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# *Togo*

## *Politics, economy and society in 2009*

Dirk Kohnert <sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Domestic politics in Togo in 2009 was dominated by the preparation for the decisive 2010 presidential elections and by the aggravating family feud within the ruling Gnassingbé clan. In April, the latter culminated in an alleged coup plot of Kpatcha Gnassingbé, the junior half-brother of the Head of State, which involved also other members of the 'family' which were imprisoned without official arraignment until the end of the year. The international donor community rewarded political reforms. Economic growth was negatively affected by the global economic and financial crisis.

**Résumé:** La politique intérieure au Togo en 2009 a été dominée par la préparation des élections présidentielles décisives de 2010 et par la querelle de famille aggravante au sein du clan Gnassingbé au pouvoir. En avril, ce dernier point culminait dans un présumé complot de Kpatcha Gnassingbé, demi-frère cadet du chef de l'État, qui impliquait également d'autres membres de la «famille» qui étaient emprisonnés sans inculpation officielle avant la fin de l'année. La communauté internationale des donateurs a récompensé les réformes politiques. La croissance économique a été négativement affectée par la crise économique et financière mondiale.

**Keywords:** countrywide study, Togo, West Africa, domestic politics, foreign affairs, socio-economic development

**JEL-code:** A14, F35, N97, O17, O55, Z13

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Domestic politics was dominated by the preparation for the decisive 2010 presidential elections and by the aggravating family feud within the ruling Gnassingbé clan. In April, the latter culminated in an alleged coup plot of Kpatcha Gnassingbé, the junior half-brother of the Head of State, which involved also other members of the 'family' which were imprisoned without official arraignment until the end of the year. The international donor community rewarded political reforms. Economic growth was negatively affected by the global economic and financial crisis.

## **Domestic Politics**

With the start of the year, the political heavyweights of the country were keen to get a pole position in the **race for the decisive presidential elections** in early 2010. The upcoming elections were considered a litmus test of the sincerity of the regime's commitment to democratisation. The rigged presidential elections of 2005 had brought the acting president, Faure Gnassingbé in power by means of a constitutional coup, massive political repression, accompanied by widespread violence with hundreds of death and the displacement of some 40,000 political refugees. In a hardly disguised pre-election campaign the President travelled the country in January and tried among others to unite the traditional chiefs behind the incumbent and leader of the ruling 'Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais' (RPT). In a meeting of 329 district chiefs at Kara (29.1.), he announced the doubling of the annual allowances for these influential 'guardians of customary law' which was loudly applauded. This was well in line with the policy of his father Eyadéma who had instrumentalized traditional institution for his particular purpose already through decades of autocratic rule.

However, the head of the major opposition party 'Union des Forces du Changement' (UFC), Gilchrist Olympio, counted on enhanced chances to win the race as well. Unlike the parliamentary polls of 2007, each vote will have equal weight in the presidentials, without favouring the sparsely populated northern strongholds of the RPT. The latter had been lost by the opposition in the legislative elections mainly because of the then newly introduced voting system of proportional representation with medium and small constituencies, tailored to meet the interests of the ruling party. Thus, the **opposition** coalition of UFC and 'Comité d'Action pour le Renouveau' (CAR), which won the majority of votes in 2007 (45 per cent; UFC 37, CAR 8, compared with 39 of the RPT), would have a real chance to win, if only they would rally behind a single candidate. In January, both opposition parties agreed in principle to back a common candidate, as already practised in 2005, when G. Olympio was barred from participation. The RPT parliamentary majority had effected changes in the constitution of 2002 and in the electoral code of 2005, in order to prevent a showdown between the Gnassingbé clan and his major adversary, the son of the first Togolese president Sylvanus Olympio, allegedly assassinated by Eyadéma Gnassingbé in 1963. In February the concerned parties started to negotiate the removal of the strict residence and single nationality requirements from the electoral code which barred the head of the UFC and other

