

President Sarkozy and Franco-Cameroonian Relations

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The hypothesis underlying this article is the idea of a new start for France's foreign policy in Africa. Since he took office, President Sarkozy has demonstrated the political will necessary to give a new impetus to this area of French policy. Indeed, all three pillars (economic, political and military and security) of France's relations with Africa have undergone a certain degree of "modernisation". The signature of a long-term debt reduction contract, the revision of the defense and military cooperation agreements and the multilateralization of France's relations with its former colonies (Europeanization of aid, Africanization of peacekeeping efforts, etc.)¹ are all relatively new features of French foreign policy in Africa²

Cameroon is among the first countries that benefited from all these reforms. The deep historical ties that bind this country to France (we will return to this point in the first section) explain its prominent place in France's African policy. Yet, since he took office, N. Sarkozy has been rather aloof from the Cameroonian head of State. It is worth noting here that President Biya, who recently became the most senior Francophone head of State in Africa, is considered as one of the pillars of *françafrique*³, a system of personal, ambiguous and corrupt relations between French presidents and their African counterparts. This system is strongly denounced in Africa, in France and at the international level. Can N. Sarkozy's attitude be understood as an attempt to depersonalize France's relations with Cameroon? If this is the case, does it correspond to the rupture he had announced? Based on Cameroon's example, this article will analyze the terms and conditions of President Sarkozy's commitment to the "reform" of the Franco-African

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¹ The multilateralization of France's relations with its former colonies entails a multiplication of the actors involved and a depersonalization of the relations between French and African statesmen.

² Many reforms were implemented in a very short amount of time and it is worth asking whether these changes were launched by N. Sarkozy or whether they represent the last step of a process started by his predecessors. But this article is not trying to answer that question.

³ We establish a distinction between *françafrique* as defined above and France-Africa, understood as straightforward diplomatic and political relations.

relationship. The ultimate aim here is to help understand “sarkozysm” based on his African policy.

France and Cameroon: An unequal historical relationship

This article builds its argument on two observations: France’s remarkable unpopularity in Cameroon (Fred Eboko et al, 2008) and its President’s, N. Sarkozy’s, unpopularity. France was not Cameroon’s only colonizer and the United Kingdom and Germany also played a role. But none of these powers had the impact France had on Cameroonian diplomacy, so much so that, at times, it might seem that France alone bears the responsibility of Cameroon’s ties with Europe (or even the rest of the world) (S. Tonme, 2008).

Cameroon and France have maintained very close relations since independence and this relationship has evolved with the changes occurring in each country. Cameroon has indeed undergone radical social, economic and political changes since the early 1990s. These reforms were marked by a political crisis, the formal liberalization of the political process and an accelerated and difficult integration of its economy in the global market (G. Courade, 2000). With this in mind, the establishment of relations with new partners, the conditionalities imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions and the new policy of its oldest partner (France) seem to have played on Cameroon’s understanding of, frustration, expectation, hopes and resentments towards its “mother country”. The conference at La Baule in 1990, the speech in Dakar in 2007, but also the CFA franc’s devaluation in January 1994 all show that France’s position vis-à-vis its African partners has always elicited strong reactions, be it support (rarely), disaffection, acceptance, anger or disappointment. Specialists in international relations, economy and African studies all agree that the country’s dependence on France is regrettable. Franco-Cameroonian relations are based on close and unfavorable economic ties (Bayart 1995, Tonmé 2008), a military presence (J. E. Pondi, 2002; S. Tonmé, 2008), diplomatic loyalty and political patronage (M. Beti, 1993; S. Foutoyet 2009; V. Hugueux 2009).

Governance support or sovereignty boosting

France’s political influence in Cameroon is undeniable. Franco-African cooperation can be traced back to 1944, in Brazzaville, capital of the Free French Forces, towards the end of World War II. A conference was held there from January 30 until February 8, 1944, to lay the foundations of the relationship between France and Africa and, therefore, of France’s bilateral relations with

Cameroon. This conference brought together administrative representatives of French territories in Africa and France's Commissioner on the Colonies, René Pléven. General De Gaulle, who chaired the meeting, laid the foundations for the French Union, an institution that embodied the common destiny of France and its former colonies that were renamed overseas territories. But many argue that this conference was a false start for decolonization.

