



Policy Brief 3 of 2017

23<sup>rd</sup> March 2017

## Major South African Foreign Policy Trends and Issues of 2017



*23<sup>rd</sup> March 2017*

### Introduction

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2017, SALO held a dialogue on “Major South African Foreign Policy Trends and Issues of 2017”. The keynote speaker for this dialogue was Hon Siphosizwe Masango, Chairperson of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Cooperation. The aim of the dialogue was to provide an informed overview of the key concerns and issues that would affect and underpin South African foreign policy in 2017. The discussion as led by the speakers, as well as the contributions from the participants, highlighted the challenging international environment, which seems to be in a state of flux characterised by growing uncertainty and the emergence of entrenched conservatism and protectionism. This is the context within which South Africa has to navigate, and evaluate, its foreign policy approaches, as well as calibrate its future International Relations priorities.

### Key Issues Raised

#### Concerns relating to the perception that South Africa’s foreign policy is inconsistent

There is a growing perception especially amongst South Africa’s Northern partners (including Germany and the wider European Union) that South Africa’s foreign policy does “not follow a clear and consistent paradigm” that is underpinned by a constant set of values. South Africa’s Northern partners are concerned that this perceived inconsistency is largely a consequence of the lack of clearly delineated and definitive

values that underpin and guide South Africa's foreign policy and international relations outlook. The expectation of most EU member states including Germany is that South Africa should play a leading role in terms of democratisation processes (regionally and continentally) and greater integration on the continent.

### **The challenging international environment**

South Africa has to conceptualise and implement its foreign policy at a time when the international context is characterised by increasing uncertainty and polarisation. The noticeable rise in right wing populism and politics in a number of European countries and the United States is cause for concern, and it is crucial for South African policymakers to assess how this will ultimately impact the country as well as the continent. Hon Masango highlighted the increasing "militarisation of diplomacy" and a growing emphasis on unilateralism within the international system, as evidenced by events in Syria and the Korean peninsula.

### **The prioritisation of the African continent**

South Africa will continue to prioritise the African continent in terms of supporting regional and continental governance, developmental, as well as peace and security programmes. One of the issues noted was the transformation of the SADC parliamentary forum into an active regional parliamentary body that is aligned with the Pan African Parliament (PAP). This would enhance and strengthen SADC democratisation initiatives, and provide greater representation for SADC citizens. It was also acknowledged that South Africa should play a key role in terms of strengthening and capacitating key continental bodies such as the African Court on Human and Peoples Rights, so that it becomes the primary arbitary body on the continent. This will complement measures taken to support and enhance national and regional judicial bodies; meaning that institutions such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) will be a "court of last resort".

South Africa is set to continue actively supporting efforts towards greater and deepened continental integration, especially as intra-African trade volumes remain worryingly low at below 15%. In light of this, South Africa will seek to "fast track the implementation" of the SADC industrial strategy. South Africa through its membership of multilateral bodies such as BRICS and G20 and the platforms they provide will promote the African Agenda and voice continental concerns. In terms of the BRICS, South Africa will work to secure 'alternative' funds for African infrastructure programmes via the BRICS New Development Bank. South Africa chairs the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Presidential Infrastructure Champion Initiative (PICI) hence the emphasis on the importance of greater inter-regional and regional integration underpinned by infrastructure development.

To complement the regional development programmes being carried out across the continent South Africa will continue to mediate in a number of conflict contexts throughout the continent, as well as support peace and reconstruction processes. Some of these contexts include: the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan.

### **The importance of North-South partnership**

South Africa recognises the importance of its strategic partnerships with its Northern partners, especially with regards to domestic (and continental) trade as well as economic development objectives. Therefore institutional frameworks and forums such as the EU-South Africa strategic partnership (as well as Africa-EU cooperation) and the G20 are a vital aspect of South Africa's cooperation with Northern partners in terms of key regional and continental priorities such as peace and security, as well as 'shared' and sustainable economic growth. South Africa will continue to engage important Northern partners such as

the United States and the United Kingdom. With regards to the former, South Africa acknowledges the significance and value of policies such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in terms of economic growth opportunities for a number of African countries. In terms of the latter, South Africa is concerned about how Brexit will affect EU-South Africa relations, as well as the bilateral relations with the UK. Hon Masango highlighted the importance of Northern partners when he stated:

*“[the EU] particularly Germany if you look at their investment here, remains an important partner in the development of both South Africa and the continent, and it fact South Africa benefits more than [other] African states, both with the USA and Europe and of course with China”*

It was noted that Northern actors, including Germany, view and provide support to South Africa as a “progressive voice” around key issues pertaining to: climate and energy, migration, human rights as well as peace and security.

