

From PES activists Lisbon to your attention

Sunday, the 11th of February, the Portuguese electorate voted on a referendum for the decriminalization of abortion, when requested by the women, up until the ten weeks of gestation, to be made in a legally authorized health facility.

With a 44% participation (higher than the previous European Parliamentary election), circa 3.8 million Portuguese went to the polls. 2 million 200 thousand votes gave the «YES» a 60-40 win, and surprised those that thought of Portugal as a semi-developed country, dominated by the catholic church, in the back of Europe and outside the cultural and political post-modernist mainstream ways (in 1998, with only 2.6 million of voters and a 68% abstention, the «NO» won with a 0.5% margin – 50.7% x 49.1%). This vote gave the Portuguese the feeling that they really are part of Europe.

In the end of the referendum we can make some general appreciations. It all went well for us, I think. We made, all throughout the campaign a positive approach on the issues on the table. We never made any kind of attack to those whose ideas were far apart from ours. We dedicated our time trying to put forward a discourse based on three major issues: the backstreet abortion, the legal paraphernalia and our gap towards Europe. We made a difference, especially when comparing to the «other side». They lied, presenting false numbers and examples. They used all kinds of demagogic strategies to demobilize the electorate. They tried to confuse the voters by presenting a half-baked proposal to decriminalize abortion *without changing the law* (5 days into the election) which would prevent women from utilizing legally established health facilities.

They even called us extremists, Nazis, and so on (they attacked our Prime Minister Socrates of been a dangerous radical, can you believe?).

What can we do? They didn't have any arguments. They putted all their money on this kind of intimidation, never realizing that the Portuguese people were no longer so cultural (and political) dominated as they were in the past by the traditional elites.

This win is important not only for what it means, for the women and men of this country, but also because of what a defeat would have meant. If we hadn't won, all our other «cultural fights» would never leave the ground. Now we can continue to fight, with our European partners, for a better society towards a Europe that is finally free from its secular cultural structures. We have to realize that our present is made of differences and social networks that interact in a dependent way. This is, I hope, only our first win. Sexual, gender and reproduction rights are still in our list of things to change (together with emigration rights). Now we can pursue them.

In the last fortnight all our efforts have been concentrated in accomplish what we purposed. To win. To change a law that sent women to jail if they were found guilty of abortion. A law that outlawed, every year, nearly 18,000 women(the number of abortions estimated per year). A law that, every day, pushed young women to the dark alleys of the backstreet abortion.

The Portuguese members of PES activists, although still few in numbers, were spread through the different civic movements created specifically for this referendum and, of course, the activities of the Portuguese Socialist Party. It made us feel very good that the first initiative we've been associated with was one related with this fight. It was a small but meaningful act, one we're very proud of. It was our first appearance.

For us it was very important to count, from the beginning, with the support of Poul Rasmussen, someone who make us feel very proud to be socialist and Zita Gurmai, one of the most interesting women in Europe today, with a long known association with the rights of women worldwide. They, with their kind words, gave us the necessary push to embrace this project. We also want to recognize the invaluable work and advice of Helder (and Gisela). It's good fun to be with them in this beginning. And to Nils Woerner, the first and outmost responsible for our existence, our special thanks. His pace, patience and readiness to give us the necessary boost to take in hands this political experience.

All of us are sure that this is only the first activity of PES Portugal. We hope in the near future to start to work on a more regular basis, and when that happens, you will ear from us.

In the beginning of this campaign we hope that, with our customary 30 years gap, we manage to team up with the rest of Europe. After all, we realize that we came to democracy 30 years late, to Europe 30 years late, and, at last, to the decriminalization of abortion (up until the 10th week), with the usual 30 years delay. We hope, now, that our next conquest will take lass time...

Today, as it passed a couple of days, I found myself proud of been Portuguese. We managed to show to Europe, to the world that the XXIst century also has a stop in Portugal.

See you on the next train.

Thank you for your support and solidarity,

From PES Portugal,

José Reis Santos