Minutes from the 9th Africa Club on 20 February 2013
17:30 - 19:30, VIDC Möllwaldplatz 5/3, 1040 Vienna

The Republic of Central Africa: Causes of the crisis and possible exit strategies

Inputs from

- Karla Urbana Krieger | program officer at EU-Delegation in Bangui (2010-12)
- Angela Meyer | Organization for Internat’l Dialogue and Conflict Management –IDC
- Bashir Alhaji-Shehu | Masterarbeit zu ethno-religiösen Konflikten
- Gerald Hainzl | Landesverteidigungsakademie, Wien
- Mamadou Bah Kone | Timbouctou Centre

Moderation: Otalia Sacko
Minutes: Mariam Diakite and Ibrahima Djiguine, Editing: Franz Schmidjell
30 participants from African communities, public institutions, and (Austrian) civil society

Welcome Franz Schmidjell: Africa Club is an initiative of AVP, VIDC, VAS, and Ambassador Georg Lennkh. The discussion is animated by African students, visiting scholars and representatives of the African Diaspora in Austria. The Africa Club is a kind of informal forum for the exchange of ideas on African politics in a suitable environment.

Introduction Otalia Sacko: In March 2013, the Central African Republic faced a new climax of instability. President François Bozizé was accused by the rebels of not to have complied with the peace agreement of Libreville (Jan. 10th, 2013). Within 3 months, Michel Djotodia, chief of the rebel movement “Seleka”, had conquered the capital Bangui, and forced Bozizé to flee the country. Djotodia then auto-proclaimed himself president, but was unable to put an end to the general instability.

1 Actually, the crisis began on 25th December, 2012, culminated in the flight of President Bozizé on 24th March 2013, when Bangui was taken by the rebels. Since that time, the level of violence has been varying in different places but the country has been in a situation where there was/is no more the rule of law.
lawlessness that overtook the country. After months of violence and the steady lapse of the country into chaos, nearly half of the population had fled the country, or had become part of the ever-growing number of internally displaced people. As the situation in the country worsened and threatened to turn into an ethno-religious civil war, the international community began to react to the plight of the people and pressured President Djotodia into resigning from his mandate. With the approval of the CEMAC (regional association of Central African countries), the then mayor of Bangui, Catherine Samba Panza was named president of the country.

**What do you think about the malfunctioning of the state as the cause of conflict?**

**Input: Angela Meyer** appreciated being at the meeting. She intervened on this question and brought up the idea of the absence of a functioning public sector and the inability of the state to satisfy the needs of the population as a central cause of the current conflict. She underlined that the roots of the crisis in the CAR go much deeper and that the violent change of the regime in March 2013 and the current conflict are only one of its actual manifestations. The conflict also has a clear regional dimension and the vulnerability of the neighbor countries also should be considered part of the conflict. This instability in Central Africa has many causes and many dimensions. She mentioned that the religious dimension should be seen as only one aspect of the conflict. She explained that the state was disfunctioning because beyond the capital the state was more or less inexisten, and territorial integrity was weak as the northern and northeastern part was mainly marginalized and isolated. In addition, the country is in the middle of other conflict-torn countries (Sudan, South-Sudan, Republic of Congo). And one consequence of having some parts of the country isolated was that the population took some measures of self-defense. Furthermore, there is a real legitimacy problem between the regime and the population.

**Input Mamadou Bah Kone:** To me, the fundamental roots of the conflicts in Africa either mentioned or not are and remain internal and external. These lines will be centered on the endogenous factors.

It will be constantly discussed that Africans are not taking advantage of the enormous wealth generated from the natural resources of single countries. This, of course, is due to insane internal management as a consequence of the failure of the governances; also, the ongoing interests of some partners along with systematic exploitation of the natural resources are evident.
The stability of some regions in Africa cannot be achieved in the persistence of political, economic, and social injustice. The main sources of these instabilities are poverty, and no one but African leaders need to address sustainable solutions for the economic hibernation of their respective countries. As Julius K. Nyerere said:

"Instead of internalising dependence in its various forms, we must act in the recognition of reality: nobody in this world will come to Africa's rescue; no one else is or will be interested in liberating us from poverty. [...] ...To that end we have to think about what Africa is and where it is in the world...[...] we have to think coolly, objectively, and without either illusion or bitterness...[...]"

The failure of politics led to disaster everywhere, not only in Africa, but historically in every continent. As far as Africa is concerned, the determining factor for its stability will be the quality of its governances. The transient solutions by the EU or the United Nations never reached the causes at the roots, but rather released the population from serious aggravation of conflicts to genocide in some cases.

