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Togo - 2016: domestic policy, foreing affairs, and socio-economic development

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Togo 2016

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President Faure Gnassingbé acted throughout the year from a position of strength, given the divided and weakened opposition. Overdue political and institutional reforms and local elections were postponed indefinitely. The human rights situation improved slightly, but the regime continued to be describable as 'authoritarian'. In view of the growing jihadi risk in the sub-region, the international donor community rewarded Togo's apparent political stability as an anchor of security in West Africa with a substantial increase in development aid. With promising growth prospects, low inflation and an absence of major external shocks, the government was able to improve the macroeconomic situation.

Domestic Politics

President Faure Gnassingbé focused on foreign affairs and economic development as his overwhelming victory in the 2015 presidential elections consolidated his power base. The weakened and divided opposition coalition CAP 2015 ('Combat pour l'Alternance Politique en 2015'), which had been formed to challenge the incumbent in 2015, remained intact, its main components being the 'Alliance Nationale pour le Changement' (ANC), the biggest opposition party, and three smaller parties, the 'Parti Démocratique Panafricain' (PDP), the 'Convergence Patriotique Panafricaine' (CPP), and the 'Parti pour la Démocratie et le Renouveau' (PDR). The opposition tried to mobilise the population to support the overdue political and institutional reforms required for free and fair elections, including local elections, demanded in vain in the past years. End of February, Jean-Pierre Fabre, leader of the ANC and official frontrunner of the opposition requested again in a letter directed to the Minister of territorial administration that the reforms should take place at least before the pending local elections. The latter had been postponed time and again since 30 years. The last local elections on 5 July 1987, when the country was still under the reign of late Eyadéma Gnassingbé. During the political upheavals of the 1990s, local elections were not government priorities. In 2001, the government had provisionally installed special delegations intended to be in place until the next local polls. On 26 October, the Council of Ministers nominated new members of the special delegations in the prefectures of Anié and Bas-Mono. The opposition condemned this as a unilateral, partisan and unconstitutional measure. On 11 March, the cabinet had published a road-map for local elections, and in early December, Minister for Territorial Administration Payadowa BoukpeSSI announced that they would probably take place in July 2018. The opposition accused the government of playing for time in order to tailor the new electoral districts to its advantage. The upgrading of the former sub-prefectures of Mò, Agoè-Nyivé, Oti-Sud and Kpendjal-Ouest (replacing Naki-Est) to prefectures on 27 May confirmed this suspicion in the view of the opposition. It qualified the exercise as "Balkanisation" of prefectures for partisan electoral purposes.

Apparently, the ruling power elite still lacked the political will for the devolution of power and resources in order to enhance local autonomy, as demanded by the constitution, the opposition and the donor community. The demand had been included already in the renowned Global Political Accord (APG) of 2006 between the ruling party (then RPT, Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais, which transformed itself in 2012 to become UNIR, l'Union pour la République) and five major opposition parties under the aegis of the donor community, putting an end to years of severe political crisis. Apart from local elections, the demands of the opposition included a limit on presidential terms in office, a reform of the electoral system, a review of the rules applied to impunity for state representatives and the reform of the security services. All these issues should have been tackled by the High Commissariat for Reconciliation ('Haut-Commissariat à la Réconciliation et au Renforcement de l'Unité Nationale'; HCRRUN), which the government had created in March 2015 to implement the 68 recommendations of the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission ('Commission Vérité, Justice et Réconciliation'; CVJR), assisted by a civil society platform ('Plateforme citoyenne justice et Vérité'; PCJV). However, in retrospect the creation of these institutions served to delay the reforms. In July, the government delayed the implementation of these reforms once again when it referred several outstanding issues to national discussion groups. Moreover, the commitment of the government within the APG of 2006 to replace discredited prefects was implemented only half-heartedly by the replacement of prefects in February that continued the reshuffle of prefects in 2007 and 2009. Of 11 prefects replaced in February two were high-ranking militarys, i.e. Col. Biténéwé Kouma (East Mono), Mateindou Monpion (Tchaoudjo), the same holds for the sous-prefecture with Ctd Soufoloum Adam Kassim (Plaine de Mò).

