

# PORTUGAL DIPLOMÁTICO



**40 Years of Portugal in the European Union**

**EU-Mercosur Agreement**

**Interview with Francisco Ribeiro de Menezes**

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# Month of MFA

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By Bruno Oliveira

In the first month of 2026, we highlight the visit of the Minister of State and Foreign Affairs, Paulo Rangel, to the headquarters of the CPLP, on the occasion of its 30th anniversary celebrations, as well as his participation in the European Commission's work programme. In addition, the Minister also welcomed the President of Estonia to Portugal, before travelling to Strasbourg for the celebrations marking 50 years of Portugal's membership of the Council of Europe. The month ended with the usual Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Brussels, where Rangel met with his Belgian counterpart.

## 30 years of CPLP

The CPLP is celebrating its 30th anniversary and Paulo Rangel did not miss the occasion. On a visit to its headquarters in Lisbon, accompanied by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Ana Isabel Xavier, he was received by the organisation's Executive Secretary, Ambassador Fátima Jardim. In front of the ambassadors accredited to the CPLP, this was a significant meeting, where the Minister made clear Portugal's commitment to this community and its growing geopolitical importance.



*Visit by Paulo Rangel (centre) to the headquarters of the CPLP  
(source: MNE)*

## European Commission Work Programme 2026

In the middle of the month, the Minister attended the session on the European Commission's Work Programme 2026, which took place at the Assembly of the Republic. This session, which was attended by several Portuguese nationals working in the European Union, such as Commissioner Maria Luís Albuquerque, and experts on European affairs, served to define Portugal's priorities for this year within the European Union.

### **Visit by the President of Estonia**

On the occasion of the state visit by the President of Estonia, Alar Karis, to Portugal, the MFA hosted a lunch in his honour at the Palácio das Necessidades. The bilateral relationship between the two countries was discussed, where, despite being at opposite ends of the European continent, they have an excellent relationship and cooperation in the areas of digital innovation, cybersecurity, and education, particularly within the framework of the European Union and NATO.



*Meeting between Paulo Rangel (left) and the President of Estonia, Alar Karis (source: MNE)*

### **50 years of Portugal in the Council of Europe**

Fifty years ago, Portugal joined the Council of Europe, defending multilateralism and human rights for five decades. To celebrate the occasion, Paulo Rangel was in Strasbourg, the seat of the Council of Europe, on the 21st, where he was the first Foreign Secretary in 20 years to attend the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. In his speech to the committee, the Minister emphasised the importance of multilateralism, human rights, the defence of the rule of law and the integrity of the European Convention on Human Rights system. This visit also included the signing of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Legal Profession. The day before (20), the Minister and the President of the Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, attended a dinner hosted by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Alain Berset.



*Signing of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Legal Profession (source: MNE)*

### **Foreign Affairs Council and Belgian Counterpart**

At the end of the month, the MFA participated in the European Union Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels. The agenda for this council included various topics such as the war in Ukraine, the situation in the Middle East and Great Lakes regions, and human rights.

While in Brussels, Paulo Rangel met with Maxime Prévot, Belgium's Minister of Foreign Affairs. At this meeting between counterparts, bilateral relations between the two European states were discussed, with particular emphasis on their participation in the EU, as well as the EU's relations with Africa and the countries of the Western Balkans and Ukraine, with a view to enlargement.



*Paulo Rangel (left) and his Belgian counterpart, Maxime Prévot (right) (Source: MNE)*

# 40 Years of Portugal in the European Union

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By Raquel Bravo

On January 1, 2026, Portugal marked four decades as a Member State of the European Union, celebrating 40 years of profound transformation in the country. In the economy, politics, and the social sphere alike, change has been significant: the country consolidated its democracy, modernized its economy, and embraced intrinsically European values of respect for freedom and equality.

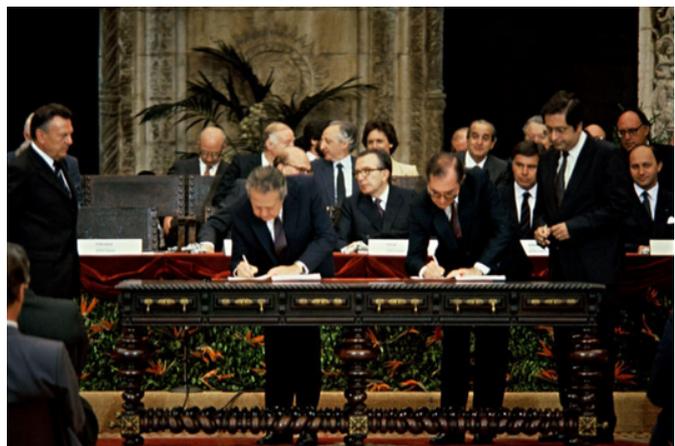


*Logo of the 40th Anniversary of Portugal's accession into the EU (Source: Portuguese Republic)*

## History of the country's accession to the EU

Shortly after emerging from a dictatorship, the country took its first steps toward strengthening a democratic political system and an open, modern market economy. Integration into the European project would reinforce these objectives. Portugal's application for accession to the European Economic Community (EEC), now known as the European Union, took place in 1977 under the government led by Mário Soares.

The first formal milestone of accession dates back to 1985, with the signing of the Treaty of Accession to the European Communities on June 12, at the Jerónimos Monastery in Lisbon.



*Signing of the Treaty of Accession to the European Economic Community, June 12, 1985 (Source: European Commission - Representation in Portugal)*

The following year, on January 1, 1986, Portugal officially became a full member, alongside neighboring Spain.

To this day, Portugal has had a President of the European Commission (Durão Barroso), of the European Council (António Costa), and of the Eurogroup (Mário Centeno), and has held the presidency of the Council of the European Union on four occasions.



*Flags of the European Union, Brussels (Source: Expresso)*

### **Portugal's accession to the EU: a balance between praise of a "historic milestone" and criticism**

On this 40th anniversary, several national and European figures chose to mark the date. One of them was the current President of the European Council, António Costa, who highlighted Portugal's accession as a "historic milestone in the country's development." As part of the celebrations, the Prime Minister, Luís Montenegro, also emphasized that the process of European integration irreversibly altered the country's trajectory. The Head of Government stated that EU membership represented a collective strategic choice to accelerate economic growth, strengthen institutions, and consolidate national cohesion.

However, in the view of António Tânger Corrêa of Chega, accession brought "good and bad things." The MEP stated that while it resulted in the country's development, Portugal must "navigate the waters of the Union more wisely" and adopt a truly "strategic vision." João Oliveira, MEP from the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), said that the balance of Portugal's four decades in the EU "is not very positive," noting a "worsening of asymmetries and inequalities" between Portugal and other Member States.

Finally, among the most prominent voices within the EU, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, also marked this historic date, stating: "Forty years ago, our European family came together again. Portugal returned to its rightful place, at the heart of the European family." She further noted that over these

four decades, “we have become stronger, together. This beautiful country, the garden planted by the sea, was transformed from Minho to the Algarve. Today, people live longer and earn more.”

### **Impact on the country**

The figures confirm the truth of these statements: since 1986, the average life expectancy of Portuguese citizens has increased from 72.9 to 81.2 years; early school leaving has fallen dramatically, from 50% in 1990 to the current 6.6%, while the number of students in higher education has nearly tripled. In education, it is also important to highlight the importance and impact of the Erasmus+ program, in which more than 100,000 Portuguese students have participated, benefiting from academic mobility abroad that provides unique and transformative experiences.

Portugal has benefited from more than €95 billion in European funds, which were invested across various regions of the country, driving the modernization of infrastructure and services. The country's capacity for innovation has also been strengthened, as demonstrated by seven thousand scientific research projects supported with nearly €3 billion.



*President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa (right) and King Felipe VI of Spain attended a session commemorating the 40th anniversary at the European Parliament (Source: LusoJournal)*

### **40 years later: between achievements and challenges**

Analyzing the country's situation over the past 40 years, across multiple dimensions, is therefore not a simple exercise but a complex one. Transformation and benefits are undeniable: accession proved positive in consolidating democracy, opening the economy, modernizing and developing infrastructure and services, and increasing life expectancy. However, the debate remains ongoing. Alongside higher levels of freedom, mobility, and growth, voices continue to be heard highlighting the challenges the country still faces, as well as questions surrounding the use and effectiveness of European funds.

# Diplomatic Seminar in Portugal

By Maria Neves

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs held the 2026 Diplomatic Seminar between January 5 and 8, which featured a state visit from Hakan Fidan.



