

## AFRICA DIVIDED

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Representatives at an African Union summit on 30 January failed to elect a head for the organisation's important commission, its executive arm and public face. The contest was between the incumbent, Jean Ping of Gabon, and Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, South Africa's current minister of Home Affairs, former Foreign Affairs minister and the ex-wife of South African President Jacob Zuma.

According to AFP sources in Addis Ababa, neither incumbent, Jean Ping nor Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, managed to secure a two-thirds majority needed to become commission chairperson – the administrative head of the AU. In a tight contest, three rounds of elections were held. Ping won the first round by three votes (28 to 25) and the second by one vote (27 to 26). According to the rules, when Ping clinched the third round (29 to 24), Dlamini-Zuma was compelled to withdraw from the race. But the rules further dictated that Ping still needed a two-thirds majority, which he failed to secure (News 24: 2012).

The South African delegation in Addis Ababa emerged from their failed bid to win the African Union chair, dancing; yet another signal to their African peers that South Africa is a "continental bully" and wants to install itself as a continental leader in a post Khadafi Africa.<sup>1</sup> During the campaign, the South African government used the same tactics as it did at the AU Summit in Ghana in 2007 that resulted in a rejection by African leaders of the late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's proposal for the creation of a United States of Africa.<sup>2</sup> In preparation for the Ghana summit, Gaddafi used his oil wealth to buy influence within the AU by paying the debts of member states. The 28 January Mail & Guardian quotes a Foreign Affairs official as saying, "At the time, we said to African leaders whose countries depended on Gaddafi: 'Agree with him, but oppose him at the secret ballot'. We are doing the same

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<sup>1</sup> Pillay, V. 2012. SA's AU dance: Optimistic or inappropriate? (Mail & Guardian, 31 January). Available online at <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-01-31-sas-au-dance-optimistic-or-inappropriate>

<sup>2</sup> Mail&Guardian. 2012. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma for the Win ( January 28). Available online at <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-01-28-sa-nkosazana-dlaminizuma-for-the-win>

with poor Francophone countries who depend on France for their survival to say: 'Agree to vote for Ping, but when you get your ballot, vote Dlamini-Zuma'," <sup>3</sup>

The outcome of the election, however, suggests that this strategy backfired and some countries in SADC may have voted against South Africa, such as Zimbabwe, whose relations with South Africa are at a low. South Africa backed the United Nations Security Council's resolution 1973 which called for a no-fly zone over Libya and Zimbabwean President, Robert Mugabe, is unhappy with President Jacob Zuma's hard line stance on implementing the global peace agreement.

South Africa's attempt to flex its foreign policy muscle by capturing the AU's top post may be frustrated by nations resentful of its already dominant role on the continent. South Africa initially failed to back the 54-nation body's demand last year that Ivory Coast President, Laurent Gbagbo, cede power to Alassane Ouattara after a disputed election.

It also clashed with Gabon, Nigeria and Ethiopia when it refused to recognise Libya's National Transitional Council. President Jacob Zuma attempted to persuade the AU to delay recognition, owing to close ties between the South African political elite and the Mouammar Khadafi regime.

This deadlock is indicative of a split between the African French-speaking nations in the west and in the north of the continent and a southern bloc led by South Africa where English is more commonly spoken.

Meanwhile, the African Union extended Jean Ping's mandate until the next summit scheduled to take place in Lilongwe in June this year. The South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation announced that Dlamini-Zuma will once again vie for the position in the next election. It is unlikely, however, that she will be successful this time around. South Africa's economic muscle, its stance on Libya and Côte d'Ivoire and, most recently, its views on sanctions against Syria in the Security Council have increasingly alienated it from its African peers and the West with its three permanent powers in the UN Security Council, namely, the US, France and the United Kingdom who still play an influential role in African Affairs.

#### FURTHER READING

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VOA News. 2012. AU Leaders fail to choose Top Official. Available online at <http://blogs.voanews.com/breaking-news/2012/01/30/au-leaders-fail-to-choose-top-official-3/>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

News24. 2012. Dlamini Zuma to vie for the AU top job again. Available online at <http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/Dlamini-Zuma-to-vie-for-AU-top-job-again-20120131>

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