

## **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

### **Between Three Continents: Rethinking Equatorial Guinea on the Fortieth Anniversary of Its Independence from Spain**

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#### **Equatorial Guinea's External Relations: São Tomé e Príncipe and the CPLP**

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##### Introduction

From around 1471 to 1778 present-day Equatorial-Guinea, together with the neighbouring islands of São Tomé and Príncipe, formerly belonged to the Portuguese colonial empire. However, during this period only the latter were effectively colonized by Portugal. The small island of Annobón was settled with African slaves from São Tomé, but colonial domination under the Portuguese always remained weak. Fernando Pó (today Bioko), the only of the four Gulf of Guinea islands populated when the first Portuguese arrived, was not colonized by Portugal at all. Only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century contacts between Fernando Pó and São Tomé intensified when Santomeans migrated to the former in search of employment in the local economy. Before Equatorial Guinea's independence in 1968 Santomeans constituted a considerable community in Fernando Pó and there were regular sea and air links between the four islands. It was not by coincidence that in 1972 the Liberation Movement of São Tomé and Príncipe (MLSTP) was founded in Santa Isabel (Malabo). However, due to the increasing violence by the regime of Macías Nguema (1968-1979), most Santomeans returned home. Regular sea and air links between the two neighbouring countries ceased to exist. Bilateral relations between Malabo and São Tomé were only resumed a few years ago. In 2004 President Teodoro Obiang was invited by President Fradique de Menezes as special guest to the biannual summit of the heads of state and government of the CPLP, the eight-member Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, founded in 1996, which in that year took place in São Tomé. At the summit Obiang declared his country's interest to become a member of the CPLP. This request was not granted, but the CPLP changed its statutes to create the category of associated observer. At the CPLP summit in Bissau in 2006 Equatorial Guinea formally joined the community as observer state. During a visit of the CPLP's executive secretary to Malabo in 2007 Obiang declared his regime's intention to introduce Portuguese as third official language to become a full member of the CPLP. This paper describes the relations between the Gulf of Guinea islands since the 16<sup>th</sup> century and examines the motives behind the recent mutual approachment between Malabo and São Tomé and the CPLP respectively.

## **The early Portuguese (1471-1778) and subsequent Spanish colonial period (1778 - 1968)**

During the formal Portuguese domination of all four Gulf of Guinea islands, from around 1471 to 1778, only the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe were effectively colonized by the Portuguese. In the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the small island of Annobón (17 km<sup>2</sup>) was settled with African slaves from São Tomé, but the Portuguese presence always remained reduced to rarely more than two persons and contacts with this island were very irregular. Fernando Pó (Bioko), the only of the four Gulf of Guinea islands populated when the first Portuguese arrived, was not colonized by Portugal at all. However, at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century the Portuguese in São Tomé acquired slaves in Fernando Pó.<sup>1</sup>

In later centuries, runaway slaves from São Tomé or from Príncipe, carried in their canoes by the sea currents and sometimes reached the island of Fernando Pó. In 1778, the year of the transition from the Portuguese domination to that of Spain, a group of former slaves from São Tomé and Príncipe lived in the south of Fernando Pó.<sup>2</sup> The presence of these maroons and their descendants in Ureka, in the south of the island, was also reported in 1827 when the British founded Port Clarence (Malabo). At the time, the native Bubis referred to them as 'angolanos'. The Portuguese-based creole language of this maroon community in Fernando Pó exercised some influence on the emerging Equatorial Guinean Spanish.<sup>3</sup>

Cocoa was introduced in Fernando Pó in 1836 or 1854 from São Tomé and Príncipe.<sup>4</sup> In the Portuguese islands the new cash crop had been introduced from Brazil around 1820. After the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when Spain was in effective control of the island, the runaway slaves from São Tomé and Príncipe, and, after the abolition of slavery in 1875, escaped African contract workers respectively, were frequently returned by the local Spanish authorities to their masters in São Tomé and Príncipe. Others were simply handed over to local employers.<sup>5</sup>

A century later, in 1976, Jorge Trabulo Marques, at the time a Portuguese resident in São Tomé, departed from this island alone in a canoe in an attempt to cross the Atlantic. Instead, after an odyssey of 38 days he went ashore in Fernando Pó. He was detained and interrogated by the local authorities and then repatriated to São Tomé.<sup>6</sup>

There are reports from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century of anglophone creoles from Fernando Pó, the Fernandinos, who migrated to Príncipe and São Tomé respectively

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<sup>1</sup> Caldeira 2006a

<sup>2</sup> Caldeira 2006b: nota 20, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> Lipski 2002, note 2.

