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Togo – 2010

Domestic politics, foreign affairs, and socio-economic development

Dirk Kohnert ¹

Abstract: Non-violent presidential elections paved the way for another five-year mandate for Faure Gnassingbé in Togo in 2010. Although marked by considerable irregularities, the voting was considered largely credible by the international community, which enhanced the legitimacy of the incumbent. An important cause of the defeat of the major opposition party was the growing internal divide between the 'old guard' and the 'young Turks', which led to a split in the 'Union des Forces du Changement' (UFC). Its leader Gilchrist Olympio, the generation-long adversary of the Gnassingbé regime, saw his hopes dashed and entered the government of national reconstruction, while the party's presidential candidate, together with the majority of its faction within the UFC founded a new radical opposition group. The EU and the international community followed a 'laissez-faire' approach in the interests of stability and their own national interests in dealings with the country. A World Bank review of the economy revealed a remarkable shift in exports caused by the ailing phosphate and cotton sectors, along with an enduring lack of good governance.

Résumé: Les élections présidentielles non violentes ont ouvert la voie à un nouveau mandat de cinq ans pour Faure Gnassingbé au Togo en 2010. Bien que marqué par des irrégularités considérables, le vote a été jugé largement crédible par la communauté internationale, ce qui a renforcé la légitimité du président sortant. Une cause importante de la défaite du principal parti d'opposition a été la division interne croissante entre la «vieille garde» et les «jeunes Turcs», qui a conduit à une scission dans l'Union des Forces du Changement (UFC). Son dirigeant Gilchrist Olympio, l'adversaire de longue date du régime Gnassingbé, vit ses espoirs déçus et entra dans le gouvernement de reconstruction nationale, tandis que le candidat présidentiel du parti et la majorité de son parti au sein de l'UFC fondaient un nouveau groupe d'opposition radicale. L'UE et la communauté internationale ont adopté une approche de laissez-faire dans l'intérêt de la stabilité dans la région et de leurs propres intérêts nationaux dans leurs relations avec le pays. Un examen de l'économie Togolaise par la Banque mondiale a révélé un déplacement remarquable des exportations causé par la faiblesse des secteurs du phosphate et du coton, ainsi qu'un manque persistant de bonne gouvernance.

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

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Non-violent presidential elections paved the way for another five-year mandate for Faure Gnassingbé. Although marked by considerable irregularities, the voting was considered largely credible by the international community, which enhanced the legitimacy of the incumbent. An important cause of the defeat of the major opposition party was the growing internal divide between the 'old guard' and the 'young Turks', which led to a split in the 'Union des Forces du Changement' (UFC). Its leader Gilchrist Olympio, the generation-long adversary of the Gnassingbé regime, saw his hopes dashed and entered the government of national reconstruction, while the party's presidential candidate, together with the majority of its faction within the UFC founded a new radical opposition group. The EU and the international community followed a 'laissez-faire' approach in the interests of stability and their own national interests in dealings with the country. A World Bank review of the economy revealed a remarkable shift in exports caused by the ailing phosphate and cotton sectors, along with an enduring lack of good governance.

Domestic Politics

Having experienced decades of undemocratic **elections**, the Togolese people awaited the presidential polls of 4 March with keen interest. The organization and legal framework of the election were intended to contribute towards national reconciliation but were nevertheless the subject of intense bargaining up to the finish between the government of Faure Gnassingbé, backed by the ruling 'Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais' (RPT), and opposition parties and civil society groups. In contravention of the 1992 Constitution (revised as a result of the 'constitutional coup' of 2002), the RPT had used its parliamentary majority to push through significant changes of the electoral law to its own advantage in August 2009. The newly introduced first-past-the-post system, for example, provided the incumbent, fighting for his second five-year term as president, with a comfortable advantage over his competitors. A simple majority in the first round was sufficient for victory, but the divided opposition could not agree upon a joint nominee, so their votes would be split between six rival candidates.

