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Togo

Politics, economy and society in 2005

Dirk Kohnert ¹

Abstract: When the longest-serving African dictator, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, died unexpectedly in February after 38 years of autocratic rule, political conflict flared up again. His son, Faure Gnassingbé sized power in a coup with the backing of the army and the Barons of the ruling party. Violent protest at home and diplomatic pressure of major donors and African peers forced Gnassingbé to hold presidential elections in April. But as the elections were rigged right from the beginning, it was no surprise that they confirmed the power of the incumbent as heir to the throne of his father. In the interest of political stability in the sub-region, neighbouring states, France and the ECOWAS condoned the election results and the brutal political persecution of opponents. About 700 people died and some 40,000 fled to neighbouring Benin and Ghana in fear of reprisals. This, as well as the continuing suspension of aid from the EU, contributed to the further deterioration of the economy.

Résumé: [*Togo - 2005: Politique intérieure, affaires étrangères, économie et société*] Lorsque le plus ancien dictateur africain, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, est décédé subitement en février 2005 après 38 ans de régime autocratique, le conflit politique a de nouveau éclaté. Son fils, Faure Gnassingbé, a pris le pouvoir dans un coup d'Etat avec le soutien de l'armée et des barons du parti au pouvoir. Les protestations violentes de l'opposition et les pressions diplomatiques des principaux donateurs ainsi que des pairs africains ont forcé Gnassingbé à organiser des élections présidentielles en avril. Mais comme les élections ont été truquées dès le début, il n'est pas surprenant qu'elles aient confirmé le pouvoir du président sortant en tant qu'héritier du trône de son père. Dans l'intérêt de la stabilité politique dans la sous-région, les États voisins, la France et la CEDEAO ont cautionné les résultats des élections et la persécution politique brutale des opposants. Environ 700 personnes sont mortes et quelque 40 000 personnes ont fui vers le Bénin et le Ghana voisins par crainte de représailles. Ceci, ainsi que la suspension continue de l'aide de l'UE, ont contribué à la détérioration de l'économie.

Keywords: countrywide study, Togo, West Africa, domestic politics, foreign affairs, socio-economic development

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When the longest-serving African dictator, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, died unexpectedly in February after 38 years of autocratic rule, political conflict flared up again. His son, Faure Gnassingbé sized power in a coup with the backing of the army and the Barons of the ruling party. Violent protest at home and diplomatic pressure of major donors and African peers forced Gnassingbé to hold presidential elections in April. But as the elections were rigged right from the beginning, it was no surprise that they confirmed the power of the incumbent as heir to the throne of his father. In the interest of political stability in the sub-region, neighbouring states, France and the ECOWAS condoned the election results and the brutal political persecution of opponents. About 700 people died and some 40,000 fled to neighbouring Benin and Ghana in fear of reprisals. This, as well as the continuing suspension of aid from the EU, contributed to the further deterioration of the economy.

Domestic politics

When President **Eyadéma died** from a stroke during a rescue flight to Europe on 5.2, borders and radio stations were closed down and demonstrations banned. Parliamentary President Fambaré Natchaba Ouattara, who hurried back from a visit to Paris to overtake the interims presidency, as stipulated by the constitution, was barred to enter the country. His flight was grounded in the neighbouring capital Cotonou. Backed by the army, the parliament, dominated by the ruling party 'Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais' (RPT), which held all but two of the parliamentary seats, deposed Natchaba. At the same time, it enthroned Faure Gnassingbé as his successor (6.2.) until the end of the mandate of the deceased in 2008. Faure Gnassingbé, aged 39, a son and designated heir of his father, educated at the Sorbonne (Paris) and George Washington University (USA), was first elected into parliament in 2002, when he became Minister of Equipment, Mines, Post and Telecommunications, which put him in charge of the phosphate mines, a major foreign exchange earner and a secret 'war chest' of the Eyadéma clan. Constitutional stipulations, demanding new elections within 60 days after the death of the president, were removed by the parliament without replacement, under the pretext to prevent a political power vacuum. This flagrant violation of the constitution and all criteria of good governance demonstrated that although the longest-serving dictator of Africa had died, the autocratic reign of the Eyadéma-Gnassingbé clan was very much alive, it acted like feudal European kingmakers. The opposition, as well as African peers, were unanimous in rejecting this second '**constitutional coup**' of the Gnassingbé-Regime within only three years. Violent civil unrest was accompanied by threats with sanctions by the international donor community, the ECOWAS and the AU. Alpha Oumar Konaré, former Malian president and present chairman of the AU, branded the new rulers in Lomé as a 'new type of mercenaries called constitutionalists' who would never consent in free elections if remaining in power (23.2.). Both organisations imposed sanctions on Togo (19.2.). The Nigerian head of state, Olusegun Obasanjo, even threatened with military intervention. On 25.2. Faure Gnassingbé yielded under the combined pressure of internal and external opposition. He resigned as