In view of the political stalemate, the influential catholic church intervened once more and expressed its support for political reforms in a pastoral letter of its bishops on the occasion of the 56th anniversary of independence (27 April). Apparently, the government was not amused by this unmasked intervention. In actual fact, the relations between church and state had been strained since more than four decades, it started already well before the political opening in the early 1990s when Mgr. Philippe Kpodzro, then Archbishop of Lomé (retired in 2007), presided the transitional parliament that had been formed on the recommendations of the Sovereign National Conference of 1991, and had been dissolved by the military under the reign of Eyadéma. The relations eased off somewhat under Eyadéma's son, the present head of state, who among others had been received by the Pope Francis on 28 January in Rome. Already one year before (Mai 2015), the latter had invited the Togolese bishops to continue to make the church maintain its proper place in the process of the current institutional reforms on occasion of their visit of the Vatican. Therefore, Mgr. Barrigah-Bénissan, the president of the CVJR, used the occasion of his participation in a national workshop of the HCRRUN in Lomé on 11-15 July to underline the consensus found during the workshop. It supported the limitation of the presidential mandate to two five-year terms and uninominal elections in two rounds for both the presidential and legislative elections. Besides, the workshop made three additional recommendations: first, the suppression of the Senate, i.e. the second chamber of legislation which had remained non-operational to date, although demanded by the constitution, the organisation of local elections following the Ghanaian model, i.e. without party political candidates; third, a more equitable delimitation of electoral districts.

On 28 June, already the ANC and a smaller opposition party, the 'Alliance pour la démocratie et le développement Intégral' (ADDI), had introduced a bill in parliament to amend nine articles of the constitution in a similar vein. The bill envisaged among others a partial return to the 1992 constitution (adapted to the needs of the ruling Eyadéma regime in a 'constitutional coup' of 2002) by re-instituting the presidential term limit, but this time dating from the beginning of the president's current term, and a return to a two-round majority system for presidential elections. Additional demands included granting the power to appoint members of the Constitutional Court to parliament instead of to the head of state, who had misused the prerogative in the past in order to install his followers. However, the bill had no chance to pass in view of the parliament's domination by UNIR, which had already disproved a similar draft bill introduced in June 2014 by its own prime minister in a charade to prove his preparedness for reform.

The government remained firmly in control of the president. All so-called '*postes de souveraineté*' (security, Justice, economy, foreign affairs) were held by the ruling party. The Defence Ministry remained (as it had since 2008) in the hands of the president himself, apparently as precaution against possible coup attempts. In August, a cabinet reshuffle reduced the representation of women further from four in 2015 or 17% (already a cutback from 26% in 2013) to 13%, i.e. three women, in the ministries of commerce, Literacy and postal services.

The government grew increasingly concerned that terrorist violence would spill over into Togo's territory, given the numerous terrorist incidents in neighbouring countries. The jihadist attack in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) on 15 January, the deadly assault on the tourist resort of Grand Bassam (Côte d'Ivoire) on 13 March, following on from the jihadist siege on the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako (Mali) in November 2015, all left their mark on the political discourse. The government had deployed more than 1,000 peacekeepers within the framework of the UN Peace-keeping mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Five of them were killed in an ambush in central Mali on 29 May. Another peacekeeper from Togo and two Malian civilians were killed in November in an attack on a military convoy. The MINUSMA was considered as the deadliest UN mission, more than 30 of its troops had been killed in 2016, more than in any other UN peacekeeping mission.

