



African Science Day 2007
Saturday, 20th October 2007
Katholische Hochschulgemeinde
Frankfurt am Main

Report:

Decorated in Green and White, colors of the African Union, the conference room is completely full, occupied mainly by Africans. Among the guests are not only the speakers of the day, but also an Ambassador from Brussels. We are at the opening ceremony of the 3rd. African Science Day organized by our association- the African Development Initiative. For this year's edition, the initiators of the project are honored by the presence of His Excellence Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif, Ambassador, and Permanent Representative of the African Union to the European Union. This year's African Science Day is officially open by the High Emissary of the African Union. It is 10h30 and the experts carry on with the agenda. Four panels are listed on the menu:

- The horn of Africa between Bible and Koran;
- Poverty, Church and International relations;
- The question of Energy in international cooperation
- Africa vis-à-vis the dilemma of its local languages.

The first speaker is an Eritrean political scientist. He starts with an analysis of the conflict that opposes his country to Ethiopia since several years. According to the speaker, although great economic and political stakes are at the origin of the conflict, the demarcation of borders between the two States is the principal cause of hostilities. Indeed, the Ethiopian government has at several occasions, proven its incapacity to respect peace agreements, which had been negotiated and ratified. According to Mr. Mussie Habte, it is this attitude from Addis Abeba, which constitutes the principal cause of conflict at the horn of Africa.

Dr. Lemma Betru, an Ethiopian political scientist, does not share this position. According to his analysis of the crisis, in addition to the frontier question, the Ethiopian- Eritrean crisis, clearly illustrates two diametrically opposed visions of the State: On the political level: the Ethiopian government favors a model of federalism based on ethnic groups which would constitute federate entities. This view deeply differs from the Eritrean government's model.



Here is a preference for a unitary State. For Asmara's authorities, ethno-federalism would lead to the balkanization of the State.

Furthermore, since the dissolution of a common monetary union and the creation of a national currency by the Eritrean government, economic stakes also constitute one of the points of divergences between the belligerents. The adoption of a new economic policy created important damages to Ethiopia, thus contributing to tarnish the quality of diplomatic relations between the two neighbors.

The Eritrean government's foreign policy has largely contributed to worsen the state of the relationship between the two States, as the implementation of a regional hegemonic policy by Asmara necessitates the adoption of an aggressive military policy, which has inevitably resulted in an important increase of the Eritrean military forces and a considerable growth of military expenditures.

The Ethiopian government follows a different policy. After the recognition of the independence of Eritrea in 1993, and as a proof of its goodwill, the Ethiopian government did not only define a comprehensive framework for economic co-operation between the two States, it also with the assistance of the GTZ inter alia, demobilized a significant part of its military forces, reducing it to 50.000 men. Further, in the analysis of Dr. Lemma Betru, the Eritrean government, far from following the same logic of military demobilization, rather launched out a policy, which largely contributed to tarnish the good economic and diplomatic cooperation between the two neighbors. In such a constellation, Ethiopia has no choice other than to react consequently.

Just like Mr. Mussie Habte, Dr. Lemma Betru sees in the current crisis a major risk of destabilization in the horn of Africa as a whole. Even if he refuses to see the presence of Ethiopian forces in Somalia as a military occupation (as his Eritrean colleague does), he also shares the point of view of Mr. Mussie on the advantages of a peaceful political and economic cooperation between both States. According to him, Eritrea and Ethiopia have more to gain from a peaceful cooperation than a military victory from one side or the other.

