

CRACKS IN THE ANCHOR. SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA NEEDS A STRONG SOUTH AFRICA

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Sub-Saharan Africa, marred by genocides, wars, and a death toll of several millions, has been regarded as the region's crisis hotspot ever since the end of the Cold War. Until the beginning of 2009, six UN Blue Helmet missions had been deployed in the region; more than half of all UN security resolutions focused on the problems of sub-Saharan Africa.

Economically, the region has been going backwards for a long time. It is now catching up again, but only gradually. So far, only Botswana, Mauritius and South Africa have been and still are economically engaged in forward-looking industries, such as manufacturing and service. Business expenses and risks are high, productivity is low, and administrations and infrastructures show substantial deficiencies. Furthermore, there are the disastrous consequences of the current global economic crisis. In many places, living conditions leave a lot to be desired. About half the population is suffering from a lack of drinking water and unsatisfactory sanitary facilities. In 2007, almost two in three people who were infected with HIV lived in sub-Saharan Africa, where AIDS still is the most common cause of death. Civil wars, economic underdevelopment, and poverty often create a vicious circle and are mutually dependent.

How can this region be helped? Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa have a key function for sub-Saharan Africa. Especially the three last-mentioned countries play a leading role in and across the region. In 2000, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) referred to Nigeria and South Africa as 'strategic anchor countries', and to South Africa as an aspirant for a 'preferred partnership' with the Federal Republic of Germany.

On the other hand, two former 'anchors' plummeted: Zimbabwe in 2000 and Côte d'Ivoire in 2002. Because of increasing endemic corruption, fraudulent elections, burgeoning political violence, and innumerable displaced people the once 'stable Kenya' has lost much of its reputation. Nigeria, in turn, is a country which is paralyzed not only by corruption and electoral fraud but also by the inefficiency of its administration, a high crime rate, blatant economic inequality, and ethnic, social, and religious conflicts – a colossus standing on feet of clay. South Africa remains the country on which to pin one's hopes, although it also shows gaping cracks.

To be sure, much has changed in the country at the Cape since the upheaval of 1994: its macro-economic data are impressive, social housing is

progressing, and the supply of drinking water, electricity, and sanitary installations is improving. However, the situation of the Black lower classes is as bad as ever. Among the emerging countries, South Africa even shows the gravest inequalities in income distribution after Brazil. As regards the incidence of violent offences, it is one of the top countries worldwide. A structural unemployment rate of more than 40 percent, the decline of public administration, and the persistence of massive infrastructural deficiencies are only some of South Africa's serious problems.

In the field of administration, things look particularly bleak, not least as a consequence of 'affirmative action': the state is investigating 30,000 officials for corruption. One of the causes is the fact that the replacement of White executives by Blacks has been carried out more rigorously in the public service than in the private economy, qualification being a less decisive factor than the quality of personal relations.

When South Africa, having been elected host of the World Cup 2010, attracted international attention, the international community learned about the riots of impoverished Blacks and violent gangs throughout the country, which mostly victimized African immigrants. Because employees fled for fear or did not show up at work, even mines had to reduce their production. Thus, the country lost much of its attractiveness to international investors.

To avoid an implosion, the republic at the Cape must reorganize its public administration. The governing party, the ANC, is hampered by severe conflicts about personnel and content. Having been dismissed by President Thabo Mbeki in 2007, vice president Jacob Zuma was elected chairman of the ANC in 2007. Although his disciplined economic policy is appreciated, Mr Mbeki's 'affirmative action' as well as his strategy vis-à-vis Zimbabwe or the AIDS problem is harshly criticized. While Mr Mbeki has moved away from the Black grass roots, his challenger, Mr Zuma, enjoys the support of large segments of the population. He is backed not only by dissatisfied members of the ANC but also by groups that are prepared to use violence as well as by left-wing partners within the ANC alliance. In September 2008, the Zuma camp even forced Mr Mbeki to resign.

By forming the Congress of the People (COPE) late in 2008, the followers of Mr Mbeki intended to regroup. However, they are far from becoming a middle-class party. Their support for expanding the national work programme certainly meets with approval, but some of those leading the COPE are being blamed for having made mistakes as former members of the government. Mr Zuma himself probably is a dubious figure. His financial adviser has been convicted of corruption, and now Mr Zuma faces the same charge. Since he does not have any formal school-leaving degree, Mr Zuma appears chauvinistic and naive when he talks about HIV/AIDS. Observers

fear that a policy led by him will turn into a policy of devastation, especially as he enjoys great popularity with the left-wing and militant camps of the ANC. To the followers of Mr Zuma, electing their idol president is linked to their hope for radical redistribution. Does that mean that Mr Zuma represents chaos and anarchy?

However, Jacob Zuma might also send some positive signals as he does not have any racist reservations about White South Africans. And because he does not hold any ideological positions either, the diverse factions within the ANC might be balanced under Mr Zuma.

South Africa's government should revive the values of old, a process in which moral entities such as the former president, Nelson Mandela, and Bishop Desmond Tutu might set signals as prime movers. The message addresses not least the vast number of ordinary Black citizens, many of which are conservative, value-oriented Christians. Furthermore, a return of the White officials who were driven out after 1994 would be important for the state to regain its stability and functionality. Given the lack of competent employees in the public service and the economy, the state should appeal to emigrated specialists to come home.

Mr Zuma and his fellow campaigners have by now started to woo the Afrikaans-speaking minority. Mr Zuma himself not only demonstratively met with representatives of the Afrikaans-speaking elite but also visited the slums of the impoverished Whites and the farms whose White owners were savagely murdered. Moreover, he expressed his understanding for the problems of exactly this group of South Africa's population.

The White victims of 'affirmative action' and cultural marginalization will have heard the message. However, they will be able to follow the call only when their existence as an ethnic community, their linguistic and cultural rights, and their territorial base are secure. The solution could be an autonomous status, as provided for in the constitution.

The change South Africa is experiencing at the moment also offers opportunities, which should be used, or the country, which is still regarded as the most important anchor state in southern Africa, will be threatened by progressive erosion.

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