The growing jihadist threat prompted both the Christian churches and the Muslim Union of Togo ('Union Musulmane du Togo'; UMT) to condemn unanimously any form of terrorism. In February, the president of the UMT, Alhaji Inoussa Bouraïma, and his entourage had already organised a week-long awareness raising campaign in the Muslim communities of all prefectures of the country against the growing terrorist threat from Islamist groups like the Nigerian Boko Haram, active in neighbouring countries. Bouraïma repeated his warnings during the opening of Ramadan festivities in the Kégué stadium in Lomé on 7 July.). Meanwhile the proliferation of more or less obscure new evangelical churches, Islamic mosques and Coran-schools with often opaque financing had reached worrisome dimensions. According to the Minister for Territorial Administration, Payadowa BoukpeSSI, about 12,000 Christian churches alone had applied for official recognition up to 9 September. The authorities promised to regulate the religious sector which, according to them, was characterised by the spread a certain anarchy.

The Human rights situation improved slightly. In 2015, The national human rights commission ('Commission Nationale des Droits de l'Homme'; CNDH) had complained of lack of resources and of the government's unwillingness to cooperate. On March 11, Parliament passed a bill to improve its organisational capacity. However, the local human rights organisation 'Collectif des Associations Contre l'Impunité au Togo' (CACIT) questioned (18.8) the independence of the CNDH in view of its domination by the ruling party and the government. On 4 May, five new members of the independent watchdog, the High Authority for Audio-visual and Communication (HAAC), were elected by the National Assembly to supplement four other new. The ANC boycotted the election because the UNIR had changed in a last-minute manoeuvre the candidate proposed by the ANC (Quist Crosby) to Octave Olympio, a member of the l'Union des Forces de Changement (UFC), the smaller party in the government coalition. The five elected members hand-picked by the head of state. One of the latter, Pitang Tchala, a former minister of communications under the late General Eyadéma, became HAAC president. In late July, the opposition accused him of corruption, alleging that he had distributed money from the presidency to silence more than a dozen journalists. In April the Council of Ministers published a draft law on the freedom of expression. Amnesty International, NGOs and CSOs were alarmed because the law mentioned sanctions that could further restrict the right to freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly and in addition introduced discriminations vis à vis foreign associations. The law has still to be adapted by parliament.

Following the first Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC, in Geneva) in 2011, Togo submitted its second national report on 17 August in order to prove its commitment to consolidating democracy and strengthening the rule of law and to show how it had implemented the 122 recommendations it had accepted in 2011. On 4 November, the UN HRC working group on the UPR adopted its report, which proposed 136 additional recommendations for the improvement of human rights and the rule of law in Togo. Child labour, particularly in the agriculture sector but also in quarries and sand mines, and human trafficking, especially of children, remained serious issues. The worst forms of child labour, including in forced domestic work, were also a result of human trafficking, according to the US Department of Labor 2015 findings published on 30 September. Also, followers of Sufi leaders, known as *talibés*, were forced to beg for money. AI stated in its November universal periodic review, titled '*A long way to go*', that the human rights situation was stagnating since its last periodic review of 2011. AI called again for the protection of the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression in Togo, complaining that security forces had killed and injured many people during peaceful demonstrations, and arrested journalist and human rights defenders during the five-year survey period. It called on the international community to be more vigilant with regard to the human rights situation in Togo.

Both government and opposition made increasing use of Twitter and Facebook to reach their followers. Internet access also improved (7.3% of the population in 2016, against 2.4% in 2008). A major reason behind the growth of Internet access was the fast-growing mobile phone penetration (about 70% in 2014; a 93% growth rate since 2009). Freedom House's overall 'Freedom in the World Rating' improved from the overall status of 'not free' in previous years to 'partly free', mainly due to the peaceful conduct

of the 2013 and 2015 elections. Freedom House's 'Freedom of the Press' for 2016 raised Togo two places, to 60th out of 100 countries moving it from the 'Not Free' category to 'Partly Free' as a result of improvements in the media environment during the 2015 election period. Opposition candidates had had equal access to the state media and enjoyed a better relationship with the regulatory body and journalists had had greater access to campaign rallies and other events. On the contrary, the Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) democracy index 2015 for Togo published in spring 2016 remained largely unchanged, ranking Togo 130th out of 167 countries with an overall low score of 3.41 out of 10. Accordingly, Togo was still classed as an 'authoritarian regime'.

