

Nicolas Sarkozy's African Policy in the context of Franco-Chadian Relations

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In Cotonou, on the 19th of May 2006, then Minister of the Interior and leader of the UMP Nicolas Sarkozy declared himself in favour of the establishment of new relationships between France and Africa. He declared in particular to be willing to “*build a healthier, uncomplicated and balanced relationship, clear from the dross of the past [...] of the networks of informal emissaries of former times who have no mandate other than that which they fashion for themselves*” and instead asked for “*greater transparency*” and a bond between France and Africa relying far less on “*personalization of relations*”. The term *Françafrique* was not used, but Nicolas Sarkozy seemed to refer to it nevertheless in order to better condemn its different components, notably when he declared that it was necessary to “*renounce any paternalism*” or “*the appearance of France giving lessons*”¹.

The “*challenges*” Africa had to face, in his view, were essentially political and economic. From a political point of view, Nicolas Sarkozy focused on stability and peace but insisted moreover on the democratization of the continent, a democratization based on strong institutions, respect for the rule of law and good governance. From an economic point of view, he called on Africa to build a dynamic economy capable of offering “*opportunities and a future, the promise of a better life to [the] numerous, motivated youth*”².

Elected President of the Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy, in the highly controversial Dakar speech³ reiterated the same commitment and the same wishes, setting them henceforth as new objectives and new principles to govern France’s African policy. The French President thus

1 SARKOZY Nicolas, Declaration of M. Nicolas Sarkozy, Minister of the Interior, on democracy in Benin and the establishment of new relationships between France and Africa. Cotonou, the 19th of May 2006, available on the Internet [viepublique.fr](http://discours.viepublique.fr) at the following address: <http://discours.viepublique.fr/notices/063001811.html> [Accessed the 15th of July 2010].

2 *Ibidem*.

3 Dakar speech consists of two parts. In the first, Nicolas Sarkozy gives his vision of “*the African man*”. In the second, he explains that France will support Africa particularly if it makes the choice of democracy or militates in favour “*of an alternative globalization*”. If the first part of the Dakar speech was widely decried in Africa and to a lesser extent in France, this was not the case for the second, which revisits largely the thrusts of the Cotonou speech by expanding them at times, notably when Nicolas Sarkozy mentions his “*Eurafrique*” project.

reasserted his will to establish a “*partnership between Nations equal in rights and duties*”. This partnership would not only promote the peace and stability of the continent but also its democratization and the emergence of rule of law. Furthermore, it was to lead to the “*co-development*” of France and Africa. As in Cotonou, a year earlier, in Dakar Nicolas Sarkozy made himself the partisan of a greater regional integration and announced the desire to go even further and “*prepare the advent of the Eurafrique*”, a concept which echoed his desire to see France, Europe and Africa fight “*alongside all those in the world who want to change globalization*”⁴.

If Nicolas Sarkozy declared that France wanted to be the first partner of Africa in facing these challenges, he warned: “*success [...] relies first and foremost on yourselves*”⁵. The constant reference to Europe indicated, however, that Nicolas Sarkozy looked more to associate the European Union with these objectives. What seemed to make this easier was that the program that he outlined matched entirely the ambitions of the EU in terms of external policy, whether in the search for peace and stability, the promotion of democracy and rule of law, or the development of an economic partnership between the European and African ensembles.

Both in its objectives and in the methods that it aimed to employ, the vision of Nicolas Sarkozy broke with that which is sometimes called the *Françafrique*. Franco-Chadian relations, however, reveal the scale of the difficulties which confront it, and they show the fragility of this vision that is still far from constituting the alpha and omega of French foreign policy. French policy in Africa is rapidly changing. It seems nonetheless as difficult for her to break with the practices of the past as to implement the reforms announced by Nicolas Sarkozy. The difficulties are such that French policy in Africa appears ultimately to seek a *raison d'être* and gives the impression that its sole objective is responding to short-term domestic political imperative.