The credibility of the process was further weakened by the refusal of the Constitutional Court to recognise the **candidatures** of two of the most promising contenders. At the end of January, the Court invalidated the candidature of Kofi Yamgnane on rather weak technical grounds. Yamgnane, an independent candidate of dual French and Togolese nationality, born in Bassar, northern Togo, was considered to be one of the more serious challengers. He had considerable political experience in France (as secretary of state in the French government from 1991 to 1993 and as one of the first black mayors in France, among other things) and could have attracted considerable support away from the incumbent's following because he was popular among the same northern ethnic groups that usually support the Gnassingbés. In addition, UFC leader Gilchrist Olympio, the historical adversary of the Gnassingbé family, was unable to submit his credentials in time because of an unfortunate accident during a visit to the United States, so the secretary-general of the UFC, Jean-Pierre Fabre, had to step in at short notice. However, Olympio, now aged 74, was not amused by this decision, which probably deprived him of his last chance to defeat the Gnassingbé clan, which has been held responsible for the murder in 1963 of his father, Sylvanus Olympio, the first president of independent Togo. Olympio only reluctantly accepted his replacement by Fabre, whom he supported half-heartedly during the campaign.

The opposition endangered its chances even further by hesitating over whether to participate in the election at all, as is shown by repeated threats to boycott the polls or to refuse to cooperate with the newly composed Independent Electoral Commission (Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante, CENI). Controversial key issues were **election procedures**, the timetable and the electoral list. The contested revision of the register resulted in only a partial adjustment of the 2007 list, which was deemed to be weighted in favour of the northern, traditionally pro-Gnassingbé regions. The 300,000 newly registered voters (some 10% of the 3,277,492 electorates), as published by CENI on 21 January, were distributed as follows: 42.7% in the sparsely populated north, 27% in the centre, and 30% in the south. Verification of the registrations was made practically impossible by an extremely tight time schedule for the appeals procedure. In addition, Faure Gnassingbé profited from a structure that gave advantages to the incumbent, i.e. easier access to campaign funding and to the media (notably state-owned media). He also benefited from a professional electoral machine, which matched international standards, and the propagation of his image as father of the nation and reconciler.

The presidential elections on 4 March, although overshadowed by an atmosphere of tension and suspicion, finally passed off largely peacefully, in stark contrast to the previous rigged presidentials of 2005, with their aftermath of bloody political persecution. The Gnassingbé regime had apparently learned its lessons from the past. It was eager to boost its power through the legitimacy provided by peaceful elections, which were assured by the deployment of some 6,000 gendarmes and policemen (known as FOSEP, 'Force de Sécurisation de l'Élection Présidentielle'), who were specially equipped for this task by the EU. In addition, about 500 international election observers, including 150 military observers from ECOWAS (the largest ECOWAS deployment in its history) and 130 from the EU, and 5,000 national observers, trained by the UNHCR, were scattered across the 35 prefectures. According to the **provisional results** released by the CENI on the eve of 6 March, the acting head of state won the elections with a comfortable margin, ahead of six competing candidates, having received 60.9% or 1.24 m of the 2,040,546 valid votes. His nearest rival, Jean-Pierre Fabre of the UFC, received 33.9%, while Yawovi Agboyibo of the 'Comité d'Action pour le Renouveau' (CAR) came third with just 3%.

The relatively low 65% turn-out, compared with 85% at the previous legislative elections in 2007, was interpreted by EU observers as a sign of general disappointment on the part of the opposition about the inequalities of the electoral process. In addition, the EU observers' report listed numerous **flagrant irregularities**, notably concerning the process of vote aggregation and transmission at the local and regional level. On 9 March, state security services confiscated a parallel compilation of election results by the UFC headquarters in Lomé, which was based on legally received copies of the tally sheets of each of the over 5,000 polling stations. They ransacked the UFC headquarters, despite the protest of EU election observers present. Fabre contested the results immediately after the election and claimed victory for himself. The EU chief observer, José Manuel García-Margallo y Marfil, declared openly before the press that he had no evidence to prove who had won the elections, although the irregularities presumably did not affect the overall outcome. These cautious comments were in stark contrast to the final statements of the EU (published three months later) and other international election observers (ECOWAS, AU, OIF observer mission), which unanimously asserted that the elections had been largely credible, free and fair – apparently out of their overriding interest in continued stability. Several African heads of state did not even await the final

results, but enthusiastically sent congratulatory messages to the newly elected president shortly after the polls.