With regard to Cameroon, the first texts governing its relations with France were signed on December 31, 1958, exactly 12 months before the country's declaration of independence on January 1, 1960. These texts have granted a special status to the Cameroonian territory⁴ by granting it a certain degree of autonomy. But these were accompanied by conventions that reinforced France's control over the institutional process. According to the powers vested to him by the French Republic, the High Commissioner for the Colonies could nominate the Cameroonian Prime Minister and chose the local politician most likely to preserve French interests. But the agreement of December 31, 1959 on Cameroon's independence gave total autonomy (at least politically) to the country. This agreement has indeed given rise to a flourish of political activities in Cameroon, but it also has, at the same, led to a political deadlock as it was negotiated by "good students" in the eyes of the former colony, the political elite that took power after independence. As a consequence, France's policy in Africa was soon described as neocolonial.

The first criticisms of France's policy in Cameroon thus date back to independence. The second wave of criticisms can be dated back to the 1990s. At the time, Cameroon was opening up to democracy and the opposition and a segment of the public opinion complained about France's support to President Biya and its silence following incidents that marred the political process. Jean-François Bayart, specialist in Cameroonian politics and the relationship between France and Africa, noted that: *"He [Mr. Biya] is too shrewd a politician to ignore the fact that our [France's] regular admonishments do not outweigh the fact that we are determined at all cost to avoid a break between his country and the International Monetary Fund. And he could note with satisfaction that France continued to provide military support, limited but responsive and at no political cost, during the confrontation with Nigeria. This allowed him to cause his main opponent, Mr. Fru Ndi, to make a misstep, to abate the anger of the dissenting press and to nip in the bud the palace revolution that could have happened at the beginning of the year [1995]"* (J. F. Bayart, 1995).

⁴ 1957 decree on the matters under the French State's authority; December 30, 1958 ruling on the status of the Cameroonian State (trusteeship, among others).

The Cameroonian writer, Mongo Béti, also thought that Africa, especially francophone Africa, continued to fall into unprecedented decay above all because of “French cooperation”. According to him, to preserve its dream of greatness, France ended up supporting dictatorships and one-party systems and blocked any attempt by African states to take ownership of their own development (M. Béti, 1995). Franco-Cameroonian cooperation, just like Franco-African cooperation, under the pretext of ensuring the future development of the continent would just be an anti-African mask that enables France to support dictators and other corrupt African leaders in order to defend its interests, however arbitrary they may be, at the expense of the African people. In this regard, France would then have also greatly contributed to the persecution of Cameroonian opinion leaders⁵.

France’s defense and military cooperation agreements are the clearest sign of its sovereignty boosting policy. These agreements (the specific clauses of which still remain secret today) are based on a equivocation, deliberately kept alive by France, between the internal and external security of the Cameroonian state. The sole purpose of France’s diplomatic-military action – training of army officers, technical assistance, capacity-building in the field of defense, etc. – would be to guarantee France’s access to Cameroon’s raw materials. This also justifies its intervention doctrine. Even though Cameroon does not have a French military base in its territory, the presence of French military officers in all army corps, even in the presidential guard, (J. F. Bayart, 1995) point to France’s presence and profound influence in the Cameroonian territory.

Heavy economic domination

Economic ties between France and Cameroon are marked by a very close historical relationship, starting from the Franco-British condominium until present times, as France remains a privileged partner of the Cameroonian economy. Many Cameroonians blame the upheaval in the economic and political life of the country on a fool’s bargain and unequal representation.