aspirants of the opposition from standing as presidential candidate. A body of concertation (Cadre Permanent de Dialogue et Concertation, CPDC), created in 2006 to bridge the long-standing cleavages between government, ruling party and opposition, met again on 4.2. to solve this and other controversial issues. However, this was of little avail in view of the CDPCs domination by the ruling power. Negotiations ended in a stalemate after months of fruitless haggling. Finally, the warring parties arrived under considerable pressure from the donor community at a partial consensus mediated by the president of Burkina Faso. The controversial appointment of Henri Kolani as head of the new CENI was revoked in favour of the independent candidate Issifou Taffa Tabiou, and a **new electoral code** was presented at Ouagadougou on 8.8. The Togolese parliament adopted the code two weeks later (21.8.) unanimously. This opened the way for Gilchrist Olympio to stand as a candidate. On the base of the electoral code, a new independent electoral commission ('Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante', CENI) with a more balanced composition was created. The 17 members of the CENI, sworn in on 1.9., announced two weeks later (18.9.) the calendar for the upcoming elections to be held on 28 February 2010. The schedule included the crucial revision of the chronically deficient electoral list (delayed by one month - 14.12. to 10.1.10 - because of the quarrel about the new CENI chief, and the framework for the electoral campaign, 13 to 26 February 2010). However, there was still one lingering controversial point, which could not be resolved up to the end of the year, not least because the opposition put it rather late on the agenda: according to an amendment of the 1992 constitution, pushed through by the RPT majority in 2002, the presidential election was to be held in one single round, contrary to internationally recognized standards that prefer two rounds in order to give the opposition the chance to unite behind a single candidate in the run-off on the base of the respective performance of different candidates in the first round. Repeated threats of major opposition parties to boycott the elections, if the regulations of the 1992 constitution were not re-introduced, were to no avail. This led to a **split of the opposition** on the issue of a sole presidential candidate which had serious repercussions on its chances to win. The CAR declared (21.10.) that it would accept all but a candidacy of G. Olympio who – although an experienced and charismatic politician - was said to polarize politics in view of his antagonistic relations with the Gnassingbé clan. The latter was not only responsible for the murder of Olympio's father but also for an assassination attempt on the leader of the UFC himself during an election campaign in Northern Togo in 1992. At that time 12 people of Olympio's campaign team were killed in an ambush at Soudou, he himself escaped only seriously injured over the Benin border. In the third trimester, other candidates from the opposition announced their intention to stand for the presidentials: among them, Kofi Yamgnane, who announced his candidature on 3.9. Although Togolese citizen, born in Bassar, Northern Togo, he lived in France; but because of his political career as first African migrant who became major in France and later-on French secretary of State for Social Affairs in the government of late François Mitterand (1991-93), he seemed to be a favourite candidate of the Quai d'Orsay. At about the same time veteran opposition leader Léopold Gnininvi from the Convention démocratique des peuples africaines (CDPA), the last opposition member in the cabinet, resigned from his post as minister

of state for industry and health in order to be able to stand for the presidentials as he did already in 1998.

Nonetheless, the split of the opposition was outmatched by the long-standing but aggravating **family feud within the ruling Gnassingbé clan** between 'modernizers' and conservative hardliners who wanted to preserve the prerogatives of the Eyadéma regime. On the verge of the departure of the President to China, his most powerful younger half-brother Kpatcha Gnassingbé, who got deposed as defence minister one year before (Dec. 2007), apparently plotted a **coup d'état** (12.4). There were well-founded rumours that a foreign intelligence service had alerted the President in advance. In a nightly shoot-out at Kpatcha's residence in Lomé between his bodyguards and the Rapid Intervention Force, under the command of Colonel Abalo F. Kadanga, a Ewe from Atakpamé, married to an Eyadéma daughter, who remained loyal to the President, several of Kpatcha's guards were killed. The armed intervention of another half-brother of the President, lieutenant colonel Rock Gnassingbé, commander of a tank regiment of reconnaissance who was quite close to Kpatcha, saved him but only temporarily. When the latter searched in vain for asylum before the gates of the US embassy three days later, he got arrested along with two other family members (Essolizam a third brother, and captain Bagou-Badgi Gnassingbé, a cousin of the President) and other presumed coup plotters (18 soldiers and ten civilians). The same day (15.4.) they were accused by the public prosecutor Robert Bakaï of staging a rebellion and undermining state security with ample proof of Kpatcha being the ringleader. Kpatcha and others denied the accusation and considered themselves victims of a conspiracy staged in order to sideline them in the ongoing power battle. Even within the opposition, there were concerns that the coup plot was not genuine and basic human rights of the accused not guaranteed. Although the Army Chief of Staff, General Zakari Nandja had remained loyal to the President he got replaced, but he was offered the newly created post as minister for water and sanitation. General Essofa Ayeva, former chief of staff in the president's office, became the new Army chief. Although other high ranking army officers, as well as the secretary-general of the RPT, publicly announced their support for the acting regime, the cracks within the power elite, composed of the Gnassingbé family, the RPT and the security services, became once more apparent. This posed a serious threat to the transition process. It could not be ruled out that the hardliners would derail the ongoing democratization process as soon as they would recognize defeat in the upcoming elections.