head of state, and the parliament designated one of the loyalists of the RPT, the deputy speaker of the parliament, Abass Bonfoh, as new interim president. The illegal constitutional changes of 6.2. were revised, those of the constitutional coup of December 2002 however remained, thus again effectively excluding the major opposition candidate, Gilchrist Olympio, the charismatic leader of the major opposition party 'Union des Forces du Changement' (UFC) from the electoral process. Early presidential elections were set for 24.4. An extraordinary party congress of the RPT (25.3.) voted unanimously for Faure Gnassingbé as its leader and candidate for the upcoming presidential election. His major contender Olympio being barred from candidacy by dubious constitutional changes of 2002, the opposition was at pains to agree upon a new candidate. The six major opposition parties disparagingly labelled 'radical opposition' by the ruling powers, agreed again on the 74 years old vice-president of the UFC, Emmanuel Bob Akintani as their common candidate for the presidential race (14.3.), as during the fraudulent 2003 presidential elections. Political repression and civil unrest, instigated mainly by newly created armed militia in favour of the ruling party, created a **climate of countrywide despair and distrust**, as deplored by the established Christian churches. Guided by Archbishop Philippe Fanoko Kpodzro, they demonstrated once more their engagement for peaceful conflict resolution, like in the violent transition process of the early 1990s. In a public march of priests in full ordinate to the presidency (16.4.) they demanded to halt the violent conflicts which had already resulted in the loss of many lives. In addition, they appealed to end the instrumentalisation of ethnicity and xenophobia for political ends and demanded the rescheduling of the election, because major preconditions of free and fair elections (like security and the revision of the heavily biased electoral list) could not be guaranteed in the short pre-election period. The Togolese Bar Association and national as well as international human rights NGOs supported these demands. These fell however on deaf ears on the side of the government and the ECOWAS, which had offered to supervise the electoral process. Three days before the polling day even Interior Minister François Boko pleaded without avail for a postponement, because pre-electoral bloody confrontations threatened to escalate into a veritable civil war. He was deposed immediately (22.4.), and applied for political asylum with the German embassy in view of threats against his life.

The **presidential elections** of 24.4. were marred by the stuffing of ballot boxes on a large scale, theft of ballot boxes in opposition headquarters by military personnel, some 700 polling stations destroyed, and other blatant **irregularities and excesses of violence**, notably in urban centres and in the South. Parallel structures of the opposition and civic rights groups, like the National Council for Election Supervision (CONEL), created already during the 2003 presidential elections to counteract electoral fraud on all levels of public vote counting, were obstructed by armed raids of the headquarters of the opposition, seizure of computers meant to collate and check the poll results, a nationwide shutting down of telecommunication and internet gateways, including obstruction of the phone, fax and mobile phone net during the decisive three days (including polling day), and biased pro-government media policy. When the supposedly

Independent National Election Commission (CENI) on 26.4. announced the preliminary results and the victory of Faure Gnassingbé with doubtful 60% of votes, angry supporters of the opposition took to the streets and confronted the security forces and pro-government militia by acts of counter-violence. Whereas some 150 election observers of the ECOWAS, who arrived the day before polling and left before the counting was finished, confirmed (27.4.) uncritically the validity of the count and the general credibility of the electoral process, diplomatic observers of the EU as well as international NGOs like 'Survie-France' doubted the official results. According to their calculation, the opposition candidate Akitani won the election with 72% against 26% for his adversary. The 'radical opposition' protested in vain against the 'stolen elections', and Akitani declared himself the true president on 27.4. The Constitutional Court, however, dominated by Eyadéma-followers, confirmed on 3.6. the official election results of 60,1% for the incumbent and 38,3% for Akitani (3,599,306 registered voters, voter turnout 63,6%). One day later Faure Gnassingbé was sworn in as the new president. According to a report of the 'Ligue Togolaise de Droit de l'Homme' (LTDH), published on 13.5., excesses of violence since the death of Eyadéma, notably during the electoral process, resulted in more than 800 death and 4,500 injured. Although the frontiers to the neighbouring Ghana and Benin remained closed from 22.4. to 6.5., continuing political persecution triggered a **mass exodus of political refugees**. The UNHCR counted more than 34,000 refugees in Benin and Ghana until 27.5.

