

A look at Nicolas Sarkozy's African policy in the French "backyard"

Sonia Le Gouriellec, Université Paris Descartes¹

Introduction

Many studies have attempted to analyze the evolution of France's African policy. They focus on the changes from one government to another, and problematize the paradox of change and continuity, or a variation: fracture and permanency². As his term of office is coming to an end, we can begin making a first assessment of the Presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy, who was elected in 2007.

Despite suspicions that have weighed on the new government, France would wish to remain in Africa. In fact, the stakes have changed little since the decolonization era:

- Africa remains a lever of influence at the UN, and major international institutions in general, and therefore helps in consolidating the French position;
- It allows access to raw materials in well-stocked countries which are also dependent on the export of some gross commodities (agriculture and mining). One thinks of the Niger uranium, Mauritanian ores, Nigerian gas...
- It is the main vector of the *Francophonie*, and can promote the dissemination of the French culture. France thus commands 129 French alliances in Africa, distributed among 38 countries.

¹ Sonia Le Gouriellec is doing a PhD in Political Science, and teaches at the University Paris Descartes. She is also a member of the IRSEM's young research analysts community.

² Special Issues : *Modern and Contemporary France*, vol.13, n°1, February 2005 ; *Politique africaine* « Sortir du pacte colonial », n°105, March 2007 ; CHAFER Tony, « French African Policy in Historical Perspective » in *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, vol.19, n°2, July 2001, pp.168-182 ; OMBALLA Magelan, « La politique africaine de la France : ruptures et continuités » in *Questions internationales*, n°5, Jan-Feb 2004, pp.54-65 ; HUGON Philippe, « Où en est-on de la « Françafrique » ? » in *Revue internationale et stratégique*, 2010/1, n° 77, pp.163-168

- French nationals are rather numerous³; French economic interests are important.

However, evolutions between the different governments are perceptible, and we can make out various policies since the beginning of the 1990s. First, a voluntary and alert policy, which didn't last long, developed in the La Baule speech in 1990⁴; followed by a more transparent policy starting in 1997, in the form of political disengagement or fracture, as illustrated by the phrase "neither interference, nor indifference" (L. Jospin); since 2002, a hesitant policy wavering between influence and 'wait-and-see', supported by the 'assisting without dictating' doctrine (D. de Villepin); and since 2007, a policy of fracture and opening outside the traditional realm based on the prevalence of economic interests and the desire to multilateralize operations. Hence opening up to English-speaking countries. At the last Africa-France summit in Nice, last May, South African Jacob Zuma and Nigerian Goodluck Jonathan were particularly attended to. As for Nicolas Sarkozy and his Prime Minister, François Fillon, their diplomatic visits are shared out between the French-speaking 'backyard' countries (Niger, Chad, Senegal, Gabon, Congo, Cameroun) and the regional leaders (Nigeria, South Africa, Angola) ⁵.

This paper is an attempt at analyzing the first 3 years of President Nicolas Sarkozy's term of office, the way it was perceived by the African French-speaking countries, often described as part of the French 'backyard'.

An unpopular candidate

Ever since the presidential campaign, the candidate N. Sarkozy has affirmed his fracture policy in order to distance himself from his predecessor, Jacques Chirac, who came from the same political party. At Cotonou, in May 2006, N. Sarkozy thus called for "*definitely turning over a new leaf, leaving behind complacency, government agencies, secrecy and ambiguity*"⁶. His campaign addresses the sub-continent by raising concerns close to that of the voters, particularly the immigration

3 According to the Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs, the number of French nationals settled in Sub-Saharan Africa increased from 116,102 in 2007 to 126,771 in 2009.

4 In the introduction speech delivered at the opening of the 16th French-African Summit, which was held at La Baule, in June 1990.

5 The Mauritanian, Beninese, Nigerian and Cameroonian Heads of State have been making official visits to France since 2007. The French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bernard Kouchner, traveled to Rwanda, D.R.C., Chad, Burkina Faso and Mali on several occasions. He also visited Ethiopia, Djibouti, Sudan, Congo, Ivory Coast, Mauritania and Senegal.

