

Angola, Spain and Turkey: A Few Notes on the Winners and Losers Racing for a Seat on the Security Council

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Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain and Venezuela were elected as non-permanent members of the UN Security Council for the 2015-2016 biennium. For obvious reasons, Portugal closely followed Angola and Spain's bids. Whereas in the case of Angola Portuguese support was a mere formality—Luanda ran on a clean slate, getting 190 of the 193 possible votes—Spain managed to be elected only after a third round of voting in which it faced Turkey. Madrid got 132 votes while Ankara received 60.

Ankara's late decision to bid for a seat partly explains its defeat. Having had a seat at the Security Council in 2009/2010, in 2011 the Turkish government decided to go ahead with a new bid. The tardy decision inevitably became a handicap, as there was lack of preparation and many votes had already been promised to Spain and New Zealand. In addition, the way Turkey has responded both to the civil war in Syria and to the Islamic State's military progress in the Middle East, certainly had considerable weight on the final voting.

Turkey's tardy bid, for which Portugal certainly had sympathy—Ankara was one Portugal's main supporter in its 2010 bid—may have benefited Portuguese diplomacy. By 2011 Portugal had already pledged its support for Spain's bid, which gave Portugal little room to manoeuvre in favour of alternative candidates. Adding to this, given the depth and strength of bilateral relations between

Lisbon and Madrid, a sudden shift in preferences would have been highly unlikely.

The Turkish defeat opened a wound that may prove difficult to heal and it will surely leave some scars. However, if Turkey wants to have a more regular presence in the Security Council and intends to make of its participation within UN institutions a central pillar in its foreign policy, Ankara needs then to understand what went wrong and draw some lessons out of the failed bid.

The non-permanent seats at the UN Security Council are becoming increasingly disputed and bids are getting announced with greater forethought. As an example, the Portuguese bid for 2011/2012 was launched 11 years before, in 2000. Having barely ended the two year-term, in 2013 Portugal announced its bid for one of the slots available for 2027/2028—in which Austria is also a candidate—with 14 years to go.

Fierce disputes are understandable. Presence in the Security Council provides prestige, therefore States employ much of their diplomatic effort toward that task. It is not, however, all about prestige. A seat in the Security Council also represents a diplomatic tool that confers influence and additional powers, if in a limited way. As any ambassador of a State that has been in the Security Council can confirm, suddenly the phone does not stop ringing.

As normally happens in these processes, Angola and Spain attached an agenda and a set of priorities to their respective bids. Luanda's agenda, for instance, includes supporting the Security Council reform process,

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contributing to the dialogue between civilizations, highlighting the importance of preventive diplomacy and, of course, standing as a pivot in the pursuit of an African agenda. Naturally, part of such bids are mere diplomatic rhetoric—I even dare to call it politically correct jargon—that has to be used, something which in its innocuous version does not generate any disagreements. Other priorities can be said to be more specific and closer to the realistic diplomatic agenda. Matters related to Guinea-Bissau surely have greater priority to Angola, and the same can be said about maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.

It is worth noting that the true capacity of any non-permanent member in shaping the Security Council's agenda—regardless of the prestige, influence and power associated with having a seat—is limited. Furthermore, the recent past teaches us that making big plans is barely worth the effort, as there is always some crisis when and where we least expect it.

Conversely, what is worth planning and coordinating, as I have long argued, is a Lusophone strategy directed at the Security Council.¹ Considering the small number of Portuguese-speaking countries, a continued Lusophone presence is certainly difficult to guarantee. Still, such a strategy would make sense in order to avoid juxtapositions. Brazil and Portugal were simultaneously present at the Security Council in 1998 and 2011, and the same happened to Angola and Brazil in 2004. Notably, such a strategy would be a diplomatic advantage for the Lusophone countries in terms of avoiding juxtapositions and guaranteeing, when possible, a regular Lusophone

presence. Planning and coordinating a common strategy would not require much effort. The Angolan seat in the next biennium may turn out to represent the shift towards this goal. However, a pertinent question remains: is there political will?

¹ Paulo Gorjão, "Lusophone countries must devise a grand strategy towards the Security Council" (*IPRIS Lusophone Countries Bulletin*, February 2010), pp. 6-7.

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