Dr. Melha Rout Biel is a Sudanese, to be more precise, he is from the southern part of Sudan. After having presented his country with its great geographical and cultural diversities (2, 5 Km² millions, 39 million inhabitants, more than 50 ethnic groups, etc), he places this vast territory on a regional political map. He then goes on to elaborate on the historical, political and economical relationship, which Sudan has always shared with other countries,



located at the horn of Africa. These relationships have been particularly intensified during the South-Sudanese liberation war, and which has progressively contributed to build-up a vivid regional economic space. The conference participants could for example learn that the touristic sector in the South of Sudan is primarily controlled by Ethiopian businessmen. The speaker consequently sees in the current unpeaceful relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea a major risk of conflict escalation with regional consequences. With regard to the political role Sudan could play in the conflict resolution process, he calls for massive political pressures on the government of Khartoum, since the democratization of Sudan would largely contribute to the resolution of the crisis between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

After the statements of the three first brilliant speakers of the day, the floor is opened for comments or questions, which immediately started with another phase of the Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict- that is the one in Frankfurt am Main. The analysis of the crisis by the Ethiopian political Scientist Dr. Lemma Betru is not acceptable according to some participants. Several Eritreans judge it skewed, while Ethiopian participants find it founded. Just like the African Science Day of the 21st of October 2006, participants once again witnessed a hot discussion between Eritreans and Ethiopians. Fortunately enough, contradictory contributions were done with respect and courtesy with each speaker finding scientific foundations to his or her arguments. Globally, following issues were debated and criticized:

- The role of the USA in their world war against terrorism;
- The role of the African Union and other international institutions intervening in the conflict;
- The ambiguous role of the GTZ whose funds would have help in the production of a political map allotting to Ethiopia a part of the Eritrean territory;
- The role of political actors in both States who privilege more their personal interests and pride than the search for a sustainable peace, etc.

Intervening at the end of the first panel, His Excellence Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif assesses the quality of the contributions, and mentions the great interest of the African Union for any outline or proposal, which could help to the resolution of conflicts in Africa. With a very good knowledge of the conflict opposing the two countries, he then invites the experts to follow up their research, this in order to provide decision makers with trustworthy information. He finally invites Africans of the Diaspora to always maintain alive the spirit of dialogue and courtesy which have so far accompanied the debates, because the solution to our problems will not come from outside of the continent. It will be inescapably the result of our intelligence, the result of our capacity to negotiate and respect the peace agreements that have freely been signed and ratified.



One of the important points on the agenda of diplomatic meetings is the thorn bush problem of poverty. The seven most industrialized States and Russia once again debated on this problem during the G8 meeting of June 2007 in Germany. At the end of the summit, nice promises were made. As many observers mentioned, this was business as usual. For some few years ago (September 2000), the Heads of States and governments of the UN Member States adopted a solemn text, the declaration on the millennium development goals. Through this text, which is of historical importance, the plenipotentiaries firmly committed themselves to eradicate poverty on the planet by the year 2015. It is thus judicious that the African Development Initiative registered this topic on the agenda of the African Science Day 2007.

Within the framework of the second panel, the participants approach the crucial problem of poverty in Africa from a multidisciplinary perspective. The first analysis of the problem is that of a political scientist. According to the speaker, poverty has a structural origin. Its causes are deeply rooted in the state of the current International law. Therefore, it can be efficiently fought only through a deep reform of the international law and current diplomatic practices. Dr. Leonard Jamfa, Postdoctoral research fellow at the Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule Sankt Georgen in Frankfurt am Main and president of ADI draws up the state of the debate on Africa's poverty in the post-war international relations. He also makes a review of various instruments which have so far been designed by Western policy makers and international institutions. The tax on air tickets recently instituted by the French government and later adopted by a dozen of other States is also analyzed. According to the speaker, none of those instruments has stood the challenge of poverty alleviation. Even the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted with great solemnity in September 2000 will not surely be achieved by the year 2015. With regard to this reality, Dr. Leonard Jamfa then proposes the institutionalization of a "development tax" which would be paid exclusively by Africans of the Diaspora. The speaker presents the new "tax", focusing attention to the advantages and disadvantages of such an instrument. However, when compared to instruments, which have been experienced up to now, there is a net comparative advantage for the "development tax". Concretely, as the speaker through an example points it out; if the German Parliament institutionalizes the "development tax" at an annual rate of only about 3.65 Euro per African living in Germany, Africa could receive a yearly contribution of more than 1.010.951 Euro. The problem is then to know how to sensitize German political elite for such a "tax".



