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Togo

Politics, economy and society in 2014

Dirk Kohnert

The upcoming presidential election set for 2015 dominated political discussion. The ruling elite clearly lacked the will for constitutional and electoral reforms, which the opposition, civil society and international donors regarded as precondition for free and fair polls. The donor community nevertheless increased their aid because of concerns about growing instability and terrorism in the sub-region and Togo's role as a willing supplier of troops for UN-missions. Promising growth prospects were overshadowed by increasing poverty, inequality and youth unemployment.

Domestic Politics

Urgently needed reforms of electoral institutions and the constitutional framework in the run-up to the **upcoming presidential election** in March/April 2015 dominated political discussions throughout the year. The inter-party dialogue '[Cadre Permanent de Dialogue et de Concertation](#)', begun in 2009 between government and opposition but suspended since 2012, formally resumed on 19 May. Because of irreconcilable differences, the talks between the two camps stalled again in early June. Correcting the biased electoral system was one of the opposition's most salient demands for electoral reform prior to the next election. The political accord of 2006 ('[Accord Politique Global](#)', APG) had endorsed a return to the 1992 constitutional two-term limit on incumbent presidents and its implementation would have put an end to 47 years of autocratic rule by the [Gnassingbé](#) clan. The government accepted the APG in principle but wanted to apply the constitutional term-limit only from 2015 onwards, enabling [Faure Gnassingbé](#) to remain in office for a third and ultimately also a fourth term.

After the break-down of the interparty dialogue, the government of Prime Minister [Ahoomey-Zumu](#), in a surprise move on 24 June, tabled a **draft reform bill** in order to accommodate some of the opposition's key demands. The bill envisaged (among other things) a partial return to the 1992 Constitution (adapted to the needs of the ruling Eyadéma regime in a 'constitutional coup' of 2002) by re-establishing a presidential term limit and a return to a two-round majority system for presidential elections. Further proposals included the institution of a second chamber, the Senate (already provided for in the Constitution but never established), a reform of the Constitutional Court, a redefinition of the prerogatives of the prime minister and new conditions for eligibility for the presidency. Although the bill did not meet all the opposition's demands, notably the limitation on the presidential mandate with retroactive effect, the opposition was nevertheless ready to enter into negotiations with the government. In fact, this coup stunned not only the opposition and the general public but also international donors, who acted as facilitators of the dialogue. However, only one week later it appeared that the government's initiative was yet another trick to

outmanoeuvre the opposition and not a genuine offer. On 30 June, the majority of the ruling '[Union pour la République](#)' (UNIR) in parliament voted against its own president's draft bill, while the opposition voted in favour.

But if the president had surmised that the opposition and the international community would nevertheless recognise him as a moderniser who was impeded by hardliners in his own party, his plan did not work. The stance of the major donors (the G5, i.e. France, Germany, US, EU, UNDP) vis à vis the government hardened. Thus the G5's support for a consensus and for the APG meant that the donors de facto supported the opposition.

The **stalemate** following the imbroglio in parliament went on for months. In a joint statement on 1 October, Togo's three churches (Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist) appealed to the political actors to resume the dialogue. The churches also decried the fact that the parliamentary majority had rejected the bill drafted by the ruling party. Ten days later the donor communities supported the churches' joint stance

Minister for Territorial Administration and Decentralization [Gilbert Bawara](#), who was responsible for the organisation of elections, responded by asserting that electoral reforms could not be carried out before the 2015 presidential election. He was seconded by the president of the Constitutional Court, Aboudou Assouma, who, on 5 October, declared the APG void. Assouma referred to the advent of a functioning pluralist parliament and stated that "the page of reforms had been turned definitely since 30 June by the refusal of the parliamentary majority of the draft reform bill". This statement of the most senior judge in the land reinforced once more the lack of trust on the part of the **opposition and civil society** in the impartiality of the justice system. Shortly before, in mid-September the head of state and his UNIR parliamentary majority, had re-elected largely the same (seven of nine) notorious judges as members of the Constitutional Court who had been chosen for the same posts in 2007. The president himself, on a state visit to Accra (Ghana) on 25 November, reaffirmed that the Constitution (of 2002) would be rigorously respected in the run-up to the 2015 presidential election, thus indirectly refusing to commit to any reforms before that election. Instead he proposed to put in place a new expert commission with a mandate to elaborate on proposals for political reforms. In so doing, he neutralised the mandate of the already established [Truth and Reconciliation Commission \(CVJR\)](#) of Mgr Barrigah, which had already tabled its proposals on these issues. In early April, the government itself had adopted a draft bill for a White Book concerning the implementation of the 68 recommendations for reconciliation based on the CVJR's final report, issued in 2012. In October, 26 local development projects throughout the country were identified, on the basis of CVJR recommendations, within the framework of the '[Projet d'Appui à la Société Civile et à la Réconciliation Nationale](#)' (founded in 2012) in collaboration with the EU and local civil society organisations.