The first economic agreements between France and Cameroon date back to November 1960, the year of independence. But economic exchanges between the two countries go far beyond that (S. Tchinda, 2003). Cameroon had good economic results thanks to high growth rates from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. Growth was moderate (4% between 1966 and 1976), but soared after the

⁵ For instance, Félix Moumié was poisoned and died in Switzerland with the help of French secret service. He was one of the leaders of the Cameroonian independent party (Union of the Peoples of Cameroon) and one of the martyrs of Cameroonian independence, alongside Ruben Um Nyobé and Ernest Ouandié.

discovery of oil fields. Between 1977 and 1985, the oil boom had an impact on the entire Cameroonian economy. Growth was around 10% from 1978 to 1980. It fell slightly between 1981 and 1985 with an annual growth rate of 8%. But the economic situation quickly deteriorated. Between 1985 and 1986, the growth rate, while remaining positive, weakened markedly and dropped to 4,5%. Oil production that increased by 32% every year between 1980 and 1985 stabilized. At the same time, agricultural production (20% of GDP) becomes cyclical and increases more slowly. *“Since then, the Cameroonian economic situation has kept deteriorating. At first, export resources fell sharply. Between 1984/85 and 1987/88, following the dual shock of falling international prices and the depreciation of the dollar, the terms of trade collapsed (-30% in 1985/86, -25% in 1987/88 for all assets) and oil lost 65% of its value”* (J. J. Aerts et al, 2000).

The Cameroonian government is taken by surprise and is not prepared to respond to this change in its economy and at the international level. This marks the beginning of an economic depression accompanied by social unrest that lasted throughout the 1990s and profoundly transformed Cameroonian society. The first structural adjustment policies led to a tightening of public expenditures, notably reduced investments in basic infrastructure. Debt, both internal and external, is driving the economy to ruin and, after initial resistance, the country agrees to implement a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP).

The brutal economic changes imposed by the SAP resulted in severe psychological and political traumas and greatly damaged the relationship between France and Cameroon. These changes have been experienced as a setback and Cameroonians thought France was backpedaling from its commitments. France was accused of having left Cameroon and of letting the Bretton Woods institutions impose harsh terms when it could have intervened to defend the interests of its long-standing ally. Cameroonians still have not realized that, despite a history of shared hopes and promises, actual achievements are hard to find, pointing once again in the direction of a fool's bargain. According to one understanding of Franco-Cameroonian economic ties, France is accused of profiting from the strict financial and economic constraints imposed on the country (F. Eboko et al, 2008). This logic can be found both in the past and the present with the significant presence of French companies on the Cameroonian territory and an old official development assistance policy.

The devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994, in line with the recommendations of the Bretton Woods institutions, caused a more painful and long-term break. Despite the reluctance of the Cameroonian head of State and of other African statesmen, the devaluation was dealt with briskly

with the help of the French Treasury. The price of imported products (especially of medicine) doubled and, at the same time, salaries dropped and employment was cut. This was one of the most immediate and devastating consequences of the devaluation. It also doubled the country's external debt and cut in half French public aid. Already a serious problem before the devaluation, the service of the debt became intolerable.

France in Cameroon: between rejection and the need for greater involvement

Today, Franco-Cameroonian cooperation is based on a Partnership Framework Document (PFD) and represents 713 million Euros for the period 2006-2010. This PFD relies heavily on an innovative mechanism, the Debt Reduction Contract (DRC), of 537 million Euros signed in 2006 following the implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, the same amount disbursed during the implementation of the HIPC Initiative. The DRC rescheduled the repayment deadlines for Cameroon's debt towards France for 2006-2010 and refinanced the debt by providing grants. This new economic tool is one of the most important official development assistance (ODA) programs ever implemented by France. J. F. Valette, former French ambassador to Cameroon (2003-2006) declared in an interview on France's contribution to development in Cameroon: *"What struck me the most is the number of facilities and infrastructure that France either helped build, finance or maintain in Cameroon [...] The bridge on Wouri built in 1956 was restored with French resources first by a Togolese contractor, then by French companies. The road between Gabon and Equatorial Guinea was financed by France. The bridge of Makabaye was also financed by France and built by a French company. [...] Today, France is increasingly acting within the European framework. It is important to note that, today, after France, one of the main donors to Cameroon is the European Development Fund that intervenes notably in the road sector. The majority of the road network in Cameroon was financed by Europe, with a 25% contribution by France. People don't know that"*⁶.