6 Nicolas Sarkozy, « Declaration of Mr Nicolas Sarkozy, Minister of Interior and Land Settlement, on democracy in Benin, and the establishment of new relations between France and Africa », Cotonou, 19 May 2006, [online], consulted on November 11th 2010

<http://discours.vie-publique.fr/notices/063001811.html>

issue that was so dear to him as Minister of Interior, while his socialist opponent, Ségolène Royal, favoured development, the environment and the role of women in society. However, the concept of “chosen immigration” is perceived as a provocation in Africa. In fact, during the presidential campaign, the future President already suffered from this policy, and later in 2005, the part he played in the suburbs uprising stripped his popularity away, while most of the popular media supported Ségolène Royal (African childhood in the suburbs of Dakar).

Furthermore, the candidate Sarkozy put forward the « new generation leader » in him, and therefore a relationship freed from any post-colonial guilt, and boasting a new frankness: *“Allow me to speak to you very openly, as is probably not often enough done between French and Africans.”*⁷ N. Sarkozy wanted to put new life into French politics, even though he has been a part of it for almost 30 years now.

He is a new face in Africa, and his former political positions (mayor of Neuilly-sur-Seine, Minister of Budget, Minister of Interior...) haven't led him to travel to the continent and weave networks of contacts, considering that relationships between Presidents are essential, even though it is something he challenges: *“Relations between modern States cannot depend solely on the quality of personal relationships between heads of States.”*⁸ However, successive Presidents of the 5th Republic have always considered France's foreign policy as their exclusive area, and African affairs as coming under their direct responsibility, whichever their political affinity. On June 22nd 1983, in Yaoundé, François Mitterrand thus made an initial assessment of his presidency: *“There is no hiatus in France's African policy, before May 1981 and after. If the methods have changed, the goal remains.”*⁹ Theoretically, the 2007 elections ought to have led to the rise of a new generation of politicians born during the colonial period. However, in practice, this new generation's interest in the continent is debatable.

Though Nicolas Sarkozy criticized French-African networks during his campaign, he still deems France's action in Africa positive in many ways: *“I believe I can say that no country in the North pays as much attention to Africa as France does. No Nation is as committed to the stability, development and success of*

7 Ibid.

8 On February 28th, 2007, during a press conference on international politics: « Sarkozy: his foreign policy », in *L'Express*, 28 February 2007, [online] consulted on August 10th 2010

http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/sarkozy-sa-politique-etrangere_463192.html

9 P.MARCHESIN, « Mitterrand l'Africain », in *Politique africaine*, n°58, June 1995, p.9

*African countries [...] The relationship between Africa and France, Africa and Europe, must assert itself as a major axis of global stability, and as a model for North-South relationships.*¹⁰

His dynamic style appeals to Americans, but jostles the old African elites that have been in power for decades: since 1982 for Paul Biya (Cameroon), 1987 for Blaise Compaoré (Burkina Faso), 1991 for Idriss Déby Itno (Chad), 2000 for Abdoulaye Wade (Senegal), 1999 for Ismael Omar Buelleh (Djibouti), from 1979 to 1992, and then again from 1997 onwards for Denis Sassou-Nguesso (Congo)... Furthermore, as far as Philippe Hugon is concerned: *“late decolonization has bred resentment, which is out of touch with the President’s voluntary policy.”*¹¹

Two speeches on « change » that breed concern

Two important events have marked the early period of the new President’s term of office, on the African political scene. First of all, the Dakar speech, which triggered a wave of hostility on the continent. Indeed, in a speech written by his special advisor, Henri Guaino, and delivered in a lecture hall at the Cheikh-Anta-Diop University of Dakar, on July 26th, 2007, the President of the Republic portrayed the African man as prisoner of his own culture, marked by irrationality and the inability to consider the future: *“The tragedy of Africa is that the African man has never really entered History (...). He never leaps towards the future (...). In this universe where Nature commands all (...), there is no room either for human adventure or for the idea of progress.”*¹²

While the audience was expecting a speech of rupture, the announcement of a revival of French-African relations and colonial repentance, it heard a paternalistic and culturalist one. For Achille Mbembe, Cameroonian, Professor of History and Political Science at the University of Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg: « In his urge for ‘frankness’ and ‘sincerity’, Nicolas Sarkozy brought to light what, up until then, always remained unspoken, namely the fact that the intellectual frame that underlies France’s African policy dates back from the end of the 19th century.” According to him, the « French elites in power » have a half-pastoral, half-nightmarish vision of Africa, based on “a community of ailments prostrated in an off-world”. To which he

10 « Speech by Mr Nicolas SARKOZY, Minister of State, Minister of Interior and Land Settlement, on the subject of the partnership between Africa and France in the field of development, at Bamako, in Mali », 18 May 2006, [online], consulted on August 10th 2010,

http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/misill/sections/le_ministre/interventions/archives-sarkozy-2005-2007/18-05-2006-deplacement-mali

11 HUGON, Philippe, « Où en est-on de la « Françafrique » ? », *Revue internationale et stratégique*, 1/2010, n°77, p. 163.