In line with the president's attempts to move the debate about critical election issues into commissions, Bawara, the minister responsible for election organisation, had appointed on 21 October an expert committee to develop a roadmap for the **local elections**. This had been postponed several times since the last elections in 1987 due to the ruling elite's lack of political will to devolve powers to the regions and districts. The government also feared that it might lose ground to the opposition in the urban centres and the south. Shortly before, Prime Minister Ahoomey-Zunu had ruled out local elections taking place before the upcoming 2015 presidential election.

On 17 September, parliament nominated the 17 members of the Independent National **Electoral Commission** ([CENI](#)), without any major disagreement between government and opposition. However, the nomination of the expert committee, including the re-nomination by the ruling party of former CENI-chef Taffa Tabiou (UNIR) as CENI president proved much more controversial. This was a strategy of the government to maintain its hold over the CENI.

A national uprising at the end of October against [President Compaoré](#) in neighbouring Burkina Faso after 27 years of autocratic rule encouraged the Togolese opposition in turn to take a firmer stand against the ruling regime. It caused the opposition alliance, *Arc-en-Ciel*, to end its quarrels with the more radical '[Collectif Sauvons le Togo](#)' to create a **common opposition alliance** called '[Combat pour l'Alternative Politique en 2015](#)' (CAP 2015). On 31 October, the two parties agreed to nominate Jean-Pierre Fabre, the head of the main opposition party, '[Alliance Nationale pour le Changement](#)' (ANC), as the sole opposition candidate in the upcoming presidential election. According to [Afrobarometer](#) data in October, about two-thirds of the population thought that the current electoral system allowed the electorate neither to vote the president out of office nor to vote for deputies who reflected their will.

The **reorganisation of the military** continued in December with the aim of reinforcing the power of the head of state vis-à-vis hardliners within his own ranks. Two battalions of a Rapid Intervention Force had already been created by presidential decree on 9 October. [Raymond Germanos](#), Gnassingbé's dubious military advisor, a retired French five-star general, supervised the establishment of these battalions, which consisted of 550 well-equipped troops with headquarters in Lomé and Kara. Colonel [Awoki Panassa](#), former head of the National Gendarmerie, became the president's chief of staff, replacing Néyo Takougnadi, who became the head of the National Navy. A fundamental reform of the National Gendarmerie, with the creation of two regional directorates, was announced at the same time. [Yotroféi Massina](#), the chef of the controversial intelligence agency ('*Agence Nationale de Renseignements*'), accused of torture in 2012 by the [National Human Rights Commission \(CNDH\)](#), became head of the Gendarmerie. In mid-October, the protection of the electoral process, which had been hitherto the task of the national police under the command of the minister in charge of security and civil protection, Colonel Yark Daméhame, was transferred to the Ministry of Defence and thus de facto to the head of state himself. In addition, a special force ('[Force Sécurité Élection Présidentielle](#)', FOSEP 2015) composed of elements of the gendarmerie and the police was created to secure the presidential election, as in previous elections.

Corruption, money laundering and **illicit financial flows** continued to influence domestic politics. Lomé attracted all sorts of merchandise from all over central Africa, such as ivory (four tons in January alone), which was then re-exported clandestinely in huge quantities to Vietnam and China. According to a report by the US non-profit think tank [Global Financial Integrity](#), published in April and put before the general public in Togo in August by the ANC, illicit outflows from Togo averaged \$ 1,847 bn between 2002 and 2011, with a peak in 2008 when it amounted to 160% of GDP, more than four times the state budget. The ANC was quick to point to the Gnassingbé regime as the main beneficiary, claiming that this explained its reluctance to implement political reforms.

In September, ECOWAS launched a maritime piloting zone to fight **piracy** in the coastal waters of Nigeria, Benin and Togo. The deep water harbour of Lomé

emerged as the primary African destination for US petroleum exports, partly as a way to thwart pirates.

The **human rights** situation remained precarious. Although Togo's [Freedom House](#) rating improved from 'not free' in previous years to 'partly free', this was mainly due to the peaceful conduct of the 2013 legislative elections. The elections were free, but not fair. On the [democracy index of the Economist Intelligence Unit](#) for 2013, Togo had improved by two places compared with 2012 to rank 128th out of 167 countries. However, Togo's low score of 3.45 out of 10 remained unchanged and the country thus continued to be classed as an '*authoritarian regime*'. In the ranking of the Paris based [Reporters Without Borders](#), Togo improved from 83rd out of 179 countries in 2013 to 76th. A delegation of the New York-based [Parliamentarians for Global Action](#) visited Togo at the end of June. The purpose of the trip was to persuade the government to sign up to the ICC in The Hague. The mission failed and Togo thus remained the only ECOWAS member that is not a member of the ICC.