Mediation efforts of the AU and ECOWAS to solve the post-election crisis by proposing a government of national unity started immediately after the elections. But they failed, due to the uncompromising attitude of Faure Gnassingbé, who acted from a position of strength and, although formally agreeing on limited power-sharing, insisted on his newly gained legitimacy as elected head of state. AU president and Nigerian leader Olusegun Obasanjo, who brokered two meetings between Gnassingbé and Olympio, invited the bitterly divided parties to the Nigerian capital Abuja for reconciliation talks (18.5.). But neither he nor the acting head of ECOWAS, Niger's president Mamadou Tandja, succeeded in resolving the dangerous stalemate between the political adversaries.

Instead, Gnassingbé continued successfully the policy of divide and rule of his father in splitting the opposition. He convinced the 67 year old ambitious veteran politician Edem Kodjo, former economist, founding member of the RPT and secretary general of the OAU, since the early 1990s leader of a small 'moderate' opposition party 'Convergence Patriotique Panafricaine' (CPP), to act as Prime Minister of a new 30 member cabinet (8.6.). Thus Faure copied the same procedure which his father already had employed successfully in 1994, when Kodjo entered the government of the late Eyadéma as Prime Minister, sidelining his stronger rivals in the opposition's coalition against established parliamentary procedures, which reserved the seat of the Prime Minister for representatives of the largest opposition party. However, the strategic posts in the **new government**, labelled government of 'national coalition', presented to the public on 20.6., remained in the hands of relatives and hardline loyalists of the

Gnassingbé clan. Kpatcha Gnassingbé, an elder half-brother of the head of state, was appointed defence minister, assisted by his younger brother, Rock Gnassinbé, chief of an elite unit of the army. A close friend of the family, a Kabiyé from Kara as well, colonel Pitalouna-Ani Laokpessi, commander of the paramilitary gendarmerie in the 1990s, frequently accused by the opposition of torturing political prisoners, became Security Minister. Payadowa BoukpeSSI, former minister for Telecommunication in the Eyadéma government, also close to the Gnassingbés, was nominated Minister of Economy, Finance and Privatisation. Minister of Telecommunications became another friend of Faure, Koukouvi Dogbé, assisted by the young brother of the president, May Gnassingbé (25 years), as deputy director general of 'Togotélécom'. Apart from Zarifou Ayéva, leader of the small opposition party 'Parti pour la Démocratie et le Renouveau' (PDR), who was rewarded with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, only four members of the opposition could be convinced to enter minor cabinet posts. Thus the government of stalwarts of the RPT and a handful of opposition defectors consolidated the power base of the Gnassingbé regime which ruled the country like its personal fiefdom to the detriment of national reconciliation. The marge of manoeuvre of Kodjo's cabinet became further restricted by an informal 'kitchen cabinet' of the president, composed of his defence minister and senior brother Kpatcha, labelled already 'vice president' by the population, his cabinet director Pascal Bodjona, former leader of the HACAME militia, later nominated ambassador in Washington by Eyadéma, and two powerful personal counsellors, Pitang Tchalla, former Minister of communication under Eyadéma, and the opaque French lawyer Charles Debbasch, searched by an international warrant of the French justice, who had already advised Eyadéma in the previous years in staging his constitutional coup.