<sup>4</sup> Clarence-Smith 1994: 180.

<sup>5</sup> Clarence-Smith: 1994: 192.

<sup>6</sup> Marques 1999.

where they acquired land. At the same time, Creoles from this archipelago became planters in neighbouring Fernando Pó.<sup>7</sup>

### **Equatorial Guinea's postcolonial period**

Possibly during World War II Santomeans began to emigrate in larger numbers to neighbouring Fernando Pó. By the 1960s this immigrant community was constituted by a few hundred people. Most of them worked in the trade, administration, or as foremen on the local cocoa plantations. At home the Santomeans had never been considered as "natives" (indígenos) under the Portuguese indigenato regime applied to non-assimilated Angolans, Guineans, and Mozambicans until 1961. However, it was not before 1953 that Portugal formally excluded the native Creole population of São Tomé and Príncipe from the indigenato status and recognized them as citizens. Consequently, in Spanish Guinea the Santomeans were considered as Portuguese and enjoyed a higher status than the local native population. They had the same rights as the Spanish residents.

During the same period, in the mid-1960s, Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah hosted a few exiled members of the Liberation Committee of São Tomé and Príncipe (CLSTP), a small group of nationalists set up in 1960. When, following the military coup of February 1966 that toppled Nkrumah, the new rulers in Accra expelled the members of the CLSTP from Ghana, three of them first went to Brazzaville, where they were hosted by the government of Alfonse Massamba-Débats (1963-1968). In 1969, after having been accepted by President Macías Nguema (1968-1979) the group moved on to Equatorial Guinea that had become independent from Spain in the year before. At that time, the Santomean immigrant community in Fernando Pó was considerable and, reportedly, sometimes the meetings organized by the nationalists were attended by up to 300 people. However, since its forced departure from Ghana in 1966 the CLSTP had remained largely inactive until 1972.

That same year in July, nine Santomean nationalists met in Santa Isabel (Malabo) where they reconstituted the defunct CLSTP as Liberation Movement of São Tomé and Príncipe (MLSTP). During the meeting all the participants of the meeting became members of the organization's Political Bureau. Manuel Pinto da Costa, who shortly before had earned a doctorate in economy in East-Berlin, became secretary-general of the MLSTP. The MLSTP established its office in Santa Isabel, but remained largely inactive. In January 1973 the MLSTP was recognized by the Liberation Committee of the OAU. However, before the Portuguese Revolution of 25 April 1974 the MLSTP did not carry out any political action in São Tomé and Príncipe. Taken by surprise by the military coup in Lisbon, in May 1974, the MLSTP leadership moved from Santa Isabel to Libreville, where two of the party's members had been residents for years. From Libreville the MLSTP began to organize political actions in the archipelago that finally led to the archipelago's independence on 12 July 1975.<sup>8</sup> The founders of the MLSTP

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<sup>7</sup> Clarence-Smith 1989: 491.

<sup>8</sup> Seibert 2006: 94, 98-100.

integrated the first post-colonial governments. Still today, in São Tomé and Príncipe, this founder generation is known as the “Generation of Santa Isabel”.

Meanwhile, in Fernando Pó the Santomean community was increasingly affected by the hostile measures of the Macías Nguema regime against foreigners. Many returned directly to São Tomé. Others were evacuated together with other foreigners by the Spanish Red Cross and taken to the Canary Islands. From there some moved on to Spain, while others eventually returned to São Tomé.

During the socialist one-party regime, in May 1982, São Tomé’s National Popular Assembly approved a series of bilateral agreements with Equatorial Guinea, including a general agreement of economic, scientific, and technical cooperation, a trade agreement, agreements of air and sea transport, and a treaty of friendship and good neighbourhood.<sup>9</sup> President Pinto da Costa had signed these agreements during an official visit to Malabo on 17 February 1982. However, it seems that very little of these intentions were made true at that time. In the beginning the Equatorial Guinean ship ‘Acácio Mañé’ that maintained a monthly service between Malabo and Annobón had also a stop over in São Tomé. When this boat was destroyed by a fire the sea link between the two countries ceased to exist. There has never been any regular flight connection between the two countries. Likewise, there was no Equatorial Guinean embassy in São Tomé nor a Santomean embassy in Malabo. There was only a honorary consul of São Tomé and Príncipe in Malabo, Freitas Maquengo, a member of the local Santomean community.