*First session of the Diplomatic Seminar of 2026 (Source: Instituto Diplomático)*

The Diplomatic Seminar is an annual event organized by the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs that brings together members of the government, representatives of the public administration, universities, the business community, and other strategic sectors with Portuguese ambassadors. The seminar serves as a platform to discuss the main priorities of Portugal's foreign policy.

This year's edition was marked by the visit to Lisbon of the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hakan Fidan, on January 5, to commemorate the centenary of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The visit included a bilateral meeting between Paulo Rangel and Hakan Fidan, during which they discussed ways to strengthen political and economic cooperation between Lisbon and Ankara.

In a panel entitled "Challenges Arising from the New Global Order and the Paradigms of Security", Fidan addressed Portuguese diplomats. In his speech, he highlighted the measures both countries should take to reinforce their bilateral and economic ties through intensified consultations on regional and global development and by promoting mutual investment in strategic sectors such as energy and infrastructure.

He then emphasized Turkey's stance and expectations regarding Brussels, defending the importance of Turkey's integration into the EU's industrial strategy and its participation in other European initiatives, projects, and programs concerning security and defense. Fidan and Rangel also exchanged views on efforts to end the Russia-Ukraine war. Finally, the Turkish minister reiterated the importance of implementing a ceasefire agreement in Gaza and ensuring the uninterrupted flow of international humanitarian aid to civilians in the enclave.

The seminar's opening session took place on January 6 at the Museum of the Orient in Lisbon. In his address, Rangel stated that we live in "the moment of greatest complexity, uncertainty, and unpredictability since the Second World War," adding that this seminar is "a seminar of eve ,or, using religious language, a vigil " in view of the changes in international relations.

The minister also emphasized five priorities of Portuguese diplomacy: the Atlantic, Europeanism, Lusophony, the Portuguese diaspora, and multilateralism.

During the event, a tribute was paid to António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, whose presence was prevented by the international crisis following the U.S. attack on Venezuela. On behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ana Paula Zacarias honored him, stating: "Here we leave the tribute of Portuguese diplomats and a profound expression of gratitude for his example as a global diplomat and for his commitment and dedication to building a more just and dignified world, where diplomacy shines over confrontation and war." A tribute was also held in memory of Mário Soares, who was remembered for his singular role in Portuguese democracy and international projection.

On January 7, a panel on European Defense took place, featuring European Commissioner for Defense and Space Andrius Kubilius, National Defense Minister Nuno Melo, and NATO Secretary-General Radmila Shekerinska.

On January 8, at the Palácio da Bolsa in Porto, another highlight of the session was a video address by Brazil's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mauro Vieira, who presented an overview of Brazil's recent G20 presidency and called for a "reinvention of the world order" through renewed multilateralism, a Global Alliance Against Hunger, and the newly announced Mercosur-European Union agreement.

The seminar concluded with a closing dinner during which the President of the Republic was honored by Minister Rangel, who stated that "the President of the Republic has undoubtedly been an outstanding external representative of our country, having always honored the nation's name and shown great appreciation for the work of diplomats."

# Interview with Francisco Ribeiro de Menezes

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*In this first interview of 2026, our guest is the current Portuguese Ambassador to France, Francisco Ribeiro de Menezes. With a degree in Law from the University of Lisbon, he has taught at the Faculty of Law of the University of Lisbon and at Lusíada University. He joined the diplomatic service in 1990 and was posted to the Portuguese Delegation to NATO and the WEU in Brussels (1994). He served as deputy in the Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs (1996) and later in the Office of the Minister of State and Foreign Affairs (1999).*

*In 2001, he joined the Portuguese Embassy in Madrid, where he worked until 2005, when he became head of the Office of the Secretary of State for European Affairs and, in 2006, head of the Office of the Minister of State and Foreign Affairs. In 2010, he presented his credentials as Ambassador to Stockholm and, in 2011, he took up the position of Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister.*

*He was appointed Ambassador to Madrid in 2014, also serving as non-resident Ambassador to Andorra. In 2020, he was appointed Ambassador to Berlin and, since 6 May 2025, he has been Portugal's Ambassador to Paris, also accredited as non-resident Ambassador to the Principality of Monaco since 21 October 2025. Interview conducted by Bruno Oliveira.*

**First of all, I would like to thank you for accepting our invitation to this interview. You have worked in some of the most important embassies in the Portuguese diplomatic network, such as Madrid, Berlin and, currently, Paris. How would you briefly describe your experience in each of them?**

That is a very broad question, but diplomats also have a duty to be concise. Our primary role is to represent and defend our country's interests in the places where we are accredited. We have very good relations within the European framework and bilaterally, both with Spain, Germany and France. We have a



*Ambassador Francisco Ribeiro de Menezes*

framework of agreements, treaties, understandings and joint projects that ensure that our day-to-day relations are not tense. On the contrary, we have had many good experiences with all these countries, each of which has its own specific characteristics.

Spain is the only country with which we share a land border, as well as being our largest trading partner. This has not always been the case, and it is a country with which we have, in addition to the experience of European integration and accession negotiations conducted almost simultaneously, a very important presence in other parts of the world. Latin America is very important to both of us, and we belong to the Ibero-American summit mechanism. There is a great linguistic proximity, which also helps. It is a relationship in which we strive to work together, with many projects implemented in the area of cross-border cooperation, for example. It is also a country in relation to which we must know how to differentiate ourselves in a good way. That is, a larger country compared to a smaller country, with similar languages, could tend to be confused, and one of our tasks, Spain on its side and us on ours, is to maintain our national identities while knowing how to work together.

With Germany, the reality is different. Germany is a central power, perhaps the central power in the European Union. It is a country with which we also have historical ties. A country with a very complex history of its own, but one that has been transformed since the end of the Second World War. In fact, it immediately became two countries, with reunification returning it to what it was. But it is a country that knew how to rise from the ruins of war and transform itself into an immense political, economic, financial and industrial power. And we also knew how to take advantage of this relationship and count on the experience of the many large German companies that set up in Portugal. We have a very positive commercial, economic and investment relationship, which in recent years has even been positive for Portugal, which is absolutely extraordinary. And it is a relationship that has contributed greatly to the development of the most sophisticated segment of our productive fabric, in information technology, the chemical industry, medicines and the technological development departments of major car brands.

France is different. France has a much larger Portuguese community than we have in Spain and Germany. In Germany, in any case, it is a community of between 150,000 and 200,000 people. Here we are talking about, depending on the calculations and models, almost two million people. We also have a long-standing relationship. I say, jokingly, that since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, we have never had any problems with France. French culture has always had a very strong influence in Portugal, even greater in many ways than that of Spain. We have French influences in our civil law, our administrative law, our literature, our customs, our cuisine, our painting and our music. It is a very human relationship, very close in that sense, and these personal relationships were obviously reinforced by the arrival of Portuguese immigrants and the way they were welcomed here, settled in and integrated. Today, they are active, contributing and respected members of society.

Economically speaking, something very similar is happening to what is happening in Germany. France and Germany tend to compete to see which of the two is Portugal's second economic partner, obviously after Spain. What I said about Germany and these major economic and business cooperation projects also applies to France. To be more specific, look at the interest shown by French and German airlines in bidding for the privatisation of TAP and look at the huge investment made this year by a leading French bank, BPCE, in buying Novo Banco in Portugal for more than €16 billion, which is an absolutely astronomical sum.

**In this case, what were the main priorities at each of these embassies? And were there any challenges that arose during their work?**

I have already answered this question to some extent in the previous question. In any case, the biggest challenge for an embassy, and necessarily for an ambassador from a country the size of Spain, and with the importance that this country has for us, is to know how to identify priorities, to be where you need to be and to promote what needs special attention. We have a great convergence of views in the way we look at the world, in the way we look at the European Union, we look at our closest neighbours (the Mediterranean, the Maghreb, the Sahel). We have very intense relations from a political, economic and cultural point of view. In Spain, we must always promote knowledge of the Portuguese language, our arts and our literature, and ensure that these assets are understood in Spain. There are issues where specific interests may be antagonistic and must become complementary. A classic example is water resource management. Our major rivers originate in Spain, there is a lot of international law involved in this, and there are bilateral agreements between Portugal and Spain that need to be updated and brought into line with reality. These are obviously very sensitive issues, for example, given the rapid climate change we are currently experiencing.

