



**Protocol of the Africa Club meeting, held on May 16th, 2019, 17:00-19:00
Zentrum für internationale Entwicklung, Sensengasse 3, 1090 Wien**

“Sudan. The Unfinished Revolution”

With input from:

- Ishraga Mustafa Hamid**, Sudanese writer, political scientist and activist
- Kamal Hussein Ahmed**, former UNIDO Managing Director
- Ibrahim Hakim**, Sudanese restaurant owner
- Andreas Melan**, Head of Africa Department, Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, ambassador
- Gerald Hainzl**, Peace and conflict researcher, National Defence Academy Austria

Moderation: Otafia Sacko (International consultant for sustainable development and migration, International Centre for Migration Policy Development)

Protocol: Adjima TONDJI NIAT; **Editor:** Franz Schmidjell

Past protocols: <http://www.vidc.org/themen/afrika/afrika-club/protokolle/>

Further articles:

[Sudan: Stopping a Spiral into Civil War](#), Int'l Crisis Group, June 7, 2019

[George Clooney: How Congress Can Help Stop the Killing in Sudan](#), The Sentry, June 11, 2019

[Sudan's Enduring Transition: Evolving Arrangements after the Fall of Bashir](#), PSRP PA-X Spotlight, Jan Pospisil, 2019

The Afrika Club is a joint initiative of Radio Afrika TV (RATV), the Association of African Students in Austria (VAS Österreich), the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC) and Ambassador Georg Lennkh.



Franz Schmidjell (VIDC) welcomes participants, introduces the Africa Club and outlines its purpose: to bring together the different perspectives and views of the African diaspora, public institutions and Austrian civil society, including academia.

The aim of today's round table is not only to analyse the present situation and possible future scenarios in Sudan, but also to reflect on our roles as diaspora, civil society and government institutions. The title - "The unfinished revolution" - refers to the fact that these changes are an ongoing process. There will be many challenges to overcome during this long journey of transition. He introduces the moderator, **Otalia Sacko**.

Moderator: Otalia Sacko is an international consultant for sustainable development and migration, with Ivorian-French roots. She makes welcome remarks, introduces the main speakers and explains she is there on behalf of Radio Afrika.

Ms Sacko announces the discussion agenda:

1. Inside the revolution
2. Implications for the various actors (regional, local and international)
3. Ways forward

Inside the revolution

Otalia Sacko introduces **Ishraga Mustafa Hamid**. She asks her point of view on this revolution: on its roots, and what triggered the Sudanese people to overcome their fear?

Ishraga Mustafa Hamid: Since 1989, many restrictions and interdictions have existed, especially for women. The presence of political Islam in the regime had negative consequences for the country and it was difficult for the population to rise up. Other political parties were not represented and this poses problems for future negotiations. She mentions the country's wealth (e.g. through oil), and wonders where the money went.

Women have been active since Sudan's independence. During the 30 years since al-Bashir came to power, many women – including herself - had to leave the country for political reasons. They have been networking, lobbying and communicating with foreign organisations and institutions.

During the next fortnight, much preparation will be required in order to strengthen the democratic process and civil society. She had asked her 150-member, youth WhatsApp network in Sudan whether they wanted to leave the country. They replied that if there was democracy and they had good jobs, there was no reason to leave. Many who have left would like to return. Women respondents said that first they want peace and justice. Many young people have been killed or injured. They want all responsible persons to be tried in court, not only al-Bashir.

Otalia Sacko asks **Kamal Hussein Ahmed** for his point of view.

Kamal Hussein Ahmed worked in Sudan and was later managing director at the UNIDO. He has good connections in Sudan and with international institutions. He says 30 years under Omar al-Bashir was a long time and people born during this period grew up knowing only this regime. But recently media, social media in particular, began to spread information and people began to realise things were wrong: socially, economically, with the military and with regards to human rights.



Even though people were educated and trained, unemployment was spreading. Islamist fundamentalists tried to prevent the changes, but they were unsuccessful.

Otalia Sacko introduces Ibrahim Hakim, a businessman and activist in Vienna.

Ibrahim Hakim: Mass protests started in Sudan at the end of 2018 after subsidy cuts led to price increases for staple foods and transport. President Omar al-Bashir tried to reverse the cuts, but the protests continued. The demonstrators lost their fear of the security forces and demanded democratic change.

The Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), a coalition of opposition parties, and the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), which spearheaded the uprising together with youth and women's groups, called for the protests to continue until the military handed over power to a civil government. On April 27th, the army and protest movement agreed on a "joint council".

There was a change in the people's mentality, and they overcame their fear of protest, including the women. Sudanese social media made a strong impact. The government paid little attention to its influence until it was too late and people were already protesting in the streets.

Local, regional and international actors

Otalia Sacko introduces **Gerald Hainzl** and asks him what he sees as the main obstacles and/or challenges facing Sudan. What could help to enable a peaceful transition?

Gerald Hainzl: The Sudanese would like to see a peace dividend. Economic and political changes are necessary in the next few years so people feel rewarded for their engagement and can participate in political life. The inclusion of the protest movement will be a challenging process.