Urban centres were characterised by an increasing lack of security. A series of murders took place in Lomé: for example, on 28 September, a group of traders on their way to China were ambushed at the airport by robbers, who made off with about € 4.5 m in cash. Deplorable **prison conditions** attracted international attention. According to a report by the US-based [Open Society-Justice Initiative](#) published on 1 September, Togo counted among the 20 countries worldwide with the highest percentage of pre-trial detainees, amounting to 65% of the total prison population in 2012. Detainees were housed in prison cells of about 35-50 m², which held up to 55 inmates, and had to rely on their families for basic food and drinking water. Prison staff delegated much of their authority to trustees, who effectively controlled and terrorised their co-inmates. Torture to extract confession remained widespread at police and gendarmerie stations.

Foreign Affairs

On a visit to Lomé on 27 November, the UN's West African special envoy, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, urged all political players to reach a consensus on the presidential term limits. He thus reconfirmed the position of the international donor community, notably that of the **EU**, whose representative in Lomé, Nicolàs Berlanga-Martinez, had underlined on 10 July that, contrary to the Gnassingbé government, the EU was not of the opinion that the reform question was off the table.

Nevertheless, **major donors** increased their support for Togo because of geostrategic considerations: Togo supports regional peace-keeping operations, e.g. as a troop provider. In October 2013, the EU had already agreed to raise its financial support to \$ 292 m for the funding period 2014-20 within the framework of the 11th [EDF](#). This constituted an increase of 70% compared with the previous period (2008-13). Within this framework, the EU signed a National Indicative Programme on 10 October, which provided € 216 m for state consolidation and security, water, sanitation and energy. Another € 16.7 m of EU budget support had been already approved in February. **Germany** nearly doubled its aid to € 40 m for two years (2014-15) on 5 June. In July, [IFAD](#) provided a loan of \$ 39.6 m to promote rural entrepreneurship. The World Bank, the [International Bank for Reconstruction and Development](#) and [IDA](#) approved \$ 40 m for operations in 2014. The first **IMF**-financed three-year ECF, which had expired in

2011, was not extended, due to Togo's reluctance to implement IMF recommendations. In July, the US entered into a military State Partnership Program aimed at internal and border security, in addition to a \$ 1.8 m construction and humanitarian assistance US [Africa Command \(AFRICOM\)](#) programme. The **US-Africa Leaders' Summit** in Washington DC on 4-6 August, hosted by president Obama and attended by leaders from 50 African states, among them the Togolese president, focussed on '*aid by trade*', investment and international security. One of the key issues was the extension of [AGOA](#), due to expire in September 2015, but the US Congress would not make a decision till 2015 at the earliest. **France**, which was still keen to keep its special relationship with Francophone Africa, followed the line of the EU, UNDP, Germany and the USA and insisted on political reforms before the 2015 presidential election. Paris continued its aid and military assistance programme, including the provision in July of urban guerrilla warfare equipment for the Togolese army in order to enhance its peacekeeping capabilities. **China** continued its economic cooperation, with major infrastructure projects financed by Chinese aid, e.g. the construction of a new Lomé international airport (\$ 141 m), with double the capacity of the former airport, by the China Airport Construction Group, which was completed on 25 December.

Apart from aid, **remittances** from the Togolese diaspora played a significant role in development, although there was no apparent link between remittances and economic growth. According to OECD statistics, Togo ranked high on a global scale both for ODA per capita (\$ 91 in 2011, ranked 17th) and remittances per capita (\$ 52 in 2011, ranked 7th), together amounting to franc CFA 182 bn (\$ 333 m) in 2014.

Negotiations on the controversial [EU-West African EPAs](#), which had dragged on since 2002, were increasingly under pressure by the EU, which wanted to sign the agreement by 1 October at the latest. African civil society organisations and churches, including the secretary general of the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in West Africa, the Liberian Rev. Dr Tolbert T. Jallah, a well-known anti-EPA campaigner, cautioned ECOWAS against premature conclusions and criticised the secrecy surrounding the negotiations. Despite the pressure applied on all ECOWAS members to sign the EPAs, at least five countries, among them Nigeria and Togo, refused to do so, even though the ECOWAS head of states had endorsed the negotiations at the ECOWAS 45th ordinary session in Accra (Ghana) on 10 July.