We also need to have a very frank dialogue when there are different options in specific cases. Another example is the issue of the energy model. After the Second World War, Portugal did not opt for nuclear energy, whereas Spain did. There are nuclear power plants in Spain that are reaching the end of their life cycle. These are things that naturally concern a large part of the Portuguese population, and there is joint monitoring of the work of these plants and their phasing out. On the other hand, we both have a shared, common interest in strengthening the energy interconnections between the Iberian Peninsula and the rest of Europe. That means France, which is the next country, which in turn also has a different model from ours. We have to know how to choose between integration, we have to manage differences and we must always keep the channels of communication open to avoid misunderstandings.

I had some very interesting and complex experiences in Germany. First, without a doubt, managing the effects of the pandemic. I arrived in Berlin on 2 February 2020 and shortly afterwards the first lockdown was announced. Therefore, our main

concern, our main challenge, was to ensure that we, the embassy and the entire consular network in Germany, were able to respond to the needs of Portuguese citizens and ensure that they had everything they needed in terms of assistance. The German authorities were impeccable in this regard. It was also a little difficult at times when our risk assessment criteria differed and the Germans decreed a ban on non-essential travel between Portugal and Germany, which on several occasions had very negative consequences for our tourism market, for example.

We faced a very interesting diplomatic challenge. We were in the Council of the European Union, during the same period of presidencies, Germany, Portugal and Slovenia. Germany held the presidency in the second half of 2020 and we held it in the first half of 2021. We had to scrap the programme we had drawn up because it did not take the pandemic into account, and Portugal and Germany worked very well together to design a wide range of European Union assistance programmes to help businesses and individuals overcome the economic crisis created by the pandemic. This was the case with the SURE programme in the area of employment and, above all, in the area of large-scale financing from Next Generation EU. This was worked on in Berlin, Lisbon and Brussels, with great cooperation and close collaboration between all parties.

In France, I am still in the early stages of my learning curve. It seems to me that the challenges are broadly the same. Given the size of the Portuguese community and its degree of integration in France, I think the challenges are the same as those faced by French citizens. Everyone living in France faces the same reality and, of course, we will seek to improve mechanisms, further enhance our communities and explore areas where we can work more closely with France. The big challenge now is a very concrete reality. In February this year, Portugal and France signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation in Porto. It has already been ratified by France, but not yet by us. We have to put this treaty into action. It is a treaty that provides for regular high-level consultations and summits between France and Portugal, followed by a long list of areas in which we can and should cooperate more. One easy example is the strengthening of bilateral cooperation in the defence industry. There is a long-standing relationship between the two countries in this area, but investment in defence has increased many times over. And we have ways of working with France in this area.

**During the next few questions, we will stay in France. As you mentioned, the Ambassador has recently been in Paris, and one of the first steps, so to speak, is the presentation of credentials to the President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron, which he did in September. How does this ceremony take place? And why is this moment important?**

This goes back to the principles of modern diplomacy. The ambassador is an envoy. In German, the ambassador is called Botschafter. Botschaft means message, so the ambassador is the messenger. He is an envoy of the Head of State who carries with

him the letters that accredit him as a representative in a foreign country. Each country has its own ritual, but the tradition is that the ambassador only takes up his full duties after formally presenting himself to the head of state of the country to which he has been sent. I have had several experiences of presenting credentials. In Stockholm, Madrid, Berlin, Paris, and a month and a half ago in Monaco, where I am also accredited as a non-resident ambassador.

In September, as you say, with President Macron. The procedure, the protocol, is more lavish and ostentatious in other countries, especially in monarchies, where they tend to be more devoted to the ceremonial side of the act. In France, President Macron has greatly simplified the procedure. We go to the palace, rather than the palace coming to us. And instead of a lengthy ceremony with hymns and guards of honour, President Macron decided to divide the ambassadors into groups. In my case, there were 27 of us, which is a lot, and we were arranged in order of arrival in Paris. We are received individually for no more than three minutes. Normally, the conversation between the ambassador and the head of state takes longer, which is what had happened to me until now. That does not mean that it is not an exciting moment. And, in fact, knowing that I would have, at best, three or four minutes to talk to the President forced me to compose a telegram in my head, focusing on the three or four points I had to convey, which he listened to and appreciated. One of them was to say that I have some French blood, because my paternal grandmother was French, and my paternal grandfather was in the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps during the First World War. So President Macron appreciated that distinctive aspect. The President has a great ability to charm people and put us at ease, but in that brief meeting, he ended up telling me three or four things that were very important to him, precisely related to developing the relationship based on the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and the various indicative areas. Of course, as he had already done when he visited Lisbon and Porto on his state visit, when he also spoke about Air France's bid for TAP, this was also one of the aspects that he considered important and that he pointed out to me. It is a very beautiful ceremony and I have fond memories of all of them.



*Embaixador Francisco Ribeiro de Menezes entrega as suas cartas credenciais ao Presidente francês (fonte: Embaixada de Portugal em França)*

**From that moment on, you are accredited here as Portugal's ambassador to France. In political terms, how are bilateral relations developing, given that you have also mentioned this treaty, which in this case I believe will be a priority for both countries?**

The fact that we have this treaty means that Portugal has become part, de jure and de facto, of a small group of countries with which France maintains this type of relationship. Our relationship, as we have seen, is long-standing. France is also at the origin of the County of Portugal, and French intellectual influence has always been very strong in Portugal. Even in 1975, when we were drafting our Constitution, the Constitution of 1976, a great French professor and constitutionalist, Maurice Duverger, was brought in to provide some advisory work, and that is largely where the semi-presidential aspect of our system comes from. We now have a framework that improves, stabilises and enhances what we already had, but there are political cycles.

At the moment, as we know, the European reality is dominated by the war in Ukraine, by the reconfiguration of Europe's own role and partnerships, and by some tensions within Europe itself regarding the intensity and quality of the support that should be provided to Ukraine. And now, with great anxiety, with this succession of meetings and encounters with envoys and government officials, it is complicated. On the other hand, in France, at this moment too, a government supported by a slim relative majority in parliament is trying to pass the Budget and the Social Security Financing Law for 2026, with President Macron ending his term in 2027, after we had reached a high point in our formal bilateral relationship, which was the state visit and the signing of the treaty. Since then, we have been talking at various levels, with particular emphasis on defence and defence industries, which is also natural. And tacitly, France knows that there is less room for ministerial visits and further development of what was established in the treaty until the French government has passed this stage of negotiation and approval of the budget. Then we can re-establish contacts, and we have many areas and avenues in which to do so.

This does not mean that we do not have daily diplomatic contact and that our ministers and secretaries of state do not meet and continue to make visits, albeit less frequently, especially in Brussels, within the framework of the European Union. What we want is to put the treaty into effect. This waiting period, from a bilateral point of view, does not mean that bilateral relations are not developing. They are developing from a financial point of view, through the acquisition of Novo Banco by a French bank, which is a major development for Portuguese and French banking. The interest of the France Metal group may bear fruit. Important negotiations are underway regarding the supply of weapons and defence systems from France to Portugal and from Portugal to France. Alstom is involved in the modernisation and maintenance of our railway network. We cooperate with large groups such as Thales, in the military field, but also in the field of communications and advanced technology. And so the relationship continues and the political relationship is good. At this particular

moment, France needs to resolve its budgetary issues so that we can return to a point where political dialogue is more constant.

**In a way, you have already answered part of my next question, which concerns economic relations between the two countries and how the embassy works in this area.**

We have an economic department at the embassy, a delegation from Turismo de Portugal (the Portuguese Tourism Board) and a delegation from AICEP (the Portuguese Trade and Investment Agency), whose delegate is formally accredited as the embassy's economic and commercial advisor.

We do promotional work. We give presentations on the economic and financial situation throughout the country. The last one I did, already with me, was in Strasbourg, after the summer. We also give presentations here at the embassy, to anyone who asks us. We had one from the Regional Government of Madeira, as well as one with TAP. This same room hosted the Annual General Meeting of the Franco-Portuguese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which brings together the best Portuguese entrepreneurs in France. We are talking about companies that together have a turnover of well over two or three billion euros. We also provide the space for accredited companies to make their presentations here. We are in contact with the ministries concerned with this matter. We help Portuguese companies facing contentious administrative problems, we guide them in the right direction and, on several occasions, we have defended them before the French authorities. Obviously, this is respected, it is common practice and tends to yield some results.

