

WHAT NEXT FOR SOUTH SUDAN?

The preliminary results of the recent referendum on secession in Southern Sudan in January indicate that this summer a new African nation will come into existence. While the Referendum Commission and the President of Southern Sudan, Salva Kiir, are cautioning citizens to refrain from celebrations until the official announcement on 9 July, the separation of north and south is a fait accompli in the minds of the people. Bashir's government has been praised for its handling of the referendum and the results. However, many commentators have expressed concern over how the situation will evolve in the coming months as the two governments attempt to resolve a number of matters. Furthermore, there are several issues internal to Southern Sudan that will have to be addressed to ensure the stability and development of the nascent nation. What are these issues and how can the EU contribute to a smooth transition to independence and the establishment of a viable nation-state?

North-South dynamics

One of the key issues that must be resolved is border demarcation, especially in the oil-rich region of Abyei. The fragility of this issue has been highlighted in recent weeks with reports of brutal attacks on convoys of southerners returning to Southern Sudan via Abyei; Abyei town is reported to be currently under blockade from the North and cut off by Misseriya militias. With this region posing such a serious risk to regional stability, an agreement must be reached on the region as soon as possible. There are numerous strategic reasons as to why this border demarcation was delayed and the referendum on Abyei will no longer take place. Rather the issue will be resolved by negotiations between the two governments, who have agreed to finalise the issue by March. In light of the discussion between the presidents of the two Sudans on the possibility of using an EU-style joint institution to manage oil exports in the region, EU technical



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expertise would be extremely beneficial. The EU must continue to exert diplomatic pressure on the two governments to reach a peaceful conclusion, while also providing technical assistance as required to carry out the demarcation and facilitate negotiations.

Sudan's foreign debt of \$39 billion – mostly comprised of arrears – is a point of contention between the two governments. As it stands the north insists the debt burden be split between the two countries, while the south alleges that none of the borrowed money was spent in the south and thus it must not bear any of this burden. The regime in Khartoum has historically complained that political discord with the West has prevented it from benefitting from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt-relief programme and recently Sudanese officials have been lobbying intensively, particularly among Western nations, to have the countries' debts cancelled. EU foreign ministers have said that they are ready to look closely at EU support for an international debt relief effort for Sudan, consistent with political progress. Given that six of Sudan's top ten creditors are EU countries (UK, France, Belgium, Austria, Denmark and Italy), the EU must play a pivotal role in coordinating a progressive and coherent response by its Member States as an incentive for continuity of peace and development

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in Sudan, both north and south. Debt relief is a key tool for leverage by the international community and such an opportunity to influence the north's behaviour in Darfur and relationship with the newly independent south must not be wasted.

Internal Dynamics

Since independence, Southern Sudan's identity and that of its people has been based primarily on the common enemy of the north and the common goal of secession. With this enemy to a large extent 'defeated' and the goal attained, the absence of a distinct and unified southern identity is an issue that may lead to internal conflict. For now, those in power are towing the line that the most important thing is internal solidarity. But there are widespread reports of increased internal conflict and fears that politics could become increasingly ethnicised. There is already a strong fear of tribal domination in the region with some fearing that a Dinka-domination of national politics will cause civil unrest. As a result of the shift toward decentralised politics, fear of Dinka-domination is accompanied by fear of other regionally populous tribes dominating state-level politics. The example of a strong anti-Toposa sentiment among some groups in Eastern Equatoria is representative of this phenomenon. Ultimately as Southern Sudan establishes itself as an independent nation, the governing of the country will necessitate a move away from the de facto single-party rule that has been in place since the signing of the CPA in 2005. Already established parties are likely to become stronger and new parties are likely to emerge. Given the potential for ethnicised politics in this region, it is important that political parties appeal to the electorate based on policies, not tribal affiliation. Viable political parties are crucial to democratic consolidation. As such there is a clear need to provide technical assistance to opposition parties so that they can pose a significant challenge to the ruling party in elections. The SPLM, as the ruling party, will also need technical assistance to improve its ability to carry out its mandates.

There are important humanitarian issues in Southern Sudan with estimates of 2,000 people returning to the south daily from the north and with over 190,000 people returning in the months prior to the referendum. This is the result of an accelerated repatriation drive undertaken by the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS). Plans by GoSS and its development partners to meet the humanitarian needs of these people still face serious logistical and humanitarian challenges. The reality of reintegration into many of these underdeveloped rural areas requires major adjustment on the part of

the returnees and indeed the receiving communities. The scale of the returns has for the most part taken the humanitarian community by surprise. Limited GoSS funding is undermining efforts to meet the needs of these people and reintegrate them into local communities. With this in mind, funds need to be earmarked to cater for emergency humanitarian needs and to support the Southern Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, which is overseeing the reintegration programme.

While much attention has been paid to north-south dynamics and to weaknesses within Southern Sudan, less attention has been paid to the stability of the regime in Khartoum. Recent analyses have begun to remedy this by highlighting, for example, the reduced opportunities for patronage that will result from the loss of the south's oil wealth. This, coupled with the ongoing conflict in Darfur and outstanding ICC indictments for war crimes, has weakened the legitimacy of the regime and just weeks after the referendum, Bashir is already facing mounting political opposition. Given his historical predilection for using the state's military apparatus to suppress dissent and in light of the current situation in nearby Egypt and Tunisia which shows signs of contagion, it may not take much for the small-scale protests in Khartoum to evolve into something larger and more volatile. If there is overwhelming popular support for a regime change, the international community – including the EU – should support the will of the people and use all diplomatic channels to allow a move toward free and transparent political and economic reform. However, there is not only cause for concern in Khartoum, close attention must also be paid to the Government of Southern Sudan and, for example, the way that they oversee and conduct the upcoming elections in Southern Kordofan. A 99.57% vote for independence in the recent referendum should raise concerns and while there is no doubt in most analysts minds that the majority of Southern Sudanese are in favour of secession, such exceedingly high majorities are usually indicators of suppressed dissent, again highlighting the importance of support for political debate and diversity.

What Next?

The 'two Sudans' are beset with narratives of conflict: between Arab Africans and Black Africans; between Islam and Christianity; between those who fought the civil war and those who fled to neighbouring countries. The binaries are endless and whether their content is real or imagined, they remain powerful portrayals of the region as a battleground of opposing interests and causes. There are many

challenges both in the short and long-term, only some of which have been outlined here but this is a historic moment for Sudan and for the whole African continent. The achievements to date should not be forgotten. The multitude of reports predicting widespread violence during the referendum and conflict in its aftermath have thus far not proved correct and with adequate support, both diplomatic and financial, it is possible that the south could

secede peacefully from the north and embark on its nation-building project. Nonetheless, numerous challenges remain and sustained diplomatic attention from the international community is imperative and Sudan must remain high on the political agenda in Brussels in the coming months.

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the EUISS