

FOCUS

South Africa



Transition of power in South Africa

The first step to Jacob Zuma's presidency in 2009

On 21 September South African President Thabo Mbeki submitted his resignation from the Office of the President to the Speaker of Parliament, Baleka Mbete. The second, democratically elected president of South Africa was forced to take this step by the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress (ANC) which has been led by Jacob Zuma since December last year. The former vice-president of the ANC, Kgalema Motlanthe has been elected as the country's new president. A third of the old cabinet also submitted its resignation. New presidential elections are scheduled to take place in May next year. It is believed that Jacob Zuma will in all probability win these elections. Discussions are currently underway regarding the division of the governing party, the ANC, into two camps.

"Even when faced with difficulty, and confronted by unanticipated challenges, the ANC has remained unwavering in its commitment to advance the interests of all the people of South Africa. (...) We will not allow the stability of our democratic order to be compromised."

Kgalema Motlanthe, South African President –
In his inaugural speech on 25 September 2008



In Retrospect

In order to understand the resignation of President Mbeki, it is necessary to look back to 2005 when Mbeki dismissed Jacob Zuma from the office of Vice-President due to corruption suspicions and allegations. The current transition of power goes back to the conflict between the Mbeki and the Zuma camps within the ANC, which also differ significantly on a political level.

After the first democratic elections in 1994 Jacob Zuma was elected as a member of the provincial government of KwaZulu-Natal, three years later he was elected vice-president of the ANC and in 1999 was selected by President Thabo Mbeki to serve as his Deputy in the highest office in the state. The two politicians worked well together until June 2005 when Zuma faced severe corruption allegations after his financial advisor had been sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for corruption. President Mbeki dismissed his deputy on 14 June, and declared the then Minister of Minerals and Energy, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka as the new deputy president of South Africa. This invited considerable criticism since the allegations that Zuma had accepted bribes in the country's largest arms deal and had acted with insider-knowledge, had not been proven. The corresponding trial had only just begun at that point. Approximately 6 months after his dismissal from office Zuma was accused of the rape of an AIDS activist in Johannesburg – he was acquitted in court, however. He then also left his position as deputy president of the ANC.

Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma belong to two different camps within the governing party. Mbeki stands for an enterprise-friendly, liberal economic policy which has come under sharp criticism in recent months. This is because on the one hand the economy grows by an average of four percent, whereas on other hand the fight against unemployment, inequality and poverty progresses sluggishly fourteen years after the end of apartheid. According to the Gini Coefficient, which measures the inequality of income distribution, South Africa belongs to the highest in the world, with one-third of South Africans still living in poverty. Millions of people still have no access to drinking water, sanitary facilities and electricity. Earlier this year the prices for electricity and basic food items sky-rocketed. This resulted in unrest

Biography of Jacob Zuma

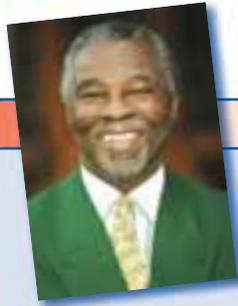
12. April 1942	Born in Inkandla, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal
1959	Entry into the ANC, three years later member of Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation).
1963	Arrest on charges of anti-government activities, sentenced to ten years' imprisonment on Robben Island.
1977	Member of the executive committee of the ANC
1997	Elected as deputy-president of the ANC
1999	Elected as deputy president of South Africa
June 2005	Zuma's financial advisor Schabir Shaik convicted on charges of corruption, charges also brought against Jacob Zuma. President Mbeki dismisses Zuma from his office as deputy president. Zuma also leaves his position as ANC deputy president.
October 2005	Suspected of and charged with the rape of an AIDS activist.
April 2006	Charges are dismissed.
May 2006	Zuma once again becomes deputy president of the African National Congress (ANC).
September 2006	The first corruption trial against Zuma dismissed due to procedural errors.
November 2007	Public prosecutor's office initiates second charge against Zuma
December 2007	Zuma elected as new president of the ANC.
12. September 2008	Judge Chris Nicholson dismisses the second charge of corruption against Zuma. He stresses the procedural errors and criticizes the executive interference.

and acts of violence against African immigrants in the impoverished sectors of the large cities.