Promotional work is ongoing. And in this regard, we cannot be passive. We have to be very active and proactive in identifying opportunities here for Portuguese companies that we have already identified, but also in Portugal for French companies that wish to set up or expand their operations in Portugal. This involves extensive screening of our companies and French companies. When operations reach the scale of buying a bank or participating in a tender for the privatisation of a flag carrier, embassies also have a role to play. There is work to be done in terms of prospecting, analysis and explaining objectives. It is also very important to follow the major economic debates here in order to understand where the French economy is heading, what the priorities are, what the ideas are, what lies beyond the turning of the page, and what the long-term trends are. This also applies to the analysis of both the French economic reality, in some detail, and what is being said in the public arena and in the media about these projects. It is clear that we are interested in reading, recording and understanding everything that comes out in France about Air France's interest in TAP, or what was said at the time of the privatisation of Novo Banco and BPCE's interest. Therefore, we are in contact with all these companies. It is a matter of obtaining relevant, pertinent, intelligent and as accurate information as possible. This quality control is, I believe, the ambassador's greatest responsibility. But we have been working with airlines, hotel groups, we value the Portuguese

companies that are here, we invite them, we have strategic advice, we have the Chamber, with whom I work almost daily.

### **Culture is another central element in Portuguese-French relations. How does the Embassy promote culture?**

Cultural promotion is planned in accordance with guidelines from Lisbon. We strive not to miss any anniversaries, birthdays or death anniversaries, great writers, painters, bringing Portuguese musicians here or helping them find sponsors so that they can move around the commercial circuit. We have to look at the publishing map to see what is in the pipeline and what translations we can expect. There is a possibility that we will be invited as a guest country to the Book Festival here in Paris in one of the coming years. It would be great if we could achieve this. I did that when I was ambassador to Spain at the Madrid book fair, which is a street fair. The Book Festival here is at the *Grand Palais*, but it is easy to imagine that it is quite costly to do this and that there also has to be work to mobilise and persuade the responsible authorities in Lisbon. We also had a historic moment, and for me it was the most notable event in these six months, the presentation at this embassy of *Astérix in Lusitania*, which was a unique occasion, spread over a day with the press and an evening of celebration with larger than life-size figures. Something absolutely extraordinary, but which clearly shows the proximity between Portugal and France. In universities, and we have lectureships in a good number of universities, we have started to support universities where Portuguese is taught, also with a view to training translators and interpreters. Without good translators, our literature, or literature in general, cannot circulate. It is easier to translate from French to Portuguese and from Portuguese to French than from German, for example. But we have to encourage this reality.

But Portuguese culture is very present in France, in bookshops, music, festivals, cinema, animation, documentaries and dance. There are many Portuguese musi-



cians and composers here, many Portuguese composers here. There is a great deal of circulation, which is also fuelled, financed and supported by the Portuguese community. We showcase Portuguese music and open our doors to Portuguese composers here. We always associate music with the celebrations on 10 June. We follow Portuguese artists here and those responsible for cultural programming in France, who are very

*Ambassador Francisco Ribeiro de Menezes at the presentation of the book 'Astérix in Lusitania' at the Portuguese Embassy in Paris (source: Portuguese Embassy in France)*

numerous throughout the country. France is huge and is a bastion of its own culture, so we have a lot to do.

**Another vital aspect of the embassy's work is supporting the Portuguese community. How is this done?**

It is something that is closely related to culture and the teaching of the Portuguese language. We have France, with, as I said, almost two million Portuguese people, with or without dual nationality, and from several generations here. We also have young Portuguese people who move around France using the first and most important of the basic principles of European integration, which is freedom of movement, from which freedom of establishment derives. It is a community that is well integrated and well established overall, which contributes to society, votes in regional and local elections, and thus also generates interest from political parties. Many Portuguese people have been elected in France, their descendants in the Senate, the National Assembly, regional governments, town halls and prefectures. It is a highly respected community that has overcome old preconceptions. It is a community of entrepreneurs, musicians, teachers, intellectuals, film directors, composers and politicians. All this is what it is, and it is a truly large community.

At the same time, we must ensure that Portuguese is taught here. There is an agreement dating back to the early 1970s that continues to be applied. We are responsible for the public education system in primary schools and the French State is responsible for secondary education up to the BAC, with certified French or Portuguese teachers. In parallel, we have our own education network for children who, for whatever reason, are outside the French system. This is education organised by the Portuguese State in France, with teachers who are usually Portuguese, operating in parallel with the official education system. We have around 140 teachers and many students each year. There are always problems, teachers get sick, some classes are difficult to put together, and all of this has to be done in spaces provided by schools or other entities. But it is a system that ultimately works and is subject to periodic review by the authorities and the French and Portuguese school administrations.

The associations are very important for preserving the ties of traditional Portuguese culture, and we see that even there there has been some evolution. That is, the association movement is no longer just a folkloric association movement for celebrations on important dates, but also functions as a network of social support and friendly solidarity. And there are associations that are becoming more specialised, similar to what happens in other countries, such as Germany, with ASPPA, which is an association for postgraduates, with remarkable reflective work. We don't have the money to fund the associations, but there are many people with money in the Portuguese community who can help fund them. The result of this is the wonderful reality that we have a Portuguese community that is integrated into France and is a full part of French society. But in general, it continues to maintain a very close and intimate connection with Portugal.

And so there is no risk of Portuguese disappearing, traditions disappearing, and the big festivals and meeting places disappearing. We have a modest but effective programme of funding for specific projects submitted by associations. But we are talking about thousands of associations in France, literally from one end of the country to the other, covering many different situations. It is not just the reality of folklore, it is also the reality of the historical past. So it is a very beautiful and laborious area. We have a very comprehensive network. We have the embassy in Paris, a consulate-general in Paris, and then we have consulate-generals in Lyon, Marseille, Bordeaux and Strasbourg. We have several of these consulates with permanent consular offices in other cities. For example, the consulate in Marseille has an operational branch that issues passports and citizen cards in Nice. We have consular presences, consulate teams that travel to various points within their areas of jurisdiction. This is also very important when it comes to organising elections in Portugal. We have many honorary consuls, who are usually people who are very dedicated to maintaining ties with the country. It is not just an administrative service, but something more personalised. Therefore, I think we have the necessary structure to support not only the community, but also associations. And I think the balance is positive. Then, the other reality is that the Portuguese community here is huge, as we have seen, and they vote in France as well as they can vote in Portugal. This means that when there are major elections in Portugal, as there will be now for the presidential elections, the candidates must make a stop in France, Paris and other cities.

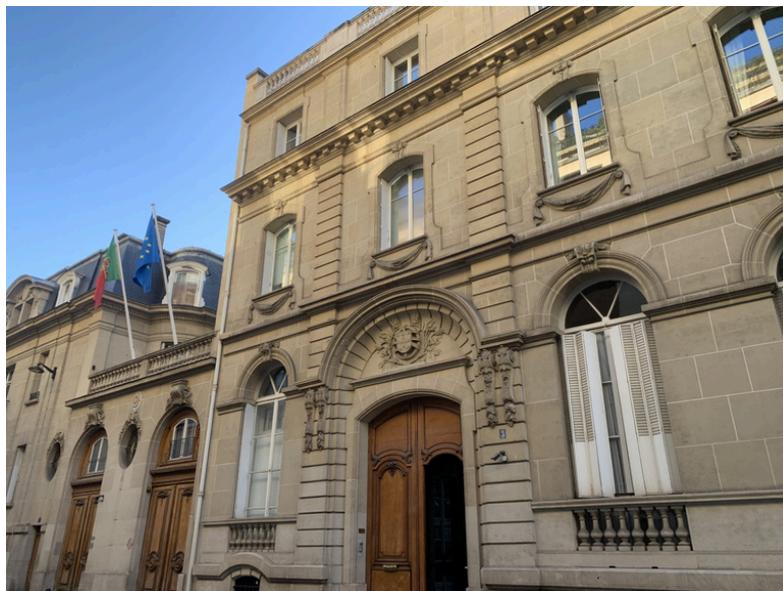
**Finally, throughout your diplomatic career, what was the moment that marked you the most?**

We are talking about 1999. I was deputy to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jaime Gama, and we had the consultation in Timor on its independence. And in July of that year, the Security Council approved Resolution 1246, which authorised the establishment of UNAMET, the United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor, which would be in the territory to carry out the referendum and to supervise the steps following the referendum, hoping and knowing that the answer would be yes, we want independence. The referendum and the announcement of the result were followed by a wave of immense violence, fuelled by Indonesia, with local groups, the Aitaraks, causing great destruction and posing a great risk of further bloodshed on the island.

