

Towards democratic governance and an effective fight against poverty in Burundi after the elections

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Between May and September 2010, Burundi has been through several stages of an electoral process. The first vote was at communal level on 24 May. The presidential elections took place on 28 June and the legislative elections followed on 23 July. On 27 August Pierre Nkurunziza, re-elected president, was sworn in for his second term. Elections for *chefs de collines* and *chefs de quartiers* (heads of villages and neighbourhoods) completed the series on 7 September.

The electoral process did not go as expected: reacting to the results of the communal elections the main opposition parties decided not to put up candidates for the remaining polls, denouncing what they described as « *massive fraud* » used against them in the communal elections. The various independent observation missions, among them the joint mission of the Civil Society Coalition for Electoral Monitoring (COSOME) and the European Network for Central Africa (EurAc), did not come to this conclusion. While they accepted that there had been some irregularities during the poll, the independent observers found no proof of such "*massive fraud*" on a scale which would confirm the opposition's analysis.

The consequence of the opposition's withdrawal was an overwhelming victory at all the other polls for the party in power, CNDD/FDD. The party thus emerges from the electoral process in total control of the institutions of power at all levels. There is therefore a risk that certain authoritarian tendencies which already exist in the party will be reinforced. In addition the presidents of three major opposition parties (Agathon Rwasa of the FNL, Léonard Nyangoma of CNDD and Alexis Sinduhije of MSD) have left the stage and gone into hiding, saying that they fear for their lives. Several sources on the ground are now noticing that recruitment is starting and this leads to a fear that the country could revert to a situation of war. The political assassinations which took place on 7 September and the grenades on the following nights add to this fear.

Whatever later developments occur, this situation is bad for the country's future. In order to consolidate its fledgling democracy and build a strategy in the struggle against poverty, Burundi needs coherent and transparent government action. Now that there is no longer any legitimate parliamentary opposition to act as a watchdog for the idea and practice of good governance, these can only be demanded and defended by the media and civil society.

EurAc considers that Pierre Nkurunziza's speech at the investiture for his second term to be a positive sign. The President committed himself "*to fight against any ideology or practice of genocide and exclusion, to promote and defend individual rights and liberties*". He also promised to "*defend the overall interests of the nation, to ensure national unity and cohesion, peace and social justice*". Finally he announced "zero tolerance" for all those who carry out acts of corruption and financial irregularities. However, he made no reference to any process of dialogue which might be started with the opposition parties, nor did he speak about a role for civil society..

That said, EurAc awaits the commitments made in this investiture speech to be put into practice. In reality, the everyday behaviour of the régime gives a totally

different picture. We note and regret the lack of progress with regard to some cases in which serious abuses of democratic liberties and governance have been observed. The political and judicial authorities have decided to suppress embarrassing dossiers such as the sale of the Falcon 50 presidential jet and the aid in the form of fuel given by the Federal Republic of Nigeria since 2005. In the case of the assassination of the Vice President of the watchdog, the *Observatoire de la Lutte contre la Corruption et Malversations Economiques* (OLUCOME), Ernest Manirumva, in April 2009, les proceedings seem to be kept at the level of those who carried out the crime, leaving out those who ordered it.

In view of this situation, the network of European NGOs for advocacy in Central Africa (EurAc) recommends to the European Union and its member states to continue to work with Burundi to encourage it to have effective policies consistent with the values and commitments expressed in the President's investiture speech. In addition EurAc recommends to them, within the framework of policy dialogue with the Burundian authorities to:

- ensure that the space for democracy is protected so that political parties can function without harassment and that civil society and the media can stand up to the government on behalf of the citizen. This implies monitoring the independent working of the judiciary and ensuring serious investigation into accusations of acts of torture and political violence;
- support active diplomacy so as to discourage a return to war by promoting dialogue between the Burundian politicians and by encouraging urgently a vote on the law regulating non-parliamentary opposition. We also recommend that the European Union and its member states should be involved in creating conditions which will enable the exiled political leaders to return by guaranteeing their safety and freedom of expression;
- contribute to drawing up procedures and putting in place control organs and mechanisms for politics and the democratic running of the country so as to achieve the country's ambition to practice the principles of good governance ;
- support with expertise and funding the processes of demobilisation and of the reintegration of demobilised personnel;
- contribute to the struggle against poverty and the achievement of the Millenium Development Goals as a way of countering possible reasons for returning to war.

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