

World News Roundup

Portugal

'Reform' at risk

Coelho to form 'minority' govt

LISBON, Oct 5, (RTRS): Portugal's Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho is expected to form a minority government after his centre-right coalition won an election but lost its parliamentary majority, a move shrugged off by markets which see little immediate risk of instability.



Coelho

But economists said on Monday reforms needed to help the indebted country's meagre growth after a steep recession in 2011-13 would be more difficult to pass and the austerity-minded government could face political turmoil next year.

The election "will further constrain the potential for structural economic reforms and increase risks to the fiscal outlook", said Eurasia Group analyst Federico Santi, adding the "likelihood that the new legislature will not reach the end of its four-year term is quite high".

Portuguese shares rose more than 2 percent on Monday, largely in line with other European stock indices, while bond yields were steady to lower in early trade after hitting their lowest level in five months soon after opening.

President Anibal Cavaco Silva must name the new prime minister after talking to all political leaders with discussions likely to start later this week and take around two weeks.

Imposing

Passos Coelho would be the first leader in Europe to be re-elected after imposing hardship on voters under international bailout packages during the sovereign debt crisis.

His government raised taxes while cutting public spending, but argued during the campaign that the country was now beginning to see the fruits of those measures with a gradual return to growth after three years of recession.

Passos Coelho said he was ready to form a government while suggesting he may have to compromise on policies. Most analysts saw a good chance for the government to be formed and work well into next year without major challenges, continuing budget consolidation.

Defeated Socialist candidate Antonio Costa ruled out forming part of a left-wing "negative majority of those who create obstacles". Analysts say it is unlikely that the moderate, pro-European Socialists will ally with the anti-euro Communists and the radical Left Bloc in parliament.

The president is expected to try to convince Passos Coelho's centre-right alliance and the Socialists to form a centrist coalition, but the Socialists are unlikely to agree. Passos Coelho's alliance is made up of his Social Democrats and rightist CDS-PP.

While party leaders converged for Republic Day in Lisbon's City Hall, the president did not attend as, according to his office, "he has to focus on reflecting about decisions to be taken in the next few days".

In a tone of compromise, the Socialist mayor of Lisbon, Fernando Medina, told the gathering the voters' message was that they wanted to "reconcile our European and euro membership with a change of economic and social policies via negotiations between various parties".

"We'll have a minority government that will make agreements in crucial moments like passing budgets. Such agreements are perfectly viable with the Socialists abstaining, be it this year or in coming years," said political scientist Adelino Maltez.

The 2016 budget bill can only be presented after the new government has been appointed.

Sombro

Antonio Barroso, senior vice president at Teneo Intelligence in London had a more sombre outlook, saying: "Political stability could become a challenge very soon, possibly as early as next year" when the government tries to pass the 2017 budget.

With 99.2 percent of parishes counted, the ruling coalition had around 38.3 percent of the vote, while the Socialists had 32.4 percent. The final count may take another five to 10 days.

The results showed the government with 104 seats in the 230-seat parliament, short of the 116 needed for a majority. Portugal, a country of 10 million people, has little history of minority administrations surviving a full term.

"It's likely to be a minority government formally, but the Socialists are fairly close in their views on budget consolidation with the government. So we see all of this as reassuring and do not expect any impact on the economic outlook in the short run," said Citi economist Giada Giani.



In this handout picture released by the Vatican press office, Pope Francis arrives to lead a mass for the opening of the synod on the family on Oct 4, 2015 at St Peter's Basilica in Vatican. Pope Francis opened a gathering of bishops intended to review Catholic teaching on the family against a backdrop of controversy over homosexuality. The church's second synod on the family opened in a tense atmosphere the day after a senior priest announced he was gay and accused the Vatican of 'institutionalised homophobia'. (AFP)

Synod

Pope urges bishops to put aside prejudices

'Church must be open to change'



The head of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)'s long term election observation mission, Boris Frelc speaks during a press conference in Bishkek, on Oct 5, 2015. The Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan, linked to pro-Moscow President Almazbek Atambayev, came out on top at Oct 4's parliamentary election in the ex-Soviet state, with five other pro-Russian parties also winning seats. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on Oct 5 declared Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary vote 'competitive' despite significant procedural shortcomings. (AFP)



Szydlo



Poroshenko

Europe

Szydlo backs close ties: An opposition lawmaker tipped to become Poland's next prime minister after an Oct. 25 national election said Warsaw must work much more closely with its central European neighbours on issues such as migration despite their warm ties with Russia.