To be on the sure side, Faure Gnassingbé created a special Force Sécurité Election Présidentielle 2010 (FOSEP) in view to secure his own military force besides the army in case of conflict between modernizers and hardliners within the regime. Its official task was to 'guarantee security before, during and after the elections'. As head of this force, he nominated the chief of the Gendarmerie National, lieutenant-colonel Yark Damehane. The latter was notorious because of his involvement in the brutal repression of opponents during the 2005 presidential elections and figured on the index of a UN report on human rights violations in Togo.

In November, one of the former representatives of the hardliners, Ernest Gnassingbé, died (12.11). This eldest son of Eyadéma had been commander of the 'red berets' parachutist battalion of Camp Landja (Kara), renowned for its brutal suppression of the democratic transition in the early 1990s, including involvement in extra-legal killings of heads of opposition (e.g. Marc Atidépé) and attempted assassination of Gilchrist Olympio and his entourage in 1992. The burial of Ernest in Pya, the home village of the Gnassingbé family, in absence of incarcerated family members like Kpatcha Gnassingbé and other assumed coup plotters, highlighted again the deep division within the Gnassingbé clan.

The **human rights situation** improved further. On 23.6. the parliament voted unanimously for the abolition of the death penalty. It thus became the 15th member of the AU and the 94<sup>th</sup> country worldwide to denounce death penalty for all crimes. However, the bill was rather symbolic. In real practice, legal executions had ceased already 30 years ago. The thorny problem remained that most human right violations in Togo committed or tolerated by the state had been extra-legal killings caused by political persecution. A technical team, supported by the UNHCR, toured the country from March to July to gather opinions on human rights violations of the past, the truth about the perpetrators, the longstanding political culture of impunity, and reconciliation. A truth and reconciliation commission (Commission Vérité, Justice et Réconciliation, CVJR or TRC) was officially established on 29.5, its mandate had been discussed controversially already one year before. Meant to investigate human rights violations from 1958 up to the bloody political persecutions of 2005, it proved to be a paper tiger right from the beginning. The CVJR had no power to put an end to impunity of the perpetrators of human right violations nor to offer amnesty or reparations, tasks which remained prerogative of the state. Its 11 members represented different groups of the civil society, notably religious leaders, but ought not to include political parties. In early December its president, Mgr. Nicodème A. Barrigah, Catholic bishop of Atakpamé, announced the suspension of the commission's hearings until further notice in order not to be accused of interference in election politics.

## **Foreign Affairs**

On 13 March **France** and Togo signed a new defence and security agreement. It followed the policy announced already one year before by the French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, of a break with the colonial past. Casually, it was also meant to stop the practice of secret clauses which had permitted France to intervene in order to guard the status quo and the regime in place, as stipulated in the defence pacts of 1958 and 1963. The new military cooperation focused on training, equipment and support of UN and AU peacekeeping operations. In addition, Paris cancelled Togo's bilateral trade finance debts (US \$ 104m) in October. The traditional special relations between Paris and Lomé cracked temporarily, when the minister of Foreign Affairs, Koffi Esaw, expelled a high

ranking diplomat of the French embassy (7.12., the first time since independence). Éric Bosc, first secretary of the embassy, was accused of interfering in internal affairs, notably, of backing Kofi Yamgnane, a francophone politician born in Bassar (Northern Togo), considered as a rival candidate to the President in the upcoming elections. Following the usual diplomatic tit for tat, Paris immediately retaliated by demanding the depart of a Togolese diplomat in Paris.