In view of the apparent unwillingness of the regime to effect any meaningful political change, the population became increasingly disillusioned and alienated by their political leaders. In the 'World Database on Happiness' (an index of subjective wellbeing), the Togolese were among the lowest of the 149 countries surveyed, which was confirmed by the UN World Happiness Report 2016, which ranked Togo as one of the lowest country worldwide (155th out of 157, over the period 2013-15). Nevertheless, some improvements were undeniable. According to the Ibrahim Index of African Governance 2016, Togo was among the top five countries for the greatest improvement in overall governance over the previous decade (rank 33 of 54 in 2015; score 48.5, +9.7, 2006-2015). It ranked on the second place behind Côte d'Ivoire (+13.1), followed by Zimbabwe (+9.7), Liberia (+8.7) and Rwanda (+8.4). Yet at the indicator level Togo still registered deterioration since 2006 and varying performances in 2015.

Foreign Affairs

In February, a mid-term-evaluation of NEPAD's African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), aimed at enhancing good governance, was completed. It included stakeholder analyses of six West-African states (Togo, Ghana, Benin, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso). The auto-evaluation directed by the national APRM commission in Lomé was still in progress at the end of the year, including regional seminars for capacity building of civil society organisations (CSOs). In June, the first session of the UN Economic and Social Council to evaluate Togo's first Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) progress report took place. Togo was the first of 22 pilot countries that had committed themselves to participate in this exercise. The report found that the most pressing issues to be solved up to 2030 were youth unemployment, coastal erosion and energy supply. A detailed plan to implement the 17 SDG goals was to be included in the National Development Plan (2018-22), that was to replace the 'Stratégie de Croissance Accélérée et de Promotion de l'Emploi' (SCAPE 2013-17). The report identified CSOs and the Togolese diaspora, including its remittances, as major actors beside the state to realize the SDGs. Togo which had been a member of WTO since 1995, and which had ratified a WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) on 8 Oct. 2015 as third LDC that did approve this treaty, issued a note of acceptance of the protocol in 2016 as one out of 106 of the 164 countries that had ratified the TFA. Only four additional ratifications would be needed to enter the TFA into force. The TFA broke new ground for achieving the SDGs in least-developed countries. For the first time in WTO history, the requirement to implement the Agreement was directly linked to the capacity of the country to do so.

Togo continued to rank among the most corrupt African states (ranked 107th out of 168 countries, according to TI's Corruption Perception Index, and was also the major culprit in illicit financial transfers worldwide with illicit transfers from Togo representing the equivalent of 76.3% of GDP (2008-13) according to a country diagnostic of the World Bank, published in September. The most recent example was the Indian corporation WACEM (West African Cement) listed in the Panama Papers. WACEM is heavily involved in Togo's cement industry and has its headquarters in Tabligbo, 80 km north-east of Lomé. In addition, the opposition and media accused Prime Minister Komi Selom Klassou, who, together with other high ranking Togolese officials, was recorded in the Panama papers as a shareholder in WACEM, of involvement in fraud. This would have been especially shady because the prime minister was also ex-officio president of the supervisory board of the initiative for transparency in the extractive industries (EITI) in Togo.

In late October, an extraordinary AU joint summit on Maritime Security and Development in Africa of Heads of State and the AU Commission met in Lomé and adopted a charter on maritime security and safety. The charter was to be incorporated into the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (adopted in 2012) and aimed at combating piracy, illegal fishing and oil bunkering, as well as trafficking in drugs, arms and human beings in the Gulf of Guinea. Yet, anecdotal figures on maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea indicated already a decreasing tendency of 47 acts recorded in 2013, 33 in 2014, 29 in 2015 and 19 in the first 9 month of 2016.

