



# IPRIS Viewpoints

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## Angola's new focus on Africa rewards the relationship with Namibia

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Angola's renewed reentrance into the African political scene appears to be moving forward without any substantial obstacles. Having announced in Nigeria its intention of embarking on a new phase by developing and solidifying relations with African countries, Angolan diplomacy was quick enough to match its words with deeds, seizing the opportunity of Namibian President Lucas Pohamba's trip to the United Kingdom to schedule a brief meeting with Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos, after being received by Foreign Minister George Chicoty. The event itself is not worthy of spectacular regional focus, considering both countries are neighbors, both political parties in power are seen as allies and both hold membership in common international organizations. Yet, in the logic of escaping and diversifying the China, EU and US axis of foreign policy inclination – an intention revealed at Goodluck Jonathan's swearing in ceremony in Nigeria<sup>1</sup> – Angola's focus on Namibia comes to reinforce its convergence on the African continent.

Even though no agreements were expected to result from this visit, both countries already collaborate on a wide range of issues. Bilateral cooperation between the two

touches on several domains, mainly security and defense, transportation, energy and water, tourism, trade and fisheries, besides all the approved frameworks laid down by SADC. Angola is also an important destination for Namibian exports, accounting for roughly 10% of the country's total exports, the third largest behind South Africa (31%) and the United Kingdom (16%).<sup>2</sup> However, not only trade deals and sector specific cooperation define these countries' relationship. Both Angola and Namibia experienced colonialism and occupation, which led to the emergence of independence movements during roughly the same decade. Both countries' parties in power, the MPLA and SWAPO, began their struggle for independence in the 1960s, against Portuguese and South African colonialism and occupation respectively. Strategically, during the war, an alliance between these two parties made absolute sense, as the MPLA was fighting UNITA who had the express support of South Africa, SWAPO's enemy, besides an overall sharing of similar ideological positions and approaches to the 'struggle'. However, tactically, SWAPO was 'forced' to befriend UNITA, since the former was attempting to establish a northern front

1 Vasco Martins, "Angola reopening the African window" (*IPRIS Lusophone Countries Bulletin*, No. 19, May 2011), pp. 1-2.

2 "Angola is Namibia's number three export destination" (*Trade Mark Southern Africa*, 19 July 2010).



of escape routes and supply lines in southern Angola, which in the late 1970s was mainly controlled by UNITA. Eventually SWAPO was forced to completely shift its position towards the MPLA and as a consequence engage in limited skirmishes with UNITA, although there is evidence to suggest many of these confrontations were not the result of ideological conflict per se, but spurred by the wish to control water resources in the dry Kalahari Desert. Ironically, Namibia's independence and SWAPO's rule were brutally connected with the Angolan civil war, in what was called the 'linkage' policy. UNITA, with the support of the Reagan administration and under the Reagan doctrine, managed to link the withdrawal of foreign forces from Angolan territory (Cubans and Russians) with the independence of Namibia by having South Africa also withdraw its forces from that territory, thus cutting support to UNITA (who already had the backing of the US). In a political move which left both the MPLA and UNITA devoid of major official foreign assistance, SWAPO and Namibia won their independence. Nevertheless, as the tables turned for UNITA after the failure of the Bicesse and Lusaka Accords, SWAPO continued to recognize the MPLA government, a policy which culminated in the celebration of a mutual defense pact between Angola and Namibia in 1999, further isolating and alienating UNITA.

Still, there was little Namibia could do to help Angola in its post-war national reconstruction program. Devoid of the necessary funds, Namibia – like all African countries – was put aside in Angola's privileged relationships, which leaned mainly towards China. More recently, after revealing its intentions to turn back to Africa – in the

form of potential new collaborations – Angola's diplomacy seems to be engaged in a sort of pinpoint exercise in order to map the African countries with whom relations are good – which coincide with those countries who supported the MPLA govern-

ment during the civil war, although this analysis is no longer valid in such a simple and linear fashion – having in Namibia a supportive neighbor and a dedicated former ally.

With this new foreign policy framework in mind, much can happen economically between Angola and Namibia. Angola already has the 6<sup>th</sup> highest GDP in the African continent, which combined with Namibia's diversified economy could potentially create beneficial deals between both countries, if the resources are allocated and if private investors are willing to engage in such an endeavor. Furthermore, due to the fact that Namibia's economy is intrinsically connected to South Africa's, any tripartite developments could come to enhance cooperation not only between the three countries but also in the wider region in general.

The juridical instruments are already in place, although specific reforms are somewhat needed. Namibia and South Africa are both members of SACU – the Southern African Customs Union. Recently, a senior Namibian politician hinted at the

possibility of Angola and Mozambique joining the SACU, hence establishing a much wider free trade bloc in the SADC region – itself a beneficial point of convergence between Angola and Namibia – sharing common external tariffs, and consequently working to upgrade regional economic integration in Southern Africa. Socially, there are loose strings in need of attachment between both countries. Due to the long Angolan civil war, roughly 30.000 ref-

The relationship between Angola and Namibia still has much for expansion. Even though politically and historically both countries have enjoyed a positive relationship, in the economic and social spheres there are opportunities which could prove to be very fruitful. With the redefinition of the scope and geography of Angolan foreign policy intervention, both countries have manifested goodwill and desire to work closer. Using this close collaboration to develop the regional economic integration process – a policy supported by both countries – is rewarding enough to prove that Angola made the right decision in refocusing and investing in the African continent.



ugees escaped to Namibia, of which approximately 8.650 still remain in the country. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees "Namibia recognizes that local integration will be the most appropriate solution for many Angolan refugees, who have been in the country since 1992".<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, linking economic development between both countries in a free trade area – where people and capital roam freely – would smooth the edges of social reintegration, perhaps even creating conditions for many of these refugees to return to their country of origin.

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<sup>3</sup> "UNHRC Global Appeal 2011" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2011).

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