As far as the African Union is concerned, this organization does not have the means for its actions, being composed of weak Member States overwhelmed by their own domestic political, economic, and social problems. It stands to reason that stable (political, economic, and social justice) countries are likely to form a strong and stable organization. Africa, a continent of 53 countries, cannot have a reliable organization in 53 years when it took other continents more than a century to form a union, starting only with a few countries and progressively from 1945 till now growing slowly (the European integration process) after 70 years. It is an illusion to expect a lot from the African Union, but more realistic visions would be single African countries addressing tangible and sustainable strategies to establish political, economic, and social justice if Africa still desires to end its political, ethnic, and religious conflicts.

Input Karla Urbana Krieger pointed out that since the transition from colonialism to a sovereign country, there had never been a government showing responsibility toward its people, thus there is no “institutional memory” of a functioning State, no practical experience of what it means to govern.

---

2 In: Africa within the World, edited by Adebayo ADEDEJI
As far as technical cooperation for development is concerned, the EU takes a partnership approach, as outlined in the Cotonou Agreement, meaning that it only collaborates with governments. The European Development Fund is, in fact, a remnant of colonialism, because it was originally created as temporary measure to allow the newly independent states to start functioning on their own resources. For various reasons (and maybe not always the most noble ones), progress was not as fast to come, as envisaged, and thus the EDF became the main instrument for technical cooperation, over time. For historic (colonial) reasons, it is still difficult to form “a public opinion” towards such intervention, especially in CAR, where part of the population was asking for the intervention of EU countries (France) to solve their problems, at the same time while others attacked French Embassy in the attempt to vent their anger over the failure of the State. Today, after over a year of increasing violence, the challenge is to get the right people together, in order to have a common dialogue and to consent on possible solutions, because nobody knows whom to trust anymore, and interpersonal violence is still rampant in the country.

**Participant:** South Africa tried to build up a State in CAR, but it could not help the population. France did not agree, because South Africa wanted to be involved in policy making. Furthermore, there is the issue of common funds: many donors give money to the countries, but these funds have to be reimbursed later on. This results in countries using their reserves and/or natural resources, in order to comply with the respective contracts, and reimbursement schedules. Sometimes, in African countries, people use the word “respect” as a synonym for “fear”, and when they have a president that monopolize power, the population is essentially scared into voting for such a dictator, because people are afraid to getting killed, if they disagree. The discussant ended with the statement that Europe should learn to leave Africa to its own devices (and get out).

Another **participant** pointed out that Africa and Europe do not define State in the same way and he said that we cannot ignore the fact that there is an ethical problem in this conflict. Religion is just considered as a tool in the conflict. The influence of neighboring countries was one of the major causes of the crisis in CAR, and he considered it a questionable exercise to compare African countries to the European countries.

---

3 The EU tends to give grants, i.e. not loans that need to be paid back, as the Worldbank and the IMF do.
One participant underlined that people should not always limit themselves to chastising “la France-Afrique”, but should also take a critical look at “Africa –Africa”. What is happening in African countries is not the fault of France, but the fault of (despotic) rulers / dictators that were in power for years. They are interested in the fact that there are always conflicts in African regions, and this is more likely to continue, if we do not redefine our roles as Africans in a way to improve the situation. No president in Africa is ready to bring change because of the benefits he’s reaping from the status quo. African leaders have prepared Africa for France to come and take advantage of our countries.

Another participant stated that this situation (crisis in CAR) might extend, sooner or later, to other African countries. Firstly, about the international community: We have to know what are their duties, their goals and their interests in those African countries, where they are present. Secondly, she stated that the African Union is a continuation of Europe. If the AU was indeed working well, why would it forget about the well-being of its populations?

One participant noted that CAR has always been considered one of the last countries, anybody would want to travel to because of the continuous instabilities and obstacles. However, he also stressed the fact that people have learned to live with these vagaries, and adopted strategies of survival (“Système D”). As this current crisis is not necessarily considered a substantial degradation of the continuous instability over the years, some citizens living in the back country the are asking why foreign troops are now coming to CAR. He accentuated that there are not more than 2000 Muslims left in Bangui.

Oitalia Sacko: Catherine Samba Panza has a government composed of 31 ministers 22 advisors (nine of them are ministers of State, i.e. superior to regular ministers). Where is the money coming from for such a government, and since a sizeable number of these members o government are from her native region, what does that mean for the ethnic-religious problems of the country?

Input Bashir Alhaji-Shehu started with the statement that history plays an important role in African countries. Looking at Europe, and going through its history, they have been in chaos for many centuries, and it took them hundreds of years to be where they are now. They are the reasons for their own destiny. Africa has made much progress, Africa is moving forward. But we have big problems with democracy. What is happening in Africa is not real democracy yet, and it is still going to take a long time to get to it. We tend to say, for instance, that Ghana and Namibia are democratic
countries, but if we look under the surface, we will see what is really happening in those countries. If we look at ethnicity in Africa, for instance in Nigeria, we have around 370 different ethnic groups, so it is very difficult in some countries, to live together and to be humble. Ethnicity and religion are very much interconnected, and conflicts along those lines are often due to government negligence. Looking at the Seleka group in CAR, statistics show that 80% of them are Muslims, although they constitute a minority, when compared to the total population of the country. Another point is the language issue.

