

Does the EU still have a foreign policy on Zimbabwe?

Written by Administrator
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by Clifford Chitupa Mashiri, 07/07/14.

The fallout from statements by EU's Ambassador to Zimbabwe Mr Aldo Dell'Aricecia suggesting there is no leadership crisis in Zimbabwe and criticising civil society for being allegedly "anchored in the past" raises questions whether the EU still have a foreign policy on Zimbabwe and if so, which one is the ambassador implementing?

In an address to a workshop organised by the NGO, Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition held in Harare on Tuesday 17 June 2014, Mr Dell 'Aricecia rejected opposition claims that Zimbabwe was in the throes of a major leadership crisis. The EU's top envoy insisted the 90 year old Zanu-PF leader Mr Robert Mugabe was "very much in control" of the struggling country.

The ambassador argued there would be chaos in the country if there was a leadership vacuum as alleged by Mugabe's critics. "Luckily we don't have a leadership crisis in this country because of the forces you have within the party in government, if we had a leadership crisis it will be chaos. We still have a leadership, we still have a leader who manages to keep at bay and under control these forces that are very much contradictory," said the EU ambassador. Probably we should start by analysing what diplomats are supposed to do in their work.

What do diplomats do?

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According to R.G. Feltham's (1980) Diplomatic Handbook (which was used as a training manual on a diplomatic course attended by the author before his posting in 1982), 'irrespective of the size of his staff there are certain basic priorities to which the head of mission normally devotes his personal attention:

1.

formulation of diplomatic policy;

2.

transmitting to the host government the views of his own government on important matters of common interest and common policy, and acting as the channel of communication between the two in such matters;

3.

reporting to his Ministry on events of political or economic significance, whether they are of direct significance (e.g. the national budget or ministerial changes) or of indirect significance (e.g. changes and trends in social or economic conditions) and commenting on the views of third parties in the country (e.g. articles from the local press, opinions of other diplomats);

4.

being aware of the people of influence and the sources of national power in the state in which he is serving;

5.

conducting himself in his official and personal behaviour in such a way as to bring credit to his country;

6.

cultivating as wide and as varied a circle of friends as is possible in order to be able to fulfil (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) above.

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In view of the above duties especially (d), (e) and (f), it is not surprising that many Zimbabweans and political observers were left shocked when Mr Dell 'Arliccia castigated civil society and the political opposition parties, accusing them of being perceived as "anti-government organisations (AGOs)" rather than "NGOs" or non-governmental organisations. Despite clarifying that he made the statements as a political analyst, not in his capacity as EU ambassador, the envoy's comments touched a raw nerve in civil society and academic circles within Zimbabwe and in the diaspora.

Analyst after another angrily tore into Mr Arliccia's 'undiplomatic' 'disrespectful,' 'dishonest' and 'provocative,' statements. "Unfortunately, statements such as the ambassador's that say that there is no leadership crisis reinforce Mugabe's arrogance and belief that he is doing the right thing and that is hugely offensive and disrespectful to us Zimbabweans who continue to bear the brunt of Mugabe's leadership shortcomings," said Vince Musewe, Zimbabwe-based economist and political analyst in an opinion piece published in the independent daily *Newsday*.

[\[1\]](#)

Pius Wakatama, author of *Independence for the Third World Church: An African's Perspective on Missionary Work* (1976) felt the European Union's image as a "bastion of freedom, justice and fair play" was being tarnished by a slow, but steady, erosion of its once high values.

People were irked by what they saw as Mr Arliccia taking sides. As a result, Mr Wakatama wrote

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in The Standard newspaper: “This can be clearly observed in the case of Zimbabwe where its ambassador, Aldo dell ‘Ariccia is taking sides with the government against ordinary Zimbabweans and opposition forces, both political and civic, who are saying the country has a serious humanitarian crisis.” The solution in Mr Wakatama’s view, is: “If the EU is to regain the confidence and respect of Zimbabweans it must recall this diplomat (Mr Dell ‘Ariccia) and appoint a more professional and tactful representative who will stick to non-partisan diplomacy.”

It could be argued that instead of ‘cultivating as wide and as varied a circle of friends as is possible’ in order to be able to fulfil his role, the EU top envoy raised the ire of Zimbabweans by claiming that ‘progress has been made and Zimbabwe is now a normal, peaceful and democratic state,’ a point disputed by many as they observed that ‘what Dell ‘Ariccia is calling peace is not peace at all.’ In Wakatamma’s view, “It is an exterior quietness, brought about by fear, while underneath there is an ominously roaring inferno.”

UK-based Zimbabwean diaspora group, Zimvigil dubbed Mr Dell ‘Ariccia, “Mugabe’s EU cheerleader”. The pressure group said ‘Zimbabweans driven into exile are horrified to see the EU’s Ambassador in Harare has come out openly in support of the illegitimate Mugabe regime’. The Zimvigil further stated: “It appears to us that the EU is bending over backwards to embrace Mugabe despite his refusal to hold free and fair elections or make any reforms to correct the abuses which prompted the EU to adopt its targeted measures against him and his cronies”.

The Zimbabwe Social Democrats denounced the ambassador’s statements as ‘a denial of the truth to justify the EU’s continued engagement with the Mugabe regime and promised reward from the regime of EU access to the country’s diamonds’.