Indeed, despite the generally positive assessment of the DRC, reservations about its implementation still stand. People feel that the French government is only *pretending* to help the Cameroonian economy to take off by financing diverse projects, but that in reality France ensures that very little is left up to Cameroonians themselves⁷. France is systematically compared to the country's new economic partners to prove the point that it is not the only partner and that others might have more to offer.

⁶ "Le Cameroun tel qu'il va: le regard de JF Valette", Cameroon Tribune, Yaounde, September 11, 2006

⁷ Most projects are implemented by French companies or by companies with ties to France (like the Bolloré group).

However, most Cameroonians recognize as a fact that France is the first economic partner of their country. This ambiguous position is highlighted by the fact that “other partners” are put forward as valuable interlocutors⁸. We are referring here to an idea of Fred Eboko et al.: *“it is worth noting the relative ambiguity of sentiment between the declared satisfaction about the existence of new partners and the fact that France’s is accused of not being visible or present enough, as if criticizing France’s ‘domination’ did not mean that France should be less present and visible compared to other partners”* (F. Eboko et al, 2008). The reason behind this ambivalence can be found in the strong historical ties between Cameroon and France that do not exist with other partners and in the fact that French presence and engagement in Cameroon is both familiar and expected.

Nicolas Sarkozy and Paul Biya: France and Cameroon falling out of love?

On the international diplomatic scene, personal relations between heads of State are critical (H. Charrette De, 2008). It is with this in mind that all African presidents have tried, since independence, to maintain a special relationship with their French counterparts. For these African statesmen, maintaining a close relationship with the French head of State was a way to guarantee their hold on power and to increase their international respectability. This is the reason why French heads of State have been received with pomp and splendor during their trips to the continent, a welcome that stands in sharp contrast with the simplicity and sobriety of their visits in Paris. One only needs to look at the recent short visits of President Sarkozy in Senegal, Niger, Congo or Gabon. Indeed, a visit by a French President is considered an honor and lends political credibility both inside and outside the country. So why has President Sarkozy never traveled to Cameroon? What is the best way to describe his relationship with the Cameroonian head of State?

P. Biya: a discrete pilot

The Cameroonian President, whose real name is Paul Barthélémy Biya’a Bi Mvondo, was born in 1933 in southern Cameroon. After completing his primary and secondary education in Cameroon and his higher education in Paris (Sorbonne University, Sciences Po Paris, Institut des Hautes Etudes d’outre mer) from 1960 to 1963, he held his first government job in 1962 as chargé de mission in the Office of the President of the Republic. In 1975, he became Prime Minister and

⁸ The projects implemented by certain partners are very visible for the population: the “Chinese hospital”, the “Japanese school”, etc.

replaced Ahmadou Ahidjo who resigned the presidency. He was reelected three times as President of the Republic in 1991, 1997 and 2004 and he is also the President of CPDM (Cameroon People's Democratic Movement), the ruling party since 1985⁹.

P. Biya's presidency has been marked by turmoil of the sort few other politicians today can survive. In 1982, Paul Biya decided to open up the economy and to relaunch the democratic process. But, following an attempted coup d'état in 1984, a chaotic democratic transition in 1991 in a context of civil disobedience (operation "ghost towns"), food riots and rumors about his death, President Biya's action was governed by two factors: a chronic economic crisis and his desire to assert his power. His unpredictability, his taste for secrecy and the fact that his trips outside the country were a closely guarded secret have earned him a reputation as a "sphinx" or an "invisible man". This can easily be explained. At the national level, the President of the Republic makes very rare public appearances and only addresses the nation on very formal occasions: on February 11, Youth Day and on December 31 for the President's New Year's Eve wishes. Many Cameroonian citizens were surprised by the President's interview on France 24 in October 2007 during a brief visit to Paris to meet with N. Sarkozy. President Biya's last televised interview dated back to 1985. Could this "feat" be attributed to his desire to find common ground with the new French President?