Once the grip on power was assured, the government tried to come to terms with the opposition, as this was one of the preconditions of resuming EU aid, which insisted on the 22 commitments made by the Eyadéma government to the EU in April 2004, in order to promote democratisation. On 21.7. Gnassingbé and Olympio held talks under the auspices of the 'Sant'Egidio' Community in Rome and pledged to end violence, to secure the return of the refugees and to free political prisoners. A follow-up meeting was held in Rome on 7-9.11. to evaluate the implementation of the foregoing recommendations. One week later (18.11.) the head of state started a new phase of **national dialogue**, including representatives of the three major parties of the 'radical opposition' (UFC, CAR, PDR), to agree upon a framework for early local and parliamentary elections and a revised electoral code. Although the president showed formal signs of flexibility, e. g. in offering talks with or without external mediators at a place even outside of the country, sustainable reconciliation was unlikely in foreseeable future. Whereas the major opposition parties called for a repetition of the rigged presidential election as well as a return to the 1992 constitution and to the electoral code of 2000, the RPT majority in parliament persevered the amendments of the 2002 'constitutional coup' and of the code, as these favoured the ruling party, and of course both the government and the parliament underlined the legitimacy of the elected president.

In following recommendations of the ‘Sant’Egidio’ dialogue, which a. o. proposed to reorganise the **military** in order to render it more accountable, the defence minister Kpatcha Gnassingbé started end of August to replace a number of army commanders (27.8. and 26.12.). Whether these measures would enhance accountability was open to question, as he installed the key positions of the army, overwhelmingly composed of *Kabiyé* (about 7,000 of a total of 13,000), i.e. the same ethnic group as the Gnassingbés, again with similar loyalists: the majority of the commanders of the operational units were borne in Pya (a village near Kara, the native place of the Gnassingbés). This tradition was cherished with the nomination of Béréna Gnankoudè as chief of the general staff of the army, which commanded also elite corps directed by other brothers of the Gnassingbés. The brother in law of the president, Félix Abalo Kadanga, became commander of the Rapid Intervention Force (FIR); according to a confidential UN-report he was implied in several atrocities committed during the electoral process earlier in this year. The new commander of the presidential guard (RCGP, the renowned *Bérets verts*, i.e. ‘green berets’), Bali Wiyao, originated equally from Pya. The Kabiyé Lemou Tchalo replaced Ernest Gnassingbé, the eldest son of Eyadéma, retired because of chronic illness, as chief of the parachutist regiment (RPC, ‘red berets’) of Kara, notorious for its human rights violations in the past. Thus, the army, together with reinforced or newly formed paramilitary militias (originating mostly from student organisations like the HACAME) and private policing units and security firms (including the Security Advisory and Services, SAS-Togo, owned by the notorious French businessman and arms dealer Robert Montoya, former member of an anti-terrorist unit of the Elysée, Paris), both closely interwoven with the army structure, continued to be the major pillar of the power of the Gnassingbé clan.

Although civic unrest calmed down in the second half of the year, and 460 political prisoners were freed in early November, the political climate remained tense. Despite repeated insurances of the government that the refugees could return without being persecuted or victimized, the number of **people fleeing Togo** in the aftermath of election violence still increased up to August, when the UNHCR counted 24,500 refugees in Benin and 15,500 in Ghana, whereas the World Food Programme (WFP, Rome) called on 15.7. for urgent help for even 66,500 people forced from their homes, including 18,500 displaced, scattered over local host communities in Benin and Ghana and 10,000 internal refugees. The majority of refugees were young men from the south, the region held to be the heartland of the opposition. While some of them went home during the following month, still more than 19,000 preferred to live in the refugee camps of Benin (10,960 in Come and Agame camps and 8,130 in Cotonou) at the end of the year, in fear of their safety at home. In the Ghanaian Krisan refugee camp conditions deteriorated because of seeming lack of protection against Togolese *agents-provocateurs* or spies, in view of the alleged ambiguous attitude of the Ghanaian security forces and of the government in Accra, accused of collaboration with Lomé. This caused nearly half of the population, about 800 refugees mostly from Togo, to leave the camp in November for Elubo, further west at the Ivorian border. Between 300

and 500 of these '**double refugees**', including families with young children, hid in groups of 60 or 70 in the wild swamplands surrounding the Krishan camp still in December in fear of persecution.

