

PORTUGAL AND BRAZIL STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC COOPERATION

# PAÍS€CONÓMICO

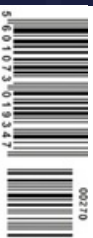
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Dibitec Administrator

## Porto Forte supports Portuguese companies

Sérgio Castro, CEO of the OPorto Forte Group, headquartered in the city of Porto and with offices in several countries, is a leader in supporting Portuguese companies in internationalization processes, but is also a promoter of a series of investments in various sectors, namely in several African countries.



Sérgio Castro, CEO of Grupo Oporto Forte, a company that supports the internationalization of Portuguese companies, but also invests in its own projects in several countries

# «We are present in 12 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Brazil»

*In 1993, Sérgio Castro, a young economist, joined forces with a colleague who had graduated in engineering, and they founded the company OPorto Forte, based in the city of Porto. Sérgio Castro is the CEO of the OPorto Forte Group, and in an interview with PAÍSECONÔMICO he highlights that the company took advantage of the expertise of its two partners to invest in business consultancy work and investment support, both in Portugal and in various geographies around the world. The OPorto Forte Group is currently present in 12 countries, “where we have at least one company in each of these countries”, with special emphasis on direct presence in countries such as Brazil, the United Arab Emirates (Dubai), but also in five African countries, four of which are in the West African region (Senegal, Ivory Coast, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde). In some of these countries, the OPorto Forte Group has developed important projects in the areas of housing, renewable energy, agriculture and livestock, and tourism (Guinea-Bissau). Sérgio Castro also highlights that the company he leads has supported several international companies, particularly Brazilian and Arab ones, to invest in Portugal, «as our country is increasingly sought after for investments in assets from different sectors. The OPorto Forte Group is capable and available to reinforce support for the internationalization of Portuguese companies in international markets, as well as to support foreign companies in their investments in Portugal”, highlighted the CEO of the group based in Porto.*

TEXT › JORGE ALEGRIA PHOTOGRAPHY › RUI ROCHA REIS

The Porto Forte Group was founded in 1993, with headquarters in the city of Porto, and is especially focused on providing business consultancy, training, certification, disposal and asset management, procurement, support for companies to enter new markets, obtain international funding for partner projects in the country, in addition to investing in international projects.

From the beginning, recalls Sérgio Castro, CEO of the OPorto Forte Group, “we were very focused on supporting the internationalization of Portuguese companies, without neglecting to be directly present in various geographies of the world using our own investments. I remember very well when in 1997 we accompanied the visit of the Portuguese president Jorge Sampaio to Bulgaria, as we were, at the time, the only company

Portuguese physically present in that Eastern European country. Later, we were also involved in supporting the development of a project by the Hyundai car manufacturer in the city of Shanghai, China.”

In this path of ascension and international affirmation, Sérgio Castro highlights that in 2003, «I arrived in Brazil, a country where I have lived for 17 years, having returned to Portugal in 2019. In that country of Latin America,



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we established OPorto Forte as a company that secured a prominent position in supporting the entry of Portuguese and European companies into the Brazilian market, the vast majority of which were successful, some not so much, but this is part of the attempt of many companies when they intend to internationalize», highlights Sérgio Castro.

**«Brazil is a very demanding market»**

In Portugal, reference is often made to the failures of Portuguese companies in the Brazilian market, although emphasis is placed on those that manage to stand out in that large market. Sérgio Castro states, bluntly, “that many Portuguese companies, at various times, thought that it was enough to be present at fairs in their respective sector of activity in Brazil to start exporting their products and/or services. It's not like that. In fact, I often say, and I know this is controversial, that companies

Portuguese companies do not gain much from their presence at trade fairs in Brazil. The Brazilian market is quite complex, with business culture habits that are very different from those practiced in Portugal and Europe, which is why any Portuguese company that intends to enter the Brazilian market must have a good knowledge of Brazil beforehand, which is a country that varies greatly from state to state and from region to region.

When asked about what the OPorto Forte Group can do to help a Portuguese company (or from another country) enter the Brazilian market, the executive leader of the Porto-based company recalled that “we are present with offices in the states of Pernambuco, Espírito Santo, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, we have a multifaceted and very well-prepared team to provide all the necessary support to any company, particularly Portuguese, that intends to enter the Brazilian market, as we understand that it is of the utmost importance

“We must not only know the business potential, but also have a thorough understanding of how to make investments, do business and be fully informed about the complex Brazilian tax system. I can assure PAÍSECONÓMICO readers that the Porto Forte Group is very well qualified in Brazil to provide highly qualified support to companies wishing to enter Brazil,” stressed Sérgio Castro.

