



Policy Dialogue Report No: 63

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



23 March 2017

### Executive Summary

On the 23rd of March 2017, the Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) in partnership with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) hosted a dialogue workshop on '*Major South African Foreign Policy Trends and Issues for 2017*'. This workshop aimed to address two main concerns, namely:

- What are likely to be the key items on SA's Foreign Policy agenda for 2017?
- What are some of the key trends and considerations likely to inform the country's international engagements in 2017?

This dialogue was a continuation of a series of dialogues held annually on the same topic by SALO, which is now in its third year. The pertinence of this dialogue is shown by the context of rapidly changing global dynamics: growing global trends towards the values of popularism, a greater push towards a multipolar world order with the rise of China and the re-emergence of Russia, and South Africa and the AU's focus on South-South relations. Other key topics of discussion included South Africa's approach to the ICC Rome Statute and its role in the BRICS Development Bank.

For 2017, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation's (DIRCO) Minister, the Honourable Maite Nkoana-Mashabane has indicated that key to South Africa's foreign policy priorities and objectives will be *"accelerating our economic diplomacy efforts, creating new trade opportunities aimed at opening market access, increasing investment and deepening existing economic ties"*. Minister Mashabane has also pointed out that the African continent will remain high on the agenda of South Africa's engagements with other partners across the globe.

In his introductory remarks, the chair of the dialogue, SALO Researcher Mr. Tawanda Sachikonye, cited two consistent concerns around South Africa's Foreign Policy that would be relevant to the topic of the dialogue, namely:

- Domestic issues, which are informed by job creation, equality, and poverty will remain central in South Africa's approach to foreign policy
- South Africa's chairing of SADC in 2017 and its involvement in the African Union Security Council will ensure that inter-African relations remain a top priority

The Keynote Speaker of this dialogue was the Honorable Mr Siphosizwe Masango, Chairperson of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Cooperation. Other speakers included Ms. Renate Tenbusch, South Africa Resident Director of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Mr. Lebohang Matshaba, International Relations Coordinator on South-South Relations for the African National Congress (ANC) and Ms. Sanusha Naidu, Senior Research Associate at the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD).

## SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS

**Ms. Renate Tenbusch**, South Africa Resident Director of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)



Ms. Tenbusch made opening remarks of behalf of FES South Africa, she said: "[s]peaking of foreign policy actors in Germany, as well as on the European level, one could clearly identify a certain confusion and growing concern among them in relation to South Africa's actual foreign policy approach".

She highlighted two instances where this confusion and growing concern became increasingly apparent, namely, the ANC Policy Document on International Relations that was published in the run up to the Policy Conference in the election year, 2014 and the

SA government's decision to withdraw from the ICC Rome Statute.

Ms. Tenbusch acknowledged the growing crisis of migration and terrorist groups within the African continent as one of major focus points for German-Africa relations. She pointed out the importance of Germany's chairing of the G20 and its subsequent Marshall Plan for Africa and the Compact for Africa. She indicated that these programmes recognise the potential for economic growth in African countries and that Germany is sensitive to the role South Africa plays in accepting a significant proportion of African migrants and refugees.

In her concluding remarks the FES Director explained that "Our aim is - together with our South African counterparts and comrades in the ANC, in Parliament, in the Trade Unions and Civil Society - is to support South Africa in its role as a respected and decisive soft power on the continent and in the international arena, and we would like to support South Africa as a progressive voice in discussions on international issues like climate and energy, migration, human and social rights, the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, as well as peace and conflict resolution."

**Mr. Siphosizwe Masango**, Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Cooperation



Honourable Masango began by contextualising the dialogue within global events, specifically the rise of conservative, reactionary, and nationalistic popularism. He argued that there seems to be a global uncertainty that has followed this trend. He characterised South African Foreign Policy as "*committed to the establishment of a humane and equitable, a democratic and*

*a just world order*" with the core underlying value of Ubuntu. South Africa's strategic policy imperative will remain focused on the reform of international organisations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

In response to Ms. Tenbusch's comments on South Africa's responsibility as a signatory of the ICC, Hon. Masango expressed that South Africa believes in the values of the ICC Rome Statute but is, however, critical of its selection of which heads of state to prosecute. He stated that it was important to be aware of the power international organisations like the ICC hold. According to Hon. Masango, this is in order to ensure that they do not become global instruments of power that enforce political change and control over developing countries. As with the ICC, he expressed concern about the G20 and the power it holds to pursue the interests of developed nations at the expense of the developing.

