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Book Part — Accepted Manuscript (Postprint)

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Suggested Citation: Kohnert, Dirk (2013) : Togo – 2012: Domestic politics, foreign affairs, and socio-economic development, In: Melber, Henning Mehler, Andreas Walraven, Klaas (Ed.): Africa Yearbook Volume 9: Politics, Economy and Society South of the Sahara in 2012, Brill, Leiden, pp. 195-201

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/301799>

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Togo – 2012

Domestic politics, foreign affairs, and socio-economic development

Dirk Kohnert ¹

Abstract: - Domestic politics in Togo in 2012 were dominated by the upcoming legislative and local elections and irreconcilable differences between the ruling party on the one hand and a broad coalition of opposition parties and civil society organisations on the other. Under the growing momentum of regular anti-government demonstrations, often violently suppressed, the call for the resignation of President Faure Gnassingbé and political change became more articulate. In foreign affairs, the pro-Western stance of the government was increasingly valued by international donors in view of the growing threat of terrorism in the neighbouring Sahel. Promising growth prospects led the government and its majority in parliament to vote an ambitious budget for 2013.

Résumé: - La politique intérieure au Togo en 2012 a été dominée par les prochaines élections législatives et locales et les divergences irréconciliables entre le parti au pouvoir d'une part et une large coalition de partis d'opposition et d'organisations de la société civile d'autre part. Sous l'impulsion croissante des manifestations anti-gouvernementales régulières, souvent violemment réprimées, l'appel à la démission du président Faure Gnassingbé et le changement politique sont devenus plus explicites. Dans le domaine des affaires étrangères, la position pro-occidentale du gouvernement était de plus en plus appréciée par les bailleurs de fonds internationaux en raison de la menace grandissante du terrorisme dans le Sahel voisin. Des perspectives de croissance prometteuses ont conduit le gouvernement et sa majorité au parlement à voter un budget ambitieux pour 2013.

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 were dominated by the upcoming legislative and local elections and irreconcilable differences between the ruling party on the one hand and a broad coalition of opposition parties and civil society organisations on the other. Under the growing momentum of regular anti-government demonstrations, often violently suppressed, the call for the resignation of President Faure Gnassingbé and political change became more articulate. In foreign affairs, the pro-Western stance of the government was increasingly valued by international donors in view of the growing threat of terrorism in the neighbouring Sahel. Promising growth prospects led the government and its majority in parliament to vote an ambitious budget for 2013.

Domestic Politics

The reformed ‘Cadre Permanent de Dialogue et de Concertation’ (CDPC), created in 2009, which had resumed work in September 2011, submitted recommendations of its first round of talks in February. However, the most important opposition parties, the ‘Alliance Nationale pour le Changement’ (ANC) and the ‘Comité d’Action pour le Renouveau’ (CAR), as well as various civil society groups, boycotted the dialogue because ANC MPs were still denied their rights as elected legislators and barred from parliament. The ANC, CAR and the ruling ‘Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais’ (RPT) agreed in March on separate consultations in order to overcome their differences, but the **dialogue** stalled again. Finally, the president accused Prime Minister Gilbert F. Houngbo of mishandling the affair. After the latter’s replacement on 8 July, the new prime minister, Ahoomey-Zunu, tried to reopen the dialogue again in September and mid-November, but to no avail. This was the result of incompatible differences between an unyielding ruling party RPT/UNIR (‘Union pour la République’) and the opposition, notably on the question of limitation of the presidential mandate to two consecutive terms (the current one terminating in 2015) and the adjustment of constitutional boundaries, which were heavily biased in favour of the ruling party.