Between the temptation of continuity and the uncertainty of a breach

Stability and peace seem in many ways to be the main challenges identified by President Sarkozy. None of the other objectives that he set could be reached without these two conditions also being met. To do so in accordance with what Nicolas Sarkozy announced in the Cotonou and Dakar speeches, France sought increasingly to encourage greater involvement of the African

4 SARKOZY Nicolas, Address of M. Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the Republic, delivered at the University of Dakar, Dakar, Senegal, 26th of July 2007, available on the website of the Presidency of the Republic at the following address :

http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais/interventions/2007/juillet/allocution_a_l_universite_de_dakar_79184.html [Accessed the 15th of July 2010]

5 SARKOZY Nicolas, Declaration of M. Nicolas Sarkozy, Minister of the Interior, on democracy in Benin and the establishment of new relationships between France and Africa. Cotonou, the 19th of May 2006. *Op. cit.*

States. At the same time, he campaigned in favour of greater European investment in Africa. French policy in Africa has thus experienced a genuine multilateral turning in the last few years, since, in addition to European and African States, France seems increasingly concerned with obtaining support from international organizations, starting with the UN, and even NGOs. This conversion to multilateralism, as ambitious as it is, nonetheless meets serious obstacles that raise questions about the determination of France to complete it successfully.

The prospect of a multilateral shift in French African policy

The use of multilateralism appears in many respects to be an attempt to respond to criticisms that have been directed at French African policy. Multilateralism offered the advantage of conferring a new legitimacy on a policy undergoing radical transformation, along with the means to achieve - at minimum cost - the objectives of that policy.

France's African policy was redefined after the wave of decolonization, in the context of the cold war. Under these circumstances, the fall of the Berlin Wall required that its various components be rethought. However necessary this work was, it was widely criticized. The legitimacy of this policy as well as its cost became the subject of debate. While some denounced its excesses and its deviations⁶, others highlighted the cost of the French operation in Africa, which, in the post-Cold War context of the 1990s, had lost, in their view, its *raison d'être*. The very validity of France's presence in Africa was thus challenged. It was necessary not only to redefine the methods, but above all to set new goals for this presence.

Multilateralism offered the advantage not only of answering criticisms and questions that had been raised, but also presented the opportunity to provide a new legitimacy and new methods to French African policy. This became obvious as the 1990s progressed. From this point of view, Nicolas Sarkozy positions himself in the continuation of reform that was already underway, notably when in Cotonou he explained the reasons for the presence of France in Africa. He added " *the first mission [of the French military bases in Africa], is to assist the African Union, a fine example of a successful African integration, in building an architecture of peace and regional security which will enable the continent to have at its disposal a tool to better ensure, in solidarity, its security and stability*". He also emphasized that " *the fact of being present militarily in a country [...] sometimes leads to having to intervene in a conflict or internal crisis, in a humanitarian capacity, to protect the security of the civilian*

⁶ These criticisms arise notably from NGOs such as the Survival organization that has constantly criticized the excess and the persistence of the *Françafrique*. The work of historians and judges has allowed the better understanding of the secret networks which, after independence, continued to link French and African officials. It cannot be ruled out that some of these networks are still active.

population as well as foreign nationals” and Nicolas Sarkozy insisted “*We do this to safeguard human lives and most often in consultation with the international community, the United Nations and the African Union*”⁷. By planning its African policy in association with the UN and the AU, France gave it some legitimacy, and eventually additional resources insofar as it could expect to receive support from the African States. This legitimacy would be, moreover, strengthened by the humanitarian nature of the interventions that France intended henceforth to conduct.

The program of Reinforcement of African Peace-keeping Capacities (RECAMP) perfectly illustrates this attempt to reform France’s African policy in the aftermath of the cold war by introducing a more multilateral dimension. The RECAMP concept emerged during the second part of the 1990s. At that time it coincided with the redeployment and easing of French military operations in Africa. Multilateralism occupies a central place in RECAMP. Firstly, the program exists under the aegis of the UN and its final aim is to allow Africans to conduct peacekeeping operations directed or authorized by the UN. Secondly, while RECAMP is addressed primarily to the African States, it favours cooperation with regional organizations - in particular the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) - that it has, indeed, helped to strengthen, without marginalizing the African Union, with which constant contact must be maintained.

Nicolas Sarkozy has, in fact, less broken than continued the French African policy reform initiated by his predecessors, who had defined its main axes, deciding in particular to give it a resolutely multilateral dimension.

Chad, a State with persistent instability in which France has not hesitated to interfere in the past, provides a good viewpoint from which to assess the reforms undertaken by France since the mid-1990s, as well as the determination of President Sarkozy to commit himself to the goals that he fixed during the founding speeches of Cotonou and Dakar.

Chadian instability tests multilateralism

Far from symbolizing the renewal of French African policy, the Chadian example reveals the ambiguity of the undertaken reforms, their weakness and more generally the uncertainties that press on them.