12 Nicolas Sarkozy, “Speech at the University of Dakar”, 26 July 2007, [online], consulted on August 10th 2010, <http://www.elysee.fr/president/les-actualites/discours/2007/discours-a-l-universite-de-dakar.8264.html?search=Dakar&xtmc=dakar&xcr=1>

added that had this speech been translated into English, it probably would not have failed “to spark far more sustained controversies, given the tradition of nationalism, pan-africanism and afro-centrism, more entrenched among English-speaking African countries than French-speaking ones.”¹³

The protests didn't hold off long: the former Minister of Culture from Mali, Aminata Traoré, published “Africa humiliated” in January 2008, followed in February by “Africa replies to Sarkozy. Against the Dakar speech”, written by a group of African intellectuals, and in June by “Sarkozy's Africa. A denial of History”, directed by Jean-Pierre Chrétien and Achille Mbembe.

Moreover, the continent's defiance towards the new President is fueled by the creation of the Ministry of Immigration and National Identity, one of the strongest commitments of Nicolas Sarkozy's presidential campaign, which has brought on a real outcry both in France and on the continent. Responsible for carrying out the « selective immigration » policy promoted by the July 24th 2006 Act, this ministry was tasked, among others, to set up upper limits for annual entry admissions and immigration quotas per regions, to harden the conditions for family reunification, and to implement DNA testings... These measures, combined with tighter conditions of stay and visa, the rise of far-right in France since 2002, and the part Nicolas Sarkozy played in the 2005 suburban riots, have altered the African people's perception of the Human Rights' homeland. Faced with these angry reactions, in May 2008, N. Sarkozy offered to his Beninese audience a cooperation in order to manage these issues: *“The phrase ‘selective immigration’ has been greatly distorted and used for polemical purposes. (...) When I speak of ‘selective immigration’, I mean one chosen both by the country of origin, and the country of destination. ‘Selective immigration’ also means regulated immigration, organized between countries of origin and destination countries.”*¹⁴

However, as indicated by Philippe Hugon, *“many fractures remain on the symbolic and discursive levels”*.

In fact, after his election, he:

- Removed the African unit of the Elysée, an emblematic symbol of the special nature of French-African relations;
- Appointed popular Bernard Kouchner as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean-Marie Bockel as « Minister of Overture » for cooperation, and Rama Yade, born in Senegal, as the Secretary of State to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in charge of Human Rights.

But 3 years later, the record is ambivalent:

¹³ Achille Mbembe, « L'Afrique de Nicolas Sarkozy », *Africultures*, 1st August 2007, [online], consulted on August 10th 2010, <http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=article&no=6784>

¹⁴ Op. Cit. Cotonou Speech, 19 May 2006.

- Bernard Kouchner has no influence. The Elysée¹⁵ and Claude Guéant in particular centralize all decision-makings;
- Jean-Marie Bockel, who claimed in August 2007 wanting the death of « Françafrique » (*“the backyard no longer exists!”*¹⁶, *“I want to sign the death certificate of the Françafrique”*¹⁷) has been dismissed. The day after, the Council of Ministers from Gabon condemned *“a scornful cliché portraying African States as common beggars seeking out France’s charity to no end”*;
- In June 2009, the Secretariat of State for Human Rights was abolished.