Although the incumbent won all the 24 prefectures in the four northern regions, and the opposition took the seven prefectures in the densely populated maritime region, the results revealed a gradual departure from established patterns of ethnic or regional voting and the resulting **north-south divide**, with both the president and the opposition leader receiving historic levels of support in each other's former heartland. Whereas the ruling RPT had never taken more than 20% of votes in the maritime region under late General Eyadéma, this time his son Faure took more than 35% in Golf prefecture and about 40% in Zio and Avé prefectures. This was ultimately due to the backing of his old political allies such as Edem Kodjo, one of the founding members of the RPT, but now the leader of the 'Convergence Patriotique Panafricaine' (CPP). The UFC, on the other hand, was able to mobilize its activists even in the Kara region, the fiefdom of the Gnassingbé clan, where it attracted, for example, more than 30% of the vote in Bassar and Dankpen prefectures, thanks to the support of its northern political allies such as Kofi Yamgnane (Sursaut-Togo) and Dahuku Péré (Alliance).

The Constitutional Court endorsed the election results on 18 March, rejecting complaints from five candidates. Gnassingbé was sworn in on 3 May. The major opposition parties, the UFC and CAR, rejected the **court's decision** and called for street protests, which were rapidly quelled by the police. As a consequence of the emerging schism within the opposition, the subsequent weekly protests organised by UFC hardliners petered out within months. The population was clearly tired of being used by a disunited opposition elite.

On 7 May, the head of state reappointed Gilbert Fossoun Hounbo, an independent technocrat, highly praised by the international community, as prime minister and asked him to coordinate consultations with the opposition to form a new **broad-based government**. On 26 May, the veteran leader of the UFC, Gilchrist Olympio, surprisingly agreed to join the 'government of national recovery'. In view of his generation-long rivalry with the Gnassingbé family, this constituted a landmark in Togolese politics. The deal provided the Olympio fraction of the UFC with seven portfolios, including foreign affairs (Elliott Ohin), in an extended 31-strong government (four more members than the last cabinet). In fact, it was the first time since the introduction of multi-party elections in Togo that the major opposition party had formally participated in government. On 9 November, both parties agreed on a 'moderate presidential regime', whereby the president would appoint the prime minister from within the parliamentary majority. The new government included 17 former ministers of the previous cabinet and 14 new ones. Apart from foreign affairs, the UFC ministers took charge of industry, the free trade zone, higher education, communication and technology. All security portfolios remained in the hands of the RPT. In addition, the command of the armed forces was restricted to a few selected individuals, all from the same ethnic group as the president (Kabyé): Col. Pitalouna-ani Laokpessi, the former security minister, became special security advisor to the president. The ministry of defence remained attached to the presidency, since its former minister, Faure's half-brother, Kpatcha Gnassingbé, was imprisoned on allegations of an attempted coup d'état. Awa Beleyi (chief of staff) was replaced in December by the newly promoted brigadier Atcha Titikpina, the former interior minister, renowned for his brutal suppression of the 2005 unrest. Others promoted included General Eindrè Gnakouafré (army) and Awoki Panassa (gendarmes). Nevertheless, according to the Ibrahim Index of African governance, released in Johannesburg on 4 October, Togo had risen in the

ratings for governance over the previous four years from 36th to 43rd (100 being the highest), although it was still ranked in the bottom half of African countries.

Olympio did not join the cabinet but became chairman of a committee with equal representation of both parties set up to monitor the implementation of the process of national recovery. The unity deal also allowed the participation of the UFC in the nomination of ambassadors, prefects and heads of parastatals, and – most importantly – the implementation of crucial institutional reforms, already outlined in the comprehensive global political accord of 2006: a population census to be conducted from 6 to 21 November, the compilation of a new reliable electoral register, adjustment of constituency boundaries (so far biased in favour of the RPT) and the organisation of local elections, which had been repeatedly delayed. At year's end, only the census had been undertaken.

The reconciliation between the RPT and UFC resulted in a **schism** in the major **opposition party**. Following the announcement of the agreement between the two parties, thousands of angry UFC activists demonstrated in the streets of Lomé condemning the 'traitors' within their own ranks. Olympio and the seven new ministers were temporarily suspended from the party by its national bureau (28 May). Fabre and 19 others of the 27 UFC MPs continued to boycott parliamentary proceedings. On 12 October, after months of bitter quarrelling, the majority wing of the UFC led by Jean-Pierre Fabre, broke away with about 90% of the UFC's political bureau, including leading figures such as Patrick Lawson and Isabelle Ameganvi, as well as more than 30 out of about 40 local party federations. They registered as a new political party ('L'Alliance Nationale pour le Changement', ANC) with the ministry of territorial administration. On 22 November, the Constitutional Court made a controversial decision to deprive Fabre and eight other leading members of the ANC of their parliamentary seats, although the Constitution (art. 52) stipulated that seats should not be tied to a particular party because each MP is accountable to the electorate as a whole. They were replaced by nine new UFC MPs in early December.

