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Cape Verde in 2011: Turning Atypical into Typical

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By now, Cape Verde is accustomed to international praise and recognition for its singular achievements in Africa. Facing several meaningful constraints due to its small size, the island has nonetheless thrived over the past few years in an attempt to excel in terms of good governance and commitment to democratic ideals. That, in turn, has required credible and intensive diplomatic work, seeking not only to present the country abroad as a worthy partner but also to attract greater interest for its development and business opportunities on the ground, in order to sustain a moderate pattern of economic growth.

In that sense, if conditions had remained constant it would have been safe to predict that 2011 would end up just as prolific as 2010 proved to be for Cape Verde.¹ However, parliamentary and presidential elections combined with the effects of the international economic crisis, resulted in a challenging context for the government's intended course of action.

Be that as it may, Cape Verde managed to retain a great deal of its diplomatic hyperactivity on a number of fronts. With that in mind, one will then seek to depict the developments of 2011, highlighting the achievements and the obstacles that the small island nation had to face all year. The internal elections will inevitably receive greater attention but so will the country's projection in the wider African context and the generalized recognition by the international community that Cape Verde kept on receiving. Likewise, traditional relationships and the search/reinforcement with new partners will be equally taken into consideration. Conclusions will then be drawn regarding what can be expected for Cape Verde in the year ahead.

Developments at the home front

The central issue for Cape Verde in 2011 undoubtedly revolved around the decade-long rule of the *Partido Africano para a Independência de Cabo Verde* (PAICV) and whether the party would be able to stay in power after a predictably hectic electoral year. The first test came on 6 February, when the country went to the ballot to choose if Carlos Veiga,

the leader of the main opposition party *Movimento para a Democracia* (MpD) would get a chance to beat José Maria Neves and return to the office of Prime Minister. The results, however, showcased the penetration of the PAICV into Cape Verdean society as Neves won again and even managed to increase his party's absolute majority to 37 seats out of 72 in the Cape Verdean Parliament. Such turnout naturally allows for some inferences regarding a foreseeable stable political constituency in the years ahead. Moreover it also provides some clues as for the degree of generalized approval of the path taken this far and of the proposals for the way ahead.²

Among his official governing program for 2011-2016, Neves indicated the will to build upon previous policies including, as expected, the country's foreign policy options. With Jorge Borges now in charge of the Foreign Ministry, the new cabinet proposed to uphold three guiding principles: "affirm the global nation, promote peace and global/regional security and support the economic agenda".³ Evidently, it does not comprise a deep cut with the past as it continues down the same lines followed in the past few years. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that such a program does take into consideration some new variables, such as Cape Verde's graduation from the Least Developed Countries (LDC) list or the varying geopolitical context in the wider African neighborhood. In this sense, it is clearly more in tune with the present international reality.

Nevertheless, despite the significant political boost that Neves received, the PAICV's intended victory lap suddenly came to a halt following the presidential elections on 7 August. Marking a stark contrast with the country's heavily polarized political scene, this election witnessed four candidates running for office and, more importantly, a break within PAICV's own ranks on who should receive the party's nomination. Manuel Inocêncio de Sousa eventually won the party's endorsement but the candidacy of Aristides Lima – a long-time PAICV member and a former Parliament Speaker – ended up dividing the coveted votes. This split within

1 See Pedro Seabra, "Cape Verde in 2010: a prolific year" (*IPRIS Lusophone Countries Bulletin: 2010 Review*, 2011), pp. 13-18.

2 Pedro Seabra, "Cape Verde: new path on old ground?" (*IPRIS Viewpoints*, No. 53, May 2011), p. 1.

3 "Cabo Verde 2016 – Programa do Governo para a VII Legislatura 2011-2016" (*Governo de Cabo Verde*, 5 April 2011), p. 41.

the PAICV would then compromise the party's chances and eventually lead to a second round of voting on 21 August that was greatly capitalized by MpD's candidate Jorge Carlos Fonseca to his personal advantage and that resulted in his subsequent victory with 54.16% of the electorate.