After 28 years in office and 48 years on the political scene, P. Biya's experience cannot be questioned. A *protégé*¹⁰ of France, P. Biya has nevertheless been able to establish relationships with other partners. It is within this context that his support to the U.S. government's decision to invade Iraq in 2003, despite France's opposition, should be understood¹¹. Paradoxically, by coming out of the shadows for an interview with a French television channel during an official visit in 2007, he seems to want to get off on the right foot with N. Sarkozy, a new President he *still has not met*. President Biya makes very rare appearances on Cameroonian or foreign television (national day on May 20, presentation of credentials by foreign diplomats, official visits, international summits like France-Africa summit or the Francophonie summits, etc.). This "invisibility" in Cameroon and his numerous trips abroad have strengthened his image of a "vacationer in power" for many Cameroonians. A lot of ink has been spilled over the much

⁹ Formerly known as CNU (Cameroon National Union)

¹⁰ France's support following the attempted coup d'état in 1984, during the border dispute with Nigeria about the Bakassi peninsula, France's silence after the contested presidential elections of 1991 that were followed by riots, etc.

¹¹ At the time, Cameroon was President of the UN Security Council. Biya was received at the White House by G. W. Bush.

talked about constitutional review he ordered in 2008 in order to be able to stand for election in 2011. This explains in part the impression at the international level that P. Biya has been running the country with an iron fist for 28 years and that he has discreetly made sure that he would be able to stay in power.

“N. Sarkozy is everywhere ...” except in Cameroon

The positions taken by N. Sarkozy during his presidential campaign, the first months of his presidency and even during his tenure as Interior Minister were meant to launch a new “political era”. Out of his intransigence, pragmatism and activism, “sarkozysm” was born, N. Sarkozy’s presidential policy, a Euro-Mediterranean liberal model in rupture with the methods of the past, a model that extols work, a mix of liberalism and open Atlanticism¹². But, for some critics like P. Rosanvallon, “*sarkozysm is neither a doctrine nor a policy: it is a perpetual attempt to adapt opportunistically to reality*”¹³.

Nicolas Paul Stéphane Sarkozy de Nagy-Bosca was born in 1955 in Paris. After studying law and political science, he got involved in politics very young (21 years old) and joined the RPR (Rassemblement pour la République), today’s UMP (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire). In 1983, N. Sarkozy became France’s youngest mayor when he was elected as mayor of Neuilly-sur-seine where he proved himself. He then climbed the ranks of his party and became Minister of the Budget and Spokesman of the Government of Balladur. He decided to support Balladur in 1995 against Chirac and the victory at the polls of the “plural left” made him disappear from the French political landscape until 2002. Elected as deputy with the highest number of votes compared to other deputies from his party, he supported J. Chirac’s reelection bid and became Minister of the Interior, Internal Security and Local Freedoms. He gained influence at the national level while, at the same, becoming very unpopular in Africa¹⁴. Once elected President of the Republic in 2007, he resigned as president of his party for impartiality’s sake.

During the first months of his presidency, the candidate who campaigned on the idea of “rupture” wants to match words with deeds. He is very active at the national and international levels. At the national level, President Sarkozy is present on all fronts: economy, health, security,

¹² <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarkozysme>

¹³ « Pierre Rosanvallon: “L’échec du sarkozysme, la panne de la gauche” » [archive], Mediapart, September 17, 2010.

