

Portugal — Political Situation

Following Portugal's non-violent revolution in 1974, the country abandoned the conservative, authoritarian regime of former prime minister Antonio de Oliveira Salazar and began its transition toward a parliamentary democracy. This development had a profound effect on the political, social and economic life of modern-day Portugal.

On October 6, 1991, Anibal Cavaco Silva's centre-right Social Democratic Party (PSD) was re-elected with an absolute majority in the Portuguese parliament. Repeating its 1987 electoral feat, the PSD is the only party since the 1974 revolution (and for the second time) to be in a position to govern without forming a coalition with Portugal's other main political parties, namely the Socialists (PS) and the Unitary Democratic Coalition (CDU).

Since gaining power in 1985, Prime Minister Cavaco Silva has emphasized the need for efficiency and orderly government. Under his administration, Portugal has experienced one of the highest economic growth rates among members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and was successful in 1986 in its bid to join the European Community (EC).

High on the political agenda is the issue of constitutional reform. The ruling Social Democrats are proposing a revision of the constitution to modify the electoral law. Moreover, electoral constituencies may be reorganized, while laws governing political parties and local government law could also be altered. Prime Minister Cavaco Silva's objective is to lower the electoral ceiling, so that a vote of only 38-39% would be necessary to achieve an overall majority in parliament, against the present 43-44%. To do so, he will need the support of the opposition Socialists and others, as constitutional reforms require a two-third majority in parliament.