



SOUTH AFRICA'S MISSED CHANCE AT THE AFRICAN UNION

On January 30th at Addis Ababa the Foreign Minister of Chad, Moussa Faki Mahamat, was elected as chairman of the African Union Commission. He replaces the South African Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma who declined six months ago in Kigali to stand for a second four year term. Despite South Africa's rough campaign to get Dlamini-Zuma elected, once she was in office South Africa had the unique chance to prove to the continent that it is willing to lead and to take responsibility. Dlamini-Zuma's refusal to stand for a usually normal second term confirmed the unconcern of South Africa in increasing its responsibility for the continent.

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On January 30th at Addis Ababa the Foreign Minister of Chad, Moussa Faki Mahamat, was elected as chairman of the African Union Commission. He beat Kenya's Foreign Minister, Amina Mohamed, by a comfortable margin of 39 to 15 votes. He replaces the South African Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma who declined six months ago in Kigali to stand for a second four year term. She is seeking to become president of the ANC and to succeed President Zuma. Her retreat from the AU in Kigali came as a surprise and the meeting then could not agree on a successor.

Usually the race for the top job at the AU is resolved in behind-the-scenes talks. This time, member states chose the candidate on merit. Mahamat resolved political unrest in his own country, negotiated the Dafur agreement, worked on the return of peace to South Sudan, contributed to peace talks in Mali and the CAR (Central African Republic), and is fighting terrorism by being instrumental in the establishment of a multilateral force to combat Boko Haram in the Lake Chad basin.

Mahamat's credentials are in contrast to what Dlamini-Zuma's critics believe were her main shortcomings: that she neglected many of Africa's crises. They list the many civil wars on the continent, Ebola, the deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean, El Nino and hunger.¹ She "didn't know Africa and only cared about her ambitions back home," writes Nigerian human rights activist Chidi Anselm Odinkalu.² She had a reputation for being unapproachable and allegedly surrounded herself with imported South African staffers.

The most controversial aspect of Dlamini-Zuma's term was that South Africa elbowed her into this office and by doing so ignored the unwritten "gentlemen's agreement" that nobody from a major power in Africa should be at the top of the AU. The fear is that the chairperson from a big country will always be accused of bias. She has never been able to overcome the perception that she is in Addis Ababa to promote South Africa's interests. To some extent that was also positive because ex-President Thabo Mbeki and his vision for an "African Renaissance" remains popular at the AU. The expectations at the beginning of Dlamini-Zuma's term, therefore, were high, also because she had been a Minister of Foreign Affairs under Mbeki. It is true that the AU has very little power to stop civil wars or to stop dictators hanging on to power. The disappointment about her term is a combination of high expectations that could not be fulfilled and the perception that she did not use her office to the full potential.

Mahamat in his acceptance speech like Dlamini-Zuma wants to make the organisation financially more independent. Out of the AU's budget of \$782 million for 2016 only \$200 million come from member states. The AU is still heavily dependent on donor countries, mainly from western governments. Dlamini-Zuma has to be credited that she managed to convince member states to impose a 0.2% levy on African imports which from 2017 onwards will contribute 25% to the AU's peace operations. If member states fulfil their obligations this should bring the contributions to \$ 400 million by 2020. One of her other accomplishments was to bring professionalism to the AU bureaucracy. She enforced mandatory retirement and tried to improve the commission's gender balance.

She worked hard on the Agenda 2063, the first time the organisation tried to vision how Africa would look like half a century from now. The agenda outlines how Africa exploits its own resources, is pioneering in renewable energy, how economies grow and how its people become prosperous; and how the continent unifies and integrates. The Economist is less convinced and writes: "Her flagship

¹ Ludger Schadomsky: 'Good riddance' – Africa says good bye to AU's Dlamini-Zuma, in Deutsche Welle, 25.01.2017

² Quoted in Schadomsky, 2017.

policy, Agenda 2063, is like a balloon ride over the Serengeti, offering pleasant views of a distant horizon and powered by hot air”.³

At the AU summit the majority of heads of states recommended “collective withdrawal” from the ICC (International Criminal Court). In the document member states acknowledge that “collective withdrawal” has not yet been recognized by international law. It remains the prerogative of individual countries to give notice to the Rome Statutes under which the ICC is established. The summit reiterated that the ICC is biased against Africa and that sitting heads of government should be exempt from prosecution. The quest for impunity for sitting heads of government shakes the foundations of the basic idea of the ICC namely that those who are in power and believe that they can escape prosecution because of that power do not have a safe haven.