¹⁴ He was criticized at the time for his strong-arm immigration policy and his attitude towards the youth of the suburbs of predominantly African and Arabic descent.

transport, education, justice, employment, etc.¹⁵. He regularly gives interviews to journalists, organizes press conferences, visits sites on the ground (companies, high schools, hospitals, construction sites, etc.), speaks directly to the people, even reacts when he is called out or personally insulted. At the international level, his ambitious program of “rupture” has made a deep impression. Key to his success, this rupture was everywhere visible. He burst onto the international scene with a lot of media hype around his role in the release of Ingrid Bettancourt who was held hostage by the FARC in Colombia, the release of the Bulgarian nurses, the rapprochement of France with the United States, his attempt to change the status quo with Israel, his firm stance on the Franco-African relationship, the open door policy towards China, frequent contacts with the Near East, the Middle East and the Mediterranean, France’s growing leadership in Europe and its greater role in NATO’s integrated military command, etc., N. Sarkozy is literally bubbling with energy, to the point that people might think he is a little bit too “agitated”.

Two personalities at odds

To say the least, N. Sarkozy is everywhere. He is hyperactive and his dynamic and direct approach stands in sharp contrast with President Biya’s remarkable discretion. They belong to different generations and have opposite communication styles. The official diplomatic relationship between the two men seems very impersonal, almost cold. In Cotonou, in 2006, N. Sarkozy declared that: *“relations between modern States should not depend on the quality of the personal relationship between heads of State (...)”*.

The French President’s ignorance about African issues is not the sole explanation, but is clear that, for him, his relationship with the Cameroonian head of State is not vital. It is probably for this reason that his visits on the African continent are so rare and brief. Perhaps this is also why he never traveled to Cameroon despite President Biya’s repeated invitations. Perhaps it is because of this frosty relationship that President Biya, during an official visit in Paris, decided to spend a day in Bordeaux with J. Chirac’s former Primer Minister, A. Juppé¹⁶? It should be recalled that President Biya had snubbed N. Sarkozy by first meeting A. Juppé. Is it because they lack political affinities? If one digs deeper, one might even wonder why a President of the Republic like P. Biya decided to take the TGV to do the round trip Paris-Bordeaux-Paris? Was it because of the

¹⁵ For further information about N. Sarkozy’s domestic policy, see the site of the Office of the President of the Republic: www.elysee.fr

¹⁶ A. Juppé traveled several times to Cameroon in 1985, when P. Biya became the President of his newly founded party. In May 2010, at the international conference (Africa21) organized by Cameroon to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of its independence, he was welcomed “like a head of State” according to the local media. When President Biya came to see him in 2007, Juppé was a probable candidate for the elections in 2011.

economic crisis? Was it simply a problem of logistics or was he returning a favor? If it were not for the fact that he is the most senior head of State in francophone Africa, would P. Biya still be welcome in France?

While their personalities and styles may differ, they still have one thing in common: unpredictability. It is difficult to uncover the main lines of both presidents' foreign policy. The French President is known for having criticized China and then inviting its President in France and the Cameroonian President is known for his open support to France while, at the same time, voting in favor of the war in Iraq and hosting the second largest U.S. embassy in the world. The list does not stop here. Nevertheless, formalism and respect seem to be the hallmarks of the token diplomatic relationship between the two men. It is also worth recalling that, at the France – Africa summit, during the ceremony of July 14 or at the Francophonie summit, President Biya was asked to speak in the name of the African heads of State and was seated on the President's right. In our opinion, these highly symbolic gestures are simply linked to his status as most senior francophone African head of State. If it is indeed true that Cameroon holds an important place for France in Africa, the country and its President do not seem essential to N. Sarkozy's foreign policy in Africa. What can we learn, based on their relationship, about N. Sarkozy's African policy?

The place and role of Cameroon in Nicolas Sarkozy's foreign policy in Africa: Keeping Cameroon at arm's reach?

Cameroon is an important player on the African scene. The country is not only an important economic partner in Central Africa, its political stability and the credible leadership of President Biya are key factors for France's future relationship with Africa.

