

## **A union that's cracking at the seams?**

*Introductory paragraph:*

*Zanzibar is known as a charming holiday paradise of white sandy beaches and turquoise seas. However, the political situation on the archipelago is fragile. A new draft constitution is calling into question the union with the rest of Tanzania. The dream of greater autonomy is further fuelled by the prospect of revenue from oil and gas. But these developments are causing a rift.*

*By:*

*Rasmus Hundsbæk, postdoc at DIIS*

*Ole Therkildsen, Senior Researcher Emeritus at DIIS*

*Text:*

The two different parts of the East African nation of Tanzania – the archipelago Zanzibar and Tanzania Mainland – are joined in a union: a marriage of convenience that has endured for 50 years. But the union is starting to show fault lines. A draft constitution – now being debated in a Constituent Assembly – offers the islands the prospect of greater autonomy. Within the ruling party, CCM, opinions are divided on the issue. Whereas factions of the party, including the chairman of the party, President Kikwete, were long thought to be in favour of greater autonomy for Zanzibar they have now declared that they oppose a the proposed three-tier government with separate governments for Zanzibar and the mainland and a union government for the entire country. Many fear for the nation's unity. Alliances are crumbling and historical truths are being re-examined.

The United Republic of Tanzania was created in 1964, when Zanzibar and the mainland (known at that time as Tanganyika) united after a bloody revolution on the islands. Those behind the coup wanted the union to protect themselves against the former rulers, and the governing parties in the two parts of the country entered into an alliance. In 1977 they joined forces to become CCM, Chama Cha Mapinduzi, which is still in power today. This suited the president on the mainland, Julius Nyrere. He had come to power a few years previously and had become a spokesperson for African unity across the old colonial frontiers. For him, union with Zanzibar was the first step. In effect, the union is part of CCM's DNA.

The price of political stability was harsh suppression of the opposition, particularly on Zanzibar. And there are still traces of this repression today. The introduction of multi-party elections in the early 1990s opened

the door to opposition parties and critical voices. Owing to its continued solid support on mainland Tanzania, CCM still firmly holds the reins there; however, on Zanzibar the party has held on to power through electoral fraud and violence. While Tanzania as a whole is regarded as relatively stable and democratic today, in some respects Zanzibar has been more akin to a dictatorship.

Despite the repression, Tanzania as a whole, and Zanzibar in particular, have been major recipients of development aid. For instance, Tanzania is the country that has received the most Danish development aid. Like other Scandinavian countries, Denmark gave aid out of a genuine wish to help a young nation still marred by colonialism. But a further reason for the assistance was an awareness of the region's geo-political importance. For a long time Tanzania was a front-line state in the anti-apartheid struggle in southern Africa, which the Scandinavians supported. At the same time they, along with other Western donors, tried to keep Zanzibar out of the clutches of communism by providing development aid.

Today, 50 years on, international politics still plays a role for donor aid. The US in particular is concerned about Islamic fundamentalism, and CCM knows how to exploit this fear. For a long time the party has classified the country's (very few) Islamic fundamentalists as potential terrorists, especially on Zanzibar. Indeed, there have been militant attacks on tourists and Christian churches on the archipelago, notably in recent years. For this reason the donors have turned a blind eye to the repression, even though much discontent is caused by the considerable economic disparity and ethnic tensions on Zanzibar rather than by fundamentalism.

The traditional fronts on Zanzibar, however, are now starting to disintegrate. Old friendships are dissolving and new alliances are being forged. In 2010 CCM and the more Islamic and largest opposition party, Civic United Front (CUF), formed a national coalition. The ruling party elite agreed to a coalition after realising that change was needed if the union was to be preserved. The prospect of substantial revenue from oil and gas from the sea around the islands also increased the pressure. Should Zanzibar, with a population of 1.3 million, really share its revenue from any oil and gas findings with 45 million Tanzanians? After 10 years of negotiations a 2012 agreement guaranteed that Zanzibar could keep its revenue. Admittedly, the discovery of offshore gas in southern Tanzania close to Mozambique was a contributing factor. Nonetheless, it is still not clear when extraction will begin and how much revenue it will generate.

Some of these contentious issues have passed on to the debate on a new constitution for Tanzania. Under the old constitution Tanzania has two governments: one for Zanzibar and a common government for the

entire country, the United Republic of Tanzania. The new draft constitution proposes three-tiered governance, with a separate government for the mainland. And it grants Zanzibar the right to retain any revenue from oil or gas. According to opinion polls this sharing of power within the union appears to reflect the wishes of the majority of the population on the mainland and on the archipelago. It does pose, however, a major challenge to CCM. The party elite appears divided. The chairman of the constitutional commission, former Prime Minister Joseph Warioba, has made no secret of the fact that the three-tiered concept is about saving the union. CCM on Zanzibar as well as President Kikwete were also long thought to be in favour of a three-tier government, but this is unacceptable to powerful groups on both the mainland and Zanzibar. CCM Zanzibar and the President have now clarified that they are against this solution. Later in the year a referendum will be held on a final draft of the new constitution. The future of the union remains open.

**Box 1: Tanzania's draft constitution**

- Greater autonomy for the two parts of the union, Tanzania Mainland and Zanzibar, which will each have their own government. A third joint government will deal with matters concerning the union.
- Democratisation: Less presidential power and more parliamentary power.
- The Constitutional Review Commission met for the first time last month and will continue to meet for at least two months.

**Box 2: Little-known facts about Zanzibar**

- 1890: Britain gains control of Zanzibar through the Heligoland-Zanzibar Treaty. Germany is given the islands of Heligoland in the North Sea as a naval base in return for recognition of British control of Zanzibar.
  - 1963: Zanzibar is granted independence.
  - 1964: Following a coup Zanzibar and the mainland unite to form Tanzania. The revolution is bloody, claiming 5,000 to 10,000 lives out of a population of approximately 300,000.
  - 2001: Unrest following elections costs at least 20 lives. 2000 flee to Kenya.
  - 2010: The ruling party, CCM, and the largest opposition party, CUF, join forces in a national coalition.