We travelled from Brussels, where we had attended a meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, to New York to fight our battle. At the time, the Portuguese ambassador to the United Nations was António Monteiro, who later became ambassador here, and we spent two days at the United Nations. We had meetings with him and with delegations, mainly from the United States and Australia, which was a very important power in this regard. In the early hours of 15 September, we pushed through, we didn't vote because we weren't on the council, but we worked to ensure that the consensus was in that direction, the creation of INTERFET, an

interposition military force that was later deployed in Timor, and which ensured that the Aitaraks disappeared and that life in the future state of Timor-Leste returned to normal. And after many years of working on this, and much anxiety, and completely different schedules, because we covered the Far East, Europe and the United States. At the time, TSF, before the news bulletins, would say that it was X o'clock in Dili, X o'clock in Angola and X o'clock in New York. And the INTERFET resolution was approved in a very late night session, and we, the delegation, were sitting there. The minister, Ambassador Fernando Neves, and myself. At one point, with the vote already secured and the various Member States taking turns to speak, I realised that it was already two or three in the morning and that the Portuguese delegation had largely fallen asleep, but out of exhaustion, because we had been working for 72 hours to make the resolution a reality.

And I think that was the most immediate, most impactful moment. It was a moment when I saw how the diplomacy of a country with tradition and presence, but in reality small, can aspire to resolve a chronic situation that had lasted for decades, and which resulted in the oppression of a people who were invaded by the Japanese, with the entry of the Portuguese into the Second World War, and then occupied by the Indonesians. The Portuguese presence was gradually erased, but even so, we had the capacity, ingenuity, spirit of sacrifice and mobilisation to occupy the space that was ours and help the Timorese become an independent state.



*Portuguese Embassy in Paris*

# **The Strategic Island: Denmark, the USA, and the Challenges of Security in the Arctic**

By Magda Gonçalves

Greenland, an autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark, has become in recent months one of the most intense focuses of global geopolitical attention. The statements and initiatives of the President of the United States of America, Donald Trump, regarding the need for the US to "control" or guarantee a privileged position on the island, for reasons he associates with security in the Arctic, have provoked a series of diplomatic, strategic, and even economic tensions between Washington, European allies, and multilateral organizations.



*Protest organized in front of the American consulate in Nuuk, capital of Greenland, against declarations made by American President Donald Trump (Source: AP News)*

## **The United States' Commitment under the Trump Administration**

Since 2025 and throughout early 2026, President Donald Trump has publicly reiterated what he considers to be the United States' primary strategic interest in Greenland. In public statements before the World Economic Forum in Davos, Trump stated that the US "needs" the island to ensure its security in the Arctic and to contain rival influences, namely from Russia and China, positions that, while presented as indispensable to US interests, have generated diplomatic unease and strong rhetoric among European partners.

In mid-January 2026, in the context of these tensions, Trump announced his intention to impose 10% tariffs on eight European countries, including Denmark, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, due to their opposition to the so-called "control" or acquisition of Greenland by the US; these tariffs could reach 25% in the

summer if no agreement was reached. This threat of economic retaliation marked an unconventional escalation in transatlantic relations, underscoring the direct link that the US administration established between security objectives and economic instruments.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2026, a turning point was announced by Trump and NATO Secretary General, Mark Rutte, towards a framework for a future agreement on Greenland, leading to the suspension of planned tariffs. Trump stated that the US would not use force to obtain the island and stressed the importance of deepening NATO cooperation for security in the Arctic.

Despite this formal retreat from punitive economic measures, the U.S. administration maintains its strategic objective of securing a central role in Greenland, motivated by the perception that greater control over the island would strengthen surveillance and defense capabilities in the North Atlantic, including potential advanced defense projects.

### **Reactions and Positions of Allied States and Organizations**

The aggressive stance initially taken by Washington provoked a firm response from several European capitals. Denmark reiterated with complete clarity that Greenland's territorial sovereignty is not for sale nor is it subject to unilateral negotiation, and that any discussion on security or cooperation must fully respect international law and involve both Copenhagen and the Greenlandic authorities.

The European response included both political statements and intensified military cooperation in the North Atlantic. NATO member countries announced increased military presence and joint exercises in the region, demonstrating solidarity with Danish sovereignty and an interest in maintaining stability in the Arctic. Furthermore, many European governments, including Portugal, publicly advocated for a united and robust European Union response to Washington's tariff threats and rhetoric, emphasizing that certain "lines" of national sovereignty cannot be crossed without consequences for mutual trust between allies. The European Union, through its political leadership, also announced plans to strengthen security in the Arctic with a package of measures aimed at strengthening maritime and surveillance capabilities, as well as infrastructure investments, underlining the importance of maintaining regional stability and supporting local actors.

Within the NATO framework, the dialogue has taken on a renewed strategic dimension. Secretary-General Rutte, despite his personal and political relationship with President Trump, stressed the need for allies to rapidly increase security efforts in the Arctic, reflecting the recognition that collective cooperation is essential to address the challenges arising from climate change and global geopolitical competition, sometimes referred to as "the new frontier of transatlantic security".

### **Economic and Trade Policy Repercussions**

Tensions surrounding Greenland also impacted global financial markets, with assets traditionally considered "safe havens," such as gold and silver, reaching record highs in response to geopolitical uncertainties linked to tariff threats and the prospect of disruptions in transatlantic relations. At the same time, international economic institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), warned of the risks of escalating trade tensions and recommended a negotiated solution that preserves the stability of global trade and minimizes adverse impacts on investment and economic growth.

### **Implications for the International Security System**

Recent events centered on Greenland reveal that, in the current context of geopolitical competition, territorial security, strategic interests, and economic relations are closely intertwined. The actions of the US under Trump's leadership, the coordinated responses of the European Union, Denmark, and other allies, as well as discussions in multilateral organizations such as NATO, illustrate the multifaceted nature of contemporary tensions.

This way, The crisis involving Greenland exposed latent weaknesses and tensions in relations between allies who, until then, shared solid commitments within the framework of NATO and the liberal international order. The association between security objectives and coercive economic measures by one member of the alliance raised questions about the nature of military cooperation and trust between strategic partners. How these disagreements are managed will have lasting implications for the cohesion of the alliance, especially in the context of a rapidly changing Arctic, where the presence of other powers such as Russia and China adds complexity to the balance of power.

# Free Trade Agreement between the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and the European Union (EU)

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By Jorge Paixão

In a world increasingly characterised by protectionist trade policies, diplomatic coercion between nations, and the normalisation of continuous disregard for the compliance of international law, the European Union, together with the Southern Common Market, demonstrate that, even though international cooperation and the creation of new inter-dialogue ties, such as trade interconnection between states are increasingly rare, when implemented, they still allow smaller countries to defend their own sovereignty and dictate their national interests in a mutually constructive way.

At the end of last year, in mid-December, the European Commission, under the leadership of President Ursula von der Leyen, reaffirmed its commitment to finalizing the free trade agreement with the Southern Common Market, one of the main priorities of economic foreign policy, established by the commission for the 2024-2029 term. At the same time, this free trade agreement has been the subject of a large discussion among member states, particularly among EU members, with permanent opposition from France, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Ireland and Belgium.

This opposition is particularly due to the fears of European governments about the potential additional pressure that this agreement could put on national agricultural industries, which, currently, due to the economic instability recently caused by the global increase in trade tariffs, together with the historically high level of energy costs on the continent since the year 2022, and the development of regulations and restrictions on the use of pollutants such as pesticides in agriculture due to the EU's attempts to reduce its own polluting emissions, meant that European agricultural sector, was already under some strain due to increasing production costs.

## **What is the importance of this trade agreement?**

This agreement, which has been under development since 1999, just 14 years after the formation of the Southern Common Market, also known as (MERCOSUL) in Portuguese and (MERCOSUR) in Spanish, is an intergovernmental organization with the objective of promoting free trade between its member states, also promoting, additionally, their gradual economic integration. The organization encompasses about 270 million consumers, extending to the following countries in descending order of population, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, which is not currently included in the

free trade agreement with the EU, but may later join Paraguay and Uruguay. These South American economies have a particular charm, mainly the fact that their national industries are severely protected against any foreign competition, due to the adoption of protectionist measures by their governments, one of the most visible examples of these measures would be the external tariffs on foreign products, which in the case of cars and wines, are around 35% and 27% respectively. These semi-permanent measures severely hinder the integration of these nations into the supply chains of the global economy, aggravating at the same time, three of their main weaknesses, namely their lack of consumers, their dependence on the extraction of raw materials and low-skilled industries, and the inability to absorb the industrial production of developed countries for the development of their own specialized industries and service economies.

