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Addressing state fragility in Guinea-Conakry: A European success story?

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»» Consolidating the transitional process and improving resource exploitation in Guinea-Conakry would help to create stability and prosperity in the West Africa region. For the European Union (EU), this would mean enhanced conditions for trade and less incentive for illegal immigration into its member states. It would also enable the EU to gain broader security cooperation in the Sahel. So, redressing state fragility is a priority for external donors. In the aftermath of Guinea's disputed 2010 elections, development partners hoped a successful democratic transition would improve resource management and secure peace and economic development. Democracy index Polity IV changed Guinea's rating from 1 in 2009 to 6 in 2010, suggesting that the country would become a success story of a speedy and effective transition. This policy brief challenges this optimistic view and examines European policies in Guinea, a country that ranks 156th out of 169 in the UN Human Development Index. The EU is Guinea's most important development partner – it spent €155 million on aid to the country in 2008. But it could improve its diplomatic influence. To counter state fragility, the EU must support institutions and not just rely on withholding aid. In this way, it can help to shape Guinea's economic and security environment as the country takes its first steps towards a functioning democracy.

OVERLY OPTIMISTIC

The overly optimistic predictions on Guinea's transition have mainly been based on two events: the reaction to state violence in September 2009 and the election of long-standing opposition leader Alpha Condé as president in December 2010. These actions arguably put a stop to the

HIGHLIGHTS

- Guinea has not completed its transition to democracy and is not yet the success story the EU had hoped it would be.
- The EU has linked delivery of aid to elections, but this is not enough to tackle state fragility.
- The EU must prioritise the rule of law in business-state relations and in security sector reform.

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»»»»» chaotic direction of President Lansana Conté's last years, the military coup and junta government. But in 2012, a reality check is needed and expectations will have to be scaled back.

In September 2009, Guinea's junta violently repressed an opposition gathering at a Conakry stadium, and outcry followed. Human rights organisations denounced the rape, mass murder, torture and disposal of hundreds of victims, and have since demanded an investigation and the prosecution of military and police forces. International institutions, including the EU, adopted specific sanctions. The EU 'strongly condemned the repression' and instituted an arms embargo and travel bans for junta leaders. It also suspended a fishing agreement that is key in EU-Guinea relations. The junta eventually fell as a result of national and international pressure, leading to elections in 2010. The arms embargo has now been lifted and the fishing agreement resumed, but even so, justice has been elusive. In February, a former minister of the military junta who still holds a position in government, Tiegboro Camara, was charged with crimes against humanity in the events of 2009. This is an important step for the judicial process and has raised hopes about the independence of the courts. But justice is slow in Guinea; Tiegboro was not imprisoned, in spite of the fact that a United Nations investigation identified him as a witness and leading figure in the repression.

In 2010, the disputed election that brought Condé to power was considered an encouraging precedent in West Africa. Condé was elected over former prime minister Cellou Diallo, who won a majority of votes in the first round but admitted defeat in the run-off. The EU financed the electoral process and engaged in post-election 'mediation'. This was interpreted as the first step in a democratic transition that would bring about a functioning, reformed state, as well as fostering economic development.

Condé now claims that Guinea's growth rate has increased from 1 to 5 per cent, and the

Guinean Franc is relatively stable. Mobile phone subscriptions in Guinea stood at 1.35 million at the end of 2011, up 49 per cent on the previous year. But only 10 per cent of families have electricity and petrol prices have gone up. Life expectancy is 59 years and just 30 per cent of Guineans are literate. Guinea-Conakry is still considered a failed state in the Foreign Policy Index and the World Bank's Doing Business project ranked it 179th out of 183 economies on 'ease of doing business'. National civil society representatives and analysts are worried about an escalation of ethnic confrontation. Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group have warned of President Condé's unsatisfactory measures to curb human rights violations and finalise the transition process. The EU has not exerted enough pressure on Condé to democratise Guinea-Conakry's institutions. He has been in power for 15 months and governs without checks and balances, in an isolated and even authoritarian style.

THE EU'S NARROW FOCUS ON DEVELOPMENT

The European Union is an important development partner for Guinea. It has allocated €230 million for development cooperation as part of the 10th European Development Fund (EDF, to be disbursed until 2013). The Forecariah bridge, which provides a route between Guinea's capital, Conakry, and Freetown in Sierra Leone, was completed with the help of €8.35 million from the EU. But Guinea's vast natural resources mean that it could potentially mobilise sufficient domestic resources for its own economic development. It is also getting aid from other partners. The World Bank recently contributed \$25 million for a submarine broadband cable. And it approved \$73 million of new aid for 2012. China is the most important of Guinea's non-Western partners: China-Guinea relations go back to 1959 when Guinea's president at independence, Sékou Touré, recognised Mao's

People's Republic of China. China gave Guinea at least ¥170 million in 2011, and made other highly visible contributions including student exchanges, a new stadium, 100 buses and 50 rubbish-collecting trucks. Angola recently granted a credit line of \$150 million for development. With so many other international actors involved, the EU carries limited weight, even if its development aid is still a very significant drop in the Guinean finance ocean. Within the EU, France is the key actor because it accounts for more than half of Europe's total development aid. But it neither has as much interest in Guinea nor is it as strong as it is in Senegal, Gabon or Côte d'Ivoire. Germany and the United States have been important partners in military cooperation in the past.