Formal relations between the two countries were only resumed in the late 1990s when São Tomé and Príncipe had begun to develop its oil sector. In 1997 São Tomé signed its first contract with a foreign oil company. The following year, the National Assembly approved a law on the country’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) that delineated the country’s maritime boundaries for the first time after independence. São Tomé and Príncipe was the last country in the Gulf of Guinea region to assert its territorial claims to the EEZ. After having filed its maritime boundary claims with the UN Law of the Sea Commission in New York, the maps were sent to the neighbouring countries in the Gulf of Guinea to negotiate maritime border agreements. Negotiations with Malabo started in October 1998. The following year the Presidents Miguel Trovoada (1991-2001) and Obiang Nguema signed a bilateral agreement on the delineation of their countries’ maritime border.<sup>10</sup>

During a visit of President Menezes to Malabo in May 2004, members of the local Santomean immigrant community complained about the lack of support from their government. At a meeting held at the residence of São Tomé’s honorary consul, Freitas Maquengo, who executed this function for 20 years, the migrants asked the president to take initiatives to establish sea and air links between Equatorial Guinea and São Tomé. Menezes declared that during his talks with Obiang he had asked him to provide

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<sup>9</sup> RDSTP 1991: 1656-1674.

<sup>10</sup> Seibert 2006: 373.

a site for a future Santomean embassy in Malabo.<sup>11</sup> During his visit Menezes invited Obiang to participate as observer in the 5<sup>th</sup> summit of the CPLP to be held in São Tomé in July that year.

In July 2005 Teodoro Obiang was one of the four African heads of state that attended São Tomé and Príncipe's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence celebrations. In late August of the same year, São Tomé and Malabo signed a security pact aimed at controlling clandestine immigration and drug trafficking and guaranteeing the security of maritime and air traffic. Besides, the safety of the offshore oilrigs was another priority of the agreement. The two countries had been hit by coup attempts in July 2003 and March 2004 respectively, which had been the principal motive behind the bilateral agreement. In the same year, São Tomé appointed an ambassador for Malabo, who has been resident in Abuja, while Equatorial Guinea appointed a resident ambassador for São Tomé in 2006. Before that, Malabo's ambassador to São Tomé was resident in Libreville, Gabon.

However, the relations between São Tomé and Malabo and those of the two countries' heads of state intensified only after the end of the presidency of Olusegun Obasanjo in Nigeria, in May 2007. President Menezes had enjoyed a cordial relationship with Obasanjo since his own election into office in 2001. Obasango's successor, Umaru Yar'Adua, has never maintained a similar personal relationship with Fradique de Menezes. There is no doubt that Menezes's relations with Obiang intensified after Obasanjo's departure. Since 2007 President Obiang has visited São Tomé regularly and Equatorial Guinea's aid to São Tomé has increased considerably.

In 2007, in response to a request by Menezes, Malabo executed rehabilitation works of the road linking the capital with Porto Alegre in the impoverished south of São Tomé island. In that year, for the first time, the official commemoration of São Tomé and Príncipe's independence on 12 July was celebrated in Porto Alegre. The event was attended by President Obiang and the presidents of Gabon and Congo-Brazzaville, Omar Bongo and Sassou Nguesso respectively. At that time, however, the repair works executed by an Equatorial Guinean company had not yet been completely finished.<sup>12</sup>

On 25 May 2007, at the invitation of President Menezes, Obiang arrived for a three-day visit to São Tomé to strengthen the bilateral cooperation between the two neighbours. On the last day of his visit Obiang held a speech where he advocated São Tomé's adhesion to the CFA zone. In turn, on 3 August, President Menezes participated in the celebrations of the 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Obiang's coup in Malabo.