7 SARKOZY Nicolas, Declaration of M. Nicolas Sarkozy, Minister of the Interior, on democracy in Benin and the establishment of new relationships between France and Africa. Cotonou, 19th May 2006. *Op. cit.*

The French Foreign Ministry presents Chad as a “*structurally fragile country*” and emphasizes furthermore that it “*has been directly affected by the crisis in Darfur*”. To this should be added Central African problems alluded to by the Quai d’Orsay when it mentioned the 350 000 “*Sudanese and Central African*” refugees that Chad “*had to accommodate*”⁸. Structurally fragile, Chad is developing in a difficult environment that it most often makes even more unstable. Marielle Debos highlighted this: “*N’Djamena played a role in the destabilization of Darfur, long before the war in this region exacerbated tensions that affect Chad today [...] Idriss Déby himself has benefited from the support of Khartoum*”⁹.

In the past, France has intervened on several occasions to influence the development of internal politics, but also to ensure the territorial integrity of the State, an important link in the French military system in Africa and, as such, a central element of the French African “*sphere of influence*”. Thus, the Epervier operation aimed as much at supporting Hissène Habré as to protect Chad from Libyan ambitions. The French operation in Chad has remained relatively important since the Epervier operation, not forgetting that France is also present in the neighbouring Central African Republic. By contributing to the development of African peacekeeping capacity (RECAMP), France was entitled to expect that the African security architecture which was put in place would, in the future, participate increasingly at its side in the stabilisation of the country and the defence of its territorial integrity, thus allowing France to reduce its military presence in the region.

In recent years, the deterioration of the situation in Darfur, to which Chad is not totally unconnected, has in return contributed to the destabilisation of President Déby. Facing this situation, France first appeared to comply with the objectives and principles fixed by Nicolas Sarkozy and gave priority to a multilateral approach. The 25th of September 2007, it thus supported the adoption of resolution 1778 whereby the Security Council “*expressing its high concern regarding the activities of armed groups and other attacks in Eastern Chad, Northeast of the Central African Republic and West of Sudan, which poses a threat to the safety of the civilian population and the pursuit of humanitarian operations in these areas as well as the stability of these countries, and gives rise to serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law*” approves the establishment of a multidimensional presence – MINURCAT - and “*authorises the European Union to deploy [...] an operation [...] intended to support [it]*”¹⁰. Decided by the United Nations on humanitarian grounds, the deployment of a

8 See the page dedicated to Chad on the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs Internet site:

http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/pays-zones-geo_833/tchad_357/index.html [Accessed the 15th of July 2010].

9 DEBOS Marielle, "Chad, l’escalade de la crise," RAMSES, 2009, p.212.

10 Resolution 1778 of 25th September 2007 of the United Nations Security Council (S/RES/1778).

mission to Chad relied in particular on a European force, the EU having previously made an offer to the UN to deploy such a force. This deployment was accepted by the European Parliament on the 27th of September 2007. Officially decided by the Council of the European Union on the 15th of October, it began in January 2008. European forces were subsequently declared operational on the 15th of March 2008.

But, at this time, the relationship of France's African policy with multilateralism appeared in a new light. President Sarkozy had demonstrated that he could not escape from certain contradictions inherited from his predecessor, Jacques Chirac.

Foremost, it must be mentioned that it was at France's instigation that the United Nations adopted resolution 1778. It was in the same manner that France worked within the European Union in view of establishing EUFOR. The latter, under Irish command, gathered 3200 soldiers from some twenty-six States. However, France provided the logistics corps. The operational headquarters of EUFOR was located at Mount Valerian in France and the headquarters of the force based in Abéché was commanded by the French General Jean-Philippe Ganascia. France was the primary contributor to EUFOR, it provided it with more than half of its workforce and the bulk of its resources, in particular most of its helicopters (without considering that EUFOR benefitted from the presence of French elements in Chad from the Epervier operation). The role of France beside international organisations such as the UN and the EU in addition to its predominance within EUFOR could be as well explained by the persistence of a very strong link between Chad and France, and a better understanding of the situation, as by France's difficulty or refusal to see other players interfering in the affairs of a State that it numbers among the members of its "*sphere of influence*".