These measures are all symbolic, because the new President’s contacts remain linked to past practices, as manifested by his decision to make Robert Bourgi Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur in September 2007¹⁸, while only a few months earlier, he wanted to put an end to *“networks from another time”*, *“unofficial envoys with no other mandate than the one they invented”*, and the *“informal networks that have done so much harm in the past”*. The same goes with his ties with Charles Pasqua or Patrick Balkany (the latter was part of the President’s first official trip in July 2007). Moreover, in an interview given to *Le Monde* on July 7th 2010, Jean-Christophe Ruffin, former French Ambassador to Senegal, condemned *“the proximity both with the Elysée and a number of go-betweens that were called back in the last three years (...). The 2007-2010 years witnessed the restoration of the old failings of the French-African relationship.”*¹⁹ Indeed, *“though the incestuous Françafrique and its legacy are dead, the networks are still well alive. With a –major– difference: they are headless.”*²⁰ N. Sarkozy’s first trip took place in July 2007, and perfectly illustrates the problems arising from his approach to African issues. By choosing to visit Senegal and Gabon first, he hardly suggests a spirit of change in France’s African policy, and in justifying this choice: *“There is no reason to offend France’s historical friends. (...) Gabon has been a special partner since 1967, whatever the political trend in power in France.”*²¹

The second major event of the beginning of N. Sarkozy’s term of office is the Capetown Speech, which he delivered in February 2008, announcing the renegotiation of all Defense agreements

15 « M. Ruffin : « Le Quai d’Orsay ne pèse plus rien dans les affaires africaines » », in *Le Monde*, 7 July 2010.

16 Elise Colette & Philippe Perdrix, « Jean-Marie Bockel. « Le Président, l’ouverture, l’Afrique et moi » », in *Jeune Afrique*, 5-11 August 2007, pp.28-30.

17 Interview in *Le Monde*, January 16th 2008 : « Jean-Marie Bockel : « Je veux signer l’acte de décès de la « Françafrique » » ».

18 François Soudan, « Quand Sarkozy réhabilité Foccart », in *Jeune Afrique*, n°2439, 7-13 October 2007.

19 Op.Cit. , « Mr Ruffin : « Le Quai d’Orsay ne pèse plus rien dans les affaires africaines » », in *Le Monde*, 7 juillet 2010.

20 « France-Afrique, les nouveaux réseaux », in *Jeune Afrique*, n°2576, du 23 au 29 mai 2010, p.25

21 « Afrique : Sarkozy peine à prouver sa « rupture » », in *Le Monde*, 29 July 2007.

and their publication: *“France is not to maintain indefinitely armed forces in Africa.”*²² This new organization would be a more appropriate response to the future military organization of the African Union and Joint operations²³. However, many African states are far from favorable to a withdrawal of France, which could weaken them. Not to mention that the Europeanization process which France wishes to integrate into her policy and the new Defense agreement is ill-perceived. *“From Françafrique to Eurafrique”*²⁴, such seems to be the French position in relation to her former African colonies. N. Sarkozy hopes to lead the EU to stepping up her commitment in Africa, in order to mutualize European efforts for greater effectiveness of action. This process results from the observation of a near absolute polarization of French diplomacy on European construction issues. Indeed, the whole integration process has affected French diplomacy. Paris is more inclined now to developing a multilateral strategy. A strategy which isn't popular with the leaders of the continent, who prefer a head-to-head policy, while the European apparatus can impose economic sanctions on undemocratic states. However, one ought to put into perspective N. Sarkozy's action to promote a process already initiated before he took office. As Dominique de Villepin highlighted in 2003, *“the Cotonou Convention, the Europe-Africa summits, and the implementation, today in Ituri, of a European military operation, are all evidence of significant progress. In Bruxelles, we support the discussions led by Commissioner Nielsen on the financing of an African peace-building capacity. We also insist on shortening the post-crisis response time and improving the suitability of the Commission's instruments, for a true Euro-African partnership.”*²⁵ Or Jacques Chirac, in 2005: *“Europe isn't losing interest in Africa (...), if need be, France would remind the European Union of her duties toward her southern neighbour, the African continent. The European Union is fully aware that she cannot embrace the future*

22 « Speech from the President of the Republic in front of the South African Parliament », Capetown, Thursday, 28 February 2008, [online] consulted on August 10th 2010,

http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/pays-zones-geo_833/afrique-du-sud_386/france-afrique-du-sud_1013/visites_8303/deplacement-m.-nicolas-sarkozy-afrique-du-sud-28-29.02.08_59999.html

23 The French defense and security policy in Africa has always been one of the main components of France's influence in Africa. Cooperation or Technical Military Agreements (TMA) affect 24 African states: South Africa, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Comoros, Congo, Ivory Coast, Djibouti, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Mauritania, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Chad, Togo and the Democratic Republic of Congo... Defense agreements affect 8 African states: Cameroon, Togo, Gabon, Central African Republic, Senegal Djibouti, Comoros and Ivory Coast. New “Defense partnership” agreements have been signed with the former 4 countries. Three more are currently being negotiated.