The **human rights** situation improved further, despite incidents concerning press freedom. The Gnassingbé family sued about 12 different newspapers, charging them with, among other things, making false allegations about the involvement of Mey Gnassingbé, a half-brother of the president, in drug trafficking. A UN report indicated that Togo might become a transit country for international drug smuggling. In early December, the accounts of Togo's diplomatic representatives at the UN in New York were frozen because they were allegedly used for money laundering and drug trafficking. After critical evaluations of court rulings by the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists and other civic organisations, the president withdrew suits filed against five newspapers in early October. Kpatcha Gnassingbé, member of the National Assembly and former defence minister, as well as 32 others involved in charges of coup plotting, remained in detention without trial. The national truth, justice and reconciliation commission, created in May 2009 to reconcile the victims of decades of political oppression, had to suspend its activities for seven months because of tension linked to the presidential elections. Its president, Mgr Nicodème Benissan-Barrigah, reopened its offices in June, but consideration of more than 15,000 cases submitted to the commission up to December was hampered by lack of funds.

Foreign Affairs

The **EU** made a substantial contribution of about € 16 m, among others, to finance the presidential elections. In its view, the non-violent conduct of the polls and growing

stability mattered more than transparent, credible and democratic elections. The EU, therefore, remained surprisingly mute and focused on making detailed recommendations to improve future polls. This was sharply criticised by the opposition and local civic organisations. This *laissez-faire* policy opened the door for further commitments by the international donor community, including the EU. On 19 October, the EU signed a convention to the tune of € 12 m of funds to support the country through the global economic crisis and as an additional payment to the current Budget Support Programme for Poverty Alleviation of € 15 m. Total EU assistance as part of the general budget support programme for 2009 to 2010 was about € 35 m, including € 27.6 m for the 2010 fiscal year. An additional grant of € 34 m within the framework of a fast-track education programme was signed on 30 October in Lomé by the World Bank representative as coordinator of various project partners involved in the MDG 2015 aid exercise. The programme aimed, among other things, at the building of 815 classrooms and the supply of 1.5 m textbooks and other materials for primary schools.

France, as well as other major countries, followed the liberal EU approach concerning the outcome of the presidential elections. However, in contrast to 2005, when President Chirac was accused by his rival Nicolas Sarkozy of conniving with a dictator for economic and political gain, the new French head of state congratulated his Togolese colleague in a lukewarm manner, waiting until the confirmation of results by the Constitutional Court on 18 March. One reason for this may have been that Paris had backed the wrong horse, i.e. the Francophile Kofi Yamgnane, which had triggered a diplomatic row between Lomé and Paris at the end of the previous year.

In the run-up to the election of non-permanent members of the UN Security Council on 12 October, **Germany's** Chancellor Angela Merkel met with Faure Gnassingbé in New York. The talks presumably centred around aid or debt relief in exchange for Togo's vote for Germany, demonstrating yet again how realpolitik affects Western donor postures on Togo. On 9 December, the German KfW bank signed a contract to provide € 15 m to finance 17 km of a new ring road connecting the harbour of Lomé with the major national road network.

Foreign relations with **China**, which had replaced France as the major trading partner (China provided 37% of Togo's imports and France 9%), remained cordial. On 20 August, Gnassingbé visited the Expo-2010 in Shanghai where he opened the Togo-Pavilion. Togo welcomed cooperation between Africa and China under the framework of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum. This was followed by Chinese aid projects for the installation of 'e-government', agreed on 11 August, intended to provide faster and easier access to public services in collaboration with the Chinese giant Huawei telecom, and by an aid agreement on a loan and grant worth \$ 12 m for agriculture and infrastructure, signed on 10 November. In September 2009, the China Exim Bank had already agreed on a preferential loan of \$ 165 m for infrastructure projects, notably roads and telecommunications, the implementation of which started in 2010. Road improvement projects in northern Togo being carried out by the China Road and Bridge Corporation to the tune of € 75 m were to be completed in June 2012.