France's proposals had very early attracted the fear of some of its partners within the European Union. For Jean-Philippe Ganascia and Raphaël Pouyé, the situation appeared that way in 2007: "*For States that follow the French project of a military operation, this consists of decisively pursuing the development of ESDP without political compromise with Chadian and Central African security forces, of whose frequent mistakes in terms of human rights they are well aware*"¹¹. In addition, States that refused to participate in EUFOR were afraid to be associated with France's African policy, with all the consequences and risks that this could involve. In the European Parliament, Marie - Arlette Carlotti had already expressed her fears. She declared during a debate that preceded the adoption of the resolution of the 27th of September 2007 on the ESDP operation in Eastern

11 GANASCIA Jean-Philippe, POUYE Raphaël, "EUFOR Tchad-RCA : les principales leçons du terrain", *Défense nationale et sécurité collective*, n°08-09, August 2009, p.13.

Chad and Northern Central African Republic: the *“European force is essential to the overall operation of security and reconciliation in the area”* but she warned: *“it will bear its fruit only if all the parties in conflict”* *“play the game”* *“of peace. To do so, it should meet at least two conditions that I wanted to emphasize in the drafting of this resolution. First, an absolute neutrality and impartiality. Then, a balance in the forces involved: France must not try to”* *“pull the strings”* and insist: *“The attitude of Nicolas Sarkozy allows doubt to persist on this subject [...] I will be particularly vigilant to promote the interests of Africa and Europe over the French “sphere of influence””*¹². The mention of the French *“sphere of influence”* reflected the fear of a number of European politicians of participating via EUFOR in French African politics, or of seeing France confusing its own interests with those of the Union. The designation of the Irish General Patrick Nash at the head of EUFOR hardly calmed fears that were fueled by French predominance in the European force. The events of January and February 2008 were no more likely to reassure them.

At the beginning of February 2008, President Idriss Déby was forced to deal with a new attempted coup d'état from which he escaped *in extremis*, reversing the situation and repelling the rebels who, arriving in N'Djamena, had fought up to the doors of the presidential palace where the Chadian president was entrenched. For Jean Philippe Ganascia and Raphaël Pouyé, the situation at that time is clear *“The rebels, entering the Chadian capital at the beginning of February 2008 without having targeted civilians and humanitarians, do not constitute a threat to the terms of resolution 1778 [...] So the commander of the force can assure, from N'Djamena, that there will be no exception to the principle of impartiality to which the European capitals are so attached [...] The cohesion of the force is thus preserved by an unflinching commitment to follow the letter of the mandate”*¹³.

Implicitly, Jean-Philippe Ganascia and Raphaël Pouyé suggested that if the rebels had attacked civilians and humanitarians, EUFOR would have intervened. However, EUFOR always refused to associate the rebels with the worsening of the humanitarian situation because this would have required it to intervene against them. Resolution 1778 added, though, that the *“activities of armed groups and other attacks in Eastern Chad, Northern Central African Republic and Western Sudan [...] pose a threat to the safety of the civilian population and the continuation of humanitarian operations [...] and give rise to serious violations of human and international humanitarian rights”*. This observation also justified the decision of the Security Council to create MINURCAT and allow the EU to

12 See intervention by Marie-Arlette Carlotti in the European Parliament, 27th September 2007, at the website of the European Parliament :

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=CRE&reference=20070927&secondRef=ITEM-014&language=FR&ring=P6-RC-2007-0362#4-137> [Accessed 15th July 2010].

13 GANASCIA Jean-Philippe, POUYE Raphaël, *Op. cit.* p.14 – 15.

deploy a force in this region. And yet, EUFOR considered that this paragraph didn't apply to the rebels. Fighting between Chadian forces and rebels was not without consequences for civilians, EUFOR could thus be able to justify intervention against the rebels, but this would make it a de facto ally of Idriss Déby. European reticence was undoubtedly the decisive point of view.

EUFOR's conditions of intervention seem to have been open to different interpretations and show how difficult and undoubtedly illusory it is to want to separate the humanitarian component from the political conditions of an intervention. EUFOR was thus the object of numerous criticisms, notably those of "*Chadian rebels who saw it as a protection force for Idriss Déby*"¹⁴. Jean Philippe Ganascia and Raphaël Pouyé however underline that the latter also judged EUFOR guilty "*of abandonment of local populations to the violence of the rebellion*", a claim that they challenged by specifying that "*the rebels have not targeted civilians*"¹⁵. The usefulness of EUFOR seemed in fact subject to debate, which makes this observation of General Ganascia and Raphaël Pouyé particularly relevant: "*a problem arises very quickly: the only real military threat - Chadian and Sudanese rebels - do not directly target civilians and humanitarians, while inter-communal confrontations in Southeastern Chad have already ceased [when EUFOR is operational]*"¹⁶.