In October the same year, upon his return from a visit to Malabo where he attended the inauguration of the major gas lubrication plant in Central Africa, President Menezes announced that as part of the aid agreement between the two countries, Equatorial Guinea granted São Tomé a loan of \$1.4 million. In addition, Malabo had sent two freighters with 600 tons of food aid in the framework of this agreement to

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<sup>11</sup> Jornal.st, 13/05/2009.

<sup>12</sup> Correio da Semana, 14/07/2007

solve an emergency food crisis.<sup>13</sup> The aid shipment included 7 tons of rice, 1,000 cans of condensed milk and 10 boxes of vegetable oil. The commodities were marketed by local traders, while the proceeds from these sales would be used to finance pro-poor investments.<sup>14</sup>

At the 39<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Equatorial Guinea's independence, on 12 October 2007, the resident ambassador in São Tomé, Antonio Ebade Ayingono, accredited since May 2006, held a cocktail reception at the Hotel Miramar to commemorate the event. At the reception, the ambassador announced the creation of a joint commission between the two countries to discuss co-operation in the agriculture, tourism, fishing, and telecommunications sectors. He also declared the embassy's intention to establish a local association of the Equatorial-Guinean community in São Tomé and Príncipe.<sup>15</sup>

On 29 February 2008 the two countries signed in Malabo a general co-operation agreement in the health, education, transport, forest, oil and infrastructure sectors. President Menezes announced that Malabo would open a credit line for his country. The agreement also constituted a joint commission of the two countries to define the concrete aid measures.

During the signing of the contract, President Obiang proposed the joint exploration of an oil block allegedly situated at the maritime border between the two countries.<sup>16</sup> However, a few days later, then Prime Minister Patrice Trovoada denied that the bilateral agreement included any deal about the joint exploration of oil blocks. São Tomé's National Oil Agency (ANP) added that the agreement on the maritime borders signed in 2000 was the only one existing with regard to oil.<sup>17</sup>

On 12 October 2008 President Menezes participated in the 40<sup>th</sup> independence commemorations in Malabo. In late December that year, Obiang paid a four-day private visit to São Tomé. He participated in the inauguration of a casino in São Tomé that belongs to a newly constructed hotel owned by the Portuguese Pestana Group. On the same occasion, João Costa Alegre, co-ordinator of the Democratic Movement Force of Change (MDFM, the party associated to President Menezes) and secretary-general of the Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea (PDGE), Filiberto Ntutumo, established a political partnership that included the exchange of experiences and mutual support. It was believed, at the time, that Menezes was primarily seeking financial support for his party.

At the end of his visit Obiang donated a generator with a capacity of 1,800 kv to his hosts aimed at helping to solve the continuing energy crisis in São Tomé. A second generator with the same capacity was promised by President Obiang, however, by early March 2009, the generator donated in December had not been yet installed in the thermal power central situated in São Tomé city.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Macuahub, 22/10/2007.

<sup>14</sup> STP-Press, 08/11/2007.

<sup>15</sup> Correio da Semana, 20/10/2007, p.12.

<sup>16</sup> Macuahub, 03/03/2008

<sup>17</sup> Lusa, 05/03/2008

<sup>18</sup> Correio da Semana, 07/03/2009, p.3.

It seems that initiatives by Equatorial Guinea in the infrastructure, transport sectors and the labour market have not been a great deal of success either. In April 2007 São Tomé's then minister of public works, Delfim Neves, announced that the Equatorial-Guinean construction company Obras SA had been selected to build a new port and airport in Príncipe. Under the established agreement, the company would not charge anything for the works, but would be instead entitled to manage the infrastructure during 35 years, to recover the investments. The investment estimated at allegedly \$1 billion would also involve STP-Logistic, a company that would be set up in São Tomé. The airport and port scheduled for the island of Príncipe were said to be part of a revenue-generating project for the country, by providing public services to the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea region. The runway of Príncipe's airport would be extended to 2,500 metres with the capacity to receive long-range airplanes and provide a service for traffic from neighbouring airports, while the country's first oil port would serve the oil companies working in the region's offshore areas.<sup>19</sup> The Regional Government of Príncipe had approved the project; they recommended, however, to reduce the 35-year period, since there were good prospects to recover the huge investments earlier. At that time, the beginning of the construction works was expected for July 2007 and the duration was projected for two years,<sup>20</sup> but this project has never come off the ground. In May 2008, the Santomean government, pressured by Príncipe's Regional Government, signed a 15-years contract for the modernization and management of the airport of Príncipe with the Dutch company SCD Aviation.