In addition Thabo Mbeki is also regarded as authoritarian, distant and stubborn. His "quiet diplomacy" in neighbouring Zimbabwe, which for a long time, tolerated the brutal dictatorship of Mugabe, and his dismissal of the manipulated elections; the controversial Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang who placed the side-effects of anti-retroviral medication in the foreground and recommended nourishment with beetroot, pumpkin and garlic for the treatment of HIV instead, as well as Mbeki's increasing concentration of power within the presidential office, have left him unpopular. Jacob Zuma however, is regarded as the most important Zulu ANC politician and represents the left wing of the party and its associated trade unions. His strongest allies

Biography of Thabo Mbeki

18. June 1942	Born in Idutywa, Eastern Cape
1956	Entry into the African National Congress (ANC)
1961	Exile: Studies economics.
1971	Member of the executive committee of the African National Congress (ANC), first as secretary of information, and later as external spokesperson.
1990	Return from exile: Represents the ANC in negotiations with the white minority government of South Africa.
1994	After the first democratic elections: Deputy President in the Government of National Unity under Nelson Mandela.
December 1997	Elected president of the ANC
1999	Elected president of the country
2004	Re-election as president
December 2007	Mbeki loses presidency of the ANC to Jacob Zuma.
September 2008	Withdrawal as State President



include the country's largest trade union representative, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the ANC Youth League (ANC-YL). Zuma enjoys immense popularity from the grass-roots levels of South African society and uses his increased media presence for the advancement of his popularity, despite both his criminal trials in the previous year and the countless controversial statements regarding AIDS, homosexuality and the equality of women. The experienced politician who, like Nelson Mandela, spent a part of his life in Robben Island Prison is seen as the Man of the People who speaks the language of the streets and who scores points by making charismatic appearances. His presence in the media during both his trials was used to portray an image of him as the victim of a plot or conspiracy which was meant to turn one part of the African National Congress centering on Thabo Mbeki against him to hinder his assumption of the presidency after the parliamentary elections in 2009. Zuma has always been regarded as the most promising candidate for the highest office in the state. After both legal proceedings against Zuma had been dismissed due to procedural errors (corruption charge) and doubts regarding the reliability of the main witness (rape charge) Zuma was reinstated as deputy president of the ANC. On

18 December 2007 Zuma was elected president of the ANC following a decisive and grueling vote. The division between the party under Zuma and the government under Mbeki has since then increased and is the cause for Mbeki's withdrawal as president of South Africa.

The Climax of the Conflict

The resignation of President Mbeki was facilitated by judgment delivered by a judge of the High Court, Chris Nicholson. Nicholson dismissed the corruption allegations against Jacob Zuma presented by the National Prosecuting Authority due to procedural errors. In addition Nicholson ruled that executive political pressure was exerted on the public prosecutor's office to introduce a second legal procedure against Zuma. Mbeki was placed under considerable pressure due to this. The Zuma-camp within the governing body of the ANC regarded the judgment as an indictment against Mbeki and his leadership. They considered the reproach particularly serious, that the President had used state facilities to discredit Jacob Zuma, the president of the party. In addition he, Mbeki had also threatened and damaged the justice system. Following the court judgment the members of the ANC executive felt convinced that a political "smear campaign" had taken place which was meant to prevent Jacob Zuma from becoming the next president of South Africa. This was a decisive moment for the fall of Mbeki and on 19 September the ANC executive requested his resignation. Mbeki complied with the request.

The End of the Mbeki Era

In a very emotional televised 20-minute farewell speech on 21 September, Mbeki acknowledged that he recognized the authority of the ANC executive, which had requested his withdrawal. In his speech Mbeki denied influencing the corruption allegations against Jacob Zuma: "I would like to restate the position of Cabinet on the inferences made by the Honourable Judge Chris Nicholson that the President and Cabinet have interfered in the work the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA). Again I would like to state this categorically that we have never done this, and therefore never compromised the right of the National Prosecuting Authority to decide whom it wished to prosecute or not to prosecute. (...) This applies equally to the painful matter relating to the court proceedings against the

President of the ANC, Comrade Jacob Zuma. (...) More generally, I would like to assure the nation that our successive governments since 1994 have never acted in any manner intended wilfully to violate the Constitution and the law.” Mbeki has instigated legal procedures in which he raises objection to the judgments passed by Chris Nicholson.