On the other hand, the group's CEO also mentions the importance of Brazilian investors for the Portuguese market. «In recent years, as is public knowledge, Portugal has seen a strong and growing interest from Brazilian investors in purchasing Portuguese assets. I can assure you that OPorto Forte has been very active in supporting the strengthening of Brazilian investment in Portugal. I remember, in fact, the importance of the meeting we held in November of last year, which took place at the Pernambuco Institute, here in the city of Porto. He was

an excellent opportunity for contact between Brazilian companies, some from Middle Eastern countries, but also from Africa”, said Sérgio Castro.

**«Dubai is a major international financial center»**

At this time, the main executive responsible for OPorto Forte stated that the group is currently present in 12 countries, “without prejudice to supporting projects in countries bordering those where we are directly present”. One of the most important locations for the direct presence of the OPorto Forte Group is in the United Arab Emirates. «We have an office in the city of Dubai, where we operate mainly in two areas, respectively, in carrying out financial operations, given that Dubai has become an increasingly important financial center worldwide, and, on the other hand, in the area of trading. This entire area of our activity passes through the city of Dubai.

However, the OPorto Forte Group has been present on the African continent for about a decade, currently directly in five countries, respectively, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and Mozambique.

**«We have several projects in West African countries»**

Sérgio Costa highlighted that four of the countries where the group is present are part of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS),



that have a common currency, a currency that has a fixed parity with the euro, «which gives us strong security in the projects and investments that we carry out in this part of the African continent», highlights the person responsible for the OPorto Forte Group.

In these countries of the ECOWAS region, the group has developed various projects, especially in areas such as social housing, agribusiness (agriculture and livestock), renewable energy and tourism. «We are developing very concrete projects, for example, in Senegal and Ivory Coast, we are developing important housing construction projects involving the construction of 300 villas in Senegal and 1,000 houses in Ivory Coast. They are very important projects to allow many people to access housing. Or even the fact that we are also developing important projects in

agriculture and livestock sectors in the aforementioned countries, which constitutes a very notable contribution, recognized by the authorities of both countries, to the economic and social development of Senegal and Ivory Coast”, highlighted Sérgio Castro.

In neighboring Guinea-Bissau, the OPorto Forte Group decided to invest in the tourism sector, with the construction of an “Eco-Resort in Guinea-Bissau”, located on the Bijagós Island, “we expect its inauguration next year. The Bijagós region is a true environmental and ecological paradise, which is why we are firmly convinced of its strong potential to contribute to the tourist and economic progress of that Portuguese-speaking African country”, pointed out the person in charge of the Portuguese group, adding that in Guinea-Bissau the OPorto Forte Group is also developing a project to create IT Rooms, in order to guarantee access to







*Eco-Resort in Guinea-Bissau*

technological and digital education for many Guineans”, said Sérgio Castro.

### **The importance of the event (in June) in Dakar/Senegal**

In order to reinforce the national presence, In that region of Africa, the OPorto Forte Group will promote an event in June this year in Dakar, capital of Senegal, «where Portuguese, French, German, Brazilian companies, from several Arab countries, and obviously also African companies, will be able to showcase their products and services, in several sectors, for two days, which could be a magnificent opportunity for many of these companies to be able to be present in a market with almost 400 million people», emphasizes Sérgio Castro.

Despite its strong presence in several regions of the world, the OPorto Forte Group does not neglect its roots, which are in Portugal. Sérgio Castro recalls that «the

Our country is currently seen as a very interesting geography for investments coming from various countries around the world, many of which are from countries where we are present, and for which we are privileged interlocutors to advise and direct their investments in Portugal. As I mentioned before, we have been very active in supporting several Brazilian investors in Portugal, but also several investors from countries in the Arabian Gulf area. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight that the vast majority of these investors are very well informed about the reality and evolution of the Portuguese economy, and when they come to our country to invest here, in many cases they already have their assets duly identified, although they seek our support to carry out the investments they intend to make in Portugal”, pointed out the CEO of the group based in Porto.

The OPorto Forte Group currently has approximately 60 employees, spread across the various countries where the group is present. “We are not a very large group, but we are an interesting group, including for any of our employees to develop a quality international professional career. We have a policy of valuing talent, commitment and, of course, the results obtained by the team as a whole and by employees individually. Therefore, we take talent retention very seriously and we are very pleased to emphasize that we continue to recruit more talent so that we can reinforce and consolidate our know-how and presence in the various countries where we are present, and in which we intend to reinforce our activities and the projects in which we are involved”, concluded Sérgio Castro. <



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