Despite the relevance of the proposal, participants focus their attention on the difficulties related to its adoption. For many of them, in its concept, the "development tax" violates the constitutional principle of the equality of all citizens. Therefore, it would not be easily conceivable that a regional Parliament (or the German National Assembly) institute a tax devoted exclusively to a particular category of the population. This argument does not convince the speaker, insofar that the Official Development Assistance (ODA) in its current practices constitutes a real distortion of legal and ethical principles, this at least for one reason: there has never been a preliminary consultation of the African citizens on their requirement of Assistance. According to Dr. Leonard Jamfa, it is not all to give Aid to Africans. The most important point would be to know if Africans really want this assistance in the way it is actually allotted. The speaker is convinced that since Western development assistance have historically led to the over-indebtedness of Africa while emancipating the ruling elite from the control of its citizens, a referendum on the acceptance of Western development Aid in Africa would lead to a severe failure of Western developed States. African citizens would simply request them to devote their money and bags of expiring rice for their own citizens.

The second speaker of this panel is a theologian. Mr. Felix Agbara is a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, PhD Student at the Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Frankfurt. He analyses the role of the Church (his Church) in the struggle against poverty in Africa. Taking his home country Nigeria as his field of study, he firstly presents the impact of globalization on the life quality of his fellow-citizens who have become defenseless victims of economic policies generally defined in Washington, New York, London, Paris or Berlin. The speaker explains how in rural milieus, transnational economic decisions of Western institutions and donors have in a relatively short period of time led to the destruction of the traditional mode of food production and have gradually ruined ancient internal regulatory mechanisms of communities. It is in this context of deep crisis of former social structures and mechanisms that the Church operates. It is certainly a very active Church, particularly in rural areas. But as the speaker notices, this institution is unfortunately not sufficiently equipped, and could not stand the challenge of poverty alleviation. Not only should the Church invest more resources in the World campaign against poverty, it should be more aggressive vis-à-vis capitalistic forces and Western liberal ideologies.

The third speaker of the panel is Mr. Abdelrahim Bouzaidi from Morocco. He is a PhD student in political science at the University of Marburg. Moving beyond his handicap (sight problems), he speaks about the role of NGOs in poverty alleviation campaign. His field of study is the kingdom of Morocco. The speaker explains the various strategies used by social



actors in order to regroup and mobilize citizens in areas drastically exposed to the plague. He does not reduce his observations to the social dimension of popular initiatives. Political stakes, though very difficult to apprehend at the first glance are also approached: forms of assistances; identity of assistance providers; grants outcomes or expectations; freedom of NGOs administrators; etc. No aspect of the problem is left aside. The speaker finally comes to the following conclusion: like in any organizations the one who finances decides, it would be preferable for an NGO to be financed by his or her own members. This would avoid the risks of political, economic or ideological instrumentalization.

One could not debate on poverty without tackling the problem of water and electricity allocation. Two basic products for any human society, but which have become a great luxury in Africa south of the Sahara. In Cameroon for example, to have in towns a water and electricity system functioning at the same time is doubtful. At the best, one could receive water, or electricity. Most often, there is neither electricity nor water. Citizens are obliged to organize their daily existence accordingly. There is a clear regression when compared to the standards of the 1990s. Indeed, Africans actually face a paradoxical situation. According to Dr. Chicgoua Noubactep who intervenes in the framework of the third panel devoted to Africa's Energy problems, recent developments in science and technological could help resolve the problem without great difficulties. With clear experiments in three African countries (Cameroon, Ouganda and Tanzania), the speaker, a research fellow at the University of Göttingen proves that just with little means, it is possible to provide African households with drinking water in sufficient quantities today. He then allots the current shortage of drinking water not to a natural phenomenon, but rather to the lack of commitment and political good will of the African ruling elites. One of the most important help international institutions could grant Africa is to pressurize African regimes so that they create conditions for the implementation of recent scientific and technological discoveries.