For all purposes, such a fracture in PAICV's overall rule further helps to exhibit the growing maturity of Cape Verde's democratic system, as it clearly exemplifies a healthy political rotation at the country's highest offices and avoids an overly uncomfortable dominion by PAICV alone. Moreover, despite some minor claims of irregularities, it should be noted that both elections painted a stark contrast with similar contests in the nearby region.

On the other hand, although the structural changes implied by this new political dichotomy in terms of foreign policy orientation are essentially meaningless, they do provide a different internal framework from what Prime Minister Neves probably would have anticipated in his third and, presumably, final term. Be as it may, despite some conspicuous delays in the nomination of diplomatic representatives,⁴ the first few 'joint' months in office have come to demonstrate a sizeable degree of institutional respect and regular coordination between both leaders and, as such, it is not expected that major rivalry or acrimony surfaces or stands in the way of fulfilling the state's goals, whether at home or abroad.

International recognition

But while the country focused on important internal decisions, the international community did not lose sight of Cape Verde. With laudable economic performance and a number of concrete achievements, 2011 only confirmed the country's ascendant reputation.

⁴ "Cabo Verde discute apoio à Presidência da Comissão da União Africana" (*Portuguese News Network*, 28 December 2011). Fonseca's veto of the government's pick for the Embassy in Spain led to some concerns as for a stable cohabitation but the following nomination of a close ally of Prime Minister Neves for the Embassy in Portugal appeared to partially deflate such worries; see "Madalena Neves é a nova embaixadora de Cabo Verde em Portugal" (*Angop*, 31 December 2011).

Among many other examples, one could cite the Heritage Foundation and Wall Street Journal's 2011 Index of Economic Freedom that classified Cape Verde at the 65th overall position, with the third highest rank among Sub-Saharan Africa's 47 countries. Likewise, Freedom House recognized in its "Freedom in the World 2011 Report" that Cape

Verde "continued to serve as a model for political rights and civil liberties in Africa" while the African Development Bank (AfDB) noted in its "African Economic Outlook 2011" that Cape Verde was among the ten sub-Saharan countries that most improved in terms of economic governance in the previous year.

Significant accomplishments, to be sure, but none could actually top the distinction attributed in early October. Highlighting his contribution in helping Cape Verde becoming "a model of democracy and stability" as well as his refusal in seeking a constitutionally forbidden third term, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation decided to award its annual US\$5 million prize to outgoing President Pedro Pires. More importantly, it should be remembered that for the past two years, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation prize committee had declined to name a recipient, stating that no African leaders had met the criteria for promoting development and democracy by handing over power peacefully. As such, the choice of Pires was

taken as an example that democratic leadership is still possible in Africa. Moreover, the wave of international praising that followed such a distinction also helped to shine a spotlight onto Cape Verde's own progress in the areas of rule of law and good governance.⁵

Finally, culminating this roll of visibility, Cape Verdean authorities also made sure to effectively conclude the adhesion procedures to the Rome Statute that establishes the International Criminal Court, by delivering the ratification instruments on 10 October in the United Nations headquarters – a move only made possible after the constitutional revision in 2010. Cape Verde thus became the 119th coun-

⁵ See for example, Scott Baldouf, "Why Pedro Pires won the \$5 million Ibrahim Prize for African governance" (*Christian Science Monitor*, 11 October 2011); Evan Davis, "Cape Verde: African good news story" (*BBC Today*, 27 December 2011).

try in the world, the 33rd African country and, perhaps more symbolically important, the first African Lusophone country to do so. As in similar past policy options, this move signaled once again Cape Verde's commitment to the present international legal framework and respect for universal human rights and as expected, was dully commended by the remaining international community.

