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CPLP Needs a Global Strategy

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On July 20, Maputo will host the next Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) summit, and Mozambique will take over the presidency of the Community. Although the full agenda is not yet officially defined, in a recent interview the Mozambican Minister for Foreign Affairs, Oldemiro Balói, said that food security will be one of the key issues, and Equatorial Guinea's entrance into the Community as a full member and admission procedures for observer status are also likely to be discussed.¹ When the CPLP was established in 1996, no one anticipated the interest that the Community would generate among other countries. The statutes did not even provide for the admission of associate observers. It was only in the summit of São Tomé in 2004, and because of subsequent requests, that the CPLP member states agreed to accept associate observers. After this, in the summit of Bissau in 2006, Equatorial Guinea and Mauritius were admitted as observers, as did Senegal in summit of Lisbon in 2008. Only at the summit in Luanda in 2010 did the Community approve the procedure for associate observers, which will be used to assess future applications. Like CPLP, the Commonwealth of Nations and the Inter-

national Organization of the Francophonie did not anticipate that other countries might wish to join. In 1995, in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Auckland, Mozambique was accepted as the 53rd member. At the same time the CHOGM requested the establishment of an intergovernmental group to examine and advise on the criteria for assessing future applications for membership. The current criteria and procedures for membership were agreed in 2007, and Rwanda's became the 54th member in 2009 under the new rules. Unlike CPLP or La Francophonie, the Commonwealth does not accept observers. Instead, special guest status is granted to the intergovernmental and regional organizations that extend a similar invitation to the Commonwealth at their meetings.

In turn, La Francophonie has 53 member states, 3 associate members and 19 observers. Cape Verde (1996), Guinea-Bissau (1979), and São Tomé and Príncipe (1999) are now member states. Mozambique became an observer in 2006. Fifteen of the 19 observers were admitted into La Francophonie between 2002 and 2010. Indeed, the current statutes and membership terms were agreed at summits in Beirut in 2002 and amended at Bucharest in 2006.

Thus, several Portuguese-speaking countries are simultaneously members or observers of the Commonwealth, CPLP, and La Francophonie. Equatorial Guinea is seek-

¹ "CPLP Conference in Maputo to Focus on Food Security" (*AIM*, 8 June 2012). Regarding the admission of Equatorial Guinea into CPLP, see Paulo Gorjão, "CPLP and Equatorial Guinea: Chronicle of a foretold membership?" (*IPRIS Viewpoints*, No. 80, December 2011).



ing full CPLP membership; it has been a member of La Francophonie since 1989. Morocco joined La Francophonie in 1981 and is now seeking CPLP associate observer status. Georgia and Ukraine are observers of La Francophonie since 2004 and 2006, respectively, and seek a similar status within CPLP.² Swaziland is a member of the Commonwealth since 1968, but wishes to be an associate observer of CPLP.

What is the explanation for this interest of several sovereign states in joining these organizations simultaneously?

There are several reasons why a state might want to join as a full member or an observer. In the most minimalist scenario, these organizations share views and, perhaps, put certain issues on diplomatic, political or economic agendas. Being a little more optimistic, these are networks that may support political and economic national interests, as well as they may promote a shared identity and a common language. Moreover, they may confer prestige, and sometimes they may contribute to overcome political and diplomatic isolation. Finally, and without exhausting the reasons why a state may wish to join an intergovernmental organization such as the Commonwealth, CPLP, and La Francophonie, membership may be a source of information and even an instrument that substitutes for having embassies in all sovereign states.

On the other hand, why are these intergovernmental organizations willing to accept new full members and observers? What are their goals? What are their gains?

In some cases, prestige is a reason. The Commonwealth emphasizes that member countries come from six regions – Africa, Asia, the Americas, the Caribbean, Europe, and the South Pacific – and “is home to two billion citizens of all faiths and ethnicities and includes some of the world’s largest, smallest, richest and poorest countries”. Likewise, La Francophonie claims to represent “over one-

third of the United Nations’ member states and account for a population of over 890 million people”, making it one of the largest linguistic zones in the world. Last but not the least, CPLP also emphasizes that member countries come from “four continents and encompass[es] 230 million people”. Thus, size seems to matter, so the number of members and observers is relevant.

There are several reasons why a state might want to join CPLP as a full member or an observer. CPLP is a network that may support political and economic national interests, as well as it may promote a shared identity and a common language. Moreover, CPLP may confer prestige, and sometimes it may contribute to overcome political and diplomatic isolation. Finally, it may be a source of information and even an instrument that substitutes for having embassies in all Portuguese-speaking countries.

Yet, CPLP has no explicit policy to encourage new membership or observers. There is no clear expansion policy. In fact, purposely or not, the admission procedures of associate observers approved in 2010 have been an insurmountable obstacle to potential candidates. Indeed, all current associate observers were accepted before the approval of present admission procedures. This contrasts with the experience of La Francophonie: Several observers were admitted already after the approval of the current membership terms.

Meanwhile, CPLP is struggling with Equatorial Guinea’s bid for full membership. Malabo’s dictatorship certainly does not add prestige to the Community – nor to La Francophonie. Yet closer relations with one of the largest oil producers in sub-Saharan Africa is tempting. Indeed, CPLP could be a useful instrument to promote the political and economic interests of the member states. Selected membership invitations, mainly for CPLP observers, could be a tool to promote the political and economic interests of the Portuguese-speaking countries. Unfortunately there is no such policy. Likewise, until now CPLP failed to develop a strategy to deepen strategic partnerships with similar organizations. Last but not the least, even if we – incorrectly – narrow the goals of CPLP only to the promotion, defense, and dissemination of the Portuguese language, it is hard to see what has been done since 1996.

Unfortunately, the aforementioned issues will not be discussed in Maputo. Rather, the Community will squander the opportunity to discuss ends and means, and to develop a global strategy. Instead of coordinated policies, expansion will continue to come through ad hoc decisions.

2 Ukraine’s bid was mentioned in the final communiqué of the CPLP summit held in Luanda in 2010, but has been suspended since then.



Without an agreed global strategy, CPLP member states will not assemble the diplomatic, economic, military and political resources to advance a common agenda.

How could CPLP overcome the impasse?

In order to do so, the Community needs a strong executive secretary. This is the foremost ingredient. CPLP needs someone with prestige and gravitas who is able to coordinate the preparation of a comprehensive strategy, perhaps with input from a committee of experts. In turn, member states must be prepared to seek and establish a consensus that will allow the Community to take the next step. CPLP must also have a budget that will allow it to carry out a global strategy.

Without these preliminary steps, the admission of new members and associate observers puts the cart before the horse, and may prove an enormous political headache. Of course, CPLP can always discuss important but politically innocuous issues such as food security.

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