In February 2008 EUFOR did not intervene not only because the reticence within EU was strong, but also because, on that date, its deployment was incomplete (EUFOR declared itself operational the 15th of March 2008). France, however, brought substantial support to Idriss Déby. The situation was so uncertain that this support quickly acquired a decisive importance. The French authorities contented themselves by explaining that the French elements in Chad had, as their sole mission, to protect and prepare the evacuation of French nationals. Officially, the French undertaking complied with the speeches by Nicolas Sarkozy, as he met humanitarian imperatives in the case of the French participation in EUFOR, and aimed primarily to protect foreigners when it came to the French elements in Chad. It appears however highly improbable that the role of France was limited to these two missions. In an interview granted to *Paris Match*, Bernard Kouchner confirmed that on "*the night between the 28th and the 29th of January [France] warned the [Chadian] Presidency that some rebels had crossed the border*" and moreover reveals that "*no one reacted*"¹⁷. French authorities probably provided information to the Chadian army during the

14 DEBOS Marielle, *Op. cit.*, p.213.

15 GANASCIA Jean-Philippe, POUYE Raphaël, *Op. cit.*, p.17.

16 *Ibidem*, p.15.

17 Chad. Interview of the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, M. Bernard Kouchner, with the weekly "Paris Match", Paris, 6th March, 2008, available on the Internet site of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs: <https://pastel.diplomatie.gouv.fr/editorial/actual/ael2/bulletin.asp?Liste=20080306.html> [Accessed 15th July 2010].

entire duration of their offensive. Questioned on the supply of equipment, Bernard Kouchner replied “*the Libyans provided the munitions*”¹⁸. France nonetheless played an important role in preventing the rebels access to the airport, which it justified by explaining that control of the airport was necessary to guarantee the evacuation of foreign nationals. However, control of the airport could also provide protection to the Chadian battle helicopters piloted by mercenaries or facilitate the transit of munitions¹⁹. In the eyes of Jean-Dominique Giuliani “*France responded fairly, with great moderation and efficiency, awaiting unambiguous statements from the African Union and from the President of the United Nations Security Council*”²⁰. In the declaration to which he alluded: “*the Council requests that the States in the region strengthen their cooperation to put an end to the activities of armed groups and the attempt on their part to seize power by force*”²¹.

However, it should be noted that this declaration, which responds to a request from France, dates from the 4th of February 2008. By that date, the rebel offensive had failed, thanks notably to the support provided by France (and Libya). From then on, several questions remain. Did France, acting in an emergency, simply anticipate the Council Declaration? The latter in fact positions itself in the continuity of resolution 1778. In resolution 1778, the Council expressed “*its deep concern about the activities of armed groups*”. In the Declaration of the 4th of February, it “*requests that the States in the region strengthen their cooperation to put to an end the activities of armed groups²² and the attempt on their part to seize power by force*” and “*to the Member States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, to bring their support as requested by the Chadian Government*”. Do the events of January and February 2008 instead indicate that Paris maintains a utilitarian view of multilateralism? This would mean that France would add a multilateral dimension to its African policy to confer it with more legitimacy and means, but would not hesitate to act without endorsement and support from multilateral authorities (UN, AU) with its own means if this proved to be necessary and consistent with what France considers to be in its own interest.

In any case, these questions explain the reluctance of some European States to commit themselves to EUFOR. One can ask oneself if the multilateralism and the Europeanization of France’s African policy are not simple instruments used to conceal an old policy that consists in

18 *Ibidem*

19 See account n° 46 of the Tuesday 23rd March 2010 sitting of the Commission of Foreign Affairs of the National Assembly, available at the National Assembly website: http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/13/cr-cafe/09-10/c0910046.asp#P12_291 [Accessed the 15th of July 2010].

20 GIULIANI Jean-Dominique, “*Leçons du Tchad pour l’Europe*”, *Défense nationale et sécurité collective*, n°3, March 2008, p.21.