The second speaker on this panel comes from Zimbabwe and is a PhD Student at the University of Kassel. As a specialist in rural electrification, he firstly draws up the energetic potential of the region of Southern Africa. He analyses the contribution solar energy could provide for the development of the region, studies the condition of its exploitation and comes out with the clear conclusion that energy shortage in Africa is more a governance problem, than is a natural limitation. Indeed, as the speaker points it out, these resources are accessible at low costs.

Africa: the continent of great paradoxes. A rich territory of inestimable resources: but which stagnates under the weight of poverty. A continent with several linguistic resources: but



which communicates in French, English, Spanish, Portuguese or Arabic. A painful reality according to some, but a buoy to others. Indeed, how would have communication been possible between people from such distant countries such as Madagascar and Senegal, for example if the French language did not play the role of connector? How would have been exchanges between inhabitants of Guinea Bissau and those of Angola or Mozambique if Portuguese was not used as the language of communication? Mr. George Massock, a Cameroonian PhD Student at the department of Linguistics at the University of Göttingen approaches the thorn-bush problem of the language management in Africa. Taking the case of Cameroon, he shows how complex the problem is. Indeed, at the very beginning of the colonial period, the multiplicity of local languages is a major problem for the colonial authority. The speaker then analyses the linguistic policy during the colonial rule, a policy that aimed at the progressive establishment of a foreign language as the official language, and the elimination of local languages from the public sphere. The fact that a great part of the Cameroonian youth nowadays are unable to speak or to write their mother tongue is the result of the colonial language policy, and the continuity of this policy by post colonial ruling elites. Today in Cameroon, French and English are the official languages like in France or in the United Kingdom respectively, while more than 200 local languages with its attached cultural heritage are almost abandoned. What is to be done? The debate remains open.

The last speaker of the African Science Day 2007 is Mr. Sadiki Amsini, Professor at the Technische Universität Darmstadt. Far from being a conference in the classical sense of the word, the attendants experienced a meditation on human existence and the conditions of happiness: Human beings are God creatures. But as such, they belong to a given culture and intend to live in a given geographical environment, from the resources placed at their disposal by the world's Master. As divine creatures, it is their duty to aspire to life and full happiness. No one for any reason can withdraw their sovereign aspiration to life and happiness within the framework, which God designed for them. Analyzing the stand of Africans today, the Professor regrets his status of dependant and his profound alienation, which very often lead to self-destruction or suicide. This situation is mostly characterized by the rejection of our own language to speak with enthusiasm that of others; the refusal of initiation at our own school to be initiated at the school of others; the rejection of our own values for those of others, etc. According to the speaker, those attitudes testify the negative impact of colonialism on Africans today. He therefore invites Africans to a true awakening. He insists on the urgent consideration and equal treatment of all cultures, which should be considered world heritage given by the creator. Professor Amsini Sadiki sees in this approach of world cultures the only condition of a sincere dialogue between people of



different cultural horizons. In his speech, it is not only schools in Africa which should be criticized. Professor Sadiki makes a particularly severe assessment of Western States' educational system. He fustigates in particular the little mention made to the contribution of African intellectuals and researchers in the field of science and technology. Knowing how much important this contribution is, the speaker finds the attitude of Western scholars and publishers particularly unjust. It judges their attitude as a factor likely to tarnish the sincere cooperation between Africa and the West, in the sense that it could help cultivating for a long time in Western public opinion the impression that Africa and Africans have brought nothing to the development of science and technology. It is thus on this point that the speaker calls for more attention and publicity on African scientists and their researches. He also calls for a greater presence of Africa not only in Western, but also in African schools' textbooks.

The African Science Day 2007 comes to an end at exactly 7 p.m. as envisaged. This to the great satisfaction of the organizers and the participants who, once again, have succeeded in posing a different image of Africa and Africans in a social environment historically accustomed to associate Africans to dance, the spectacle, and the show. The African Science Day 2008 will be held on Saturday, October 18th, 2008 at the same time and venue.

Frankfurt /Main, 20th October, 2007

The organizing committee