24 The phrase is from Michel Barnier, former French Minister for Foreign Affairs. Quoted in *Jeune Afrique*, n°2274, 12-18 August 2004.

25 Speech from the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dominique de Villepin, during the inauguration of the 4th IHEDN forum on the African Continent, in Paris, on June 13th 2003.

*without strong ties to her southern neighbour, who doesn't consist merely of North Africa, but rather of Africa as a whole.*²⁶

Towards a new era in French-African relations?

France's legitimacy is thus increasingly challenged. There are many possible explanations for this:

- The bitterness provoked by the hardening of the French immigration policy, a key measure of the new French President's campaign;
- Maintaining the political status quo that protects dictatorships, and which the La Baule speech hasn't fundamentally changed. Anti-French feelings in countries where Paris has become well-known for its interference in internal affairs. In fact, a number of interventions have ruffled the image of the French military in both national and international public opinion. The French influence, for instance, suffered a great setback in the Great Lakes region. International and especially African public opinion pointed to France as one of the countries responsible for the genocide. A heavy burden that France continues to carry. These interventions contributed to fueling the controversy on the French interventionist policy, and the new President wasn't able to break away from it. N. Sarkozy's conduct while managing the Chad crisis in February 2008, or his silence during the riot crackdown in Cameroon²⁷ were characterized by the « bad manners » of the past: omnipotence of the Elysée, clientelism and emotional logics. An overall set too far from the pragmatism required by the wide-range influence policy foreshadowed in the speeches. Inversely, it appears that these interventions have made France into a country whose influence over friendly governments remains important, and whose armed forces contribute significantly to international stabilization efforts ;
- A definite material withdrawal: major budget reductions for the past 10 years, significant decrease in the number of aid workers and experts, and Nicolas Sarkozy's Capetown speech confirmed this trend. Again, one has to put into perspective this material withdrawal, which began under the Lionel Jospin government. Indeed, between 1995 and

26 Speech delivered by Jacques Chirac on the Senegal radio-television channel (RTS), on February 1st 2005 at Dakar.

27 In February 2008, young Cameroonians were protesting against the possibility for President Paul Biya to aspire to a new term of office.

2000, the number of French nationals went down, and the prepositioned military forces dropped from 8 000 to 5 000 men, mostly due to the closing of the military bases in the Central African Republic. Observers noted that this decline “*weakened French legitimacy among the African people*” who may have been led to believe in a French withdrawal from African affairs.

Currently, we are going through a period of transition, as we are witnessing the end of a whole generation of politicians educated in France, thus restructuring the African political class. New emerging actors, disconnected from the previous generation, gradually assert themselves as political pluralism becomes a reality. The new elites are dissatisfied with the paternalist relationship existing with the old mainland, which the Dakar speech reasserted. Many leaders do not want less from France, but rather differently. Denis Sassou N’Guesso, when he offers an African non-aggression pact, explains it this way: “*The helplessness of our continent in preventing crises and reducing conflicts which lead to bloodsheds, is coupled with the humiliation of having to call upon former colonial powers, France first and foremost, but also Great-Britain, to end them. The lack of logistic and military means is not the only reason. The lack of political determination is our greatest liability. It is the main cause of our helplessness. The will which is ours, as African states leaders, to solve conflicts on the political level, is not always carried out with the strength and coherence which the situations require. Our regional or continental engagements often reach a dead end, since without a clear perception of what our common future is, without a shared vision of what are involvement in African affairs should be, they often proceed merely from immediate interests and empty talks.*”

They wish for relations oriented towards economics and development, which is precisely what China offers in her win-win talk. French-speaking countries are looking at diversifying their relations, through new bilateral and multilateral agreements. Countries like China give African countries “*a new way of doing business*”²⁸, based on the lack of political and economic conditions, as well as non-interference diplomacy. The perception of this model by African elites is fuelled by the feeling of closure from Europeans. Furthermore, in the decades to come, the real problem will be public opinions. Indeed, African leaders try to run States that are poorly defined, and where indigeneity is still a subject of contention. The temptation which consists in dramatizing crises and in resorting to anti-Western demagoguery will act as a remedy.

