Africa Briefing

Angola: post-election challenges of a rising middle power

Brussels, 20 November 2012
(14h30-17h30)

Venue
Palais d'Egmont
Place du Petit Sablon, 8bis
1000 Brussels

BACKGROUND

On 31 August 2012, Angola held its third democratic elections since its independence in 1975 – the second since the end of the civil war (1975-2002). Despite accusations of fraud, President dos Santos obtained, as expected, a five-year extension to his 33-year administration[1]. The Union for Angola's Total Independence (UNITA), the main opposition party, received less than 20% of votes and will remain, as in 2008, politically irrelevant in the parliament.[2] Thus, at first sight, little change should be expected in the government's politics and policies.

Yet, as popular discontent over inequality and corruption grows, the party of dos Santos, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), may have started to acknowledge the need of implementing some strategic adjustments. Despite his recent victory, analysts point out that dos Santos may not be able to placate public opinion for too long if problems of corruption, lack of transparency and economic mismanagement are not seriously tackled in the immediate future. Already in 2011, inspired by the so-called 'Arab Spring', Angola's youth took to the streets in a wave of protests, demanding a greater share and better governance of the country's wealth. The first signs of such awareness could be seen during the last election campaign, when the MPLA adopted a new slogan: 'Angola: More Growth, Better Distribution', hinting at the disparities in wealth distribution.

Only a decade after the end of the civil war, Angola has become one of the shining examples of the so-called 'new' or 'rising' Africa – one that combines large reserves of natural resources, exponential economic growth[3], a young society and a rising middle class, in a context of political stability and peace. Heavily financed by China (the country's major importer of crude oil), important investments in infrastructure have been made in different sectors and parts of the country. Yet, although Luanda has become a 'modern' capital (with skyscrapers, highways, and luxury compounds), it is now also one of the most expensive cities in the world.

Inflated prices, fuelled by oil wealth, have only deepened the gap between the rich ruling elite and the more than a third of Angolans who still live in abject poverty. Among others, serious structural deficiencies, notably regarding access to water, sanitation and electricity, place the country at the bottom of most socioeconomic indicators. Angola's youthful population (two thirds of which are under 20) face another two major problems: structural unemployment (estimated at around 26%) and endemic corruption.

Therefore, rather than a simple continuation, the result of the 2012 elections may put dos Santos' popularity to test, together with the so-called Chinese-style, infrastructure-building model that has been implemented thoroughly in the country since the 1980s. Challenges to his administration come not only from the streets, but also from within the ruling elites, notably some members of MPLA and Angola's powerful oil company, Sonangol. Dos Santos, who

[1] Heading the country since 1979, 70-year-old José Eduardo dos Santos, has never been directly elected. Since the adoption of the new constitution in 2010, which suppressed direct presidential elections, the head of the party list winning parliamentary elections becomes president.

[2] Since the adoption of the 2010 constitution, which has concentrated power on the Presidency, Angolan Parliament has become considerably weaker.

[3] Second largest African producer of crude oil, Angola is the second largest economy of the continent. Its GDP has grown 12.5% on average between 2004 and 2008, and should reach 10.8% in 2012, according to IMF.

had already modified his government in 2010 to accommodate internal dissidence, may need to make further political change to ensure his tenure – and succession.[4]

Historically, there is a strong connection between Angola's domestic affairs and foreign relations, particularly in the peace and security field. After independence, for instance, the MPLA has quickly recognised the need to develop a regional strategy that allows for transforming its main regional opponents into political allies (notably via military and political assistance), while excluding UNITA and thus guaranteeing the continuation of the regime. Conducted by the president and the security services, Angola's regional foreign policy has been mainly used as a mechanism to project the country's force, extend its dominance, and prevent regional instability – particularly in the Great Lakes.

The increase of piracy activities in recent years has turned the Gulf of Guinea into another key area of concern and policy action for Luanda. Angola, which allegedly has one of the best-resourced and well-trained armed forces in the continent, has been deploying important means to securitise maritime routes and guarantee its various shipments in the Gulf – actions which are not necessarily viewed positively by other African countries.

Despite its achievements, Luanda's regional strategy may, however, be reconsidered in future years. Signs of weakness became evident during the 2010 electoral crisis in the Ivory Coast, when dos Santos (as did Jacob Zuma's administration) found himself isolated in the international arena and needed to revise the 'full assistance' initially lent to Laurent Gbagbo. Its support to Guinea Bissau's programme of security sector reform may already indicate some evolution in Luanda's regional policy - as well as the country's increasing presence in international forums such as the AU, the United Nations, the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS, where Angola is deeply involved in maritime issues) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). If President dos Santos will chose to deepen these multilateral and rather conflict resolution-oriented strategies, or pursue his traditional solo and belligerent ("peace through war") tactics is, however, still an open question.

Greater wealth and regional influence may also been changing Angola's position in the international arena. The country, which is already seen as a strategic partner to most traditional and 'emerging' powers, notably the US, the EU, China and Brazil, has more recently also emerged as an important global investor.[5] Economic diplomacy has become a key instrument of Angola's foreign policy in recent years. Among its main targets for foreign investment is its old colonial ruler, Portugal, where Angola has been buying banks, oil companies, media and agricultural firms. Whether (and how) President dos Santos will seek to diversify its external relations and, above all, ensure Angola's position as a rising 'middle' power are some of the questions to be discussed at this 'Africa Briefing'.

[4] Analysts believe Mr. dos Santos has already started planning his succession, and see Mr. Manuel Vicente, 55, as his dauphin. Mr. Vicente ranked second on the MPLA list for the August elections and is now Angola's Vice-President.

[5] In April 2012, its foreign exchange reserves reached 26 billion dollars (20.8 billion euros).

PROCESS

This Africa Briefing will gather experts, researchers and representatives of the civil society to discuss Angola's key domestic and international challenges after the 2012 legislative elections. Some of the questions proposed for discussions are listed below.

On Angola's domestic politics:

- What kind of policy compromises/strategic adjustments can be expected from Angola's leadership to ensure his tenure and succession?
- Will the Angolan ruling elite make room for change, accommodating civil society's demands for better governance, enforced democratic institutions and wealth distribution, or will it forcibly try to maintain the status quo?
- What opportunities do the 2012 elections provide to diversify Angola's economy (in particular investing on the agriculture and manufacturing sectors) and alleviate poverty?

On the country's regional strategy and external relations:

- Can Angola become a security provider to Africa?
- What are the prospects for Angola's regional policy strategy? How should Angola's complex relations with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) - which involves key political, security and economic issues - evolve? Can one expect rising competition or cooperation with South Africa regarding regional leadership?
- Is Angola becoming a rising middle power, or will it remain, at best, a regional one?
- How will Angola's global connections evolve, notably towards China, the US, Europe, and Brazil?

PROGRAMME

14h30 Welcome and Introduction

Damien Helly, Senior Research Fellow, EUISS, Paris

14h45-15:30 Panel Presentations

Augusta Conchiglia, Journalist, Grand Reporter, Paris

Fernando Macedo, Deputy-Director at the Faculty of Law, Professor of International Relations and Political Sciences at Universidade Lusíada de Angola

Justin Pearce, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London University

15h30-17h30 Questions and debate with the audience

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

This Africa Briefing is organised by the **European Union Institute for Security Studies** in partnership with **Open Society Foundations** within the framework of the **Observatoire de l'Afrique**.

Date: 20 November 2012 14h30 – 17h30
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The working language will be English.

The briefing will be held under the Chatham House rule.

Participation is on invitation basis.

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