EU relations with Guinea revolve too closely around the ACP development cooperation agreement and they need to transcend this narrow focus. The EU has not lived up to its potential as a diplomatic actor to support Guinean peace. Even though it is Guinea's most important

single donor, it has let other actors drive political negotiations. The EU was part of the International Contact Group for Guinea (ICG-G). This group was created after the 2008 military coup and included the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS),

the African Union, the United Nations, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States, the Francophonie and the Mano River Union. The ICG-G convened 17 meetings and has now become a 'Group of friends of Guinea'; delegations continue to visit Conakry, often to press for elections. The EU usually backs the African Union's position, an approach it has embraced elsewhere on the continent, even though the

pan-African body is often less capable than ECOWAS or the UN.

According to some Guinean civil society activists, the EU has a prestige that none of its member states can match by themselves, and its role in fostering democratic legitimacy is especially appreciated. EU officials have met with different political leaders, including Diallo, and have put pressure on Condé behind the scenes. These 'facilitation' efforts could nevertheless benefit from a bit more staying power. Within the EU team, better synergy is needed between the EU Delegation on the ground and the European External Action Service (EEAS) in Brussels. The EEAS does not know the details of EU development projects in Guinea, which could usefully inform thematic policies across divisions. And the Delegation is seemingly under pressure to fulfil the traditional development role for the Commission's Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation at the same time as exercising input into broader EEAS policy. The EU needs clearer institutional mandates and political will to advance its role in Guinea.

INSTITUTIONS, NOT JUST ELECTIONS

Weak institutions and an unfinished transition hinder Guinea's development, but the EU's approach to tackling fragility has relied on sanctions and aid conditionality instead of using proactive tools. After President Condé's election, the EU lifted travel ban and frozen-funds sanctions for many former junta members, even in the face of their poor records on human rights. Individuals formerly under sanction, such as Sékouba Konaté, are now co-opted as reputable leaders. The EU is still making the full resumption of development cooperation conditional on parliamentary elections, which High Representative Catherine Ashton said in a statement in September 2011 is 'fundamental for the transition and for national cohesion.' But when speaking of the Arab uprisings in 2011, Ashton

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»»»»» also called for 'deep democracy' beyond elections. The EU's credibility and leverage are undermined in Guinea by the narrow focus on elections. More importantly, this position does not address state fragility; the real concern is institutional incompetence and political confrontation that could lead to violence or a return to authoritarianism.

Political confrontation is taking place not through but *about* the elections. Elections were scheduled for December 2011 and then cancelled. Condé has announced that they will now take place in July 2012. Both the government and the opposition want to ensure that the results are favourable to their side. The main opposition party argues that the registry and the Electoral Commission currently benefit the presidential camp and it has threatened to boycott the process. Meanwhile, dozens of small parties known in Conakry as 'phone booth political parties' have been artificially created to support the different camps and to rally support along ethnic lines. The EU has engaged with as many actors as possible from these parties and civil society groups. This sometimes confers the groups with undue legitimacy. The excessive focus on form has distracted donors from the content of the political quarrels, which already hint at destructive, zero-sum power games among factions. And the prospect of a full resumption of EU aid has proven to be an insufficient incentive to carry through the electoral process.

Stronger, less partisan and more capable institutions are needed in Guinea. There is a temporary parliament, the 155-member National Transition Council (CNT), which has the power to adopt laws and has even passed a new constitution. But the CNT is made up of appointed representatives who have little experience in legislation or policy-making. USAID has provided some training, but much more is needed. Party politics could become more professional and effective if the individuals involved were given seminars on programming, campaigning and strategising. At

the moment, there is little substance in the debates; the CNT often allies with Condé's party and illegally obstructs the judiciary and the Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission is itself highly politicised. The nationally appointed Mediator (*Defenseur du Peuple*) even made some racist remarks in his May 2011 press conference about one of Guinea's major ethnic groups, saying that 'since the Peul already control the economic sphere, they should leave political power to other ethnic groups.' Public administration is suffering from new and excessive politicisation. Condé does not trust functionaries who served in previous regimes, but not all of the policy-makers in his inner circle possess the skills necessary to help govern effectively. International donors, including the World Bank, should be aware of this politicisation when drafting their capacity-building policies.