As such, since the late 80s and early 90s, among these nations, there has been a consensus on the need for this economic bloc to adapt to the current changes in the global economy that the digital age consequently brought. And it is in this context that this free trade agreement emerges, as a way to mutually improve trade links between these blocs, through the diversification of trade partners and the strengthening of their supply chains.

For Europe, which by contrast, only has about 13% tariffs on beef, regulating the majority of foreign products, with the usage of annual quotas on import limits, the agreement presents an opportunity to redistribute in a more balanced way its dependence on foreign markets, specifically on its trade dependence with China and the United States. Which, since the beginning of Donald J. Trump's second presidential term has started using its economic power as a force of diplomatic coercion on the continent in an increasingly aggravating way.

### **Internal opposition in the EU**

However, unlike the consensus within MERCOSUR member states, in the EU, the viability of this trade agreement is not universal among all members of the union, and a consensus equivalent to 2/3 of the member states was only reached at the beginning of this month, through the change of position of the Italian government, on January 6, after guarantees of increased financial investments on its own agricultural industry in the next Multiannual Financial Framework of the European Union, which will last from 2028 to 2034, one of the main reasons for this lack of consensus derives from the cause explained in the initial part of this article, namely the pressure imposed by European farmers on their national governments, however this is not the only cause, both political extremes of the European continent opposed the agreement, criticizing the impacts it would have on the sustainability of farmers' livelihoods, another group that criticized the agreement, was the ecological parties, which attacked the alleged lack of coherence of the agreement when compared to the continent's climate ambitions, stressing the need to have concrete mechanisms that ensure cooperation with MERCOSUR member states on the commitment to combat the continuous deforestation of the Amazon Forest.

These groups, together with the national governments of the member states mentioned at the beginning, particularly France and Italy, have forced the European Commission to implement concessions and economic incentives for farmers, specifically, the maintenance of the value allocated in the Multiannual Financial Framework of the European Union from 2021 and 2027 to the one from 2028 to 2034 with regard to the Common Agricultural Policy fund. A fund worth 45 billion euros, dedicated to supporting farmers through subsidies and various other credits, in addition to the removal of previously implemented taxes and restrictions on pesticide usage.



*Signing ceremony of the EU-MERCOSUR Partnership Agreement and Interim Trade Agreement, Asunción, Paraguay, 17 January 2026, (Source: European Union)*

### **What measures are implemented by this agreement?**

In practice, the agreement establishes a gradual reduction over a period of 15 years, of about 90%, of customs tariffs and trade quotas, present in both economic blocs, and the establishment of a consensus between the EU's regulatory policies regarding the use of pesticides and the presence of these same chemicals in agricultural export products from MERCOSUR countries.

This agreement, in its present form, would cover more than 780 million consumers, corresponding to approximately 1/4 of global trade, and would save European producers about 4 billion euros in external tariffs.

However, criticism of this agreement are not limited to its possible side effects, but also to the method of its implementation, with different interpretations on the possible effects of its long-term impact, there being no consensus on the increase it would actually contribute to European exports. Two examples of this opposing interpretations would be France, a member opposed to the agreement, and Italy, a member that changed its position on only very recently on January 6, with its Minister of Foreign Affairs, António Tajani, publicly stating that he would support the agreement, adding that it would increase the continent's annual exports possibly to

the amount of 700 billion euros, contrary to that, on the same day, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, opposed the minister's view, stating that, according to his own forecasts, the agreement would only have the potential to increase the EU's foreign trade, by 77 billion euros by 2040, which would be equivalent to 0.5% of the EU's annual foreign trade.

Supporters of the agreement, such as the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the President of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, on the other hand, reinforced the importance of the agreement as a way to mutually support the sovereignty of both blocs over the external pressure of other economic powers in the face of the apparent continuous degradation of the world order implemented after World War II.

### **The implementation of the agreement**

The agreement was ratified by the European Council on January 9 and officially signed on January 17 at the Central Bank of Paraguay. This event triggered a set of diverse discussions between the various political officials of Europe, one example would be, Joachim-Friedrich Martin Josef Merz, the German Chancellor, that reacted positively to the deal, stating at the same time, that, 25 years had been way too long for negotiations, calling for the next free trade agreements to be concluded much more quickly. However, in other regions of Europe, where farmers had prior to the completion of the deal, mobilized to oppose the agreement, such as France, Belgium and even certain parts of Germany, a growing movement took shape, in the form of public demonstrations organized from the 18th on forward, with the particular use of tractors in places such as Paris, Strasbourg and Brussels, cities where the main headquarters of various European institutions remain located at.

Days later, specifically on January 21, the parliamentary group, The Left in the European Parliament, together with another group, The Greens/European Free Alliance, presented to parliament a motion that would require the verification of the legality of the free trade agreement, arguing that it should be passed also on a case by case, individually in each national parliament of the 27 member states, forcing the document to be passed to the Court of Justice of the European Union. To the disdain of the European Commission, the European Parliament, passed the motion, in a vote with a merely difference of only 10 MEPs, with the distribution of votes being as follows, 334 in favour, 324 against, and 11 abstentions.

This motion, in practice, limited the implementation of the agreement for a period of 18 to 24 months, a period in which the deal would be completely stopped, until its eventual evaluation by the Court of Justice, even with this provision, the European Commission says it remains committed to the passing of this agreement, even if just provisionally, allowing the momentary implementation of some of its measures until the result of the evaluation of its own legality. Something which the leader of the International Trade Committee, Bernd Lange, revealed that he believes will happen,

with a vote occurring in the parliament to pass the deal between the months of april and may.

### **The international impact of the Free Trade Agreement**

For both trade blocs, the agreement was seen positively, as it allowed for greater trade integration, with the introduction of european manufactured goods, such as cars, and other specialized products, such as wines and cheeses, in exchange for meat, honey, and other agricultural products, in addition to various raw materials such as rare earth metals, necessary for the growth of the european renewable energy industry.

For France, unlike countries such as Germany and Spain, the agreement only aggravated its ongoing internal political crisis, resulting from the 2024 legislative elections, due to the government's alleged inability to oppose the agreement, or to protect its national farmers, even in the face of vast economic concessions to this group, worth more than 300 million euros, this has allowed the far-left and far-right parties to capitalize on the crisis and use it as a justification to present a motion of confidence in the National Assembly, which can possibly lead to the fall of the fifth French government in less than two years, if the Socialist Party decides to support this motion of confidence.

For Portugal, the agreement presents an apparently positive change, the Minister of Agriculture and Sea, José Manuel Fernandes, said that the agreement has the potential to reduce the current deficit of the portuguese trade balance in the face of imports from South America, particularly with Brazil, which represents 50% of portuguese trade with the continent, the minister even states the possibility of this becoming a market that brings Portugal a positive trade balance, or in other words a surplus, by increasing it's products to the region, without the restrictions currently implemented by the protectionist measures of these countries.

# **Massacre in Iran: From internal oppression to the international stage**

By Beatriz Saturnino

Iran is going through a social crisis marked by anti-government protests which, according to activists and international media, have already caused more than five thousand deaths as of January 23, 2026. The demonstrations, which have spread across several cities, reflect popular discontent with the country's economic and political situation, while the government responds with violent repression and strict control measures. At the same time, the international community is closely monitoring developments, expressing concern over the escalation of violence.

## **Background**

In the months leading up to the outbreak of the demonstrations on December 28, 2025, Iran showed signs of growing economic and social tension. High inflation, shortages of essential goods, and unemployment affected a large part of the population, increasing popular dissatisfaction. The regime has maintained oppressive control over the media and a policy of repressing dissenting voices, further fueling discontent and limiting space for peaceful protest.

Women and young people stand out as the main groups involved in the protests, as they are also the most affected by this dictatorship. They protest to express frustration with social and political restrictions and the lack of opportunities imposed on them. This context made the country vulnerable to large-scale demonstrations, which quickly turned violent in several cities at the hands of security forces, including Tehran, the capital, Isfahan, and Mashhad.

## **The beginning and course of the protests**

The protests began in response to specific incidents that sparked public outrage and quickly spread to various regions of the country. According to *Euronews* and *Notícias ao Minuto*, more than five thousand people may have already died, although Iranian state television does not report more than three thousand deaths. This discrepancy highlights the difficulty of obtaining accurate statistics in a context of censorship and information control, as well as the lack of freedom to which the country is subjected.

According to *SIC Notícias*, the protests began following the arrest and sentencing of activists and citizens involved in social dissent. Increased repression of dissenting voices and the brutality of security forces—including arbitrary detentions and violence in previous demonstrations—were cited as immediate catalysts that led thousands of people to take to the streets.

