

Cape Verde: a new path based on old ground?

PEDRO SEABRA

Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Security (IPRIS)

February 6th marked a new phase in Cape Verde's history. After a long but mostly predictable electoral campaign, incumbent José Maria Neves managed to secure a third consecutive term at the helm of the country, building on the work carried out by his cabinet for the last ten years. Moreover, his own party, *Partido Africano para a Independência de Cabo Verde* (PAICV) also consolidated its absolute majority in Cape Verde's Parliament with 37 seats out of a total of 72, thus allowing for a foreseeably stable political constituency for the time ahead.

But after post-election euphoria, it all usually comes down to the elected government's new agenda to ascertain how it intends to rule a country for the duration of its term, while clearly pointing out measurable goals and significant developments that it will try to achieve. To that end, in early April Prime Minister Neves presented his official program for the 2011-2016 timeframe, structured around seven main axes.¹ Among these, the focus of this article lies solely on the last, i.e. on Cape Verde's foreign insertion orientations, its international priorities and the preferential partners that are expected to figure prominently in the country's foreign policy for the next five years.

As one would expect, this analysis might initially come off as not only structurally brief – specially if we consider the meager resources at the disposal of the small African nation for these kinds of endeavors that inevitably restrain any excessive ambitions in this area – but also as not entirely pertinent, given the notorious links of policy continuity that this government will inherit from the previous one. Even the reshuffle at the Foreign Affairs Ministry – with Jorge Borges now leading it – is publicly considered as little less than a change at the top, with no significant implications on Cape Verde's national interests abroad. Still, such rushed conclusions fail to take into consideration and recognize the growing level of international notoriety that Cape Verde has successfully achieved in recent years in its regional context. In that sense they cannot be considered as worthy enough to constrain a legitimate assessment of the new/recycled target areas for Cape Verde's diplomacy.

To that end, the government's program provides some insight into the local perception of the country's capacity to deal with its internal shortcomings but also with the new challenges emanating from a volatile international context. Indeed, the effects of a "changing world" – from the global economy to the political unrest in the Maghreb and Northern African region – and the consequences of Cape Verde's graduation from the Least Developed Countries

¹ These major guidelines tackle, generally speaking, economic development, productivity increase, work force qualification, social development, good governance, infrastructure and globalization.



(LDC) list with its direct reflection on the amount of international financing available, for example, are but a few of the topics which are likely to influence any intended agenda. They are therefore properly laid out and characterized as probable obstacles in the coming years.

But what exactly does the foreign policy section of the program cover? Unsurprisingly, as it turns out, the working paradigm hardly differs from previous considerations. “Affirm the global nation, promote peace and global/regional security and support the economic agenda” thus comprise the general lines of the government’s foreign policy approach.²

The notion of a “global nation” in particular relates to the deep ties that Cape Verde nurtures with its vast community of immigrants spread around the world and who are understood as a significant lever for the country’s own development – specially through their regular remittances which are of great assistance to the national economy. In this context, a reformed immigration policy, the Partnership for Mobility established with the European Union (EU) and the subsequent and avidly-expected – but yet to be signed – visa facilitation agreement, continue to be granted precedence among the country’s main objectives.

Nevertheless, it is within the “Partnerships for Competitiveness” that the government clearly elaborates on its strategy for Cape Verde’s foreign policy. The “consolidation of old alliances and partnerships”, the “building of new bridges of cooperation” and the “deepening of the country’s participation and involvement in regional and international organizations, such as ECOWAS, CPLP, the African Union, Macaronesia, ACP and *la Francophonie*” as well as with the EU and the United Nations (UN), are thus directly expressed and given considerable weight.³ Moreover, the need to continue to mobilize external re-

sources for the sake of the country’s development and growth is not left unchecked and the same could be said for the official commitment to international values and principles: in the words of Prime Minister Neves, “international legality and the defense of supreme values such as the respect for the human being are essential in our positioning in the world”.⁴

All in all, definitely not a break with a past, that’s for sure.

For all accounts, not only did Cape Verde’s foreign gravitas significantly expand in the last ten years – the Special Partnership with the EU, accession to the World Trade Organization, worldwide praise for its good governance indicators, or reconnecting with the ECOWAS, are just some noteworthy examples – but it also wisely capitalized on such endeavors so as to reinforce and sustain the government’s own reform efforts under the so-called “Transformation Agenda”, primarily aimed at elevating the archipelago’s economic and social conditions to an unparalleled level in the region.

But in truth, was there ever the need for one in the first place? For all accounts, not only did Cape Verde’s foreign gravitas significantly grow in the last ten years – the Special Partnership with the EU, accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), worldwide praise for its good governance indicators, or reconnecting with the ECOWAS, are just some noteworthy examples – but it also wisely capitalized on such endeavors so as to reinforce and sustain the government’s own reform efforts under the so-called “Transformation Agenda”, primarily aimed at elevating the archipelago’s economic and social conditions to an unparalleled level in the region. With that in mind, one cannot be surprised that the official political will to follow down the same line exists, including when it comes to the country’s own foreign policy.

However, it is also legitimate to wonder whether this same set of objectives

and priorities remains equally valid and/or is enough to cope with the new trials and privations that the international context so frequently implies, even more so in a small, insular state like Cape Verde. For example, although mentioned in the government’s program, it is not yet clear if growing security issues – specially regarding maritime surveillance, where Cape Verde remains painfully inept – should not have been given greater political focus among the overall priorities.

2 “Cabo Verde 2016 – Programa do Governo para a VII Legislatura 2011-2016” (5 April 2011: 3.7.), p. 41.

3 *Idem*, 3.7.2., p. 43.

4 “Discurso de Apresentação do Programa do Governo para VII Legislatura 2011-2016, por S.E. o Primeiro Ministro, Dr. José Maria Pereira Neves”, p. 7.



Naturally, such options are frequently subjected to their respective pre-electoral platforms and it is not that unusual that they end up not following to the letter or even including other overlooked vectors. As such, one cannot pretend to see the definite path that Prime Minister Neves and his government will tread during the 2011-2016 term in this formal crystallization. But either way, it already provides us with some indications of what we can expect to see in Cape Verde's foreign policy in the coming years. Undoubtedly, for the most part, it foresees more of the same, given that the 'same' has worked out well for the country in the past, with remarkable results. Therefore, the only question remaining is if this approach will be able to adapt itself not only to new uncontrollable international variables and limitations, but also to Cape Verde's ascending route in the global scenario, whose benefits are frequently only matched by the weight of the challenges that accompany them.

EDITOR | Paulo Gorjão

ASSISTANT EDITORS | Laura Tereno • Vasco Martins

DESIGN | Atelier Teresa Cardoso Bastos

Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Security (IPRIS)
Rua Vitorino Nemésio, 5 - 1750-306 Lisboa
PORTUGAL

<http://www.ipris.org>
email: ipris@ipris.org

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