Regional dynamics

Widespread praise aside, it is important to reflect on where Cape Verde chose to deploy its growing foreign credentials. Africa in general proved itself a challenge for Cape Verdean diplomacy on many levels. As the year began, the most pressing situation undoubtedly resided in Côte d'Ivoire, which quickly fell into a spiral of internal violence over disputed electoral results between the incumbent Laurent Gbagbo and the internationally-backed Alassane Ouattara. Cape Verdean authorities had already immersed themselves into this conundrum back in late December 2010, through an Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) joint delegation – comprising President Pires and his counterparts from Benin and Sierra Leone, Yayi Boni and Ernest Koroma, respectively – that actively sought to negotiate a way out of the pending crisis. On 2 January, they tried to push once more for a compromise between all parts but developments on the ground appeared to dismiss any hope of a peaceful agreement.⁶ Cape Verdean efforts to lead this process, however, ended up being inevitably scarred by allegations of bias towards Gbagbo among high officials, namely President Pedro Pires and Foreign Minister José Brito, which began to surface

Cape Verdean efforts to lead this process, however, ended up being inevitably scarred by allegations of bias towards Gbagbo among high officials, namely President Pedro Pires and Foreign Minister José Brito, which began to surface both externally and domestically.⁷ The latter's case was probably the most damaging since on 26 March, the African Union (AU) decided to appoint Brito – at that time, already replaced in Neves's new cabinet by Jorge Borges – as their Special Representative for Côte d'Ivoire, in charge of coordinating all negotiation venues and putting an end to the developing strife between the two factions. Still, the nomination proved meaningless as Ouattara quickly rejected the appointment.⁸

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As one crisis appeared to end, another started to unfold, this time in Libya. Although it followed similar revolts in Tunisia and Egypt, the Libyan case was received with much more caution given the combination of a Pan-Africanist agenda and Muammar Gaddafi's extensive funding throughout the continent since the 1970s. However, "unlike Guinea-Bissau or São Tomé and Príncipe, in the last few years Cape Verde did not benefit from

⁶ Adam Nossiter, "Diplomacy Again Falls Short in Tense Ivory Coast Standoff" (*The New York Times*, 3 January 2011).

⁷ "Cabo Verde: Líder da oposição pede saída de Pedro Pires da missão da CEDEAO à Costa do Marfim" (*Lusa*, 7 January 2011).

⁸ Eugenio Teixeira, "Antigo ministro de Cabo Verde nomeado representante da União Africana na Costa do Marfim" (*Voice of America*, 28 March 2011). However, the objections made by Ouattara's supporters were, according to Brito, misstated; see "José Brito: Uma guerra na Costa do Marfim teria sido um desastre humanitário grave" (*A Semana*, 9 January 2011).

⁹ "Costa do Marfim: Cabo Verde apoia reconciliação nacional" (*Lusa*, 21 May 2011).

Gaddafi's financial support".¹⁰ Indeed, by 2011, promises of greater cooperation and investments herald by the 2009 General Cooperation Agreement coupled with increased political visits in recent years had not yet materialized and as such, Cape Verde accompanied the roll of international criticism on the Libyan authorities while their repressive response escalated. That much was made clear when local authorities summoned the Libyan ambassador to Cape Verde, Salem Ali Mohmed Almakrihi, on 27 February to express condemnation of the disproportionate use of force upon the Libyan civilian population. A few months later, as international pressure rose and as the National Transitional Council (NTC) opposition forces began to slowly make progress on the ground, Cape Verde then took the final decision left and joined a myriad of other African countries that decided to recognize the NTC as the only valid interlocutor in Libya.¹¹

Solidifying and diversifying partnerships

In 2010 ECOWAS undoubtedly comprised a central target for Cape Verde's diplomacy; on that score, significant progress was achieved in their relationship. However, 2011 proved to be less fruitful in this particular domain. As the organization spent months trying to cope with the political fallout of the Ivorian crisis and the several unsuccessful mediation efforts that it sought out – which only ended up displaying its lack of cohesive regional influence –, important decisions regarding its own political-institutional development were consistently postponed. The most pressing issue lied with the composition of the ECOW-