The following year, the establishment of the first regular air link between the two countries did not last for a long time. In early June 2008 the Equatorial Guinean airline Ceiba Internacional that had replaced the company Equatoguineana de Aviación (EGA) in 2007, inaugurated a weekly flight from Malabo to São Tomé. However, some time later this flight was already discontinued, apparently because the company did not accept the week days attributed by São Tomé's aviation authorities.

The recruitment of labour from São Tomé was also accompanied with unexpected problems. On 3 July 2008, upon their arrival at São Tomé airport, a group of 34 Santomean workers seized a plane hired by the Italian company Tecno Holdings in Equatorial Guinea during three hours to call attention to the alleged embezzlement of their salaries during seven months when working in Equatorial Guinea. The workers belonged to a group of 40 Santomeans contracted in São Tomé to work in the road construction in the neighbouring country. According to the agreement, one third of the salary of CFA 300,000 would be paid in Equatorial Guinea, and two thirds would be deposited in a bank account at home. However, only the third in Equatorial Guinea had been paid, according to the complaints. After having been on strike during one month without having been paid, they forced the company to bring them back to São Tomé. When they left the airport in São Tomé they were promised to receive the salaries in arrears. Later the problems in Equatorial Guinea were justified with the death of the company director three months before.

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<sup>19</sup> Téla-Non, 17/04/2007.

<sup>20</sup> Correio da Semana, 02/06/2007, p.23.

Despite the close relationship of the two heads of state and the increase of aid received from Equatorial Guinea since 2007, São Tomé's government does not consider Equatorial Guinea as one of the country's principal partners for development. Shortly after his inauguration in June 2008, Prime Minister Rafael Branco declared that he considered Angola, Brazil, and Portugal as his country's closest allies. It is possible that São Tomé and Príncipe will not join the CFA zone either. In 2008 and 2009 the IMF and other foreign experts recommended São Tomé to peg the national currency dobra to the euro, at the detriment of the CFA franc.

### **The Community of Portuguese-speaking countries – CPLP**

As already explained, in 2004 São Tomé was instrumental when the Obiang regime successfully approached the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP). Modelled on the examples of the Commonwealth and La Francophonie, in 1996 in Lisbon, after seven years of negotiations, the CPLP was formally created by Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe. East Timor, once gained its independence from Indonesia in May 2002, became the CPLP's eighth member state. The CPLP's headquarter is based in Lisbon. According to its own regulations the CPLP is ruled by principal objectives that include the non-interference in the internal affairs of the member states, but also the priority of peace, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and social justice.

The category of associated observer was only created in 2005. Formally, applicants must share the CPLP's guiding principles, particularly those referring to democratic practices, good governance, respect for human rights, and pursue in their government programmes, identical objectives as those of the community, even if, in the beginning they do not comply with the necessary conditions to become full members. The final decision on the observer membership application is taken by the bi-annual summit of the heads of state and governments of the organization. Associated observers do not pay membership fees, but are entitled to participate, without the right of voting, in the biannual summit of the heads of state and government, the annual Council of Ministers and the committees of permanent concert.

Equatorial Guinea's rapprochement to the CPLP became first visible in July 2004, when President Teodoro Obiang Nguema, invited by President Menezes as guest of honour to attend the 5<sup>th</sup> bi-annual summit of the heads of state and governments of the CPLP in São Tomé. In return, Malabo contributed \$100,000 to help finance the summit with an estimated total budget of \$2 million. Despite Obiang's record of human rights violations and excessive corruption, his presence was not questioned by any of the eight CPLP member states. The summit even discussed the integration of Equatorial Guinea as observer into the CPLP and adopted a resolution on the revision of the community's statutes to create the observer status that did not exist at the time. During the summit, the Cape Verdian diplomat Luís Fonseca was appointed new executive secretary of the CPLP.