28 Spoken by the former Minister of Finance from Rwanda, Mr Donald Kaberuka.

From Jean-Paul Gourévitch's point of view: *"the leaders of the French-speaking Africa, faced with an unpredictable economic situation and public protests, locked themselves on four principles, which they display as conditions for their development."* According to this academic, these duties are as follows:

- For the former colonial power to assist the countries it exploited both on economic and human levels, during the years of colonization. In May 2007, at Bamako, N. Sarkozy got whistled at when he claimed that *"France has no economic use for Africa,"*²⁹ given its trivial share in French foreign trade. One has to admit that while France remains a top donor in terms of volume, the 14 French-speaking countries have collected merely 18% of the financial aid available in 2009 (1,448 billion Euros). Moreover, economic relations with the continent have cooled, and Africa has seen its share in French exports drop from 8,7% in the 1970s to 5% in 2010 ;
- To be the spokesperson for African interests on the international scene, a stance supported by N. Sarkozy at the Copenhagen summit on climate, where France and African countries published their proposals for an agreement that strives to reduce the North-South rift. Likewise during the Africa-France summit in May 2010, N. Sarkozy declared: "One must be ready to make room for Africa in global governance. (...) None, absolutely none of the major issues our world is faced with can be solved without active involvement from the African continent. It is utterly abnormal that Africa does not have any permanent member at the Council of Security,"³⁰ to a hail of applause. He also promised "initiatives" during the French presidency of the G8 and G20 in 2011³¹;
- The recognition of a French-speaking preference and the defense of a common culture faced with Anglo-Saxon domination. Even though the French-speaking world is an instrument of cultural influence, it increasingly seeks to reach into the political and economic spheres. It would allow France to exert some form of influence over members of the organization. On the other hand, the organization's influence over non-member states would be weaker ;

29 Bamako Speech, May 2006.

30 « Speech from the President on the occasion of the 25th Africa-France Summit opening ceremony », 31 May 2010, [online], consulted on August 10th 2010,

<http://www.elysee.fr/president/les-actualites/discours/2010/allocution-du-president-a-l-occasion-de-la.9010.html>

31 African leaders want "a position in world governance", in *Le Monde*, 31 May 2010.

- To facilitate exchanges (funds transfers, movements of people) towards the French mainland, where the Sub-Saharan African diaspora is substantial.

Conclusion

For the last 20 years, France, with policies full of good intentions, but often proved not consistent with its field pragmatism, has most certainly lost much of the African people's trust. Alternating between voluntarism, disengagement and a wait-and-see attitude, France has seriously blurred her image both on the continent and with the international community.

The different governments, and particularly the successive French Presidents, gradually grew out of touch with the realities of an African continent undergoing radical transformation. While maintaining relations of close proximity with their African counterparts (themselves cut off from their people), they have failed to encourage them to promote true development policies or improve the distribution of produced wealth. Moreover, in people's minds, political coups or "fanciful" transitions always remain associated with an underground French activity.

Therefore, African populations identify less and less with the actions resulting from French politics in Africa. This observation is especially true for the young urban generation who is now without any outlook for the future. This idle and frustrated youth sees France as responsible for all its evils. An anti-French sentiment is thus developing, often hijacked and manipulated by unscrupulous populist leaders, who use this feeling in order to take advantage of the increasing competition between major powers in Africa.

Up to France to win the hearts of Africans through actions more in line with the African youth's aspirations; up to France to « hustle towards the exit » African « dinosaurs » whose presence recalls the worst collusions and the « France-à-fric » (« France-cash »); up to France to favour countries that have embarked on the path of democracy...

Franco-African relations are going through a transition period. However, it appears that France still has no concrete vision for the continent. 15 years later, we could still take up Roland Marchal's conclusion in his article "France, in search of an African policy?": *"(...) the dominating impression is that of the lack of markings and specific references. (...) To a fracture attitude in relation with networks, there's the return of personnel envoys, privileged relationships and the classic pathology of Franco-African relations. To the necessity of the rule of Law in Africa, affirmed in all tones, there's the flawless support to Presidents who use the most questionable methods to remain in power. (...) The real question concerns the*

politicians now in power, who have not yet made or assumed their choice, and are satisfied with day-to-day management instead of the ambitious policy they had promised.”

In the end, the gap between what is expected from France and what she offers is too great. Change will come from the new African elites, who already see opportunities in the increasing number of contacts. France is already perceived in some countries as a partner almost like any other.

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