AS Commission – which constitutes the executive body in charge of advancing greater integration and representing the organization abroad – that had been put on hold since the 38th Summit on the Island of Sal in July 2010. Reflecting

Reflecting its interest in ECOWAS, Cape Verde quietly but confidently lobbied throughout the year for the Vice-Presidency. However, during an extraordinary Summit in Abuja, it was decided that the seat would go instead to Liberia and as such, Cape Verde found itself without any direct representative in the new Commission. A subsequent compromise position jointly proposed with Guinea-Bissau – the only other country left out of the new organogram – over expanding the number of Commissioners in the future, might potentially provide a useful remedy but for the time being, this result undoubtedly soured Cape Verde's aspirations for greater status within ECOWAS.

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As for the European Union (EU), the coveted visa waiver agreement included in the wider Partnership for Mobility that was supposed to have been agreed upon in 2011, continued to remain at arm's length. New predictions now point to 2012 for its actual implementation.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the most important development in such a relationship probably dealt with Cape Verde's own previous graduation to a Middle Income Country (MIC) back in 2008. Since then, the country has benefited from a three-year transition period in order to allow market operators to adjust to a new tariff regime but which was bound to expire

10 Paulo Gorjão, "The Portuguese-speaking African Countries and regime change in Libya" (*IPRIS Viewpoints*, No. 63, June 2011), p. 3.

11 See "Comunicado do Governo de Cabo Verde sobre a Líbia" (*Ministério das relações Exteriores*, 24 August 2011). On September 1st, the Cape Verdean Government renewed once again the official recognition of the NTC; see "Secretário de Estado dos Negócios Estrangeiros: "Não temos projectos financiados pela Líbia"" (*A Semana*, 1 September 2011).

12 "CEDEAO: José Maria Neves reconhece que Cabo Verde aspira a alto cargo" (*Lusa*, 19 October 2011); Cabo Verde à procura de lugares de topo na Comissão na cimeira de Abuja (*Lusa*, 18 October 2011).

13 "CEDEAO: Libéria consegue vice-presidência e ambições de Cabo Verde caem por terra" (*Lusa*, 19 October 2011).

14 "Cabo Verde quer alargar de 7 para 14 o número de comissários na CEDEAO" (*A Semana*, 29 October 2011).

15 "UE/Cabo Verde: Mobilidade poderá ser realidade já em 2012" (*Lusa*, 22 November 2011).

on 31 December 2011. With that in mind, Cape Verde applied and got a favorable decision on 9 December to be included among the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP plus), which grants preferential access to the EU market for countries who respect certain conditions regarding human and labor rights, environment and good governance.¹⁶ In that order, Cape Verde became the first Western African country to enroll in such a trade scheme. Moreover, promises of greater EU financial support and a new fishing agreement coming into force were also highlights of the year.

On a bilateral note, it should be noted the continuing priority to Portuguese-speaking countries, as demonstrated by multiple official visits and contacts throughout the year. For example, Timorese President José Ramos-Horta's officially visited Cape Verde in July, President Jorge Carlos Fonseca met with Dilma Rousseff in November and Prime Minister Neves led an extensive delegation to Guinea-Bissau in the same month. Likewise, Lisbon remained a consistent and recurrent destination for Cape Verdean officials with the bilateral relationship marked by the signing in early December of the new triennial Framework Program 2012-2014 for technical-military cooperation, worth a total of €300 thousand.¹⁷ However, Cape Verde also sought to diversify ties with more distant partners. China, in particular, considerably expanded its level of contacts with Cape Verdean authorities, as exemplified by the multiple visits by Chinese high officials to Praia. According to Foreign Minister Jorge Borges, "both Governments have been able to weave, in exemplary form, friendship, solidarity and cooperation ties based on reciprocal interests".¹⁸ Hence, it comes as no surprise that such a political will produced a simultaneous growth in cooperation agreements and loans that amounted to nearly US\$6.4 million in 2011. Also worthy

of mention is the increased focus given to Japan, which was asked to join Cape Verde's Budget Support Group, along with other international partners, following consistent assistance to the islands in terms of food security aid.¹⁹

Last but not the least, the "best Christmas gift that Cape Verde could have hoped for"²⁰ came on 15 December, when the country received the long awaited confirmation that the board of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) – in charge of channeling part of the US government aid funds – had officially approved a second financial compact worth US\$62.2 million. Cape Verde thus became the first country ever to receive such a follow-up while securing added funds for local development projects.