A strategic zone

Geographically, Cameroon occupies a strategic position from France's point of view. It is not only an economic power within the Central African region, it is also strategically important because of its relative political stability and of its proximity to the French military bases in Gabon, Chad and the Congo. Cameroon also profits of its proximity to Anglophone Nigeria, one of France's most important partners in Africa that exports oil and minerals, but is also regularly plagued by political infighting. Compared to Nigeria, Chad or the Central African Republic, the absence of war and political turmoil in Cameroon ensures the safety of its people and of French

investments in the sub-region. This political stability¹⁷ is both useful and beneficial for France as it enables it to preserve its military and economic interests.

Military cooperation between France and Cameroon is based on a military cooperation agreement and a defense agreement signed in 1974¹⁸ and revised on May 21, 2009. N. Sarkozy had promised during his presidential campaign to review France's defense agreements with some of its former colonies and this promise was at the center of France's new African policy, outlined in February 2008 in Cape Town. The defense agreement was revised in order to reorganize the French military presence in Cameroon and to institutionalize its operations in a more concerted and transparent manner. In Cape Town, President Sarkozy declared that: *"France's military presence in Africa is still based on agreements dating back to decolonization, more than 50 years ago! (...) What was done in 1960 does not mean the same thing today"*¹⁹. The French Prime Minister, François Fillon, came to Cameroon last May to sign these agreements of the so-called "new generation", among other things.

Despite obvious problems (corruption, weak institutions, etc.), the Cameroonian State has remained stable, which makes the emergence of conflict less likely following an internal crisis or even an external shock. So to speak, Cameroon has no known ties to the armed groups active in the conflicts that plague its neighbors (Chad, CAR, Congo, Nigeria). Many senior State officials have constantly called for unity and demonstrated that they wanted to avoid the disintegration of the State, whether to protect their personal interests or that of the country or regime (probably a combination of both)²⁰. Cameroon is setting itself up as a haven of stability in Central Africa and as a business-friendly country.

Privileged access to raw materials

Cameroon is not just a stable country, it also guarantees to France, its main economic partner, a privileged access to raw materials. With about 140 subsidiaries of French companies in Cameroon, France is one of the major foreign investors in the country. The French groups have

¹⁷ A conflict could however arise as the 2011 presidential elections draw near.

¹⁸ The first agreements were signed even before. On November 13, 1960, Cameroon and France signed an agreement on technical military assistance to the Cameroonian armed forces, a convention on the role and status of the French military mission in Cameroon and a defense agreement. All these agreements were part of the wider Framework of the "Cooperation Agreements" between France and Cameroon.

¹⁹ Available at www.Elysee.fr, click on "international-Afrique-discours du cap"

²⁰ Because of this reputation, Cameroon is the only African country that welcomed eminent personalities like Pope John-Paul II (twice) and Pope Benedict XVI (once).

invested in the oil sector, the agro-industry, cement, timber, construction, telecommunications and logistics.

Trade between France and Cameroon went down for a few years, before recovering, and now represents over one billion Euros²¹. France's market share in Cameroon is thus quite stable, despite the irruption of new actors like China, Japan and the United States. France takes in 11,9% of Cameroon's exports, including crude oil, aluminum, timber, banana and rubber. Oil represents 30% of French imports from Cameroon. Within Europe, France alone buys 40 to 50% of all the products sold by the country (R. A. Tsafack, 2009). If France's imports are close to the Chinese, Dutch or Spanish performance, it still exports more than of its competitors with 21,03%, staying ahead of Nigeria (10.79%), China (10.25%), or Belgium (6.62%) and the U.S. (4.31%)²². Cameroon imports capital goods (machines, electrical equipments, transport, fuel) and consumer goods (wheat, flour, etc.). France thus remains Cameroon's first trading partner, followed by China and Belgium. The French group Bolloré had most of its turnover in the country. According to a study entitled "*Cameroon: Vincent Bolloré's Black Empire*" prepared by journalist Benoît Collombat and aired on France Inter²³, the Bolloré group controls the port of Douala, the railroads, maritime transport, transit, and forest resources and has a monopoly on trade in products such as rubber, palm oil or banana.

