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Maria Pintasilgo Named Portugal's 1st Woman PM

LISBON, Portugal (UPI) — President Antonio Ramalho Eanes named the first woman premier in Portugal's history Thursday, a devout Roman Catholic social activist with close ties to leftist parties.

Maria de Lurdes Pintasilgo, the country's 49-year-old representative to UNESCO, met with the president for two hours Thursday. She told reporters that Eanes asked her to form a caretaker government to oversee interim elections and that she had accepted the post.

Smiling easily, the plump, unmarried chemical engineer said that she had one week to organize her stop-gap cabinet — the nation's 11th since the 1974 revolution restored democracy — before presenting it to the lame duck parliament for approval.

Unable to find any legislator who could put together a working majority in the faction-ridden parliament, General Eanes a week ago announced his "grave decision" to disband the young democracy's first freely chosen legislature in half a century and send the country back to the ballot box in search of "a stable majority."

Eanes scheduled separate talks with the four big minority parties for the afternoon to inform them of his choice, to replace outgoing independent Premier Carlos Mota Pinto. He was expected to formally announce his decision to the nation later in the day.

"What is most important now is not names (of ministers) but to define what is the significance of this government and where it should concentrate its activities," Miss Pintasilgo



LISBON (UPI) — Maria de Lurdes Pintasilgo, Portugal's ambassador to UNESCO, leaves presidential palace after being asked by the President Eanes to replace the outgoing Premier Pinto.

said. "We are in a critical phase (for democracy)."

Miss Pintasilgo said she expected opposition from the center-right parties but that she believed their skepticism would "disappear when they see the government's actions."

Political observers said her cabinet and program would almost certainly receive parliament's approval with Socialist and Communist

support, clearing the way for its dissolution and an early return to the polls.

Miss Pintasilgo, who served in both pre- and post-revolutionary governments, said that given "the special circumstances" under which her cabinet would be formed, she would have "to give very careful attention to the areas of activity in which it would focus its attention."

Politicians said her main role would be that of a "neutral and fair overseer" during the elections.

None of the big four minority parties issued immediate reactions to her appointment.