Conclusions

Taking all the developments into account, one monumental event is missing. Its initial omission and scant references are explained not by its relevance or lack of thereof but precisely because of its still largely unpredictable but potentially threatening causal effect on Cape Verde's own national interests. Unsurprisingly, such a factor consists of the international financial crisis that emerged back in 2008 but which, for all purposes, Cape Verde appeared to admirably resist during the first years. However, if at the beginning of 2011 there was room to moderately expect an overall rising economic environment, the unfolding of the sovereign crisis within the Eurozone and the need for an international bailout by several European economies – including Portugal – incited, with reason, the worst fears in Cape Verde's official economic forecasts.

Whether because of the parity between the Cape Verdean escudo and the euro, the fact that the EU is the country's biggest commercial partner, the biggest provider of foreign direct investment and public aid or the primary source of tourists for Cape Verde's dominant service sector, it is easily discernable how downgrading circumstances in the European continent can eventually hit the islands' economy. With that in mind, Prime Minister Neves already warned in November of the "serious implications" that this crisis

16 "Cape Verde secures access to EU markets and boosts its development" (*European Commission*, 9 December 2011).

17 "Ministros da Defesa afirmam importância de manter envelope financeiro na cooperação" (*Angop*, 2 December 2011).

18 Jorge Borges, "Discurso proferido por Sua Excelência o Ministro das Relações Exteriores de Cabo Verde por ocasião do 35º aniversário do estabelecimento das relações diplomáticas entre a República Popular da China e a República de Cabo Verde" (*Ministério das Relações Exteriores*, 25 April 2011).

19 "Cabo Verde: Governo pede entrada do Japão no Grupo de Ajuda Orçamental" (*Lusa*, 11 March 2011).

20 "Segundo Compacto do MCA é a "grande prenda de natal" deste ano para os cabo-verdianos" (*Governo de Cabo Verde*, 15 December 2011).



could have and of the inescapable need for “preventive measures”, not the least of which the reassessment of the country’s diplomatic network abroad.²¹ Likewise, President Fonseca warned that Cape Verde is still a “vulnerable and fragile country”.²²

It is thus possible to grasp the level of uncertainty surrounding Cape Verde’s structural agenda in 2012. Prospective countermeasures may lie, in turn, with the expansion of stronger international connections that can predictably reward the country’s outstanding path until this date. The EU naturally comes at the top of every list but the US and even China, are bound to also remain a priority. As for ECOWAS, Cape Verde now finds itself in a rather odd position but its exclusion from the organization’s executive core can be overcome with laborious and patient diplomatic work. It is therefore not expected any kind of abrupt disengagement with the nearby region.

Retrospectively and when in comparison with the previous year, it is safe to say that 2011 proved to be an atypical year for Cape Verde due to internal and external events that constrained and molded the country’s intended agenda. Even so, confirming its exceptional status in Africa’s general setting, Cape Verde continued on solidifying its foreign credentials while earning increased international accreditation. The only question left open lies with knowing how well Cape Verde will cope with financial challenges looming ahead. Depending on several exogenous factors, for better or worse, 2012 is thus bound to bring some meaningful changes to the small archipelago.

21 José Maria Neves, “Comunicação à Nação de Sua Excelência o Primeiro Ministro, Dr. José Maria Pereira Neves sobre medidas para fazer face ao recrudescer da crise internacional” (*Governo de Cabo Verde*, 14 November 2011), p. 5.

22 Jorge Carlos Fonseca, “Mensagem de Ano Novo 2012” (*Presidência da República de Cabo Verde*, 1 January 2012).



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