The **opposition** became anxious to confront the uncompromising attitude of the government and overcome the weakness in its own ranks caused by the schism in the major opposition party, ‘Union des Forces du Changement’, in 2010. In view of the limited success of conventional party politics, opponents of the Gnassingbé regime were keen to create a broad basis for civil and political action against the regime. On 4 April, six opposition parties of the so-called ‘radical opposition’ (among them the ANC, CAR, ‘Convention Démocratique des Peuples Africains’ [CDPA] and ‘Organisation pour Bâtir dans l’Union un Togo Solidaire’, along with civil society groups), launched a broadly based opposition alliance, ‘Collectif Sauvons le Togo’ (CST), headed by the lawyer Ajavon Zeus. On 26 June, an alliance of 27 civil society organisations, called the ‘Concertation Nationale de la Société Civile Togolaise’, followed suit in creating a movement to promote democratic elections, the ‘Synergie Citoyenne pour des Elections Démocratiques’. And finally, on 3 August, a confederation of smaller parties of the ‘moderate’ opposition (such as the ‘Parti Démocratique Panafricain’ and CDPA) joined in, by founding a rainbow coalition, the ‘**Arc-en-ciel**’, meant to complement the CST. As a result, anti-government demonstrations in July-September reached a new level with up to 150,000 participants.

The dissolution of the RPT in favour of a modernized UNIR party, which had long been in the pipeline and was originally scheduled to take place on 28 January, was postponed *sine die* because of the resistance of old party barons. It took finally place at a second attempt during the 5th extraordinary party congress at Blitta and a simultaneous

constitutive conference at Atakpamé (14 April). Subsequent to the decision, the president toured the north, the traditional fief of the RPT, in order to explain the party's new vision. The outward appearance of the new ruling party was adapted to the requirements of a modern multi-party system, including a gradual democratic opening and regeneration of party members, but the personalized informal party structures remained much the same. The most powerful opponents to the party's dissolution had already been sidelined well before. They included General Assani Tidjani, who had brought Faure Gnassingbé to power after his father died in 2005 but had been sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for his alleged involvement in the 2009 coup attempt. Tidjani, who was released on bail for medical treatment, died, a frustrated man, on 7 December in Limoge, France.

On 3 April, the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission** (CVJR – 'Commission Vérité, Justice et Réconciliation') published its final report. It was presided over by Mgr Nicodème Benissan-Barrigah and supported by the UNHCR office in Lomé. The CVJR's 11 members represented various civil society groups (excluding political parties) and notably involved religious leaders. During its enquiries, it received over 20,000 petitions. Its most important recommendations included reparations, publication of documents concerning human rights violations, symbolic reconciliation (e.g. public apologies, monuments, memorial days), and last but not least prosecution of perpetrators. The Commission demanded that the government publish a White Book on how it intended to implement the CVJR's recommendations and suggested two institutions for monitoring and evaluation. However, the CVJR had neither the power to lift the immunity from prosecution of perpetrators and architects of human right violations nor the ability to offer amnesty or reparations; these remained prerogatives of the state. However, the government was reluctant to implement the recommendations, which was hardly surprising since high-ranking members of government, the military and the administration figured among those accused.

During a **government reshuffle** in July, the head of state replaced Prime Minister Gilbert Houngbo, who stepped down on 11 July because of a bitter dispute with the president about the continuing arbitrariness in the intelligence services. He was replaced by former minister for trade, Arthème K.S. Ahoomey-Zunu, known as a government loyalist. The new government was appointed on 31 July with few noteworthy changes. New Security Minister Colonel Yark Damehane replaced Dokissima Gnana Latta, who was blamed for the ineffective response to political protests. Pascal Bodjona was replaced by Gilbert Bawara as minister for territorial administration responsible for the handling of the coming elections. Later, on 11 September, Bodjona was charged with complicity in an international fraud against a background of internal rivalries in the ruling party. Others involved in this case included Togolese businessman Bertin Agba, El Youssef Abass, a trader from Abu Dhabi, and Loïk Le Floch Prigent, former CEO of the French oil company Elf-Aquitaine, in prison in Lomé since 14 September. One of the last remaining kingmakers of the 2005 uprising, General Zakari Nandja, chief-of-staff of the armed forces, who had to step down in the wake of the 2009 coup attempt and was marginalized at the Ministry of Water and Sanitation, was replaced by newcomer Bissoune Nabagou. Altogether, there were nine newcomers in the cabinet, mostly from UNIR, and the radical opposition remained excluded. The Ministry of Defence remained attached to the presidency in order to prevent another coup attempt. The military's top brass was replaced by presidential loyalists. Thus, Colonel Kadanga Félix Abalo Essodina, former commander of the Rapid Intervention Force and brother-in-law of Kpatcha Gnassingbé, the imprisoned former minister of defence, was appointed the new chief-of-staff on 2