Following up accusations of **grave human rights violations** in the aftermath of the *coup d'état* and the fraudulent electoral process, first made by the LTDH in collaboration with the 'Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme' (FIDH, Paris) in May, other international human rights bodies were at least as critical. Based on numerous eye-witness reports, collected in the refugee camps of Benin, amnesty international published on 20.7. a scathing critique of atrocities and impunity of their perpetrators, condoned by the new Gnassingbé regime in its report entitled 'Togo – will history repeat itself?', comparing the situation with the brutal repression during the presidential elections of 1998, and underlining the special responsibility of Paris, because of its long-standing ties of military aid and cooperation with Lomé. Following appeals of the AU and the international donor community, the UN dispatched also a team of investigators on 17.6. to probe allegations of widespread killings, torture, abductions and political repression. In its report released on 29.8., the UN estimated that more than 400 people had been killed during the electoral violence, putting most of the blame on the security forces and pro-government militia, instigated by the military to act with utmost brutality against suspected opponents, providing state-owned vehicles for transport of armed militia, and cutting telephone lines, thus making it impossible for the victims to call for help. But also opposition activists were severely blamed for their 'strategy of conquering power by deliberate violence disregarding the disastrous consequences'. The FIDH followed with an own report in November, deploring once again the impunity of perpetrators, the lack of human rights commitment of the new regime in general and of the judicial system in particular. Apparently, the much-awaited report of the 'independent' National Special Commission of Inquiry (CNSEI), set up in May as an official response to the growing critique of the regime, chaired by former Prime Minister Joseph Koffigoh, did not come up to the expectations of the international community. Published on 10.11. after more than four-months long inquiry it said that only 154 people were killed and 654 hurt, but it castigated the active complicity of the RPT with the perpetrators of excesses of violence and called on the government to charge and try the guilty; a list of suspects was handed over to the government.

Foreign affairs

The immediate and harsh reaction of African heavyweights like Nigeria and South Africa, the AU and ECOWAS to the Gnassingbé coup arose expectations that Togo would be handled by its African peers as a **test case of Africa's democratic commitment** within the framework of NEPAD. Even the conformist international Organisation of Francophonie (OFI) applied for the first time its Declaration of Bamako on human rights and democratisation of 2002 and suspended the membership of Togo

(8.2.). Only old friends of the Eyadéma family, like king Mohammed VI of Morocco, the Ivorian head of state Laurent Gbagbo and his Ghanaian counterpart John Kofour, showed a more sympathetic attitude in respect of the new heir to the throne in Lomé. When the latter toured in vain the capitals of other friendly presidents, like Omar Bongo (Gabun), Blaise Compaoré (Burkina Faso) and Moammar Gadaffi (Libya) in search for support, he finally ceded to the international pressure and agreed to early elections (25.2.). Once elections were held, irrespectively of its conduct, most African leaders lost interest in Togo's democratisation. When AU chairman Konaré, who had already on 23.2. demanded the deposition of Faure Gnassingbé from power, announced to send former Zambian president Kaunda as his special envoy to Lomé to evaluate the post-electoral political process, he was openly reprimanded by AU president Obasanjo (6.6.). Other African head of states, like Niger's Mamadou Tandja, followed in stopping AU and ECOWAS from further sanctions. This was welcomed also by French defence hardliners who were opposed to the growing US influence in the ECOWAS and did not want to encourage it further by enhancing its peacekeeping role.

Similar internal rifts between proponents of 'good governance' and democratisation on the one hand and of 'stability' on the other were to be observed within the EU. Whereas the French president J. Chirac deplored openly the death of his 'personal good friend' Eyadéma, the French press and academic circles demanded with surprisingly radical overtones a thorough reorientation of the French Africa policy and accused Chirac and his government of complicity with a dictator for selfish economic and political reasons. Immediately after the nomination of the new head of state in Lomé, the French Defence Minister, Michele Alliot-Marie, excluded any interference, and on 9.6. a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hailed the appointment of Edem Kodjo as prime minister and promoter of stability and reconciliation. This the more so, as Prime Minister Kodjo had renewed the governments' obligation vis à vis the 22 EU commitments of 2004 immediately after the installation of the new government. Unfortunately, an EU mission in July reported no improvement concerning the implementation of these pledges compared with the past year. The continuing critical attitude of the German government, based on similar evaluations, was not at all welcomed, neither in Paris nor in Lomé. A few days after Lomé's Interior Minister Boko took sanctuary in the German Embassy, the Goethe Institute was burned down by armed militia (28.4.), instigated by pro-government hate press and radio. Berlin asked the some 300 German residents in Togo to leave the country temporarily for the sake of their own safety. It was an open secret that the resumption of EU-aid was still blocked mainly due to the critical attitude of Berlin. Shortly after France granted 500 m F CFA for new development projects in Togo (3.8.), the EU followed suit because of some 'progress in terms of carrying out the 22 commitments' and declared its willingness on 25.8. to co-finance a new census (€ 2 m) as a base for a revision of the fraudulent electoral rolls and to release further € 1m for early legislative elections. In October the World Bank launched a \$ 4,8 m emergency anti-poverty programme, aimed at improving basic social services, notably in the Savanes region. But significant engagements were unlikely until the political conditioning of other major donors like

