

## ***NEWS, EVENTS, INFORMATION***

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### **THE AFRICAN STATE IN A CHANGING GLOBAL CONTEXT: BREAKDOWNS AND TRANSFORMATIONS**

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During the first twenty-five years of independence, the African state was largely driven from within by the ambition to establish political order in a world where national sovereignty over issues of development was not in question. National development plans provided a sense of economic and political direction. Government control of development was taken for granted. Countries in southern Africa which were still in the process of struggling for national independence were aiming at this type of system. External powers were involved but typically on terms set by the domestic policies of the African countries. Donors offered foreign aid without setting political conditions to their contributions. The two super powers – USSR and USA – got involved but – again – in response to initiatives or demands by African leaders. The African regimes, autocratic and bureaucratic as they were, remained intact. When change took place, what typically happened was change of control of the state as a result of a military coup or – in a few instances – the natural death or voluntary retirement of the head of state.

The next twenty-five years have been characterized by a different dynamic. Thanks to a number of factors, market liberalization, the emergence of a new information technology, and growing African migration both within the continent and to other regions of the world, the African state is no longer insulated from external influences, and what is more, these external influences have become increasingly important in shaping the behaviour of the state and its direction. Donors now set the conditions for Africa's development by virtue of its insistence on adherence to the Millennium Development Goals and, even more importantly, the good governance agenda. African economies are also increasingly integrated into a global economy in which they are exposed to new constraints but also new opportunities. Foreign investors not the least in the mineral sector play an important role but so does an emerging African bourgeoisie with the ambition to get rich without relying on public funds. African countries are also realizing the value of trade and greater interaction among themselves. The social differentiation that has historically made national development meaningful in other regions of the worlds is – at long last –

beginning to make a difference. Africa is still lagging behind in the information technology sector especially with regard to the use of computers, although no one wishes to underestimate the positive influence that the mobile phone has had in connecting people and facilitating financial transactions.

Our present-day global system is inevitably under transformation along the lines of the new dynamics generated by the emerging powers on African soil and in the Gulf regions. It is unanimously seen that South-South and South-(Far) East co-operations attract and at the same time deserve more attention from the different stakeholders of the global arena. In this respect Africa is “on the rise” – the question is whether African actors can develop capacities and positions to be able to decide which directions to take for long-term development.

It is no longer possible to rule an African country without taking into consideration these new factors and how the state can adapt to the challenges and opportunities associated with the new global context. Experience to date suggests that African countries have made considerable progress against severe odds – having started way behind other regions – but it is also evident that they still have a long way to go. Another feature of the trend in the last twenty-five years is the increased number of states that have broken down in the process of interacting with the new global forces. These breakdowns have not included just the change of power at the pinnacle of the state but also a breakdown of the regime, leading to civil war.

The main thesis or theme of this volume, therefore, is that more is at stake today than in the past: not only control of the state but also the nature of the regime. The domestic values of how to rule the new nation were not really challenged in the first twenty-five years, but since then these values are no longer uncontested. Some African countries have adjusted to this new situation and managed to adapt principles of governance to the new situation, but others have found it more difficult. In the most extreme cases, the regime has gone down with the state. Following such a breakdown it has become necessary to reconstruct the state and the regime on new foundations. Most African countries have managed to get themselves out of such post-conflict situations, but in the case of Somalia, a new political order seems faint.

The purpose of this volume is clearly seen: to trace some of the more important features of the role of the state in Africa since independence with a view to highlighting the difference between the past and the present and drawing conclusions with reference to what might be expected in the future. It is not possible to address all the issues that are relevant to the subject matter but those selected for attention here are representative and indicative enough to make it possible to draw some more general conclusions about the development trends

on the continent. Although politics features prominently and a good number of the contributors are political scientists the volume brings in expertise from other disciplines and its ambition is to be multi- if not interdisciplinary in orientation. It is a volume that lends itself well to classroom use in the social sciences, including development studies, and hopefully may serve as a reference also for analysts in the field of development.

Following an Introduction along the lines indicated above, the book is organized around three clusters of issues: (1) the new forces at play, (2) breakdowns and transitions, and (3) new trends within Africa. The substantive and empirical part of the book will be followed by a Conclusion. Each chapter has been selected on either or all of the following grounds: (a) fresh field research and new data, (b) significance of the issues to the theme of the book, and (c) bringing Africanist research in Central Europe to a wider audience.

The authors are primarily scholars from Central Europe, but include a select number of others. All were participants in the International Conference, held at Pecs University on May 27–28, 2010 with the title “Africa: 1960-2010-2060 – A Century Revisited: What Next?”

*The editors of the book:*

*Istvan Tarrosy* is a Lecturer and Assistant Professor in Politics at the University of Pecs and manages its new Africa Research Centre. *Lorand Szabo* teaches History at the same university and is in the process of finishing his Ph.D. focusing on the Congo Free State in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. *Goran Hyden* is Distinguished Professor Emeritus in Political Science at the University of Florida and an Africanist with close to fifty years of research and teaching experience in Africa.

Dr. Ferenc Póka

**“WESTERN BALKANS (BUDAPEST, 2010)”**

*Western Balkans* is an authoritative English-language collection of Hungarian research papers published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Hungary in cooperation with the Scientific Council of the Military Security Office of the Republic of Hungary. Edited by two creative professionals, Norbert Pap and István Kobolka, the book contains valuable contributions by recognised authors.

Committed advocates of the advancement and Euro-Atlantic integration of the Balkans, particularly the Western Balkans, of the reconciliation between