The consequences

Exactly one-third of Thabo Mbeki’s cabinet withdrew along with him, out of solidarity, although this also called for continuity. Beforehand, a wave of panic spread across South Africa in September after lists with the names of the various ministers who were suspected to resign had been circulated. The rumours regarding the withdrawal of Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, who enjoys a very high international reputation and who stands for stability, had particularly disconcerted the South African and international communities. The impression that the governing party, the ANC did not have the situation under control had spread and encouraged the ANC General Secretary Gwede Mantashe to recall several cabinet ministers to continue their work in order to ensure a conflict-free transition to the 2009 elections. Mbhasiwa Shilowa, the premier of Gauteng, the most important province in the country incorporating the seat of government Pretoria and the economic metropolis Johannesburg, announced his resignation on 29 September. He regarded the decision made by the ANC National Executive Committee as unfair, and denied rumours that he had been forced to resign, or that he knew of a planned split in the ANC.

The new and surprising developments took their toll on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and led to a weakening of the South African currency, the Rand (ZAR). This situation improved however, following Trevor Manuel’s announcement that he would serve in the new cabinet. The decision made by the governor of the central reserve bank, Tito Mboweni to remain in his position, also calmed the situation.

The public reacted with mixed emotions to the resignation of Thabo Mbeki. A part of the population and the media felt that this was long overdue. Following the loss of the ANC presidency in December of last year, Mbeki had become a “lame duck” and important plans for reform had come to a halt. Other areas of the population criticize the manner in which Mbeki had been recalled and asked to resign, and regard it as an act of revenge on the part of

Zuma supporters. Furthermore the tone between the two camps has recently changed dramatically. The general secretary of COSATU, Zwelinzima Vavi, and the chairman of the ANC-Youth League, Julius Malema allowed themselves to be carried away enough to say: “We are prepared to kill for Jacob Zuma.” Critics have stated that the ANC party had placed their personal party-political interests over the interests of the nation by recalling Mbeki – a reproach which carries much weight in a party-dominated South Africa.

The Transition President: Kgalema Motlanthe

The election of Thabo Mbeki’s successor required a special meeting of parliament on 25 September 2008. In this meeting, Kgalema Motlanthe, the former deputy-president of the ANC, was elected as the new President of South Africa. Motlanthe is appreciated and enjoys popularity publicly as well as within the governing party, due to his calm and dependable character. It is estimated that he will remain president until the elections in May 2009. His presidency will facilitate a smooth transition from Thabo Mbeki to Jacob Zuma. In his first speech he thanked Thabo Mbeki for his services: “...we have been privileged to have you as our President these last nine years. There is no value that we can place on the service you have rendered to your country, nor any tribute that can adequately capture your contribution to building this nation.” Motlanthe also expressed his belief in the need for political continuity. Alluding to the most important manifesto of the African national Congress, he intoned his desire to be president of all South Africans: “The African National Congress is a movement with a rich political tradition. While conditions have changed, and tactics have had to be adapted, the policy orientation of the ANC has remained consistent for over 50 years. The vision espoused in the Freedom Charter remains at the core of the work of this movement, reflected in the mandate of this government. (...)In the spirit of building a united democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous South Africa, I look forward to a constructive relationship with all parties within this Assembly (...)” Motlanthe stressed that his government will remain committed to the goal of reducing poverty and unemployment in South Africa by half by 2014: “This government will be able to report on tangible advances in the provision of housing, electricity, water, sanitation and other basic services to millions of



Biography of Kgalema Motlanthe

1949	Born close to Bela Bela, in the province of Transvaal (today Limpopo)
1967	First arrest on the basis of his activities for the African National Congress (ANC). After the Soweto Uprisings, the 28-year old sentenced to ten years' imprisonment which he spent on Robben Island till 1987.
1992	General Secretary for the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and unionist in the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu).
1997	Elected ANC Secretary-General
December 2007	Elected acting party chairman of the ANC
July 2008	Declared Minister without Portfolio in the cabinet of President Mbeki
September 2008	Following the official withdrawal of Mbeki and eleven Ministers on 25 September 2008 elected new President of South Africa.

our people. (...).Government remains on course to deliver on its commitments to the poor, who rely on us daily for the fulfilment of their basic needs and for the provision of important services like health, education, and social security..” In doing so he complied with all the demands made by followers of Jacob Zuma. The new president did not mention the conditions regarding the transition of power. It bears mention that in his new cabinet the Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, and Foreign Affairs Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma will retain their respective offices. Therefore no major breaks are expected in the areas of economic, financial and foreign politics. Noteworthy changes include the position of Charles Nqakula as the new Defense Minister, Enver Surty as the new Justice Minister and Barbara Hogan as the new Health Minister whose predecessor Manto Tshabalala-Msimang was particularly controversial due to her highly-flawed AIDS policies. In total, most of the cabinet ministers under Thabo Mbeki are carrying out their duties in the Motlanthe government.

