

Dilma Rousseff and Portugal: Continuity in a Cordial, However Distant, Relationship

PAULO GORJÃO*

Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Security (IPRIS)

Dilma Rousseff secured a second term as President of Brazil with 51% of the votes in the second round of the Brazilian presidential election, against Aécio Neves, who gathered 48% of the popular vote. This was not the result that Portugal desired. During her first mandate, from 2011 to 2014, Dilma showed little interest in cultivating and deepening bilateral relations between Brasília and Lisbon. In four years, Dilma paid only one short visit to Portugal, and that was in March 2011. Worse still, in January 2014, in an evident show of diplomatic discourtesy, while returning from Switzerland and on her way to Cuba, Dilma transited in Lisbon for some hours and without prior notice. Dilma's disinterest for Portugal extends to the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP), something which is clearly represented by her absence from the Heads of State and Government Summit in Maputo (2012) and Díli (2014).

In practice, Dilma's approach reflects the view prevailing among certain traditional sectors of the Itamaraty, which has never prioritized bilateral relations with Portugal or the CPLP. The dominant thought in Itamaraty circles is that this is not a league worthy of having given that Brazil is not only part of the BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—but has an eye on grabbing a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. This is the Brazil that has José Graziano da Silva and Roberto Aze-

vedo as general-directors of FAO and the WTO, respectively. According to this grand vision, relations with Portugal and the CPLP do not warrant significant diplomatic commitment.

Therefore, unless something unpredictable occurs, the recent past tells us that within the next four years bilateral relations between Brazil and Portugal will continue to be marked by distant cordiality. As far as can be anticipated, nothing seems to point at an inversion in this tendency.

As it is often the case that a smaller country must work harder to gain the attention of larger one, Portugal must exert significant effort to keep Brazil's attention. This is even more the case because Portuguese foreign policy has been built around relations with other Portuguese-speaking countries in recent decades.

Unfortunately, on the Portuguese side the conditions for a strong investment on the bilateral relationship are far from available. Since 2011 Lisbon has focused almost exclusively on its economic and financial problems, and foreign policy has not been a top priority. Therefore, and even recognizing that Portugal has every interest in politically reacting to the little attention given by Brasília, the truth is that it does not seem possible that it may happen soon.

Having said this, if Dilma's reelection means the continuation of a cordial but distant relationship, on the economic side everything seems tilted the exact same way, and in a mutually reinforcing logic. Between 2009 and 2013 Brazil rose from 11th to 10th biggest Portuguese client, and

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represented 1,6% of Portuguese total exports in 2013. Moreover, Brazil was last year the third-largest market for Portuguese exports outside the European Union (the 4th was Angola and the 6th was the US). However, so as to better understand Dilma's disinterest for Portugal, it is worth noting that Portugal is the 40th biggest supplier to the Brazilian market, representing a mere 0,5% of total imports, while being the 46th biggest buyer of Brazilian exports, making up 0,4% of total exports.¹

Surely one can see that economic relations are healthy. Nonetheless, bilateral economic relations, like political ties, are asymmetrical, and Brazil matters more to Portugal than Portugal matters to Brazil. As a result, nothing seems to point to a change in the economic aspect in Dilma's second term.

Could things have been different with Aécio Neves? We will never know. Beyond the reset button that such an electoral outcome would press, Neves said exactly what Lisbon wished to hear: Portugal deserved greater attention.² In fact, not long ago authorities in Brazil had this

kind of consideration for the historical partner. A sense of nostalgia is very present when Portugal looks at Lula da Silva's two presidential terms. Unlike Dilma, and certainly going against influential voices at the Itamaraty, Lula carefully cultivated the relationship with Portugal and the CPLP. Not by chance, Dilma's visit to Portugal in 2011 coincided with Lula's distinction with the title of doctor *honoris causa* by Coimbra University. It is worth noting that Lula was a frequent visitor to Portugal between 2003 and 2010 at an official level, and privately afterwards.

1 In addition, it is also worth noting that: "As a supplier to Portugal, Brazil ranks 12th, representing 1.5% of total imports in 2013, while being the 5th largest supplier to the EU28 (6th to Angola, 9th to China, 10th to Russia, and 11th to the US). (...) It should be pointed out that within the European Union, some of Brazil's important suppliers are Germany (4th largest supplier in 2013), Italy (8th), France (9th), Spain (12th), the United Kingdom (15th), and Switzerland (19th). See "Brasil - Ficha de Mercado (AICEP, May 2014), p. 13.

2 Ricardo Rego, "Aécio Neves: 'Portugal merece muita atenção'" (Sol, 24 October 2014), p. 48.

EDITOR | Paulo Gorjão
ASSISTANT EDITOR | Sean Goforth
DESIGN | Atelier Teresa Cardoso Bastos

Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Security (IPRIS)
Rua da Junqueira, 188 - 1349-001 Lisboa
PORTUGAL

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

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