Besides, Togo remained permanently reliant on foreign aid. In Early January, Germany's Minister for Economic Development and Cooperation Gerd Müller visited Lomé with a business delegation, announcing a new dawn in Togolese-German relations. Berlin considered Togo an anchor of stability in the sub-region that deserved to be rewarded accordingly with an increase in aid of 50% over the commitments made in 2014. On 20 January, Gnassingbé initialed three financial conventions with the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia). The IDB committed itself to a financial package of \$ 194 m to boost infrastructure, education and energy projects. On 23 February in New York, Helen Clark of UNDP and Gnassingbé signed an urgency programme for community development. It would be co-financed by UNDP and amount to \$ 258 m over three years (2016-18). On 27 April, the president inaugurated the Chinese Dayang motorcycle assembly plant in Notse, 96 km north of Lomé, which would produce over 3,000 bikes a year thus helping to reduce unemployment in Togo. In early May, Faure Gnassingbé announced that Togo had joined the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) as 40th African state to join the trade finance institution. The deal was expected to attract up to \$ 1 bn to support trade activities and infrastructure development in Togo. From 20 July to 10 August, Togo issued its first *sukuk*-bonds (€ 228.7 m for 10 years, with 6.5% interest), an Islamic mode of financing, compatible with the Sharia, provided by a branch of the IDB. Togo was the third state within the UEOMA (WAEMU) beside Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, to engage in this form of finance. South Africa and Niger had issued *sukuk* bonds before as well.

From 29 May to 2 June, Gnassingbé, escorted by high -ranking diplomatic and economic delegations, made an official state visit to China, which was followed by a visit to Germany on 8-13 June. By the end of the year, the EU, France and Germany had signed commitments totalling € 715 m (2014-20). Europe remained by far the largest

provider of development assistance, followed by China. In early June, Beijing had committed itself to the equivalent of € 114 m in project aid, including co-financing the second phase of construction of Lomé-Tokoin airport, which was to be a regional transport hub, similar to the Lomé deep-water port that had been expanded in recent years with Chinese aid. In addition, both Germany and China pledged substantial support for the long-stalled joint Benin-Togo hydroelectric Adjarala Dam Project on the lower Mono river. However, Gnassingbé declared the project suspended on 28 December because of the heavy additional indebtedness that the implementation of the project would have entailed. Beijing pledged itself to cancel parts of Togo's debt and to apply more favourable concessional loans in future. In return, Lomé counted among the eight (mostly African) governments that publicly supported Beijing in its dispute with the International Court of Justice in The Hague (Netherlands) concerning its territorial claims in the South China Sea. In August, Gnassingbé made an official visit to Israel, his second in less than four years, consolidating the long-standing cooperation between Togo and Israel in security expertise. In return, Lomé offered Israel support at the UN and in the International Atomic Energy Agency vis à vis international criticism of its settlements on the West Bank and its refusal to open its undeclared nuclear facilities to UN inspectors. Tel Aviv aimed at building a 'wall of friendly countries' in Africa stretching from the Ivory Coast, Togo and Cameroon in West Africa to Rwanda and Kenya in the east. Shortly after the end of August, Gnassingbé was among the 35 African heads of state attending the grand sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) in Nairobi (Kenya), with 10,000 delegates from the economic community, including 80 major Japanese companies, the first ever Japanese-African summit on African soil. Mid September, relations between Togo and the EU became strained temporarily, because the EU ambassador in Lomé, Nicolas Berlanga-Martinez, was extradited. Already in July he had openly denounced the danger of endless and fruitless dialogues within the framework of the HCRRUN instead of seeking real progress concerning the overdue institutional and constitutional reforms. However, the French Prime Minister, Manuel Valls again affirmed that Togo had moved in the right direction under President Gnassingbé when he visited Lomé on 28 October, the first visit of a French prime minister to Togo since 1989. Towards the end of the year there was ongoing speculation about the possible impact of Brexit on WAEMU, including Togo. The UK's vote out of the EU would probably weaken the Euro, and thereby the F CFA which is pegged to the Euro, against the US \$, making imports priced in US \$ like petroleum products more expensive and thus encouraging inflationary tendencies, whereas it could boost Togo's exports of phosphate, cement and cotton. In addition it revived the long-standing controversy about the pros and cons of the currency peg for African countries.