In terms of external relations, promises were made to the Gulf States by the military council that nothing would change: that Sudanese troops will remain in Yemen, for example. Nevertheless, there will be new dynamics. Neighbouring countries and international actors will look out for their own interests (oil, gold) in a more visible way. These external and internal interests could create obstacles for the future of Sudan.

Although it looks like a coup d'état, it could be seen as a pre-coup d'état as the military establishment saw the signs and wanted to be first to act in order to maintain their influence.

Otalia Sacko asks **Ambassador Andreas Melan**, head of the Africa Department at the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, how Austria perceives the changes and transition, and how the international community, the European Union in particular, is responding?

Andreas Melan (European Union perspective): After 30 years of the al-Bashir regime, there is no normal relationship between the EU and Sudan. Sudan is not part of the Cotonou Agreement, so the country receives no money from the EDF (European Development Fund) and there is no institutional relationship with Sudan. Sudan is isolated because of the trade embargo sanctioned by the US and followed by European enterprises.



This does not mean that the EU is not interested: Sudan is one of the major players in Africa. But the country is fragile, due to over militarization. If Sudan becomes a “failed state” like Somalia, there are many risks and much is at stake. Therefore, the EU is paying careful attention to the latest developments in Sudan.

The EU is siding with the African Union (AU) and will not accept the switch from one military regime to another, as the actual council remains a continuation of al-Bashir’s regime. The EU demands an inclusive and predominantly civil government.

How should it work? The EU is amazed and welcomes the negotiations by the Sudanese mediation committee, which has agreed on transitional institutions. It is important that Sudan enters into a real transitional phase, so that sanctions can be lifted, and investments and new agreements can be made in order to unlock funds from the EU. We need to stabilise the civil transitional government and create a dividend that satisfies the Sudanese people.

Otalia Sacko mentions that on May 1st, the African Union's Peace and Security Council noted the military's failure to transfer power to a civilian authority "with deep regret" and gave them "an additional period of up to 60 days" to do so. She asks **Mr. Kamal Hussein Ahmed** how he sees the role of AU in this transition phase and whether he thinks they will support Sudan to come up with a new transitional government?

Ahmed states that the role of the AU in this process is important. The AU doesn’t agree with a coup d’état. In two weeks, the military should have passed the power to the civilians. However, as Egypt is the current president of the AU and has its own interest in keeping the military in power, there was pressure to prolong the period to two months. Nevertheless, he is optimistic that the AU wants to play a role in banishing the military and helping the Sudanese people to have democratic and human rights.

Questions: Why is dictatorship always supported by Europe? Does the European Union have political or economic interests in Sudan?

Andreas Melan refers to the EU sanctions and says the EU has little cooperation with Sudan. The EU wants to help the country develop through technology. However, at the moment it is not possible to begin cooperation programs because it is not clear where the country is headed.

For **Gerald Hainzl** it is too early to lift the sanctions. It would be not advisable to dispense such a powerful instrument while members of the old regime remain in power.

Sanctions and restrictions: On 15 March 1994, the Council of the EU imposed restrictive measures in relation to Sudan. On 30 July 2004, in view of the humanitarian crisis and widespread human rights violations, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1556 (2004) imposing restrictive measures on Sudan. On 18 July 2011, the Council of the EU adopted restrictive measures in relation to Sudan.

When Washington lifted 20-year-old trade, economic and financial sanctions on Sudan in October 2017, citing progress on counter-terrorism and humanitarian access. But restrictions linked to the conflict in Darfur and Washington’s continued listing of Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism. Therefore businesses are unable to operate dollar transactions (channelled through Dubai (UAE) with dirhams), insurance companies are cut off from the reinsurance market and the local airline is virtually grounded for lack of spare parts. Washington will block access to funding from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, support that Sudan badly needs to pull out of inflation.



The vision of the protest movement

Ishraga Mustafa Hamid adds that, of course, there is a vision. There are organisations, such as the Alliance for Freedom and Change (AFC), which have a program and know how to implement it. She fears the role played by the African Union, which she considers negative for Sudan, but hopes Europe will play a positive role in the democratisation process.

A Sudanese woman states that this revolution started differently: due to awareness it started from the ground, mainly from young people, who know what they want, and have a vision. There are hopes for a new Sudanese civil government, which would include professionals, not only politicians. People are demanding their rights. The next six months will be dedicated to solving problems resulting from the war. Militias are creating the biggest problems in Sudan: they are well-funded and well-equipped and there is not only one official army. What we are going to do with them is a big question.

Young Sudanese answers that all they want right now is freedom. It is hard to say what will happen as the state of the country is too fragile.

Otalia Sacko asks if the EU should support civil society in Sudan, financially or otherwise?

Ibrahim Hakim: People are intelligent. Five months ago, they were dying in the streets while music was playing on official radio and TV stations, but they have managed to be heard. They don't need the European Union's help and money.

Ishraga Mustafa Hamid mentions migration. Europe does not want illegal or excessive migration, so it should support civil society in Sudan, as this is also in its own interest.

