of their past and, in particular, of the dynamics that marked the democratisation processes and their subsequent erosion or autocratisation.

REFERENCES

- 1 — Reis, A. (1994). “Introdução”. A: Reis, A. (dir.). *Portugal: 20 anos de Democracia*. Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, p. 8.
- 2 — Huntington, S. P. (1991). *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century*. University of Oklahoma Press.
- 3 — Pinto, A. C. (1999). “Saneamentos Políticos e Movimentos Radicais de Direita na Transição para a Democracia, 1974-1976”. A: *Portugal e a Transição para a Democracia (1974-1976)*. Lisbon: Fundação Mário Soares e IHC/NOVA-FCSH, p. 29.
- 4 — Nord, M.; Lundstedt, M.; Altman, D.; Angiolillo, F.; Borella, C.; Fernandes, T.; Gastaldi, L.; Good God, A.; Natsika, N.; Lindberg; S. I. (2024). *Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot*. Göteborg: Institut V-Dem, Universitat de Göteborg.

5 — Nord, M., et al. (2024). *Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot*.



Filipe Guimarães da Silva

Filipe Guimarães da Silva is the Executive Director of the Mário Soares and Maria Barroso Foundation. He has led teams and projects of higher education, science and innovation both at the research level and in the public policy and government context. He was advisor and chief of staff to the Portuguese Minister of Science, Technology and Higher Education (2016-2018), managing several policy agendas, namely the national open science policy and research infrastructures. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Languages and International Relations from the Universidade do Porto and a Master's degree in Contemporary History from NOVA FCSH, with a thesis on the nationalisation of the brewing industry during the Portuguese Revolution of 1974. He is doctoral candidate at the ISCTE-IUL, working on public policies in higher education. He is a collaborator for the Memory for All Programme, working and publishing on social and economic history, industry and the Portuguese Revolution.



Pedro Marques Gomes

Pedro Marques Gomes holds a PhD in Contemporary History from the School of Social and Human Sciences of NOVA University Lisbon (NOVA FCSH). He is a researcher at the Mário Soares and Maria Barroso Foundation and a guest lecturer at NOVA FCSH and at the School of Communication and Media Studies of Lisbon Polytechnic. He is the author of *Os Saneamentos Políticos no Diário de Notícias no Verão Quente de 1975*, (Alêtheia, 2014), *Breve História do Partido Socialista* (Público/100Folhas, 2019) and *A Imprensa na Revolução: Os Novos Jornais e as Lutas Políticas de 1975* (INCM, 2021). Currently, he is member of the editorial board and researcher of the project "The complete works of Mário Soares". His main areas of research are the history of the Portuguese revolutionary process (1974-1975), with special emphasis on the Socialist Party and the figure of Mário Soares, and the history of the media.