November. Shortly before, on 18 August, the president replaced the controversial head of the gendarmerie, Colonel Yark Damehane, with Lieutenant-Colonel Messan Akobi. A lawyer and divisional commander, Koudouovo Têko, became the new police chief. Unusually, the two appointees both originated from the south.

Concerning the **legislative and local elections** planned for October, one of the opposition's most salient demands was the revision of the biased constituency boundaries, as well as the compilation of a new trustworthy electoral register, installation of a truly independent 'Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante' (CENI) and the holding of legislative and local elections, which had been repeatedly delayed. The redrawing of constituency boundaries and the increase in the number of constituencies from 81 to 83 (instead of 91 as recommended by the CDPC) in June was rejected by the opposition as merely cosmetic. Even in the view of international donors, it failed to correct the bias in favour of the ruling party. The same was true of the controversial changes in the electoral code, adopted on 27 May, and the restructuring of CENI on 15 October. Headed by Angèle Dola Aguigah, a university professor of archaeology and formerly an RTP candidate in the 2007 legislative elections, the commission was now dominated by the government even more than before. The parliamentary majority sidelined representatives of the 'radical opposition' and the CST when electing the 17 CENI members, although the Global Political Accord of 2006 required the commission's balanced composition. The legislative and local elections were again adjourned, this time to March 2013.

The **human rights** record remained tarnished, as shown by credible reports on political persecution and torture of opponents, which the government tried in vain to suppress. On 17 February, it published a **report on torture** within the security services, notably the intelligence agency ('Agence Nationale de Renseignement'; ANR), as demanded by the opposition and international human rights groups. The report had been submitted to the government by the 'Commission Nationale des Droits de l'Homme' (CNDH), mandated to investigate allegations of torture in 2011. Two days later, CNDH president Koffi Kounté uncovered distortions in the government report, which had omitted the most critical statements and denied accusations of torture. He published the original findings but was subsequently forced to flee to France after receiving death threats. On 23 November, Samdja Alilou Cissé, a university professor and ally of the presidential majority, was elected as the new head of the CNDH. He questioned any wrongdoing by the government concerning the falsified report. At the same time, the UN Committee Against Torture voiced concerns regarding torture and ill-treatment during its examination of the second periodic report submitted by the Togolese government (49th session, Geneva, 29 October - 23 November).

Throughout the year, civil society organisations and international NGOs protested against the persecution of journalists. Although Togo's position on the Global Freedom of the Press Index improved slightly from 72 (2009) to 69 (2012), it was still not considered as 'free'. In addition, leaders and activists of new opposition student organisations, such as the 'Union nationale des élèves et étudiants du Togo', at the universities of Lomé and Kara were harassed and imprisoned. In November, the appalling conditions in the congested prisons, regularly denounced by human rights groups, again hit the headlines when the deaths were reported of two detainees in Lomé prison and another three in Dapaong prison (in the far north).

According to UN reports, Togo had become a major **trafficking** and **money-laundering** hub in West Africa. Government sources revealed the seizure of 80 tonnes of drugs between November 2011 and June 2012. Cocaine smuggling from Latin America via Lomé to destinations in Western Europe, Lebanon and Asia had become a

growing concern. Drug money and profits from illicit re-exports (notably used cars from Western Europe) from the deep-water port of Lomé to neighbouring markets (mostly in Nigeria) were apparently also used for money laundering for Hisbollah. Lomé became notorious for slack enforcement. The extent of the illegal trade in ivory from Central Africa via Lomé to China became clear when customs in Malaysia seized tusks from over 750 elephants, equivalent to all the ivory African seized in the previous year.