the EU remained. On 7./8.12. an EU-team visited Lomé again to evaluate the progress made in fulfilling the pledges to democratisation, but there was little encouraging to be reported. **China**, on the other hand, reaffirmed its commitment to unconditional aid during a visit of its assistant minister of foreign affairs, Li Jinzhang, in Lomé (1.9.). Besides the continuing construction of a new presidency, the construction of a new hospital in Lomé in 2006, as well as intensified trade in phosphate and cotton was announced.

Socioeconomic developments

Economic performance was mixed due to counteracting factors. The tertiary sector grew by about 7%, probably a side effect of the Ivorian crisis and trade diversion from Abidjan to the port of Lomé. However, the previsions for the key foreign currency earning sectors deteriorated with a sharp decline in cotton and phosphate exports (up to -50% for cotton and -21,5% for phosphate in the first 10 months). This was due to lack of incentives for cotton farmers caused by delays in payment during the past two seasons on the one hand, and the withdrawal of private management from the joint venture fertilizer production (IFG-Togo), linked to difference between the government and the foreign private managers on the misappropriation of funds two years ago, on the other. The government failed again to meet major UEMOA convergence criteria, e.g. concerning public debt and the non-accumulation of debt arrears. In view of the continuing political crisis and the subsequent suspension of development cooperation of major donors, fundamental changes in the foreseeable future were unlikely. The remedy, i.e. access to the HIPIC initiative for heavily indebted poor countries, for which Togo would be eligible in principle, was linked with the fulfilment of the political conditions for aid, imposed by the EU and other donors. End of September Togo was rated as the seventh most difficult nation of 155 countries worldwide to do business, according to the "Doing Business in 2006" report of the World Bank. As in the case of five other members of UEMOA, which equally ranked at the bottom 11, its operating environment constituted a barrier to the growth of private direct investment and private-sector activities. For the dependents of the some 60,000 thousand political refugees, i.e. the elderly, women and children left behind, life became even more difficult. Still five month after the violent electoral conflicts, many homes and property destroyed still lacked repair, there was no money to pay the school fees, and prices for maize, the major staple crops of the poor, rocketed in July because of lack of supply for local markets, apparently there was considerable trafficking of foodstuffs to neighbouring drought-ridden Sahelian countries, but also to Ghana and Gabun where wholesalers could earn larger profits.

Zusammenfassung: Als der am längsten regierende afrikanische Diktator, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, im Februar nach 38 Jahren autokratischer Herrschaft unerwartet starb, flammten politische Konflikte wieder auf. Sein Sohn Faure Gnassingbé usurpierte die Macht mit der Unterstützung der Armee und der Barone der Regierungspartei. Heftiger Protest in ganz Togo und diplomatischer Druck großer Geldgeber und afrikanischer Peers zwangen Gnassingbé, im April Präsidentschaftswahlen abzuhalten. Aber da die Wahlen von Anfang an manipuliert wurden, war es keine Überraschung, dass sie die Macht des Amtsinhabers als Thronfolger seines Vaters bestätigten. Im Interesse der politischen Stabilität in der Subregion haben die Nachbarstaaten sowie Frankreich und die ECOWAS die Wahlergebnisse und die brutale politische Verfolgung der Gegner geduldet. Etwa 700 Menschen starben und rund 40.000 flohen aus Angst vor Repressalien ins benachbarte Benin und nach Ghana. Dies sowie die anhaltende Aussetzung der Hilfe seitens der EU trugen zur weiteren Verschlechterung der Wirtschaft bei.