During the annual meeting of the Council of Ministers in Luanda in 2005 the CPLP created the status of associated observer that was attributed to Equatorial Guinea at the 6<sup>th</sup> summit of the CPLP in Bissau in 2006, together with Mauritius. Malabo's declared objective has been to become a full member of the CPLP. However, a country can only become a full member of the lusophone community if Portuguese is its official language. In order to meet this requirement, Obiang announced the adoption of Portuguese as his country's third official language, after Spanish and French. The imposition of Portuguese as official language seems as absurd as that of French in 1998, since neither language is spoken by the population. In turn, the CPLP justifies the membership of Equatorial Guinea based on historical reasons (from 1471 until 1778 its territory belonged to Portugal). In July 2007, Fonseca affirmed that Equatorial Guinea had been discovered by Portugal and that the territories had remained under the Portuguese crown up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup>

In April 2007 an Equatorial Guinean delegation headed by deputy foreign minister José Esono Micha Akeng visited the CPLP headquarters. During the talks the promotion of Portuguese-language instruction, health and the training of human resources were identified as priorities for co-operation. In late June the same year, the CPLP's executive secretary Luís Fonseca paid a two-day visit to Malabo. Upon his return to Lisbon, Fonseca confirmed again that Equatorial Guinea was willing to adopt Portuguese as an official language in order to be able to join the lusophone community. He affirmed that a senior officer in the foreign ministry would currently receive Portuguese language lessons. He further declared that Malabo was interested in co-operating with the CPLP member states in the health, tourism, and higher education sectors. He stressed the many opportunities for economic co-operation created by Equatorial Guinea's rapid economic growth.<sup>22</sup>

In November 2007, Malabo, under the representation of the deputy foreign minister Esono Micha Akeng and the ambassador Celestino Ndong Ada, participated for the first time in the annual Council of Ministers of the CPLP held at the community's headquarters in Lisbon. At the time, Luís Fonseca declared that the inclusion of Equatorial Guinea served as an incentive to improve the most criticized aspects of the regime.<sup>23</sup> When Portuguese foreign minister Luís Amado visited Malabo at the invitation of minister Pastor Micha Ondo Bile in February 2008, he announced the creation of a support programme for Portuguese language lessons for Equatorial Guineans. The two ministers appreciated the rapprochement between Equatorial Guinea and the CPLP.<sup>24</sup>

At the 7<sup>th</sup> CPLP summit of heads of state and government in Lisbon in June 2008, Equatorial Guinea's President Teodoro Obiang participated for the first time in the meeting. At this summit, where heads of state and government of Angola and Mozambique were absent, Senegal was admitted as the third associated observer. During his visit to Lisbon in January 2009, foreign minister Micha Ondo Bile declared

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<sup>21</sup> Lusa 02/07/2007

<sup>22</sup> Lusa, 02/07/2007.

<sup>23</sup> Público, 02/11/2007.

<sup>24</sup> Portugal MNE, Malabo, 26/02/2008.

that his country wanted to fully join the CPLP at the next summit in 2010, but said the country had not yet fixed a date for the introduction of Portuguese as official language; if not done so, the CPLP would lose a good opportunity to get one more member state. Although Portuguese is not yet introduced, on the official website of the CPLP the language is already listed as Equatorial Guinea's third official language, after Spanish and French. While in Lisbon, Ondo Bile signed an agreement on the support to the introduction of Portuguese as optional language in Equatorial Guinea's education system. Under this agreement, in the short term, the two countries would present an action plan with public and private financing for the project, and prepare the initial training of teachers for Portuguese as foreign language. "Our citizens must speak Portuguese, so that we can belong to the CPLP. It is not difficult for the government declares it official language, but I don't know if it makes much sense to simply declare it official if nobody speaks it" Ondo Bile stated.<sup>25</sup>

The rapprochement between the CPLP and Equatorial Guinea has been in the interest of both partners. At the same time, most CPLP member states have strengthened their bilateral economic relations with the oil-rich country. They are all interested in benefiting from the country's oil wealth, either directly or indirectly, by the economic opportunities generated by the petrodollars. However, Malabo's intention to become a full member of the CPLP puts the organization before a dilemma. Equatorial Guinea has remained far from meeting the political requirements in terms of democratic practices –at least officially demanded– by the lusophone community. However, as far as the CPLP is concerned, the language question seems to be more important. For the time being, a really credible solution is not in sight. The imposition of Portuguese as third official language by the Obiang regime does not make Equatorial Guinea a truly Portuguese-speaking country after all.

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<sup>25</sup> Lusa, 18/01/2009.

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