A five-day state visit of the President to **Germany** in June (16. to 21.6.) opened a new chapter in German – Togolese relations after 15 years of political tensions with the dictatorial regime in Lomé. Chancellor Angela Merkel praised political reforms effected under the government of Faure Ganssingbé. Three months before (12.3), the German ambassador Alexander Beckmann had announced the cancellation of bilateral debt to the tune of 18m € (treaty signed already on 2.12.09) within the framework of the HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) initiative and Paris Club negotiations.

The head of the **EU** commission's delegation in Togo, Filiberto C. Sebregondi, commended the effort for democratization and the spirit of dialogue between political actors in Togo as well during his farewell speech (4.3.). The new head of the EU in Lomé, Patrick Spirlet, underlined in December, in view of the heated debate between government and opposition on the controversial issue of one tour elections, that the EU remained indifferent in this question because it considered it to be an internal affair. The **UN Human Rights Office** (OHCHR/HCDH) in Togo, established in 2006 in the wake of the violent 2005 elections, to help build national capacities to protect human rights, announced on 3.12. its strategy to contribute to peaceful elections. This included training programs for the security forces and the installation of election monitoring centres all over the country. In early November, the OHCHR had started already the formation of 960 young 'promoters of non-violence' in the Kara region (the home region of the Gnassingbé clan) who should propagate the respect of human rights during the election period by conciensizing their peers for a non-violent election campaign.

**China** and Togo pledged once more to enhance its already close cooperation, including upgrading of relations between the two militaries, during a six-day official visit of the army chief Essofa Ayevea in China on the invitation of his Chinese counterpart, the chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army Chen Bingde (15.11.). Early November, the minister of Economics and Finances, Adji Othèth Ayassor, signed a loan with the China Exim Bank (CEB) to the tune of 165m US \$ to be paid back in 20 years (with 7 years grace period). It was mainly designed for the building and renovation of the road infrastructure in Lomé (dual-carriage ring-road connecting the harbour with the Ghanaian border and the national route to the north), Alédjo, Défalé (Kara province) and Tanjouaré (Savanes). The works will be executed by the China Road and Bridge Corporation which had already built the bridges of Togblékopé, Ilikopé and Amakpapé. In March it was announced that a China parastatal Sinohydro had won a US\$ 282m construction contract for the 96 MW Adjarala dam, the second largest barrage on the Mono river, jointly owned by Togo and Benin. The CEB had pledged to contribute to

the finance of the dam with US\$ 24m in exchange for supply contracts. International rights organizations cautioned against negative impacts of the project, including displacement of over 8,000 people (75 and 25 per cent in Togo and Benin respectively) and increased coastal erosion.

In early September, the President made a two-day official visit to **Ghana**. His Ghanaian counterpart John Atta-Mills promised to assist Togo in the conduct of peaceful and free and fair elections, based on Ghana's proven record as a model of democratic elections in West Africa. This indicated an improvement of bilateral relations in view of the long-standing strained ties between the Ganassingbé clan and the mentor of Atta-Mills, ex-president Jerry Rawlings. The latter had still in December 2008 accused Lomé of undue interference in the Ghanaian presidential elections, by mobilizing traditional Ewe chiefs on both sides of the Southern border against the party (NDC) of Rawlings and Atta-Mills. The excellent relations with **Burkina Faso** were once more recognized by all stakeholders on occasion of the mediation by President Blaise Compaoré between the Togolese government and the opposition. The former made also a visit to Lomé in order to facilitate negotiations between the protagonists (28.7.). External relations with other neighbouring African countries improved as well. At the eve of the year (29.12.) six West African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Togo) met in Lomé to ratify the **Volta basin charter**. It envisaged to share and develop the water resources of the Volta, to reduce potential environmental and socio-economic problems with trans-national implications, like soil erosion or flooding, and to avoid conflicts that might arise out of egoistic national utilization of the basin's resources. In August, Faure Gnassingbé participated in a special AU summit on conflict settlement in Tripoli, organized by the acting AU president and Libyan leader Col. Muammar al Gaddafi, after attending the celebrations of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Libyan revolution. The latter – an old friend of the Eyadéma family - had already tried in vain in 2008 to mediate in the row between Kpatacha and Faure Gnassingbé.

