Mozambique in 2011

Little happened on the domestic political scene, apart from the notable performance of a new political party. Foreign policy played out mainly at the economic interface, with major foreign interests featuring prominently. Mozambique’s leap to become a major mineral-energy exporter dominated its economic performance. By the end of the decade, the country is expected to be the largest exporter in Africa of natural gas, electricity and high quality metallurgical (coking) coal. But poverty was not reduced during the year and socio-economic disparities remained a major challenge.

Domestic Politics

Municipal by-elections served as an indicator of shifting political trends. The new opposition party, the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM), headed by Daviz Simango, mayor of Beira (not to be confused with David Simango, Frelimo mayor of Maputo), was taken seriously by the dominant party, Frelimo. Of the 43 elected mayors, 42 were Frelimo, which in July instructed five to resign. Two in the south where Frelimo was dominant refused. But those in Quelimane (Zambézia province), Pemba (Cabo Delgado) and Cuamba (Niassa) agreed, and by-elections were set for 7 December. It is probable that Frelimo thought that the three unpopular mayors would lose local elections in 2013, and decided to move before the MDM had time to build its organising capacity. Frelimo won two of the cities, but the MDM’s Manuel de Araujo won 62% of the vote in Quelimane, making him an important political figure. Renamo did not stand in the municipal by-elections.
Its president, Afonso Dhlakama, had moved to Nampula in the north, and little was heard of him – except for regular statements promising anti-government demonstrations that never took place. MDM head Daviz Simango had been expelled from Renamo by Dhlakama in 2008 and other key figures, including de Araujo, had left Renamo to join the MDM. Although Renamo was the second largest party in parliament, it was fading, and it was widely expected that the MDM would replace Renamo as the official opposition after the municipal elections in 2013 and national elections in 2014. Frelimo remained the dominant party, with good organisation and broad support. Nevertheless, patronage remained a key part of party and government, and there were complaints that Frelimo party membership was required for promotion in the civil service, loans from the district development fund, licences, etc. Businesses linked to President Armando Guebuza and Frelimo had an inside track on government contracts, and teachers in several places complained in the press about being forced to make contributions to Frelimo. MDM support initially came largely from disillusioned Renamo members. The test would be MDM’s ability to gain support from an increasingly disaffected youth.

There is a two-term limit for the state president and Guebuza was half-way through his second term. In a manoeuvre that was never adequately explained, Frelimo had told parliament in 2010 that it wanted a special commission to make changes to the constitution, but refused to say what they were. There was widespread speculation that Guebuza and his allies were looking for a way to keep him in power, either by changing the two-term limit or by strengthening the post of prime minister for him, as had happened in Russia. But gossip from within the party said that the younger generation rejected any attempt to keep Guebuza in power, saying it was time for the post-liberation-war generation