Cameroon is the largest recipient of French official development assistance. This significant assistance, even though it is now declining and has been Europeanized, barely conceals the fact that what is at stake is the preservation of French influence in all its forms. In this regard, France is clearly able to influence the European Union's policy in Africa.

One thing stands out of the above description of the ties between France and Cameroon: N. Sarkozy was never personally involved²⁴, leaving his staff to implement his policy of rupture. Considering the French President's energy and his determination to defend his reforms, one wonders why no such dynamism can be found in the relationship with Cameroon and Africa.

²¹ http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/pays-zones-geo_833/cameroun_361/france-cameroun_1114/index.html#sommaire_2

²² <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cm.html> (2009)

²³ This report can be found on France Inter's website. The program aired on March 29, 2009 and was presented by Lionel Thompson and Pascal Dervieux: "Cameroon: Vincent Bolloré's Black Empire".

²⁴ The only exception being his personal involvement in *Zoe's arch* affair, in disregard of Chad's national sovereignty.

Conclusion: A Franco-African relationship *in decline*

Marked by frank and uninhibited speeches, the revision of military cooperation agreements, a stronger economic cooperation with the multilateralization of development assistance, continued bilateral visits but a distant relationship between the heads of State, how is one to understand N. Sarkozy's policy of rupture in Africa? It is tempting to focus only on his numerous speeches designed to make a clean break from the past (Cotonou, Dakar, Cape Town, Nice etc.). But, during their presidencies, "Mitterrand the African" and "Chirac the Africa" also denounced, each in their own way, cronyism and the personal and cozy relationship between France and its former colonies, practices that only aimed at improperly and illegally making a profit at the expense of the African people.

It is also tempting to focus on the multilateralization and the depersonalization of France's relationship with Africa. But France's experience in Africa, symbolized by the summit France – Africa and, more recently, by the July 14 parade attended by African heads of State, lends weight and legitimacy to France, most notably when it comes to define and chart a path for what is at stake.

It is tempting to focus on the revision of the military cooperation and defense agreements. But the fact that these agreements remain secret, that Paris supports Idriss Déby in Chad and that the French military personnel is still present in zones without conflict clearly illustrates the strength of the Franco-African ties in the field of security. To maintain its influence, as J. F. Bayart said, France needs the regimes to remain stable and become more closely integrated with French defense (J. F Bayart 2008).

It is finally also tempting to highlight in N. Sarkozy's African policy the fact that he keeps old leaders at arm's length and that he does not seem particularly involved in cooperation reform or in the rapprochement with other States like Nigeria, Angola or Libya. The network of businessmen and political friends of the French President seems however to be running smoothly and to follow past practices (Foccart, Bourgi, Bolloré, Juppé etc.).

The relationship with Cameroon reflects the ambivalence N. Sarkozy's policy in Africa. Despite his speeches about rupture and the importance of Africa in the community of nations, despite the new instruments put in place, one must perforce recognize that Africa is not of great concern to N. Sarkozy (H. Hugon, 2010). This is in fact good news for the critics of *françafrique*. But the new

impetus created by N. Sarkozy has not prevented French diplomats in Africa to return to their old haunts. Behind a façade of rupture, the French President's policy follows the principles that have historically guided the policy of his predecessors²⁵. One cannot change foreign policy overnight. Diplomacy is difficult to reform because it possesses its own tradition and culture (F. Charillon, 2009). To change foreign policy, it is necessary to modify several key elements: its style, methods and objectives. The different initiatives launched by the candidate who called for a "peaceful rupture" and who has a rather unique way of carrying out his functions can then be understood as a kind of rupture. But old habits die slowly given the power struggles currently taking place on African soil²⁶ and the importance to African heads of State of France's support, without which they would be weakened²⁷.

²⁵ These principles aim at maintaining France's economic, political and military capabilities in Africa (J. F. Bayart, 2008).

²⁶ China, the United States, Brazil and other emerging powers are competing for raw materials and energy resources. The geostrategic environment is hence unfavorable.

²⁷ This explains the persistence of a strong military presence that has not been challenged by N. Sarkozy.

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