



Weekly Analysis: 15/2007

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The 'Weekly Analysis' (available in the 'Weekly' section of the Equilibri.net home page, or in the pop-up menu) is published every Monday and contains information from each geographical region. The analysis of the principal and most significant events supply a clear and precise view of international relations through examining both actual and future scenarios.

Ivory Coast: Prospective for the new Government

On Wednesday 4 April, Guillaume Soro, leader of the Forces Nouvelles (FN), replaced Charles Konan Banny as Prime Minister. The ex rebel leader formed a government of national unity 4 days later. The new executive is composed of 11 members from President Laurent Gbagbo's party, the Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI), 7 members of the FN and 5 members of each of the two principal opposition parties; Alassane Ouattara's Rassemblement des Républicains (RdR) and ex President Henri Konan Bédié's Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI). The new government follows the peace agreement signed, on 4 March, in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) by President Laurent Gbagbo and Guillaume Soro.

As of his first public declarations Guillaume Soro has stated his wish to guide the country out of the political, military and institutional crisis that has blocked the country since the beginning of the new millennium and more specifically since September 2002. The principal objective is that of organising elections, something announced only to be postponed on a number of occasions in the past due to arguments between the Government, the political parties and the rebel groups. Difficulties have been compounded by the problem of drawing up electoral lists, there has been no agreement on identity documents and giving nationality to a large proportion of the country's inhabitants.

This last aspect, and the problem of disarming and integrating the various armed rebel groups and pro-government forces, represent the major problems still to be resolved in order to obtain a more stable peace in the country. The issue is of particular importance given the imminent end to the French UN contingent's presence, in accordance to the Ouagadougou agreements, from the "Zone de Confiance" - instituted in 2003 to separate the Government Forces from the FN rebels in the North. The success of the peace process and national reconciliation will also depend on how security is managed in this period and how the future joint armed forces are organised.

African Desk

Cuba-Spain: bilateral relations

The Spanish Foreign Minister, Miguel Angel Moratinos, has visited Havana and met with the ad interim President Raúl Castro, the Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque and the vice President Carlos Lage. Moratinos is the first European Minister to visit the island since relations between Cuba and the EU deteriorated due to sanctions being imposed due to the long prison sentences given to 75 Cuban dissidents.

The visit assumed a strong political character; relations seem to be beginning again after the 'freeze' during the Aznar years. Diverse subject areas were discussed during the official encounters: first and foremost the delicate issue of human rights. The Cuban Government has declared itself to be ready to discuss the issue with Spain but not with the EU, stating that it considered the Iberian country a 'privileged negotiator'. The two countries will launch a 'formal and permanent mechanism of political dialogue', the initiative will be formalised through the creation of a Mixed Committee that will discuss international co-operation as a means to promote human rights. In addition to this the Foreign Ministers agreed upon a relaunch of economic co-operation (interrupted in 2003), discussions to renegotiate debt (over one billion US dollars) and a project for an Agreement on Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Investments. The last issue was the scheduling of a meeting in which discuss means of furthering cultural co-operation and collaboration at all levels.

The next meeting between the Foreign Ministers will be held in Madrid in December 2007. Pérez Roque declared himself as being ready to discuss all issues, none excluded, in a context of 'reciprocal respect and constructive dialogue'. It would be opportune for the Cuban Government to extend its goodwill to all members of the EU and that those in turn, resolving their relationships with Cuba, are able to define a common political line with the Cuban authorities. The local authorities believe that Cuba needs talks, not pressure, and have identified in Spain a possible gateway to establishing relations with the EU. As regards the island's political and institutional situation Moratinos has refused the definition of 'transition' preferring to describe the current situation as 'a new phase of change which will reflect, in its implementation and intensity, the will of the population of Cuba'.

Andrea DonofrioEuropean Desk

Sri Lanka: the Government opens to talks

On 9 April, on the sidelines of the SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Co-operation) summit held in New Delhi, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Rohitha Bogollagama, stated that the Government is ready to begin negotiations with the Tamil Tigers at any moment and without preconditions. The Foreign Minister declared that "We treat the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) as a terrorist group but at the same time maintain the objective of negotiating an end to the conflict". The last direct talks between the Tamil Tigers and the Government of Colombo were held last October in Geneva without reaching any results. Since then talks between the two parts have been interrupted.