Increased ethnic tensions are a recurring problem. They are reflected in voting patterns and have been used by politicians to deadly effect in the past. Condé is from one of the Malinke groups, which make up about 35 per cent of the population. Diallo is a Peul, a group traditionally strong in business and trade that accounts for some 40 per cent of Guinea's population. Future electoral contests between these rivals, drawing support along ethnic lines, will likely reignite tensions. The International Crisis Group thinks that ECOWAS, the African Union and the UN should focus on social cohesion policies. The EU has been reluctant to openly discuss ethnicity, perhaps because it is aware of the religious and identity issues within Europe itself. The EU strongly believes that the ethnic factor is instrumentalised and is not a real problem. It points for proof of this to intermarriage and non-segregated urban life in Guinea. But ethnic identity, as with religion in neighbour countries, has become a conflict driver. It should be analysed further and dealt with so as to minimise unacceptable discourse and mobilisation. When the EU unblocks disbursement for 'institutional support', these politics should be factored in.

SHAPING THE ECONOMIC AND SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

The EU urgently needs to refocus on democratising the Guinean economic and security environments. Some of the greatest causes of state fragility in the country are nepotism and corruption in business-state relations, along with the oversized, abusive military and police forces.

Guinea is the world's largest exporter of bauxite and it also has gold and diamond mines. But the lack of rule of law affects resource management and relations between the government and powerful companies. The Health Minister recently criticised donors for withholding funds or diverting aid to civil society, but donors counter that aid disbursement through government has been ineffective. In fact, Guinea has difficulties absorbing EU aid due to weak capacities. For example, the EU offers significant support for 'decentralisation', but its implementation requires better national follow up. Upholding the rule of law could help the EU and other donors to ensure that aid trickles down to benefit the population. In 2011, George Soros helped Condé draft a new mining code that would tackle corruption, along with controversially increasing the state's stake in mining contracts to 33 per cent.

Conflict between the state and business is frequent in Guinea. Multinational companies have little incentive to blow the whistle on corruption, because they profit from the current system and fear alternatives to the status quo. Rio Tinto recently paid \$700 million for a mining concession, which the government said would become an infrastructure investment fund for health care, education and roads. Brazilian mining major Vale will invest more in its African projects than in any other region in 2012, including on coal and bauxite projects that have been agreed in Guinea. Anglogold Ashanti has plans to double its gold output in Guinea by 2016. Besides its exposure to volatile global commodity prices, Guinea's mining

outputs create little domestic value added – its bauxite is still refined in Cameroon. The EU and other donors could help with this, and should also speak out against the slow pace of reform and entrenched mismanagement.

Guinea's army is oversized. It has around 45,000 troops for a GDP of \$4.5 billion, about the same size as Austria's army. Austria, like Guinea, has a population of 10 million people, but has a GDP of \$380 billion. Recruitment and promotions have had an ethnic and partisan bias. The 2007 and 2009 crackdowns on civilians highlighted widespread abusive practices, such as arbitrary arrests, property destruction and theft. Security sector reform is therefore extremely important in the project of building a democratic state. Last December, the army was angered by President Condé's announcement that 4,600 soldiers would have to retire. Some suspect that Condé will cut numbers but increase recruitment from 'trusted' ethnic groups. While restructuring the army is a necessary step, political sensitivity around this needs to be better managed. Contributions from the EU and the UN Peacebuilding Fund are expected to cover this restructuring. The EU will use €10 million from the EDF's B Envelope, earmarked for unforeseen circumstances and in exceptions allowing for security-related spending. Still, longer-term policy planning is needed.

The EU Council sensibly re-authorized arms sales without exception for UN and EU humanitarian or institution-building programmes, but limited the materiel covered to 'non-lethal equipment' needed by Guinean police and gendarmerie to maintain public order. This is justified given the rising national and trans-border security threats across West Africa and the widespread availability of arms for insurgent groups. For example, the main Guinean opposition is in Senegal, and former junta leader Dadis Camara, wanted for human rights violations, is in exile in Burkina Faso. Ivorian militants allegedly plot in Guinea against Côte d'Ivoire President Alassane Ouattara. And past military operations authorised by Conakry against Liberian rebels (including

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»»»» Charles Taylor) have provoked reprisal attacks on Guinean territory. Family and trade links mean that the regional diaspora population numbers in the millions. In this trans-national security environment, the EU should contribute to boosting West African cooperation, particularly through working with ECOWAS for effective security sector reform efforts.

CONCLUSION

Guinea has hopefully reversed the trend of state disintegration in favour of democratisation. But it is still too early to say that its transition is a success. Transitional justice is not complete and President Condé must still deliver on his electoral promises as the population impatiently awaits concrete improvements. Development and security need consolidation, and EU policies

can support this by tackling key dimensions of state fragility in Guinea. The EU's narrow focus on cooperation projects and elections needs to be broadened. This must include a focus on the democratisation of security forces and upholding the rule of law in business-state relations. Also, EU-Guinea relations must be envisioned from a sharper political perspective, in the context of a West Africa effort that targets regional peace and development.

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