The demonstrations took various forms, including marches, strikes, and clashes with security forces. Government repression includes the use of police force, mass arrests, and severe internet restrictions. There are reports of executions, torture, and intimidation of protesters' families, making clear the climate of fear that has taken hold in the most affected areas, reflecting government oppression.

Through official statements, the Iranian government has attempted to downplay the seriousness of events, but images released by the media show the faces of hundreds of victims, making the scale of the violence and the regime's terror impossible to ignore.



*The woman with the cigarette who symbolizes the protests in Iran (Source: Espresso)*

### **Internal consequences**

The repression of the protests has had profound consequences for Iranian society. Thousands of families have been directly affected by the loss of loved ones or the detention of relatives. As if living with little or no freedom were not enough, they have also begun to be deprived of safety and the presence of their family members. Schools, universities, and businesses have been disrupted due to instability, while a climate of fear has spread throughout entire communities.

Politically, the regime has maintained an authoritarian stance, reinforcing control measures and entrenching its internal position. The exiled Reza Pahlavi, son of the last Shah of Iran—who was overthrown during the 1979 Islamic Revolution—and now an opposition figure living mainly in the United States, frequently cited in international news as a critic of the Iranian regime, stated that the regime will fall with or without international support, underscoring the political dimension of the unrest and the strength of popular discontent.

## International repercussions

The protests in Iran immediately attracted international attention. The United States issued warnings to the Iranian government and sent a fleet to the region as a precautionary measure in response to the escalation of violence. The European Union and international organizations such as the UN expressed concern over human rights violations and called on the Iranian government to respect basic principles of freedom of expression and protection of life.

The international community has also closely followed statements by leaders and political figures, including Reza Pahlavi, who encouraged opposition to the regime, while, in contrast, Iran's foreign minister made direct threats against the United States, increasing diplomatic tension.

## Current situation and future prospects

Despite violent repression, some protests continue in several cities, though in a more restrained form. The Iranian government has intensified censorship and surveillance over the population, but discontent persists, signaling the possibility of new episodes of unrest.

Analysts and opposition leaders warn of political and social instability, pointing out that unless concrete reforms are implemented to address the population's demands, the climate of tension may continue, with significant impacts on Iran's internal stability and international relations.

The protests in Iran reveal a society in crisis, marked by human losses and severe repression. At the same time, these events place the country under international scrutiny, highlighting the tension between human rights, political stability, and regional geopolitics. Iran's future remains uncertain, and the evolution of the demonstrations may define not only the regime's internal fate but also the country's role on the international stage.



Massacre nos protestos (Fonte: *Público*)

Although it is one of the most talked-about and discussed issues today, it is also one of those with the least concrete information available. Censorship and the regime's blocking of social media are the main factors preventing the flow of information. Nevertheless, it is essential to warn against the attempt by much of the media sphere to "soften" a regime and a human rights violation of this magnitude. Saying that the Iranian regime has maintained a "firm" position does not demonstrate persistence, but rather oppression, and such expressions must be used carefully

when speaking of thousands of innocent deaths. This is an issue of extreme relevance not only for the country itself but also for the international stage, which cannot continue to allow people to die at the hands of dictatorships. As such, this represents a challenge for foreign policy circles in 2026.

The protests have persisted since the end of December, and despite all the violence to which they are being subjected, the Iranian people continue to fight. This authoritarian regime has not eased its use of force, which has led to threats of American intervention, showing that developments in this case must be closely monitored.

# **From Germany to Argentina: Secret services increase their power**

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By Johan Schäfer

## **The world is becoming more dangerous and unpredictable**

Looking at the major trends in international politics, the large-scale outbreak of war between Russia and Ukraine, supported by its Western partners, in February 2022 caused a shift from a spirit of collaboration to one of confrontation. This fundamental paradigm shift is recurrent both internally within states, for example in the management of the 'migration crisis' in Central Europe since 2015, and externally, notably through the 'war on terror' waged by the US and its supporters after 11 September 2001.

Events of this kind and the resulting perceptions of threat and fear among the general population, fuelled by media coverage, often justify significant political ruptures. Consequently, those primarily responsible for national security in each country are drafting new laws that increase the power not only of the police and the army, but also of the secret services, both civil and military. These gains in power occur with a lack of oversight from the politicians themselves and without the crucial control of independent entities in society. This worrying trend will be demonstrated below with two current examples.

## **History meets current events**

After the Second World War, West Germany's three secret services (internal, external and military) were organised by the United Kingdom, France and the United States with expressly reduced powers and with the sole focus of combating Soviet influence. After the end of the Cold War and reunification, with the main objective defeated, attention was divided between protecting German companies' global exports and monitoring potential 'troublemakers' at home, for example through wiretapping and influencing journalists (BND Journalistenskandal). From 2001 onwards, the main task once again became assisting the US in its operations, in particular by providing access to the main internet data hub in Europe, in Frankfurt.

However, the second Trump administration in 2025 was seen in the European Union as a new paradigm shift. From now on, economic and military cooperation across the Atlantic could no longer be taken for granted. This transgression also affected the relationship at the intelligence level, although it remains so deep and dependent (from Europe towards the US) that it can never be classified as a break. In addition, the confrontational stance towards Russia remains. In recent years, it has taken an increasingly aggressive turn.

### **The new law on Germany's main secret service**

The attempt to become more independent from American services is the main reason given for reforming the law on Germany's largest secret service, the *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (BND). Formally, this entity is only authorised to operate outside German territory. Despite this, this division, which was already extremely difficult to control in practice, will be considerably weakened. The government is preparing a law that aims to expand the BND's powers, providing it with legal instruments that make it much more powerful.

Among the main measures negotiated is the legal surveillance of data passing through Frankfurt, which may be stored for up to six months. Until now, it was only possible to record IP addresses and corresponding metadata, but in future all data and content from emails, messages, videos, etc. could be covered. This would affect most of the communications of the 450 million citizens of the European Union, who have always been targeted by big tech and American secret services (NSA). The *Tagesschau* news site notes that 12 years ago, when Edward Snowden revealed the NSA's mass surveillance of societies, such measures would have been considered an absolute scandal and would have sparked significant protests. But times change and people's memories are limited.

Another provision of the law allows the BND to legally hack both social media software and digital infrastructure 'to repel cyber attacks.' The agency will also be able to monitor foreigners on German territory, even journalists who until now enjoyed special protection. These are just some of the numerous measures being discussed between the government and the BND. As there is no effective counterweight or lobby in the drafting of the law or on the actions of the agency itself, and given the almost total ignorance of civil society and the media discourse on the subject, the most likely outcome will be a legal decision on a set of actions unprecedented in German history.

### **In Argentina, an equivalent law only has to pass Congress**

The tendency to empower secret services without independent scrutiny has always been one of the main challenges for democracies, and technological preponderance has opened a new chapter in this practice. Another example is the Argentine government, which used the last minutes of the year to enact Decree 941/2025, which aims to increase the possibilities for the secret service *Secretaría de Inteligencia del Estado* (SIDE) to monitor NGOs, journalists, lawyers and other critics of the ultra-liberal President Milei. To this end, it also uses facial recognition cameras with artificial intelligence-based software. Twenty-five companies in the country sell them, subject to a set of unclear laws that allow them to operate with almost no legal repercussions.

Furthermore, according to the website Netzpolitik.org and the NGO Correpí, indiscriminate use of police violence has caused at least 1,000 deaths and thousands of injuries since Milei took office. A considerable number of these occurred during protests and demonstrations against the government. These measures of state repression against its own population resort to the increasingly active use of information technology for societal control.

These two examples demonstrate the possibilities that elected governments have to increase their power based on secret services, which in turn escape democratic checks and balances. The future will inevitably bring a preponderance of technology in these actions, making surveillance and repression increasingly effective and difficult to control.