Piracy on the West African coast made it a new international ‘hot spot’. London-based Lloyd’s insurance now listed the Gulf of Guinea in the same risk category as Somalia. In December, the ICG warned about slack enforcement and lack of maritime cooperation between coastal states, hampered by political tension and distrust. In August and October, three oil tankers were hijacked by pirates off the Togolese coast and, on 27 August, a hijacked tanker damaged the West African Gas Pipeline, which interrupted the flow of gas destined for power plants in Takoradi and Tema in Ghana.

Foreign Affairs

The debate on transnational crime in West Africa resumed on 21 February at the **UNSC**, presided over by Gnassingbé in his capacity as representative of Togo as a temporary member state. Shortly before, Togo had circulated a paper on the impact of organised crime on peace, security and stability in West Africa and the Sahel region.

On 6 June, Gnassingbé was reconfirmed as executive chair of **UEMOA** during its 16th summit in Lomé, which focused on peace and security questions in the sub-region.

In late November, Gnassingbé made a surprise visit to **Israel** on his way back from Italy, where he had gone for health reasons. In Tel Aviv, he was joined by his most important security advisers, General Atcha Titikpina, head of the armed forces, Minister of Security and Civil Protection Yark Damehame, and Yotrofei Massina, deputy director of the ANR. This led to media speculation about the president’s health, which was swiftly rebutted by the government. Israel and Togo had long cooperated on security issues.

The **EU** continued assisting and monitoring the process of democratization in general. However, it refused to provide direct assistance for the organisation of local and legislative elections, which had been postponed several times, until EU recommendations on a political dialogue and the restructuring of constituency boundaries were followed. In addition, the EU contributed generously to development assistance. On 23 November, it granted € 22.5 m for the promotion of accelerated growth and employment within the framework of the budgetary support programme for public policy, which had the ambitious goal of reaching 7% growth a year in order to fight poverty and achieve the MDGs. On 17 December, another EU-funded project (€ 6 m for four years) was launched to promote civil society development (the ‘Projet d’Appui à la Société Civile et à la Réconciliation Nationale’).

The first **IMF**-financed three-year ECF, which had replaced the PRGF, had expired in 2011. It was to be extended by a further ECF in early 2013. According to the IMF, the government had largely met the programme’s conditions, although it still fell short with regard to the restructuring of the banking, phosphates and cotton sectors. The **World Bank**-backed second Interim Strategy Note (2012-13), which focused on growth, governance and poverty reduction, included environmental protection.

France continued its bilateral assistance, although the new socialist government had a more critical view on the sluggish implementation of reforms by the Gnassingbé

administration. The arrest of the former patron of the French oil giant Elf, Loïk Le Floch-Prigent, on fraud charges on 16 September caused some irritation in Paris, which demanded his extradition.

Germany resumed bilateral development cooperation with negotiations in June on a three-year aid programme worth € 27 m focusing on the agricultural sector, employment generation and the strengthening of civil society institutions in three urban regions (Kpalimé, Sokodé and Tsévié).

China honoured its partnership with Togo on 19 September in an exchange of messages between the two heads of state to celebrate the 40th anniversary of their diplomatic ties. On 24 January, relations were temporarily soured by a corruption affair. Ataféi Péwissi, the Togolese director of the Confucius Institute in Lomé founded in 2008, was dismissed, apparently in relation to accusations of mishandling students' funds provided by the Chinese. A Chinese company acquired a 50% stake in the development of the new container terminal in the port of Lomé.