The summit welcomed the announced withdrawal from the ICC by South Africa, Burundi and Gambia. But the vote for withdrawal from the ICC was not unanimous. The decision was passed with reservations by several states including Nigeria, Senegal, Cape Verde, and Liberia. Malawi, Tanzania, Tunisia and Zambia requested more time to study the issue. The Minister of Justice from Senegal, Sidiki Kaba, is the current president of the ICC’s Assembly of State Parties. He is vehemently opposed to withdrawal. Also Botswana has shown unwavering support for the ICC. That South Africa is spearheading the move against the ICC is triggered by an incident in 2015 when Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir who is wanted by the ICC for war crimes and genocide, attended the 25th summit of the AU in South Africa. Although the High Court of South Africa ordered the government to arrest him the ANC administration let him leave the country in defiance of the country’s laws.

The summit re-admitted Morocco to the AU as its 55th member with 39 out of 54 countries voting in favour. Before the summit the Foreign Ministry of Morocco in a strong worded statement charged that Dlamini-Zuma had obstructed Morocco’s request for re-admission by improvising new procedural demands and that she therewith acted contrary to her obligation of neutrality.

In 1984 Morocco withdrew from the predecessor of the AU, the Organisation of African Unity, after the organisation formally recognised Western Sahara. When Spain withdrew from its colony in 1975 Morocco and Mauritania invaded Western Sahara. Mauritania relented a few years later leaving Morocco to fight a protracted battle against the Polisario Front, the liberation movement of the Sahrawi people. In 1991 the United Nations brokered a ceasefire leaving Morocco in control of three quarters of Western Sahara. In preparation for a referendum on self –determination Morocco tries to populate the area with its own people while most Sahrawi people live in refugee camps in Algeria.

Countries governed by former liberation movements among them South Africa⁴ opposed the decision for re-admission of Morocco. The ANC described the decision as “regrettable” and fears that it is a significant setback to the cause of the Sahrawi people. Morocco is urged to accept the boundaries as they were at independence (after Spain left) and the ANC “will not allow the matter of independence of Western Sahara to be swept under the carpet of political expediency.”⁵

South Africa sees itself as a gateway to the continent and as a spokesperson for Africa given its membership in the G20 group and BRICS (the association of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). But other Africans see this differently. In interviews with senior AU officials and observers of continental politics in Addis Ababa opinions were broad forward that South Africans “are not really

³ Simon Allison: Farewell, Madame Chair: Inside Nkozasana Dlamini-Zuma’s troubled tenure at the African Union in Daily Maverick, 23.01.2017

⁴ Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique, Botswana, and Algeria

⁵ Edna Molewa, ANC’s international relations sub-committee chair.

African – they are their own Africa.”⁶ Interviewees raised the issue of xenophobia in South Africa which is directed against foreign Africans in the country and which sparked unprecedented protest actions in several African countries against South Africa after the xenophobic violence of 2015. In the minds of other Africans is also South Africa’s “double speak” when it voted for Resolution 1973 in the UN Security Council which authorised NATO intervention in Libya against Muammar Gaddafi. Before South Africa had called for an African solution to the crisis and had been against intervention in Libya.

Despite South Africa’s rough campaign to get Dlamini-Zuma elected once she was in office South Africa had the unique chance to prove to the continent that it is willing to lead and to take responsibility; and that the perception of a self-centred country is wrong. South Africa contributes more than the required 0.7% of GDP annually to development aid on the continent and supported peace and stability missions in war torn countries like Burundi, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Dlamini-Zuma’s actions were inconsistent and they reflect South Africa’s foreign policy which seems to be directed towards serving African heads of state and not towards the promotion of democracy, good governance and constitutionality. She condemned President Pierre Nkurunziza’s controversial bid for a third term but kept quiet once he consolidated his power by assassinating opponents. She condemned Egypt’s military government after the coup of 2013 and got the country temporarily suspended from the AU. On the other hand she did not protest when Paul Kagame in Rwanda and Denis Sassou-Nguessou in the Republic of Congo remained in power through controversial referenda.

Dlamini-Zuma’s refusal to stand for a usually normal second term confirmed the unconcern of South Africa in increasing its responsibility for the continent. Aditi Lalbahadur from the South African Institute of International Affairs struggles to see that Dlamini-Zuma’s term “was good for South Africa’s foreign policy” and believes that the country “has taken more of a back seat on emerging crises that have taken place in the last four years.”⁷

⁶ Maxi Schoeman, Asnake Kefale, Chris Allen: It’s time South Africa turned into Africa’s views about its role on the continent in *The Conversation*, 24.01.2017.

⁷ Quoted in Allison 2017