*Martin Jäger, diplomat and head of the BND, former German ambassador to Ukraine (Source: zdfheute)*

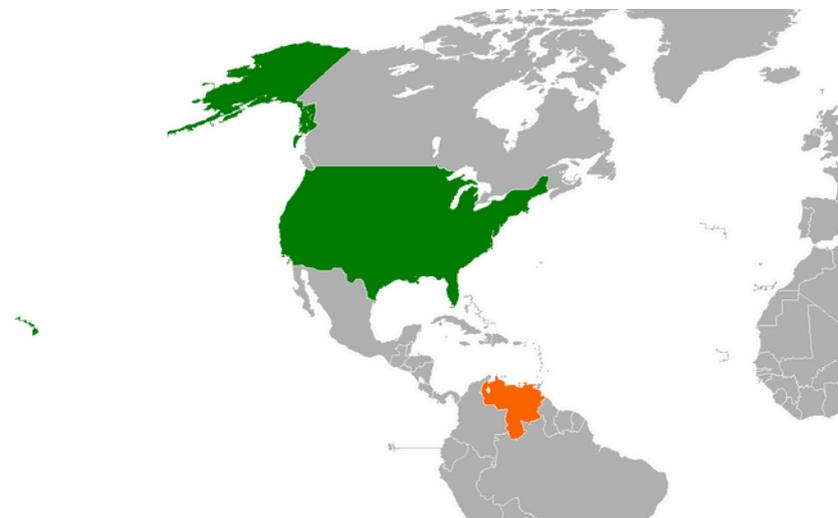
# Conflict Clarified: United States–Venezuela Conflict

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By Dario Vargas

## What conflict is this?

Since 1998, following the election of Hugo Chávez, leader of the socialist Fifth Republic Movement (MVR), to the presidency of Venezuela, relations between the South American state and the United States of America, considered close during the Cold War, have deteriorated dramatically. This process culminated in the capture of Nicolás Maduro, Chávez's successor, by U.S. special forces and his trial on U.S. soil.



*Map highlighting the United States (green) and Venezuela (orange)  
(Source: Wikimedia Commons)*

## How did it begin?

Relations between the United States and Venezuela, which began in 1835, were marked throughout the 20th century by ideological alignment and strong economic cooperation, particularly in the extraction of oil in Venezuela, an abundant resource in the country, which has the largest proven reserves in the world. These ties were reinforced by relative political stability in the Latin American state, which, after a period (1948–1958) of military dictatorship, established a multiparty system that would last until 1999. During this period, the Venezuelan nation suffered an insurgency by militias inspired by the Cuban Revolution, which strengthened an anti-communist tendency among successive Venezuelan governments and brought them closer to the U.S. government.

Venezuela's dependence on its oil industry, however, led to vulnerability to shocks in this sector, something that became evident from the 1980s onward after a sharp fall in oil prices triggered an economic crisis in the country. This trend, combined with perceptions of high inequality and corruption among political elites, led to growing distrust in institutions and dominant political parties in Venezuela, which resulted in an attempted military coup led by Hugo Chávez in 1992. After the failure of this coup, Chávez was imprisoned and later pardoned, enabling his candidacy in the 1998 presidential elections, which the military officer won.

The new Venezuelan president represented a socialist-inspired ideological strand known as Bolivarianism or Chavismo, which portrayed the United States as the main imperialist power on the American continent, and consequently opposed the significant presence of its multinationals in his country's oil industry. Thus, Chávez sought to nationalize the sector and pursue new partnerships with Cuba, Iran, Russia, and China, while limiting cooperation with the American nation in various areas. His presidency therefore marked a rupture in Venezuela's relations with the United States.

In response to Venezuela's new international alignment, as well as the growing concentration of power in the hands of the president and his party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), the United States imposed a series of retaliatory measures, ranging from sanctions on Venezuelan government officials and later on the country itself, to diplomatic pressure and support for the Venezuelan opposition. In response to these initiatives, Chávez accused the U.S. government of seeking to interfere in the country's internal affairs, a position he maintained until the end of his life.

Hugo Chávez died in 2013 and was succeeded by then Vice President Nicolás Maduro. Maduro continued his predecessor's policies but witnessed the deterioration of Venezuela's economy, increasingly dependent on an oil industry whose production was in decline, and the emergence of an economic crisis that generated a wave of emigration and growing dissatisfaction with the PSUV. Maduro sought to suppress this through expanded repression by security forces, operations that drew condemnation from the United Nations for human rights violations by Venezuelan authorities.

In 2015, after a wave of protests against the government that had emerged the previous year, the opposition, led by the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), obtained an absolute majority in Venezuela's legislative elections, marking the PSUV's first defeat in the National Assembly, the country's legislative body, since 1999. This opposition victory was followed by a presidential crisis in 2018, after the National Assembly refused to recognize Maduro's victory in that year's presidential elections, appointing Juan Guaidó, an opposition deputy, as President, an act

recognized, among others, by the United States, the European Union (EU), and the Organization of American States (OAS).

These actions by the National Assembly were contested by Maduro and the Venezuelan government, with both the armed forces and the Supreme Court siding with the PSUV candidate.

This crisis culminated, in 2019, in an uprising against Maduro by Guaidó supporters, which was nevertheless defeated by the security forces. After the failure of this initiative, the government arrested a number of opposition supporters, including National Assembly deputies, forcing others to flee the country. In the aftermath of the government's actions and with a view to offering support to the opposition, the United States imposed new sanctions on Venezuela. During this period, the Trump administration accused Nicolás Maduro of participating in drug trafficking, deepening previous accusations of negligence toward this illicit market made by the George H. W. Bush administration against Hugo Chávez's government.

From 2019 to 2024, the United States and Venezuela maintained limited contact, with the U.S. government recognizing only Juan Guaidó as president. This situation changed after he lost the opposition's confidence, which withdrew its support from the former deputy in 2023. In this context, the United States began dialogues with Maduro's government, negotiating the holding of free presidential elections in Venezuela in 2024 in exchange for the easing of sanctions imposed on the country. However, Venezuelan authorities imposed a series of restrictions on PSUV opponents, including a ban on the candidacy of María Corina Machado, a prominent opposition figure. As a result, the U.S. administration, then led by Joe Biden, reinstated punitive measures.

Venezuela's 2024 presidential elections again resulted in a victory for Maduro, who began his third term. This vote was, however, condemned as neither free nor fair by a number of countries, including the United States, and by organizations including the EU, the OAS, and the United Nations. Several heads of state and government recognized the statements of the Venezuelan opposition, which claimed that its candidate, Edmundo González, had won the elections by a large majority, accusing Maduro's government of committing electoral fraud. In light of this situation, the United States recognized, for the second time, the opposition candidate as president of Venezuela.

Tensions between the two American states intensified in 2025, when the Trump administration, also elected in 2024, launched a pressure campaign against Maduro, again accusing him of involvement in drug trafficking. Following these accusations, the United States began a significant military mobilization in the Caribbean, carrying out a series of attacks against vessels allegedly used by

criminal networks operating on Venezuelan soil. In response to this military operation, Venezuela accused the United States of seeking to violate the country's sovereignty and to breach international law.

U.S. military operations continued throughout that year and were expanded to include the seizure of a number of vessels linked to Venezuela's oil industry and under U.S. sanctions and, later, a total blockade of Venezuelan oil exports by sea. These actions culminated in the capture, on January 3, 2026, of Nicolás Maduro by U.S. special forces, accompanied by a series of air strikes on Venezuelan military installations.

In the aftermath of Maduro's capture, Delcy Rodríguez, then Venezuela's vice president, was appointed interim president of the country. For their part, the United States, which announced that Nicolás Maduro would be tried on U.S. soil for drug trafficking, also declared a series of requirements for the Hispanic state to avoid future interventions, particularly greater opening of Venezuela's oil industry to U.S. companies and exclusive partnerships in oil production and export, the severing of economic ties with China, Russia, Iran, and Cuba, and cooperation on migration and the fight against drug trafficking. Venezuela accepted some of these directives, initiating a series of reforms in its oil industry.

### **How is it relevant to Portugal?**

Portugal maintains diplomatic ties with the United States, with an embassy in Washington, D.C., and with Venezuela, with an embassy in Caracas.

During Hugo Chávez's presidency, Portugal maintained close relations both with the United States, both are NATO member states, and with Venezuela, with a process of deepening ties between the two states encouraged in part by the existence of a large Portuguese diaspora in Venezuela, the second largest one in South America. However, during Nicolás Maduro's presidency, diplomatic relations between the countries deteriorated, with Portugal recognizing Juan Guaidó's appointment in 2019 and, in 2024, Edmundo González's victory, following the European Union's position on the matter. In turn, Venezuela suspended TAP flights in the country in 2020 for a period of 90 days and, in 2025, revoked TAP's license after the airline canceled flights to the country following a U.S. security alert.

Tensions between the United States and Venezuela may have spillover effects on fuel prices in Portugal due to their impact on international markets. However, due to a continued decline in trade ties between the two states, the impact of the crisis in the South American nation in the European state's economy is limited.

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