Hon. Masango indicated that South Africa's Economic Policy strategies and plans include the Industrial Policy Action Plan. To support such plans as well as trade initiatives, DIRCO aims to establish an Economic Diplomacy Unit within its Diplomatic Academy. According to Hon. Masango, this will be aimed at training diplomats to identify opportunities for trade and foreign investment. The integration of the Regional Economic Communities, the development of Free Trade Areas and, eventually, a Continental Free Trade Area are high of high priority to South Africa as these will improve intra-Africa trade.

Hon. Masango observed that the ANC has a history of supporting the Polisario Front in its fight for the self-determination of Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and still encourages recognition of its sovereignty by the United Nations (UN). South Africa's approach to the conflict in Palestine and Israel is one that supports the two-state solution and calls for the cessation of illegal settlements and the expansion of Israel into the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Hon. Masango mentioned that whilst it was unknown what the key areas would be discussed at the August (2017) SADC Summit for Heads of State and Government, he could make the following predictions based on previous meetings:

- Peace-building and peace-keeping
- SADC
- African Integration

**Mr. Lebohang Matshaba**, International Relations Coordinator for South-South Relations, African National Congress (ANC)



Mr. Matshaba began by stating that the ANC is heading towards its fifth National Policy Conference in which it will reflect on the previous five years of policy implementation with the help of experts, academics, civil society, and the public. He stated that South Africa's Foreign Policy approach is built on the doctrine of progressive internationalism and this is shown by the African Claims Document, the Freedom Charter, and the Ready to Govern Document.

Mr. Matshaba observed that the growing influence of international bodies such as BRICS, the reemergence of Russia and the economic growth of China, bring global dynamics closer to a multipolar world order.

Mr Matshaba mentioned some key aspects that he believes South African Foreign Policy will be centred around, and these include:

- the utilisation of economic diplomacy



- to increase foreign direct investment and encourage tourism
- to call for continental integration set up on Regional Economic Communities
- As the Southern African Development Community (SADC) chair, South Africa will fast track the SADC Industrial Strategy

Mr. Matshaba stated that South Africa will aim to internalise the principles of the African Union in Agenda 2063, in particular, the Silencing of the Guns by 2020. He argued that peacekeeping and peacebuilding are essential to economic development, because economic development cannot be achieved in areas that are facing conflict situations. It is therefore essential to have peace in order to create conditions that allow for economic growth. Mr Matshaba argued that this would allow the continent to move forward with its efforts to diversify African economies.

In response to the aforementioned responsibility, South Africa has to voice the issues of Africa in international organisations. Mr. Matshaba argued that the African Agenda 2063 guides South Africa's engagement in BRICS. He referred to the use of the African Leaders Retreat as an example of how this is being implemented. He expressed that BRICS is both a political and economic instrument and will be used as a means of achieving industrial development goals.

In response to Ms. Tenbusch's comments on South Africa's criticism of the ICC, he clarified that South Africa, and in particular the ANC, is of the opinion that the ICC *"should and will always be a Court of last resort and not a Court of first instance"* and only when the local, regional and continental Courts have been exhausted should the ICC be approached. Mr. Matshaba concluded by stating that the ANC will continue to strengthen its party to party relations in order to achieve both its domestic and international policy goals.

**Ms. Sanusha Naidu**, Senior Research Associate at the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD)

Ms. Naidu began by recognising her agreement with many of the points being discussed. However, she stated that she would like to encourage the act of reflection. She expressed her belief that it is integral to reflect on what has been achieved in order to move forward. Ms. Naidu stated that whilst there has been progress, some achievements have been minimalist. She emphasised the importance of the ANC Discussion Document and highlighted a few challenges within the document:



- Is South African foreign policy adaptable and if it is, in what ways is it adapting to changing international relations?
- Are diplomats being enhanced and capacitated as international dynamics change?