## **Socioeconomic Developments**

Economic **growth** was influenced by the global economic downturn, notably diminishing exports, remittances and investment. Real GDP grew by about 1.8 per cent, inflation was down to 2,1 per cent. Re-exports, which constitute more than one-third of total exports because of the countries position as an international transit hub were especially affected. But also **cotton** production, a major export earner, declined by 25 per cent to a historical low of about 30,000 t. Farmers were reluctant to plant in view stagnant farm gate prices and unfavourable weather, the planted area plunged by 23 per cent to 42,579 ha. The impact of this downturn was especially felt by the rural poor in view of the gloomy general quality of life index that remained nearly unchanged during the past 20 years due to the ongoing political crisis and subsequent curtails of aid. Togo was ranked at the bottom 20 countries worldwide (144<sup>th</sup> out of 160 according to EIU). Nevertheless, the donor community was satisfied with the **economic policy** of the



government which honoured its obligations from the poverty and growth facility program (PRGF, April 2008 to April 2011). In its third review (November) an IMF mission attested that the country was on track. Therefore the IMF released further US\$ 14m, summing up its PRGF loans to 93m out of 141m earmarked for the whole three year period. Other donor missions followed suit, remarkably the EU granted an unconditioned budget aid (US\$ 22m) in November for the 2009 **budget**. Overall donor funding of the budget was estimated to rise from 2.2 per cent of GDP in 2009 to 4.3 in 2010. The estimated budget deficit of 2.9 per cent of GDP in 2009 was condoned by the donors in view of overall compliance.

In order to improve incomes of an estimated 4m people working in agriculture (2006 government census) the government pledged to invest US\$ 178m for a **second 'green revolution'**. Donors were reminded at a donors meeting in Kara (30.1) to honour their obligations to contribute; they agreed to give US\$ 57m in 2009 with a focus on boosting cocoa, coffee, fish and rice production. During the official launch of a rice-rehabilitation program at Zio river valley (35 km north of Lomé; 26.8.) the minister for agriculture, K. M. Ewovor, announced that the program was aimed at boosting domestic rice production from 27,000 to 52,000 tons. Whether such an ambitious agenda would work was open to question in view of the failure of the first 'green revolution' in the 1970s and 80s because of ill-adapted methods which still heavily rely on technology transfer instead of taking indigenous conditions and resources as a base for further improvements.

Other ambitious plans concerned the revitalization of the moribund **phosphate** sector which still accounted for the fifth-largest producer in Africa. The government aimed to attract some US\$ 193m over the next five years in order to rehabilitate the machinery and infrastructure, to open new mines and to built a phosphoric acid plant which could increase the value-added from phosphor export. Although phosphate production and export earnings rose by an estimated 7 per cent in 2008 to 842,000 tons, it remained on a low level compared with the peak of 3m tons in the mid-1990s, and 600 workers had to be laid off in January. In view of past experience with corruption, nepotism and inefficiency of administration of the parastatal Société nouvelle des phosphates du Togo (SNPT) and its predecessors, the key challenge remained to find new strategic private investors. This the more so because the previous public-private partnership with Brifco (Tunisia) failed in 2005.

During the third trimester (10.8. to 22.12.), about one-third of **mobile phone** users were deprived of a functioning network because of quarrels between the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication and the private operator Moov (Atlantic Telecom) about licence payments and free international access. Moov which had attracted about 600,000 subscribers since its entrance in the market in 2006 had become a tough competitor for Togocel, a subsidiary of the state-owned Togo Telecom.

In January construction works started on the new 110 MW power plant in Lomé, built and managed by the US group Contour Global. It was meant to start production in 2010 on the base of Nigerian gas provided via the West African Gas Pipeline (WAGP) and would put an end to the chronic power cuts in the capital.

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**Zusammenfassung:** Die Innenpolitik Togo's im Jahr 2009 war geprägt von der Vorbereitung auf die entscheidenden Präsidentschaftswahlen im Jahr 2010 und der sich verschärfenden Familienfehde innerhalb des regierenden Gnassingbé-Clans. Letztere gipfelte im April in einem angeblichen Putsch von Kpatcha Gnassingbé, dem jüngeren Halbbruder des Staatsoberhauptes, an dem auch andere Mitglieder der "Familie" beteiligt waren, die bis Ende des Jahres ohne offizielle Anklage inhaftiert waren. Die internationale Gebergemeinschaft honorierte politische Reformen. Das Wirtschaftswachstum wurde durch die globale Wirtschafts- und Finanzkrise negativ beeinflusst.