



‘Hurricane Chega’ — Populists Make Big Gains in Portuguese Election as Europe Shifts Right

Description

WORLD : Europe is continuing its shift to the right, as voters in Portugal on Sunday rejected socialist governance and cemented the populist-nationalist Chega party as a major political force in the country and potentially a coalition partner in the next government.

Following a corruption scandal hitting the highest levels of the socialist government of António Costa, whose own chief of staff and other government ministers were arrested on suspicion of corruption, forcing the PM to announce his resignation and call for an early election, the party has tumbled in the weekend’s election.

The snap election, held on Sunday, saw the so-called centre-right Democratic Alliance (AD), comprised of the Social Democratic Party (PSD), CDS – People’s Party (CDS–PP) and People’s Monarchist Party (PPM), come out on top in terms of seats gained as support for the governing Socialist Party (PS) fell apart.

However, the story of the evening was the performance of the right-wing populist Chega (CH) party of 41-year-old André Ventura, a former soccer commentator turned anti-mass migration firebrand.

In the previous election, the upstart party only managed to secure 12 seats in the Portuguese parliament, however, according to preliminary tallies, it now boasts at least 48 members in the 230-seat assembly, meaning that it is now firmly cemented as the third-strongest party in the country behind the Socialists at 77 and the AD at 79, the *Correio da Manhã* newspaper reports.

In a “victory” speech on Sunday evening, Ventura said that his populist movement — which the local press have dubbed a “hurricane” — will continue to grow, predicting that within the next two years Chega will outright “win the legislative elections” and that their “victory must be heard in Belém” in reference to the Belém Palace, the official residence of the President of Portugal.

“This victory is for the journalists. I hope that leaders of polling companies resign. I salute everyone who covered the campaign impartially,” he added jokingly.

The question will now turn towards the formation of the next government. While Ventura has expressed willingness to enter into a coalition with the centrist Democratic Alliance, Luís Montenegro, the president of the Social Democratic Party, which is the largest member of the AD bloc, said before and after the election that he did not want to join forces with Chega, which he has branded as “racist” over its hardline anti-mass migration stance.

Ventura has also been heavily critical of Montenegro’s supposedly centre-right party, claiming that the domination of the political landscape in Portugal following the Carnation Revolution in 1974 that ended the nationalist dictatorship of the Estado Novo government has been the principal reason for rampant corruption in the country.

Yet, it is unclear if Montenegro will be able to maintain his stance on refusing to work with Chega. While the AD and Chega would have enough seats in the parliament for an outright majority, Montenegro would likely need to govern from a minority position if he rejects a partnership with Ventura.

Further complicating matters for the centrist party, the now opposition Socialist Party has said that while it would not seek to prevent the AD from forming a government, it would not help the party pass legislation.

Therefore, regardless of whether they form a coalition government together or not, the AD would likely need support from Chega to pass laws or risk being forced into another election in the coming months.

Nevertheless, the success of populists in the election in Portugal on Sunday, which followed the victory of populist leader Geert Wilders in The Netherlands in November, represents an indication of voter sentiment as citizens across the continent head to the polls in June to decide the makeup of the next European Parliament.

Driven in large part by voter anger over globalist policies on immigration, the green agenda, and the economy, populist parties are set to make large gains, with the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) predicting in January that right-wing populist parties will be the outright victors in at least nine countries in the 27-nation bloc, while coming in second or third place in a further nine countries, including in Portugal.

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1. Control-Surveillance-Privacy-Censorship
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3. Main
4. Politics-Geopolitics-Gov.-Events

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