Last month Poland broke ranks with its ex-communist partners from the "Visegrad group" - Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia - by backing a European Union plan to share out 120,000 refugees across the 28-nation bloc.

Under the plan Poland will take in 4,500 refugees, adding to some 2,000 it has already accepted.

Beata Szydlo's nationalist-minded Law and Justice party (PiS), which opinion polls show winning Poland's election, has strongly criticised the centre-right government's decision. The migrant crisis has become a key issue in the election campaign.

"Backing Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia (on migrant quotas) was in our interest," Szydlo was quoted as saying on Monday in the daily Dziennik Gazeta Prawna. Poland's centre-right, pro-EU government says it accepted the quotas because the Visegrad group lacked the votes in the European Council to block the plan.

Analysts say Warsaw also fears it may need EU solidarity in the future if more Ukrainian refugees fleeing the conflict in eastern Ukraine end up moving to Poland. (RTRS)

Russia must cede border: President Petro Poroshenko has stressed that Ukraine must regain control of its eastern border by the end of December even if full implementation of a February peace deal with Russia is delayed until 2016.

The Western-backed leader was seeking to clarify his stance in view of remarks by French President Francois Hollande at a media event held after a summit meeting on the crisis in Paris on Friday.

Poroshenko told Ukrainian television late Sunday: "The border is a key component of our sovereignty and we are not going to compromise over it."

VATICAN CITY, Oct 5, (Agencies): Pope Francis told a Roman Catholic meeting on family issues on Monday that the Church should not be a stuffy "museum of memories" but have the courage to change if that was what God wanted.

Francis urged bishops at the start of a three-week gathering, known as a synod, to humbly empty themselves of conventions and prejudices. They should not "point fingers at the others to judge them" or feel superior to those with different ideas.

In a passage that appeared to be directed at unbending traditionalists, the pope said bishops should beware the "hardening of some hearts, which despite good intentions, keep people away from God".

Yet he also made a nod to conservatives, calling for courage that "does not let itself be intimidated by the seductions of the world" and passing fads.

Since his election in 2013 as leader of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics, Francis has given great hope to progressives who want him to forge ahead with his vision of a more inclusive and less polarised Church that concentrates on mercy rather than the strict enforcement of rigid rules they see as antiquated.

Faith was "not a museum to look at and save" but should be a source of inspiration, he said, calling on the synod to have "courage to bring life and not make our Christian life a museum of memories".

The gathering of some 300 bishops, delegates, observers and 18 married couples has been preceded by intense jockeying between conservatives and liberals on sensitive issues.

It will discuss ways to defend the tra-

ditional family and make life-long marriage more appealing to young people while reaching out to disaffected Catholics such as homosexuals, cohabiting couples and the divorced.

Francis told the first working session the bishops should not just talk but try to hear what God wanted for the Church, and to listen to differing opinions among themselves.

But key participants said they did not expect any radical modifications to Church teachings on family issues.

At a news conference after the first session, Cardinal Andre Vingt-Trois of Paris warned reporters they would be "disappointed" if they expected radical changes to basic Church doctrine on family issues such as marriage.

Pastoral

While he noted that the pope was the ultimate arbiter, Vingt-Trois predicted the changes would be to the pastoral approach to sensitive issues rather than to doctrine.

Italian Archbishop Bruno Forte, one of the synod's secretaries, said times had changed. "The Church cannot remain insensitive to the challenges ... the synod doesn't meet for nothing," Forte said.

The meeting is the follow-up to one held a year ago which was marked by stormy differences between conservatives and liberals on how welcoming the Church should be to homosexual Catholics.

The gathering of 360 participants was overshadowed this weekend by the bombshell announcement by a Polish priest, Krzysztof Charamsa, an official at the Vatican, that he is a practising homosexual with a partner.

The Vatican's ire — which saw

Charamsa fired from his post — contrasted with the news of Francis's still close relationship with an old Argentinian friend and his gay partner, who were received and hugged by the pontiff in the United States last month.

"After his example, whatever the outcome of the synod it will be impossible for a priest not to welcome homosexual couples as the pope has... making them feel at home and gradually but progressively innovating Church mentality," said religious expert Piero Schiavazzi in the Italian edition of the Huffington Post.

He warned, however, that bringing the synod's opposing sides together on such issues was unlikely in the extreme.

"It would be easier to get Vladimir Putin and Barack Obama to agree... than cardinals Camillo Ruini and Walter Kasper," he said, referring to a staunch Italian conservative and a German liberal said to be close to Francis. Homosexuality is just one of a wide range of topics to be discussed at the synod, and some prelates have called for it not to be included in the programme, according to Church sources.