Results

Thabo Mbeki's withdrawal did not threaten the constitutional order in South Africa. The entire transition of power was regulated within constitutional law. In light of this, contrary to many other African states the concerns regarding the stability of democracy in South Africa are unfounded. Nonetheless the nature of Thabo Mbeki's withdrawal and the unfavourable time, since elections are scheduled to take place in May 2009, have been sharply criticized. A weakened president who has faced increased criticism in recent months, and who has come under great pressure due to xenophobic violence, the increased cost of living and the continued lack of success in the fight against AIDS, has been dismissed. It is not to be assumed that the interim president Kgalema Motlanthe will be able to introduce and successfully implement large-scale reform projects.

Rumours are circulating regarding the possible division of the ANC and establishment of a new party by followers of Mbeki, conservatives, economically sympathetic members of the ANC as well as opponents of Jacob Zuma. The current ANC leadership ensures that the party will continue to serve as a home for all South Africans and that a closed and united appearance of the ANC will be indispensable for victory in next year's parliamentary elections. The former Minister of Defense, Mosiuoa Lekota gave his party

an ultimatum. Should the ANC leadership not return to its original values, he would lead the establishment of a splinter-party which would run against the ANC next year. Lekota was encouraged to let his membership in the ANC rest, which comes close to a dismissal and increases the chances of the establishment of a new party. It is as yet unclear how the changes in the government and within the ANC will influence next year's elections. Up to now the ANC has indicated its will for change which conforms to its constitution, which provides the voting public with the belief in the security and stability of the ANC government. Analysts have identified an increasing level of dissatisfaction amongst the population with the party. It could be assumed, however that this will not demonstrate itself in increased votes for another party, but rather in an abstinence of voting. For the black population no real alternative exists to the governing party with an established history in the liberation movement and a two-thirds majority in parliament.

The South African Public Prosecutor's Office intends to re-open the charges against Jacob Zuma for a third time. The chances of a conviction against Jacob Zuma remain largely unclear, however. This question will also determine whether Jacob Zuma will stand as a presidential candidate of the ANC next year, or if successful work by the transition president Kgalema Motlanthe will make Zuma's position as favourite contentious. ■

Editorial

The newsletter **Focus South Africa** appears in a series according to current political and economic events and is written and published by the FES Johannesburg Office. It is published in English and German.

The FES Johannesburg Office supports the process of political, social and economic transformation in South Africa, thereby wishing to consolidate democracy and social justice in the largest country in southern Africa. The newsletter aims at providing background reports and analysis of the current political, economic and social developments.

The **Focus South Africa** can be obtained free of charge. Please do not hesitate to contact us. Our homepage provides a complete set of all issues: www.fes.org.za.

Authors of this number

Dr. Werner Rechmann, Jérôme Cholet

Editor

Dr. Werner Rechmann

Layout & Design

Andreas Dorner

Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung

Johannesburg Office
34 Bompas Road, Dunkeld West
Johannesburg, South Africa
P.O.Box 412664, Craighall 2024
Phone: +27(0) 11-341 0270
Fax: +27(0) 11-341 0271
Email: fokus@fessa.co.za
Web: www.fes.org.za

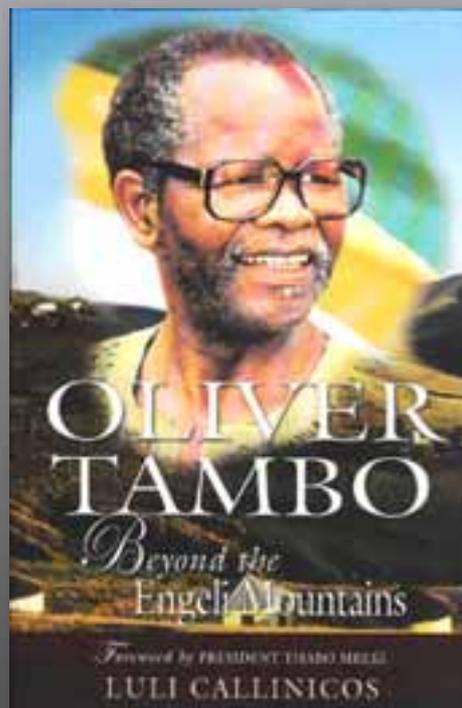


Advertisement

Oliver Tambo

Luli Callinicos

Beyond the Engeli Mountains



ISBN –86486-642-9

Cape Town - New Africa Books 2004, 672 p.

Supported by the

Friedrich Ebert Foundation - South Africa Office