## **Recommendations**

### **South Africa needs to precisely delineate and articulate what underpins its national interest**

If South Africa is to ensure that its international relations approach and foreign policy directly contribute to its economic growth and developmental goals it needs to precisely define its national interest priorities. This means South Africa has to assert clearly whether its foreign policy is primarily underpinned by a South Africa first approach, or rather an Africa first focus, or even a BRICS globalist outlook. This highlights the important notion raised by Ms Sanusha Naidu who noted it is important for South Africa to reconcile its “national interests with the pursuit of pan-Africanism and a progressive internationalist movement”.

### **South Africa’s economic diplomacy has to be closely aligned to foreign policy formulation and implementation**

South Africa’s external trade initiatives, as well as its integration into the global economy (regionally, continentally and internationally), are greatly affected by the quality of its economic diplomacy. In order to enhance and guide the work of South Africa’s 126 foreign missions across the world in terms of attaining tangible economic benefits relating to investment, trade and socioeconomic programmes, it is vital for economic diplomacy to be prioritised as a central aspect of foreign policy implementation.

This means that foreign policy practice must be aligned to domestic economic development plans such as the National Development plan (NDP), New Growth Plan (NGP), and the Industrial Policy Action Plans (IPAP). Furthermore the economic diplomacy unit at the Department of International Relations and Cooperation’s (DIRCO) Diplomatic Academy has to ensure that South African diplomats are expertly skilled as policy makers in terms of recognising potential trade and commercial opportunities, as well as promoting South African goods and services internationally.

### **South Africa must be proactive as the SADC Chair**

South Africa needs to use its position as SADC Chair to actively steer the regional integration agenda, as well as mediate the political crises in countries such as Lesotho, Zimbabwe and DRC. South Africa can play a key role in terms of supporting the initial stages towards the implementation of the SADC Industrialisation Strategy and Roadmap. However, to complement economic regional integration, it is also important for South Africa to promote values such as accountable and representative governance. In this

regard South Africa might facilitate representative dialogues on the establishment of a SADC regional parliament.

## The importance of the 5<sup>th</sup> National Policy Conference

ANC and government policymakers must use the 5<sup>th</sup> National Policy Conference to be held between the 30<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> July (2017) to perceptively evaluate the last five years<sup>1</sup> of South Africa's foreign policy formulation and implementation. The conference should serve to highlight the challenges and opportunities pertaining to South Africa's foreign policy objectives and strategies. Furthermore, the conference is an important forum for the ANC to engage with inputs from wider South African society, as various stakeholders from academia, civil society, business and the opposition respond to the publicised ANC discussion documents on international relations, economic transformation and peace and stability. The policy conference therefore provides an opportunity for the ANC and government to critique and enhance the international relations rationale and approach that underpins South African foreign policy.

## List of Speakers:

1. **Ms Renate Tenbusch**, South Africa Resident Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)
2. **Keynote speaker: Hon Siphosizwe Masango**, Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Cooperation
3. **Mr Lebohang Matshaba**, International Relations Coordinator for South - South Relations, African National Congress (ANC)
4. **Ms Sanusha Naidu**, Senior Research Associate, Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD)

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*The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Brief do not necessarily reflect the view of SALO or any of the donors or conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. The contents of the report are the sole responsibility of SALO, and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donors who provided financial assistance for this policy dialogue session.*

### About the Southern African Liaison Office:



The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) is a South African-based not-for-profit civil society organisation which, through advocacy, dialogue, policy consensus and in-depth research and analysis, influences the current thinking and debates on foreign policy especially regarding African crises and conflicts.

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<sup>1</sup> The last ANC National Policy Conference was in 2012

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