- Are we harnessing the activism of non-state actors as well as sub-national actors?
- Do our national interests align with pan-Africanism and progressive internationalism?

Ms. Naidu pointed out that SA's foreign policy seems to be caught between the international and the domestic, as well as progressive activism on the other hand. She argued that what is not coming up very coherently: is what are South Africa's national interests? In order to achieve this coherence, it is essential to thoroughly understand changing international dynamics. Ms. Naidu argued that SA needs to understand that it is grappling with a world that is in a complexity of changing dynamics, hence it is these rapid changes that SA needs to keep up with. For Ms. Naidu, SA needs to recognise that the global South is also going through its own dynamic change.

Ms. Naidu expressed that the last point is especially key as an expression of clear national interests. She concluded by asking whether the multipolar world order that we seek: is it one that is post-neoliberal or post-Western? Building on this, she encouraged a recognition of diversity in the global South in order to ensure that we do not fall into dichotomies. Ms. Naidu advised that SA's foreign policy now needs to start going back to much more detailed issues around how do it develops its vision. For her, SA's foreign policy needs to become much more clearer way in terms of providing a strategic vision, both on the continent and internationally.

### **Contributions from the floor**

Some of the contributions and questions from the floor included these:

- Is there concern about the effect the Trump administration will have on BRICS
- If BRICS is an economic instrument as well as a political one, why has trade with China not been as profitable for South Africa as trade with other nations outside of BRICS?
- Does South Africa play a dominant and oppressive role in relations with smaller African countries?
- Is South Africa or the ANC interested in playing a greater role, not only peace building and peace keeping but responding to the needs of individual victims of conflicts?
- We should reflect not only on the past five years but on the past five hundred years, with particular focus on colonialism, in order to better understand relations between developing countries and the West and how this has an effect on foreign policy.

### **Responses:**

**Hon. Siphosizwe Masango** stated that he does not believe there is lack of clarity in South African Foreign Policy, it is just in dynamic change in relation to changes in international relations. He also explained South Africa's relations with China and Russia within a historical context, stating that there has been a long history of support from these nations towards South Africa, especially the ANC during its liberation struggle period. Hon. Masango pointed out that China and Russia supported many African countries whilst they were struggling against

colonial oppression and thus the ties run deep. He then observed that South Africa's close ties to China and Russia do not negate already existing ties with Western nations.

Hon. Masango stated that South Africa is involved in many mediation efforts and makes use of the African Renaissance Fund to intervene in conflict contexts when the request is made. In response to why trade with China is not as profitable as trade with the USA, Hon. Masango argued that this is because it is a relatively new trading agreement in comparison to already existing trade agreements with the West that often have origins in colonial times.

**Mr. Lebohang Matshaba** expanded upon Hon. Masango's comment on the African Renaissance Fund, stating that the African Renaissance Fund is a tool that could be used to achieve the Agenda 2063; Silencing of the Guns by 2020. In response to the question about South Africa claiming the role of an economic bully in Africa, Mr. Matshaba expressed that the ANC has also been of the opinion that South Africa cannot be "*an island of prosperity*" and this is shown by South Africa's articulation of inter-Africa trade and its efforts to act as an economic platform to achieve this goal.

**Sanusha Naidu** responded to the issue of how far back, one should contextualise South African international relations and stated that we should recognise the history of colonialism within Foreign Policy today. However, this should not distract us from the questions of implementation, but rather inform implementation and application. She concluded by encouraging the act of not only looking backwards but looking forward and reaching a consensus of where South Africa, and Africa at large, is going.

## CONCLUSION

The chair of the dialogue, Mr. Tawanda Sachikonye, thanked the esteemed speakers and audience for their presence at the dialogue and expressed his appreciation for the resulting dialogue. He concluded by highlighting the importance of Africa's greatest resource; "*its people*". He expressed the importance of African nations investing in their own people and using international relations platforms to do so.

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*The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Dialogue Report 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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