Andreas Melan says Europe has no direct interest in the crisis in Sudan, unlike other countries, such as China, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, etc.. Most of these countries have no interest in democracy or human rights, issues which render dialogue difficult. In Europe, civil societies and the people put pressure on governments to defend human rights.

Andreas Melan adds that the EU wants to better understand the current situation, and the role of the militias in particular. He hopes the situation will go in the direction of a civil government and that the EU will not recognise a military government. He hopes the international community is aware of what is happening in Sudan.

Franz Schmidjell makes following points:

- Support for Sudan: Despite sanctions against the government and/or military, he thinks it is possible to channel support, e.g. through civil society or the diaspora.
- European interests: He thinks the problem is that there is a lack of coherence within the foreign relations of the EU, due to different interests. While development cooperation promotes democracy, human rights and participation by civil society, other actors, such as trade departments, sometimes have contradicting (economic) objectives. Short term stability is often supported at the expense of democracy and human rights.
- Although there was no official financial support for the al-Bashir regime, various reports claim repressive security forces indirectly received training, equipment or other support from the Khartoum process and EU Africa Trust Fund.(see also: [ROCK](#) and [GIZ](#)). Europe is criticised for its double standards, not only in Sudan.



A member of the diaspora agrees that the EU now has an important role to play and sanctions are still necessary. **A young woman** comments that she feels the younger generation is sceptical about what will happen. She does not think there should be external intervention. **A young man** agrees with that opinion. He says he appreciates the support but thinks EU sanctions should be lifted.

Gerald Hainzl. The Sudanese should be asked about a roadmap for the political settlement of the current violent conflict. What should be done and achieved? What about new institutions and general elections?

Ishraga Mustafa Hamid: There are already proposals for a new constitution. Diversity is important in Sudan. There are many religions and languages, and people want a separation of religion and politics. Diaspora groups use social media to find out what people are thinking. She wants to open a research center in Sudan.

Ibrahim Hakim says that the Sudanese diaspora in Europe and USA has helped a lot, through financial support for example. As yet however, the diaspora has no voice in the transition. **Ishraga Mustafa Hamid** adds that they are participating indirectly, via social media discussions for instance.

A young man thinks too much hope is placed on the European Union and that the African Union should take more responsibility. He agrees on the lifting of sanctions.

The way forward

Otalia Sacko asks about the way forward, possible scenarios, and for concrete proposals for next six months to one year. What can Austria, Europe and other countries do?

Ishraga Mustafa Hamid asks how the protest movements and opposition are making progress with negotiations. But she is worried that young people are still being killed. There is still no structural change. She states that the Islamists make it difficult to form a civil government. There are challenges as not all opposition groups are represented in the liberation movement. She has big hopes however. The Sudanese don't want foreign intervention, but rather solidarity.

Gerald Hainzl is cautiously optimistic. A roadmap for the next three years is necessary to control the process, until a democratic and hopefully freely-elected government is in place.

Andreas Melan: A positive scenario would be the handover of power to an inclusive civil government. The EU welcomes the changes in Sudan. It is an achievement and he congratulates them. When stability is achieved, with new structures, development will follow. The EU has to reestablish its relationship with the country so they can use the funds available to help strengthening civil society, which would be beneficial.

Austria has shown an interest in supporting the development of the private sector and is staying away from funding by Austrian state institutions. The main obstacles are the US sanctions, which have been in place since Sudan was designated a terrorist state.

In the long run, Austria could use its expertise and instruments in conflict prevention. There is the possibility of bringing people here for training. In future, the EU will make a big effort to monitor and help organise elections. It will be important for the African Union to be involved. There are programs and instruments to help the situation develop in a positive direction.



Kamal Hussein Ahmed:

- The protection of people is important. The Islamic fundamentalists have many connections, which is dangerous. The next step would be economic development.
- Sudanese living abroad also have a role to play: communicating with civil societies, using their influence on the political and economic parties of their respective countries, and assisting in that way, by drawing a real picture of the situation rather than the one shown by television and other sources.
- He is confident that the African Union has a major role to play as this is in their interest. He was shocked by the president of the council's decision to suspend and postpone an agreement reached only 24 hours earlier as a result of the objections of Islamic fundamentalists.
- The military should not be part of a transitional government.

Franz Schmidjell concludes and sums up the discussion as follows:

- We should respect that young Sudanese in particular do not want foreign intervention. Europeans should establish dialogue on equal terms. If the Sudanese define their wishes with a roadmap, we can enter into a dialogue for possible cooperation.
- We have a role in communication. The diaspora in particular should use its information and expertise to communicate with European media and decision makers.
- The European Union and Austria should consider what kind of strategic approach and programs are required to support knowledge transfer and/or to develop return/circular migration programs.
- Young people need a future. They need decent jobs: Austria and/or EU should assist in tracking down the billions of dollars that have left and are still leaving the country. Researchers in Sudan have no money to fund their work. Investigative journalism is essential to discover where the money went and to retrieve it.

He thanks everyone for their participation and contribution to the debate: the speakers, **Otalia Sacko** and the public. He says that this will not be the last event, that the VIDC is open to further ideas and ready to assist within its possibilities..