Togo remained a reliable and significant contributor to **peace-keeping missions** in the sub-region. In May, Nigeria, Togo, Ivory Coast and Senegal contributed to the ECOWAS force's first troop deployment in Guinea Bissau. Later, Lomé contributed to the African-led International Support Mission to Mali organised by ECOWAS. On 7 June, Lida Kouassi, a key ally of Ivory Coast's ex-president Laurent Gbagbo, was arrested in Togo and deported to Abidjan. Kouassi had served as defence minister at the time of the 2002 Ivorian coup attempt, which had led to the civil war. He was renowned as a Gbagbo hardliner.

In December, Gnassingbé attended the annual conference of the Conseil d'Entente in Niamey, where he agreed to demands from **Nigérien traders** for the restitution of € 1.4 m out of a total of € 2.6 m of foreign exchange, which had been confiscated by the ANR at Lomé airport in 2010 from traders on their way to Dubai and China, on the mistaken assumption that the money derived from illegal sources.

Socioeconomic Developments

Growth forecasts remained promising at ca. 4.5% for 2012-13, thanks in part to assistance by the international donor community. The fiscal deficit widened to 4%, due to increased public spending intended to counteract the impact of the global recession and years of underinvestment. The current account deficit remained high at 13.5% because of growing public investment, which in turn resulted in higher imports; exports of major foreign exchange earners (cotton, phosphates, etc.) lagged behind. Privatization of the four state-owned banks was delayed owing to their weak finances and the government's unwillingness to sell at the market price. In August, the 'Banque Togolaise pour le Développement' was sold for € 30 m to the Benin-based Orabank.

In January, the government adopted a new investment code promising equal treatment of domestic and foreign investors. However, investment was permitted only in certain sectors and was still vulnerable to corrupt practices. Early in the year, the government published its first report on the **Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative**, which Togo had joined in 2010, declaring payments received from and made to mining companies. Lomé expected to be fully compliant by April 2013.

Cotton production, managed by the joint-venture 'Nouvelle Société Cotonnière du Togo', recovered but remained dependent on highly volatile markets. Thus, although output rose by 25% to about 100,000 tonnes, cotton export earnings actually fell because of a 40% decline in international market prices in the previous peak year.

In April, the president committed himself to a diversification of **mining** resources and more equal regional distribution of mining proceeds. In July, the Australian iron ore and manganese development company Ferrex announced details on its 92,390 ha exploration permits in the Nayega manganese project in northern Togo, to be developed in cooperation with South African suppliers.

At the end of the year, parliament adopted the draft **budget** for 2013 to the tune of CFAfr 779.8 bn. The government defended the increase of CFAfr 200 bn compared with 2012 by pointing to improved financial discipline and promising growth forecasts. The fiscal deficit of CFAfr 6.6 bn was significantly lower than in 2012 (CFAfr 11.8 bn), but credit finance rose by 35.3 % from CFAfr 17 bn in 2012 to CFAfr 23 bn in 2013. Investment focused on infrastructure (19.4%), education (13.8%), agriculture (6.6%) and health (5.9%).

Zusammenfassung: - Die innenpolitische Lage in Togo im Jahr 2012 war geprägt von den bevorstehenden Parlaments- und Kommunalwahlen und unüberbrückbaren Differenzen zwischen der Regierungspartei einerseits und einer breiten Koalition von Oppositionsparteien und zivilgesellschaftlichen Organisationen andererseits. Unter der wachsenden Dynamik der regelmäßigen, oft gewaltsam unterdrückten Demonstrationen gegen die Regierung wurde der Aufruf zum Rücktritt von Präsident Faure Gnassingbé und zum politischen Wandel deutlicher. In der Außenpolitik wurde die prowestliche Haltung der Regierung angesichts der wachsenden Bedrohung durch den Terrorismus in der benachbarten Sahelzone zunehmend von internationalen Gebern geschätzt. Vielversprechende Wachstumsperspektiven veranlassten die Regierung, und ihrer Mehrheit im Parlament, ein ehrgeiziges Budget für 2013 zu verabschieden.