21 Statement by the President of the United Nations Security Council, 4th February 2008 (S/PRST/2008/3).

22 It should be noted that unlike EUFOR the Council makes the link between armed groups and rebels.

supporting “friendly regimes”. Certain European countries are even less inclined to support I. Déby, who is hardly more conscious of human rights, international humanitarian law or democratisation than his opponents. Marielle Debos recalls that the democratisation initiated a few years ago “*is nothing but the façade of a highly militarized regime*” and she highlights “*the amendment of the Constitution, which enabled Idriss Déby to be reelected during polls widely boycotted in May 2006, is unpopular except for within the President’s own ethnic group*”²³. In addition, President Déby seems to have used the events of January-February 2008 to blame some of his opponents, rather quickly assimilated with the rebels, including Lol Mahamat Choua and Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh.

The internal contradictions to Cotonou and Dakar speeches are obvious. To achieve its transformation, French policy must make sometimes painful choices and set its priorities among requirements that may seem contradictory: peace, security, respect of human rights and international humanitarian law, the democratisation process, etc. It must also clarify its relationship with the multilateral authorities: follow the conditions required by a multilateral approach, or act alone and tolerate the criticism and the cost of a unilateral policy. For example, it is hardly conceivable to purely and simply “Europeanise” French African policy. Paris, on the other hand, has a pivotal role to play in the definition of an African policy of the European Union provided that it agrees to question certain fundamentals and certain practices of the past.

Foreign policy and the necessities of domestic policy

French policy in Africa and particularly in Chad seems sometimes ambiguous, in the course of evaluation and redefinition. The management of the Zoé’s Ark case demonstrates the continuing imbalance in the relationship between France and Chad. More seriously, the management of this affair sometimes seemed to respond to imperatives of internal policy.

The arrest by the Chadian police of the members of the French organisation “Zoé’s Ark” occurred shortly after the election of President Sarkozy. The arrest took place while Ark members attempted to illegally board more than 100 allegedly orphaned and Sudanese children onto an aeroplane bound for France. The position of the French authorities was not entirely devoid of ambiguity, as revealed by French deputies Jean-Paul Lecoq, Patrick Braouezec, Jean-Jacques Candelier, André Chassaigne, Roland Muzeau and Daniel Paul. They noted, indeed, that although the French authorities - from the President of the Republic to the Prime Minister by way of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Human Rights – condemned the Zoé’s Ark enterprise, “*French soldiers based in N’Djamena and in Abéché brought their logistic assistance to the Children*

23 DEBOS Marielle, *Op. cit.*, p.211

rescue". They concluded "*it is legitimate to wonder if this support would have been possible without an official green-light*"²⁴. Subsequently and in different interviews²⁵, Eric Breteau implicated close advisors of Nicolas Sarkozy and Bernard Kouchner, and explained that Rachida Tati and Cécilia Sarkozy were to provide moral support by going to the airport where the plane carrying the "orphans" was going to land. The President, the Government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, maintained a strict condemnation of the operation, strongly refuting the comments of Eric Breteau.

This condemnation by the French authorities, which occurred for the first time shortly after the arrest of the members of the Ark, could allow them to think that they would be alone, especially as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered that it had warned them and had tried to dissuade them from completing their project. The change of name of the Organization gave the impression that the members of the Ark had sought to cover their tracks and to mislead the French authorities. Yet President Sarkozy decided to involve himself in the case by setting out to obtain their return to France. The Head of State's intervention was not without risk. In the first place, it might appear to be support for the members of Zoé's Ark, and for their ideas and acts at a time when rumours of organ trafficking and paedophilia were growing. In the second place, it might be perceived to be an intrusion into Chadian internal affairs, or worse a denial of Chad's sovereignty by the ex-colonial power, which might be echoed in other African States. Finally, it seemed to reflect a mistrust of Chadian justice, which was, moreover, at risk of being accused of lacking independence if the fate of the Ark members was to be the subject of a political agreement.

The outcome was hardly satisfactory. The Chadian trial was criticized in France as well as in Chad and the rest of Africa. It seemed clear that Chadian justice was at the very least pushed. Its freedom was also very much restricted. President Déby could, with this affair, ensure the support of his French counterpart. But, depending on this support, there was little opportunity to oppose the fact that, by virtue of bilateral agreements that defined judicial cooperation between the two countries, members of the Ark would return to France to serve their sentences.

24 Resolution proposing the creation of a commission of inquiry on the NGO operation "Zoé's Ark" on Chadian territory and the action of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence on this occasion, available on the website of the National Assembly at the following address: <http://www.Assemblee-Nationale.fr/13/propositions/pion0414.asp> [Accessed 15th July 2010].