Over the last six months Government Forces have gained some important victories and have ended the Tamil Tigers control of the eastern territories. The Tigers have replied through a series of terrorist attacks, including suicide attacks, against military objectives (also causing civilian deaths) and incursions aimed at psychological gains. After a series of

naval attacks conducted, with scarce success, by the 'Sea Tigers' the LTTE demonstrated, on 25 March, having a small air force. The military air force base of Katunayake, situated inside the perimeter of the Colombo international airport, was attacked by a small aircraft that launched three bombs that killed three soldiers and wounded 16 others. The attack surprised both the Government and the population adding to the sense of insecurity and reinforcing in the collective imagination the concept of the Tigers as possessing extraordinary capacities.

The fighting in the north and east has caused around 100.000 people to abandon their homes and hundreds of refugees have reached the coasts of India. If Colombo's will to negotiate is sincere then it is an occasion that the Tigers cannot loose, if for no other reason than to slow the offensive that the Government has launched against them. On its part the Government needs to gain the faith of domestic public opinion and safeguard its international reputation (there have been a number of reports of abuses and violent acts against the Tamil civilian population). At this point in time a temporary halt to the fighting would be of advantage to both the Government and the Tigers; however, it seems a little premature to imagine the discussions can lead to the start of an effective peace process.

Asia and Pacific Desk

Romania: the trust of Brussels has as yet to be conquered

After months of reciprocal accusations the verbal battle between the Prime Minister, Calin Popescu Tariceanu, leader of the Liberal Party, and the President, Traian Basescu, head of the Democratic Party, has caused the Government to collapse. The new executive, which obtained Parliament's confidence only a few days ago, will have to uphold its agreements with Brussels. The coalition that won in 2004, initially formed by the Liberal Party, the Democratic Party, the Democratic Union Party, and by the Conservative Party had the merit of having led the country, reform after reform, up until the 1 January 2007.

Since then differences of opinion have begun to explode. Tariceanu, at the head of a weakened majority, refused to consign his mandate to Basescu who has been asking for anticipated elections and has accused the Prime Minister of fraud and irregularities. The first to fall was the Foreign Minister Ungureanu, Liberal but close to Basescu, whose role has been assumed ad interim by Tariceanu. A few days ago the Liberals left government and created, alongside some minority parties, a new coalition whose objectives include withdrawing Romanian troops from Iraq. The new coalition has won a vote of confidence in Parliament but President Basescu, whose support appears to be falling, has refused to accept its legitimacy. Three Democratic Ministers have been left out, including the Justice Minister Monica Macovei, the architect of the judicial reforms that allowed Romania to enter the EU. As regards the European elections for the choice of the 35 representatives to the EU, originally scheduled for 13 May, the date has been postponed by Tariceanu by an ordinance that sets them this coming autumn.

All of this has come on the eve of the European Commission's visit to Rumania to verify progress, the results of which will be published in a report scheduled for June. It is thought unlikely that Brussels will decide to apply any particular clauses, however, Bucharest would be best advised not to take excessive risks. The new Government seems to lack a certain

capacity and polls favour the nationalist and extremist parties, a sign of a lack of satisfaction on the part of the electorate.

Elisabetta Sartorel

Iran: the operative and diplomatic advantage following the arrest of the British sailors

A few days ago 15 British sailors were freed after having been arrested by Iranian forces after being accused of entering Iranian territorial waters in the Shatt al-Arab canal. The arrest and freeing of the Royal Navy sailors were the subject of intense media speculation on the part of the Iranian Government, the objective being that of furthering diverse interests in diverse areas of international politics.

The affair was useful to testing the reactions of Tehran's Asian allies - Russia and China - after the problems caused by the UNSC's decision in regards to the nuclear issue and the divergence of opinion between Moscow and Tehran in regards to payments for the construction of the Buser reactor. Russia and China, who were moderate in their support for Iran on the two issues mentioned above, demonstrated themselves as being unwilling to condemn Iran's actions. In this fashion Iran has both responded to Washington's show of political and military force and has obliged London to open negotiations on the nuclear issue. The environment most affected by the affair remains Iraq.

The British forces are charged, via the UN 1723 resolution, to protect Iraq's national waters; this includes limiting the infiltration of individuals and military equipment from Iran. Tehran's actions have thus complicated the operative panorama of the British forces that now need to assume a more moderate presence in order to avoid any military escalation. The affair has thus gained Tehran a certain amount of 'diplomatic currency'. Iran could force negotiations in the nuclear question having given proof of Russia and China's political support. As regards Iraqi issues Iran could take advantage of the flexibility of British control over the Shatt al-Arab controlled launch, once again, its image as a regional power at the forthcoming international conference on Iraq scheduled for May.

Alessio Orlando