Socioeconomic Developments

Growth perspectives remained favourable with an average GDP growth rate of 5.5% (2015-18; GNI per capita: 1,228 PPP US\$). Inflation remained low at about 2%. Multidimensional poverty continued to be high, affecting 55.1% (figures for 2015) of the population although it had decreased slightly since 2011 (59%). The distribution of regional and inter-household income inequality increased with a Gini coefficient of 0.38 nationwide (2015) compared with 0.34 in 2013. The rural exodus from rural to urban

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areas continued, with about 40% of the population living in towns, an increase of 160% between 1990 and 2014. (AEO Togo, 2016). Growing youth unemployment reached worrying dimensions. The government had tried to counteract this trend with limited success since 2011 with programmes for unemployed school leavers. The National Agency of Volunteers in Togo ('Agence Nationale de Volontariat au Togo', ANVT), which had replaced PROVONAT (Programme de Promotion du Volontariat au Togo) in June 2014, had attracted 2,334 volunteers, of whom 1,092 had found employment up to 2016. Overall, 8,906 volunteers (32% women) had participated since 2011 in one of the programmes, of whom 44% had found employment. Inadequate health conditions, notably for the rural poor, were also recognised by the government as major problem. Only 54% of the population had access to clean drinking water and 34% to sanitary facilities. In August, the government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Ghana to construct a water pipeline from Sogakope on the Volta River to Lomé, in order to provide 4 m people with clean drinking water.

The budget for 2017 was adopted by parliament on 27 December, set at CFAfr 1,227.4 bn, an increase in public spending of 21.6% compared with the budget for 2016. The social sector accounted for 46.8% of expenditure but nothing was apparently provided for the overdue local elections. The ANC voted against the budget. The EIU expected the deficit to decrease from an estimated 5.8% of GDP in 2016 to 5.5% in 2018.

The environmental degradation in Togo continued, with one of the highest deforestation rates in the world. The Environmental Performance index (Yale university 2016) placed Togo at the bottom of global ranking (161th of 180 countries; score 46.1). Environmental laws and programmes had been adopted long ago but they were inadequate and the government was slow in its implementation. Deforestation rates remained high at an annual rate of 1.4% of the forest. In December, Togo and four neighbouring countries (Nigeria, Ghana, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire) agreed to ban imports of dirty fuels from Europe, which had been revealed by the Swiss campaign group, Public Eye, in September. They had discovered that retailers were exploiting weak regulatory standards in West Africa, dating from the colonial era, in order to dump diesel with toxin levels illegal in Europe and ranked by WHO among the top global health risks, associated with heart disease, lung cancer and respiratory problems. The new stricter standards limited sulphur in fuels from the current 3,000 parts per million to 50 (still above the EU limit of 10 ppm).

Economic freedom, as measured by the Heritage Foundation's Economic Freedom Index 2016, had improved substantially over the last four years (score: 53.6 – up 5.3 since 2012), making Togo's economy the 135th freest of 178 countries worldwide, and 29th of 46 countries in SSA. Thus, Togo moved for the first time out of the 'repressed' category, due to improvements in six of ten economic freedoms, notably investment, trade and business. Nevertheless, the overall Economic Freedom Status still remained 'mostly unfree'. Among the key constraints to promoting shared prosperity, the World Bank listed entry barriers, policies and regulations that distorted private economic activity, and high and distortionary taxation, as well as poor governance.

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