25 LOUIS Cyrille, "Arche de Zoé : Eric Breteau contre-attaque", *Figaro.fr*, the 7th April 2008, available online at the website of *Le Figaro* at the following address: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualites/2008/04/07/01001-20080407ARTFIG00566-Arche-de-Zoe-Eric-breteaucontre-Attaque.php> [Accessed the 15th of July, 2010].

He could even less deny his pardon in March 2008 after France gave him decisive support during the rebel attack of January and February of 2008.

Nicolas Sarkozy's involvement in this affair contradicts the speeches of Cotonou or Dakar, in particular the idea of a "*partnership between Nations equal in rights and duties*"²⁶. It instead shows the continuation of the unbalanced relationship between Chad and France. Neither is it likely to improve the image of France in Africa, an image already tarnished, notably by the Dakar speech²⁷. The affair known as Zoe's Ark seems in reality to have been managed from considerations of internal policy, and many - without necessarily endorsing the approach of the members of the Ark - challenged the Chadian judicial and penal system, and wanted an intervention by the President. The latter appeared in addition to seek inspiration from the Libyan precedent, although the two cases can hardly be compared, and giving assistance to French citizens abroad is a foreign policy objective.

The Zoe's Ark case comes at a key time. France African policy is indeed at a crossroads, and appears to oscillate between the old characteristic reflexes of the *Françafrique* and the multilateral temptation to associate itself progressively with Africa and Europe in defining new relationships, with France hoping, in this point of view, to play a pivotal role between the two groups. The return to the *Françafrique* is hardly possible to the degree that it requires a weighty system, and implies unequal relationships criticized by France's former partners themselves. In addition, the context, marked by the arrival of new players and the disappearance of a generation of political leaders in Africa and in France, no longer allows it. As for multilateralism, it calls for a long-term policy, essential conditions for the emergence of a strong partnership. It implies that France defines its priorities clearly to ensure that it is understood by both African and European partners, that it breaks with a middle way that is simpler to implement but more dangerous, based on promising speeches that are constantly contradicted. Among its priorities, the pursuit of stability and peace may prevail as France's primary objective. After all, it is by presenting Idriss Déby as the ultimate defence against chaos in this region of Africa that France justified the

26 SARKOZY Nicolas, *Statement by Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy, Minister of the Interior, on democracy in Benin and the establishment of new relationships between France and Africa. Cotonou on the 19th of May 2006, Op. cit.*

27 Gérard Claude reinforces this finding by indicating that "*France supports unpopular leaders while denouncing them*" and states "*the image of the France is also suffering from the hardening of its migration policy. The closure of borders, the "charters" that repatriate immigrants has deeply shocked African mentalities*" [or even President Wade]. See CLAUDE Gérard, "*Chirac "l'Africain", dix ans de politique africaine de la France, 1996-2006*", *Politique étrangère*, 2007, p.915. When it comes to the impact of the Dakar speech in Africa, see: THIAM Assane (pseudonym), "*La politique africaine de Nicolas Sarkozy : rupture ou continuité ?*", *Politique étrangère*, 2008, p.873 to 884.

support given to him²⁸, but this priority can only be understood and accepted if, on the other hand, France proved to be so attached to democracy and human rights that it withdrew the unconditional support it gives to certain African political officials. Certainly, Nicolas Sarkozy enjoys, from this point of view, a greater flexibility than did Jacques Chirac, who developed very strong relationships with many of them²⁹.

The Zoe's Ark case could however announce quite another change: the disengagement of France from francophone Africa; the latter being of interest as an internal policy issue while some States from the rest of Africa, in particular Nigeria and Angola, would become partners of growing importance given their natural wealth. The hesitant policy of Nicolas Sarkozy that was reflected in the late rescue of President Déby could be the first sign, the RECAMP programme a second. The failure of a return to the *Françafrique* or the abandonment of the multilateral project could then accelerate this disengagement. In light of the impact it might have, it is important to study this possibility carefully.

28 DEBOS Marielle, « Darfour-Tchad l'enchevêtrement des crises », *RAMSES* 2007, p.227.

29 Gérard Claude notes that "*no President can boast such close personal links with some African leaders as Jacques Chirac*". See CLAUDE Gérard, *Op. cit.*, p.906.