

How much longer can Europe pretend to be democratic?

Published: January 13, 2026, 11:51 am

I should have already covered this story: my only excuse is fatigue, but in this case that's really insufficient. As the [Telegraph](#) has reported:

Anibal Cavaco Silva, Portugal's constitutional president, has refused to appoint a Left-wing coalition government even though it secured an absolute majority in the Portuguese parliament and won a mandate to smash the austerity regime bequeathed by the EU-IMF Troika.

He deemed it too risky to let the Left Bloc or the Communists come close to power, insisting that conservatives should soldier on as a minority in order to satisfy Brussels and appease foreign financial markets.

Many others also cover the story, but possibly none as well as the Telegraph though. As Ambrose Evans-Pritchard suggested later in his piece:

Mr Cavaco Silva is effectively using his office to impose a reactionary ideological agenda, in the interests of creditors and the EMU establishment, and dressing it up with remarkable Chutzpah as a defence of democracy.

The issue is simple: the right-wing coalition in Portugal lost the election earlier this month, its share of the vote falling from just over 50% to 38%. This technically left it the largest party but that was solely because the left of centre parties had never been able to agree with each other in the past to ever offer anything that looked like a coalition. And now they have: the Greens, Communists and main left of centre party have suggested they can work together to form a government and between them they have more than 50% of the votes and seats. In that case they have the obvious right to form a government, and yet the Portuguese President has invited the right wing minority to form the government instead.

This is how the Telegraph reported his justification:

"Democracy must take second place to the higher imperative of euro rules and membership.

"In 40 years of democracy, no government in Portugal has ever depended on the support of anti-European forces, that is to say forces that campaigned to abrogate the Lisbon Treaty, the Fiscal Compact, the Growth and Stability Pact, as well as to dismantle monetary union and take Portugal out of the euro, in addition to wanting the dissolution of NATO," said Mr Cavaco Silva.

"This is the worst moment for a radical change to the foundations of our democracy

"After we carried out an onerous programme of financial assistance, entailing heavy sacrifices, it is my duty, within my constitutional powers, to do everything possible to prevent false signals being sent to financial institutions, investors and markets," he said.

And as Evan-Pritchard then noted:

Mr Cavaco Silva argued that the great majority of the Portuguese people did not vote for parties that want a return to the escudo or that advocate a traumatic showdown with Brussels.

This is true, but he skipped over the other core message from the elections held three weeks ago: that they also voted for an end to wage cuts and Troika austerity. The combined parties of the Left won 50.7pc of the vote. Led by the Socialists, they control the Assembleia.

So what we have is an EU President basically saying that he will ignore the outcome of a general election and appoint a right wing government rather than appoint a government that wishes to explore a Keynesian alternative to austerity, which austerity can never (as Evans -Pritchard correctly points out) work out for Portugal anyway. And why is he doing this? To appease bankers, markets and the European Central Bank. But the result is that democratic choice has been blatantly ignored in the interests of finance, austerity, small government, and the dogma of the ECB that has already sought to crush Greece.

As Evans-Pritchard summarised it:

Greece's Syriza movement, Europe's first radical-Left government in Europe since the Second World War, was crushed into submission for daring to confront eurozone ideology. Now the Portuguese Left is running into a variant of the same meat-grinder.

Europe's socialists face a dilemma. They are at last waking up to the unpleasant truth that monetary union is an authoritarian Right-wing enterprise that has slipped its democratic leash, yet if they act on this insight in any way they risk being prevented from taking power.

Brussels really has created a monster.

What might that monster be called? Given that this is about subjugating democracy to corporate interests the only word for it is fascism.

I thought Portugal put that behind it in April 1974. It looks like that wasn't the case.

Worry. And consider why so many are so unaccepting of Jeremy Corbyn. Might the motives be the same?