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Nevertheless, Mr Dell'Ariccia has not been without sympathisers with the Government-owned and Zanu-PF - controlled (Zimbabwe) Herald newspaper weighing in. For instance, Tichaona Zindoga, the paper's senior writer welcomed "statements this week by the EU Ambassador to Zimbabwe, Aldo Dell'Ariccia, regarding the moribund and increasingly irrelevant political actors parading as civil society organisations in Zimbabwe saying they were bound to hurt.

The Herald followed up with an editorial calling on NGOs to "reform or die". In affirmation with the envoy's rebuke on NGOs, the paper said: "We couldn't agree more. Mr Dell'Ariccia represents the financiers of this community..."

Contradictions

However, the state-owned paper and its senior writer appeared to contradict Zanu-PF "policy" on NGOs after Masvingo provincial affairs minister Kudakwashe Basikiti pleaded with NGOs for assistance in January saying the Zanu-PF government could not go it alone. The Newsday quoted Bhasikiti charmingly addressing NGOs saying: "You are very key and strategic partners to me and the government. You serve our people and make life worth living...We value your existence, which is why I met you ahead of many other groups on my schedule. We want to strengthen our relationship in development."

Contrary to assertions by an all-white lobby group calling itself Whites Against Sanctions about the positive effects of EU's reengagement with Zanu-PF, Mr Mugabe last week said Zimbabwe was no country for whites as far as the LAND was concerned. Does that inspire confidence?

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Despite the so-called re-engagement and sanctions and travel bans having been lifted on nearly all the entities and individuals except Mr and Mrs R G Mugabe, it remains a mystery why the economy is in free-fall.

One wonders if the EU ambassador is still of the view that there is no leadership failure in Zimbabwe following reports that Mr Mugabe deserted the burial of national hero Dr Sakupwanya preferring to attend Malawi's golden jubilee where the Nyasa Times noticed him as the only visiting head of state contrary to claims by the Zimbabwean state media that other SADC leaders would attend.

If there was no failure of leadership in Zimbabwe, Save Conservancy which is widely regarded as the richest and largest private wildlife sanctuary in the world, would not be under occupation of Mr Mugabe's allies and their supporters costing the country millions of dollars in tax revenue. However, Mr Dell 'Ariccia appears to have contradicted himself by reportedly admitting in an emailed response to The Independent newspaper in April 2014 that 'the Save Conservancy issue is a very long story, still far from being solved'.

In brief, if there was no failure of leadership in Zimbabwe:

- 1.

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corruption would have been brought under control by now, for example, those who allegedly looted a whistle-blower fund would have faced the music by now;

2.

there would be no wide disparity on the unemployment rate which independent economists estimate to be 80% while government puts it as 11%;

3.

Zimbabwe's two largest municipalities of Harare and Chitungwiza would not be facing a financial crisis that has seen workers go unpaid for months;

4.

the Zimbabwean government website would not be insisting that dual citizenship is still prohibited despite a Constitutional Court ruling on the contrary;

5.

government would not have failed to put its share into the pool of resources meant to assist ailing companies dubbed Distressed Industries and Marginalised Areas Fund (Dimaf);

6.

the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) would not be forcing its members countrywide to go on two weeks' leave every month to reduce spending on among others, food and utility bills at barracks despite the defence budget surpassing all budgetary allocations yearly;

7.

troubled parastatal, the Zimbabwe United Passenger Company (ZUPCO) would not be deferring the payment of April, May and June salaries for its workers which never happened before independence, despite election promises;

8.

Zimbabwe's agricultural industry would be still vibrant as at independence, and so on.

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Foreign policy and diplomatic policy of a mission

Deciphering the EU's foreign policy is no mean task given that there is a 500-page book on the subject edited by Christopher Hill & Karen E. Smith which they rate as the first output of the European Foreign Policy Unit of the LSE's department of international relations. The diplomatic policy of a mission can best be defined as 'the positive attitude adopted towards all matters relating to the intercourse between the head of mission's own state and the one to which he is accredited' (Feltham, 1980). Feltham says the diplomatic policy of a mission 'is the product of political judgement, political sense and political wisdom, and is based on an intimate knowledge and understanding of the people and governments of the two states concerned.'

Against this theoretical framework, it is right and proper to analyse the EU (Zim) delegation's diplomatic policy statement which is on its official website as of 07/07/14. It is belatedly addressed to the Global Political Agreement and the Government of National Unity – both of which ceased to exist over a year ago, therefore, it is fair to infer there is no clear and up-to-date EU foreign policy on Zimbabwe, leaving the EU Ambassador to make controversial personal statements as he sees fit with serious implications for diplomacy.

While the people cannot declare Ambassador Dell 'Ariccia 'persona non grata' (undesirable person), they feel betrayed as they are forced to move on from the scars of Gukurahundi and 2008 election violence especially as they know these rights abuses were committed while the EU was doing business as usual with Mr Mugabe's regime. They might not trust diplomats again especially after the United Nations country chief got too close to Zanu-PF in 2008/9 and fired an officer who was trying to stop the deadly cholera disease which claimed over 5000 lives.

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On a positive note Ambassador Dell 'Ariccia has made an important contribution to Zimbabwe in terms of development aid and to public debate and he is right in urging for dialogue. However, the EU's foreign policy on Zimbabwe should be updated and prioritise the restoration of dual citizenship and Diaspora through the reengagement talks, in order to reverse the brain drain and embark on economic reconstruction given that the country is left with only 6 brain surgeons. Until free and fair inclusive elections are held, Mr Mugabe's legitimacy will continue to be disputed regardless of the EU's spin in the haste to beat China for deals on Zimbabwe's natural resources.

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