The **Ebola** pandemic posed a new risk to Togo. In early October, epidemiology studies carried out by North-Eastern University in Boston (MA, USA) and Oxford University placed Togo among the ten African countries most likely to be exposed to an outbreak of Ebola. Shortly before, China had granted \$ 0.8 m for Togo to buy Ebola screening equipment. During an extraordinary ECOWAS meeting in Accra on 6 November, which focused on Ebola, Faure Gnassingbé was elected ECOWAS coordinator of Ebola related activities. At a [West African Economic and Monetary Union](#) summit in Lomé shortly before (on 25 September), member states had been urged to reinforce the health system in order to prevent the spread of the fever.

Socioeconomic Developments

Economic **growth** remained promising. The annual growth rate was expected to stand at 6.0% in 2014 and 6.3% in 2015, the increase being largely the result of heavy assistance by the international donor community. Because of falling global oil and food prices,

inflation remained well below 3%, despite a rise in domestic fuel prices in January. This was the result of government efforts to reduce subsidies. In February, the government finally established a new and more efficient revenue authority (*'Office Togolais des Recettes'*), thereby merging customs and tax directorates, a measure that had been delayed since December 2012. Overdue **privatisation** of parastatals remained an issue and suffered from lack of transparency. Two of four state-owned banks still remained to be sold and the tender to sell the phosphate mines (*'Société Nouvelle des Phosphates de Togo'* joint-venture) was still pending at the end of year. Ailing phosphate production increased by 3.4% to 900,000 tonnes in 2013. Cotton production, the most important cash crop managed by the *'Nouvelle Société Cotonnière du Togo'*, fell by 18% compared with the previous cropping season to 67,000 tonnes in 2013/14. Major investments included the extension of the deep water [port of Lomé](#) by a third container terminal, financed with € 457 m by the French Bolloré group. The extension was completed in October and allowed for the processing of 1.2 m containers per year. A supplementary fourth private container terminal was also nearing completion. Its even bigger capacity of 2.2 m containers meant that Togo would now serve as a logistical hub for the West African coast. The extension was the result of a Chinese-Dutch joint-venture with an overall cost of \$ 420 m financed in conjunction with the [IFC](#) which acted as facilitator. Other projects included road construction and the huge \$ 250 m clinker and cement grinding plant under construction by German HeidelbergCement. From 2015, up to 1.5 m tonnes of clinker a year would be produced in Tabligbo, 80 km north-east of Lomé, and up to 200,000 tonnes of cement per year from 2016 in Dapaong in the far north.

The current account **deficit** remained high (13.4% of GDP) because of growing public investment, which in turn resulted in higher imports, while exports of major foreign exchange earners and transfer inflows lagged behind. Because of high public investment and election-related expenses, the fiscal deficit was forecast to increase from 5.6% of GDP in 2014 to 5.9% of GDP in 2015.

According to an IMF poverty reduction strategy paper published in July, the government's ['Strategy for Boosting Growth and Promoting Employment'](#) (SCAPE, 2013-17), focused too much on the coastal region and was unsustainable because of high vulnerability to external shocks. The IMF further claimed that the programme was not inclusive of the country as a whole and had led to regional **inequality** and an increase in extreme poverty. Despite a small drop in monetary **poverty** since 2006, the depth and severity of poverty increased. About 81% of the population were vulnerable to falling into the poverty trap. The regional distribution varied from 91% of people living below the poverty line in the northern Savanes region to 33% in Lomé.

Youth unemployment continued to be a concern to the government because of its potential political repercussions. The programme for unemployed school leavers (PROVONAT – ['Programme de Promotion du Volontariat au Togo'](#), backed by UNDP) became in June the ['Agence Nationale de Volontariat au Togo'](#). According to official figures, about 65% of Togolese school leavers did not find employment. Up to 4,280 volunteers had participated in the PROVONAT programme since 2011 and 44% of its participants found employment.

The ambitious **budget** (franc CFA 815.9 bn) for 2015 was adopted by parliament on 30 December, with the opposition voting against. The increase of 12% over the 2014 budget was justified by citing fiscal reforms and promising economic growth perspectives. The opposition accused the government of wishful thinking and

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argued that the 2014 budget had already suffered from a budget shortfall of 13%. The IMF had warned the government in May to control the growing public debt, especially external debt, which was forecast to reach 22% of GDP by 2016. African traditional religions, notably [vodun](#) in the southern regions and occult beliefs throughout Togo, continued to play an important role in everyday life, with priests often acting as conflict mediators at the local level. In October, 'Jeune Afrique' named Ni-Mantche, the grand master of the *vodun* goodness Maman Kole in southern Togo, as one of the 15 most influential religious leaders in Africa and one of the most celebrated African *vodun* priests.

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