**Participant:** There have been close to 100 power-overthrows (coup d'état after independence) in Central and West Africa, and the history of those coups d'état is prominent in Central Africa. Africa should not have to repeat the European experience (history), in order to solve its own problems. The problem in Africa is not democracy and not even dictatorship, and the subject of the conflict was not religion.

Q: **What do you think about the security issue and the intervention of MISCA?**

**Gerald Hainzl** informed on how many (EUFOR)-troops were expected to arrive in CAR, in the upcoming week, and named the stabilization of the Bangui airport as one of the mission’s most important tasks. Another point was that there are no existing rules on who can get a weapon. It has (always) been very easy for people to get firearms, such as AK 47s. He turned the question of who should intervene in the conflict of Central Africa back to the audience.

Q: **What do people think about the ways out of this crisis in Central Africa? What are compromises of short and long-term solutions?**

**Gerald Hainzl:** In the short term, stopping the violence and the killings; and in the long term, not only the Central African Republic, but all these countries that have security problems need to come up with alternative solutions that are supported by the populations. Because since 2002, there are foreign military troops in the country, and sometimes people do not agree with the presence of these troops in their countries.

---

4 While it is true that most of the Muslims speak Arabic there remains the question if the linguistic issue played an crucial role in CAR.

5 The name of the “Anti-balaka” milicia groups is actually derived from their motto “anti-balles d'AK(47)”, meaning that they are defiant of the bullets of the fire-arms, held by the Northern (Muslim) rebels, while they only have machetes at their disposal.
Another participant’s solution was focused on education. But this approach seems to be underestimated in some countries in Africa because teachers are not paid enough to encourage the education process. If kids had proper schooling, they have a chance to change something about the future of their countries.

One participant’s solution was to develop a respectful approach. Everywhere in Africa there is a dualistic way of ruling people. We see the Eurocentric way of doing things, but we must develop the same mentality for Africans to find their own solutions. One of the most successful interventions was in Liberia. Its solution included the reduction of outside influence, and people had to learn to stand on their own. ECOMOG can do better than the European troops, in solving the problems in the Central African Republic.

Also, we must look at the mechanisms of humanitarian assistance, peace building and peace enforcement. It is impossible to live apart from each other. We live in a world of globalization where everything is more connected than ever before. Since the EU has the technical know-how, the money, and the resources, they should support the AU, and send their troops, so that solutions can work. The immediate solution could be, to have a peace agreement to stop the hostility; another alternative, would be the grassroots-development, and to put some infrastructures on ground, in order to help people to get back to work.

Another participant added that help from EU is necessary, and people should be brought together to organize a national dialogue, like what happened in Rwanda.

In African countries, there are often problems after elections, and people carry guns and get support from international communities. Where did the support for the Seleka come from?, Who provided their guns? Africans should be responsible, and they must respect the authority that is elected to execute the power.

In many cases, Africans do not know their own rights, and they still think they are slaves to some sort of conditions defined by outside powers. Only if that kind of thinking stops, can Africa take her destiny in her own hands and solve her problems.
Georg Lennkh, former Ambassador of Austria, and a leading figure in the Great Lakes Commission to resolve the Burundi crisis considered the meeting to be very interesting, and mentioned that lots of things have changed since 1989 in Africa. Good democracy is gaining ground, and the OAU/AU which is barely 10 to 12 years old, has made some incredible progress, although there are still some difficulties, particularly concerning the financial issue. African problems must be solved by Africans, although it would take more time, if no outside help is accepted. ECOMOG is considered by Georg Lennkh as a good prospect, and they can do what the EU is doing, given time. African conflicts can only be solved by Africans. The whole conflict in CAR did not start with a religious movement, but gained momentum along ethno-religious lines, as religion is an apt means to get more people involved in social mobilization. So, as a short term solution, the UN Security Council should grant the MISCA the conditions provided in article 7/41, and if that does not work, article 7/42 of the UN Charter should be applied.

Franz Schmidjell referred to three aspects of the debate. The first is the demand that Europe should get out of Africa. We have to differentiate between development cooperation and economic interests. Even if development cooperation and peace-keeping are stopped, the economic ties will remain. Another weakness of donors and NGO’s is the lack of knowledge of the local context, and of the countries’ historic developments, to understand the situation on the ground. There is little understanding of cultures and identities. Furthermore there should be a better understanding of the tension and contradictions between peace-building on the one hand and state-building on the other hand, for example if you look to the violence and local power politics in state formation.

Otalia Sacko: Before closing the meeting, she provided an example concerning Ivory Coast which had more or less the same problems, with regards to bringing people together, and luckily, after several meetings of reconciliation and dialogue, a consensus was worked out, and the economy got better. So she hoped that some of these measures could also help CAR to get out of its crisis.

Article 41 The Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures. These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations.

Article 42 Should the Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members of the United Nations.