

# São Tomé and Príncipe: follow up of the first round of the Presidential elections

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There are not many reports in the media about the upcoming presidential elections in São Tomé and Príncipe, to be held on July 17<sup>th</sup> 2011. A former colony of the Portuguese empire, São Tomé and Príncipe still has an economy which is heavily dependent on cocoa production. However, international investors have been taking note of this country since the discovery of oil in 2001. This fact repositioned São Tomé and Príncipe within the geopolitical framework of the Gulf of Guinea, leading to closer relations with Nigeria and Angola. The relationship with these two important countries has seen, since then, important developments such as the agreement reached with Nigeria in 2001, which established a Joint Development Zone centered on oil exploration. This year, São Tomé and Príncipe and Nigeria have agreed to develop this Joint Development Zone with a focus on oil exploration, but also on fishing industry and maritime resources.

More recently São Tomé and Príncipe signed two important agreements with Sonangol, with the intent of developing the archipelago's Port and International Airport. Due to a strengthening of ties with Angola, it was not surprising that former President of São Tomé and Príncipe Miguel Trovoada has been elected for the post of Executive-Secretary of the Gulf of Guinea Commission, located in Luanda. But the economic interests of São Tomé and

Príncipe do not end on the horizon of the Guinea Gulf. Portugal is actually São Tomé and Príncipe's main trading partner, and Norway and Taiwan play a significant role in the archipelago.

Besides São Tomé and Príncipe's economic relations, there are three main issues representing major challenges for the winner of this electoral battle. Firstly, the next President will have to guarantee political stability, as well as ensure that normalization of institutional relations between the main political institutions of the country – the Presidency, the Government and the National Assembly – is achieved. The country cannot cope with political instability as it has up to now. In the last decade the country has known nine governments, dealt with two attempts of *coups d'état* in 2003 and 2009 and experienced two presidential elections that ensured the appointment of current President Fradique de Menezes. These events only highlight the need for political stability.

The second challenge will be to fight for good governance, since financial inefficiency may become the country's main economic developmental stumbling block. Besides, good governance is a key factor assuring the confidence of the international donors of the Official Development Assistance towards the country's National Budget.

The third great challenge will be achieving external credibility. The country cannot be considered a difficult and



complicated place for investment by the international economic system.

Whether in bilateral relations with countries in the Gulf of Guinea, or in relations between countries of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP), the President of the Republic has an important role in maintaining the credibility of the State.

Taking a closer look at these presidential elections, we will probably see around ten candidates running for the post in the *Palácio Cor de Rosa* (The Presidential Palace). The number of contenders only reflects the importance given by São Tomé and Príncipe's society to the upcoming elections now that President Fradique de Menezes is ending his second term and is constitutionally forbidden from running for a third term.

In Parliament, the general elections of 2010 gave 26 seats to the previous opposition Independent Democratic Action (ADI), increasing its representation by 14 seats more than the result obtained in 2006. The Liberation Movement of São Tomé and Príncipe/Social Democratic Party (MLSTP/PSD) came in second with 21 seats, and the Democratic Convergence Party (PCD) took seven seats. The Democratic Movement Force of Change/Liberal Party (MDFM/PL) was the obvious loser of these elections and managed to secure only one seat. The government was formed by a coalition between ADI and MDFM/PL, and Patrice Trovoada (son of former President Miguel Trovoada) was appointed the new Prime Minister of São Tomé and Príncipe.

There will probably be a second run in these elections due to the unusual number of candidates. In these elections, one should highlight the fact that the choice of candidates from both major parties, the MLSTP/PSD and ADI, did not receive unanimous support from within the parties.

Regarding the MLSTP/PSD, candidate Aurélio Martins has not managed to be accepted by his party affiliates as the best contender in the presidential race. He will have to fight against his two party members, who are also applying for the presidential seat: former Prime Minister

Maria das Neves, who recently received current President Fradique de Menezes' support, and former Minister of National Defense of the MLSTP/PSD and PCD coalition Government Elsa Pinto.

As for the candidacy of Evaristo Carvalho, ADI candidate and current National Assembly President, the party's choice has not managed to garner much enthusiasm among supporters.

A fourth candidature deserves attention. Former President of São Tomé and Príncipe Pinto da Costa, founder of the MLSTP/PSD, is a historical reference in the independence struggle. He controlled the destiny of the country until 1990, and he will most likely retain a wide support from São Tomé and Príncipe voters in these elections. He has received significant support from notable figures outside MLSTP/PSD's circle, as well as a reasonable support by local *media*.

One can expect a tough competition with a close victory for the winner of the first round. The following month will bring us a tough campaign, extremely competitive with a victory by only a slight margin, in a country with approximately 180.000 inhabitants. The candidates that have the best chances of making it to the second round will be those from the MLSTP/PSD and ADI, and probably Pinto da Costa, because they have the experience in electoral campaigns and a solid campaign organization backing them.

The next President of the *Palácio Cor de Rosa* will surely face a difficult task and probably focus his attention on the country's external credibility, fighting for good governance and, above all, ensuring political stability.

All these factors need to be considered in order for this African country to be able to attract international investment, increase its human resources know-how, and diversify the economic structure beyond the oil and cocoa sectors. For all these reasons, the upcoming presidential elections in São Tomé and Príncipe will certainly be very interesting to follow.

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