Allen said the pope wants other threats to the family to be discussed, from "unemployment to war, environmental calamities, a culture of exaggerated individualism and consumerism, neglect of both children and the elderly".

"In his mind, the synod would likely be a failure if it doesn't get around to considering those topics. If recent experience is any guide, the pope may have his work cut out for him," Allen said.

Another key topic will be how to involve Catholics who have divorced and remarried in civil ceremonies.

They are considered to be still married to their first spouse and living in

sin. Some bishops want a change to the rules that bar them from receiving sacraments such as communion.

Francis is believed to be in favour of the Church showing more mercy towards such Catholics on a case-by-case basis but he wants the bishops to reach common ground on the divisive issue.

The bishops, meeting behind closed doors, will submit reports to the pope. He may use these to write his own document, known as an Apostolic Exhortation, on family issues.

Francis has upheld church teaching on marriage but has sought a more merciful approach, insisting that these remarried Catholics be fully part of the life of the church. Progressive prelates led by German Cardinal Walter Kasper have called for a process by which a bishop could accompany these remarried Catholics on a path of penance that, over time and on a case-by-case basis, could lead to them receiving the sacraments.

In a bid to take some of the divisive-ness out of the debate, Francis passed a law over the summer making it easier for Catholics to get an annulment - a change conservatives have criticized as tantamount to "Catholic divorce".

Vingt-Trois praised the new annulment process as a "precious" initiative that should help bishops "better put in place paths of mercy".

But Erdo, in a keynote speech addressing the main themes for the synod, made clear that Communion for civilly remarried Catholics is effectively impossible unless they abstain from sex - as the church's teaching currently states.

Erdo said his remarks were informed by responses from bishops around the world who had gotten in touch even after the Vatican drafted the working

Hollande had said after talks that also included Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel that he saw no way the February deal could conceivably be implemented by its end-of-year deadline.

The main sticking point is the date of local elections in Ukraine's eastern separatist provinces of Lugansk and Donetsk.

The shaky truce deal says Russia must cede the entire 400-kilometre (250-mile) stretch of Ukraine's porous eastern frontier the day after those polls are held. (AFP)

Kiev starts light weps withdrawal:

Ukraine has started withdrawing tanks and light artillery from the frontline in the eastern

region of Luhansk in accordance with a recent agreement with pro-Russian separatists, the Ukrainian military said on Monday.

Ukraine and separatist leaders agreed last week to extend a pull-back of weapons in eastern Ukraine, which rebels said could mean an "end to the war" with the Ukrainian government.

Counter-intel hub to be opened in Poland

WARSAW, Oct 5, (AFP): NATO will open a counter-espionage hub in Poland by year's end aimed at expanding the alliance's intelligence-gathering capabilities as it faces "threats from the east and south", a Polish defence ministry spokesman said Monday.

A counter-intelligence officer from Poland will be the first head of the new facility in the southern city of Krakow focused on joint exercises in "identifying and countering intelligence threats", Colonel Jacek Sonta told AFP.

NATO's Counter Intelligence Centre of Excellence will also have a branch at a military training range in Lest, south-central Slovakia.

"Today at 11.00 (0800 GMT) in Luhansk region we began a simultaneous removal of T-64 and T-72 tanks and in some places anti-tank artillery D-48 and D-44 and ... mortars," spokesman Ruslan Tkachuk said on Facebook. (RTRS)

Belarusians protest: Around a thousand people took to the streets of Minsk on Sunday to demonstrate against Russian plans to build an airbase in the former Soviet state.

"No foreign military bases!" the protesters at the opposition-organised rally shouted, waving placards reading: "We want a peaceful sky." "We've never attacked anyone and we're not going to. Leave us alone on our land," senior opposition figure Vladimir Neklyayev told the crowd.

After the event, protesters adopted a resolution saying the deployment of a Russian base would be "against the Belarus constitution". "It's a threat to our independence and way of life as Belarusians," the text said.

In September Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered his ministers to agree a deal with Belarus to establish an airbase in the country. Belarus is a long-standing ally of Russia and is a member of a Moscow-led economic union.

But relations between the two sides have sometimes been prickly and strongman Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko has largely remained neutral over the conflict in neighbouring Ukraine while relations with the European Union have improved slightly. (AFP)



US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, (right), reviews an honour guard with Spain's Defense Minister Pedro Morenos during a welcome ceremony at the Spanish Defense Ministry in Madrid, Monday, Oct 5, 2015. Carter arrived to Madrid for a two-day official visit to Spain. (AP)