Togo remained a significant contributor to ECOWAS **peacekeeping operations**. In October, for example, a combat section of the army made up of 200 soldiers reinforced the standing contingent of 300 Togolese military in Côte d'Ivoire, which served as a peacekeeping force during the Ivorian presidential elections in November.

Socioeconomic Developments

In early January, offshoots of the separatist 'Frente para a Libertação do Enclave de Cabinda' (FLEC) attacked the bus of the Togolese **football team** participating in the Africa Cup of Nations in Angola, as it travelled through Angola's oil-rich Cabinda province. Three people were killed and several injured. Shocked by this event, the Togolese government forced the national team to withdraw from the tournament. As a result, the international court of arbitration for sport banned Togo from the next two African Nations Cups in a controversial decision that caused an uproar. Following an appeal by the Togolese Football Federation, backed by ECOWAS and FIFA President Sepp Blatter, the Confederation of African Football executive lifted the ban at a meeting in Cairo on 14 May. On 8 November, FIFA announced that it was to pay \$ 100,000 in compensation to the team's goalkeeper, who was seriously injured.

A World Bank survey of the Togolese economy and trade integration, commissioned by the Lomé government and published in September, revealed a dramatic **shift of exports** caused by the ailing phosphate and cotton sectors. The former major export products were replaced by cement and clinker (35% and 40% of exports respectively), while exports were increasingly directed to ECOWAS countries (68% of the total). Transit and re-export (mainly of used cars) through Lomé's deep-water port, which provided attractive storage facilities for neighbouring countries, contributed 10% of GDP. Nevertheless, the revival of the phosphate and cotton sectors by improved governance, the attraction of private investors and the capacity-building of cotton producers' organisations, were still regarded as major drivers of growth by the international donor community. In addition, the survey's recommendations focused on the development of food crop production and of the transit as well as free zone trade. Insufficient access to credit constituted one of the major barriers to business growth, followed by **corruption** at all levels of the administration, including the judiciary. A survey of businesses revealed that 60% of respondents believed that the courts were neither impartial nor free from corruption. Doing business indicators had improved little over the five previous years.

In September, an IMF mission reviewed progress concerning the HIPC Initiative. It concluded that the country was on track to reach the HIPC completion point by December and it did so on 14 December. The IMF approved debt relief of up to \$ 1.8 bn or 82% of Togo's nominal external debt (47% coming from multilateral donors, 50% from Paris Club creditors and the remainder from bilateral or commercial lenders). This constituted a milestone in view of the decade-long political and economic crisis and opened the way for economic recovery based on sound economic planning without the burden of an unsustainable external debt. Togo became the 31st country worldwide to successfully graduate from the HIPC process.

ECOWAS and UEMOA provided € 300,000 to offset **flood damage** caused by heavy rains in October, which left 21 people dead and destroyed about 8,000 homes.

Dirk Kohnert

Zusammenfassung: - Die gewaltlosen Präsidentschaftswahlen haben 2010 den Weg für ein weiteres fünfjähriges Mandat für Faure Gnassingbé in Togo frei gemacht. Obwohl die Abstimmung durch erhebliche Unregelmäßigkeiten geprägt war, wurde die Wahl von der internationalen Gemeinschaft als weitgehend glaubwürdig angesehen, was die Legitimität des Amtsinhabers erhöhte. Ein wichtiger Grund für die Niederlage der großen Oppositionspartei war die wachsende innere Kluft zwischen der "alten Garde" und den "jungen Türken", die zu einer Spaltung der "Union des Forces du Change" (UFC) führte. Ihr Anführer Gilchrist Olympio, der langjährige Gegner des Gnassingbé-Regimes, sah seine Hoffnungen enttäuscht und trat in die Regierung des nationalen Wiederaufbaus ein, während der Präsidentschaftskandidat der Partei zusammen mit der Mehrheit seiner Fraktion innerhalb der UFC eine neue radikale Oppositionsgruppe gründete. Die EU und die internationale Gemeinschaft verfolgten im Interesse der regionalen Stabilität und ihrer eigenen nationalen Interessen im Umgang mit dem Land einen Laissez-faire-Ansatz. Eine Überprüfung der Wirtschaftslage Togo's durch die Weltbank ergab eine bemerkenswerte Verlagerung der Exporte, verursacht durch die angeschlagenen Phosphat- und Baumwollsektoren, ebenso wie einen anhaltenden Mangel an guter Regierungsführung.