

Assembly of Malian grassroots initiatives in Bamako (Civic' Meal): Long-term peace-dialogue of all societal groups

Instead of the white march the malian section of Afrique-Europe-Inteact has organised two people's peace assemblies in May & July in Bamako which have been supported with 9.000 Euro by the european section of our network. The first assembly has taken place on Saturday, May 4th, 2013 from 8.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. at Carrefour des Jeunes (Place de la Liberté).

In the beginning of January the Malian section of the transnational network Afrique-Europe-Interact had called for a White March ("Marche Blanche") from Mopti to Douentza. Its aim was to exceed the then current 'demarcation line' with thousands of people to strengthen the civil resistance against the Islamist terrorist regime in the North, and to enter into a dialogue with those groups of the Tuareg population, who didn't feel adequately represented neither by the Islamicist nor by the laicistic Tuareg rebels (Ansar Dine and MNLA). As it were, the project of the White March was historically outdated by the military intervention of France which began on January 11th and the subsequent expulsion of the Islamist militias from numerous cities and towns in the North – but not so the basic objectives associated with the march. In this sense, the Malian section of Afrique-Europe-Interact invites to a so-called Civic Meal ("dējeneur citoyen") in Bamako on Saturday, January 4th. During this all-day meeting Malis socio-political problems will be debated within a larger circle and specific recommendations for a lasting peace are to be developed.

The organizers explicitly mention that the Civic Meal will have an all-including characteristic, because grassroots initiatives from all across the country have been invited. Correspondingly, 20 representatives of Tuareg communities as well as numerous displaced people from the North will participate in this meeting. Considering this all-including characteristic, the invitation to the Civic Meal has deliberately been formulated in an open and low threshold way. Instead of asking for detailed blueprints, it is intended to initiate a collective search process – notwithstanding the common understanding of the crisis that has emerged within the network of Afrique-Europe-Interact within the course of the last year (as noted in a statement published by the European section of Afrique-Europe-Interact in the beginning of February). Accordingly, the three-page invitation to the Civic Meal names only some starting points for the joint debate, including the following:

a) The fact that in northern Mali Islamist forces were able to establish themselves gradually since 2003 (a prerequisite for the conquests which they made together with Tuareg-rebels last year) has primarily to do with the massive corruption by president Amadou Toumani Traoré. He was degraded in March, 2012, because his government gave Islamists a carte blanche for their smuggling operations, hijackings and racketeerings of migrants for years, and even he himself was deeply involved in the drug trade. Therefore a government is required that is actually oriented towards the interests of the local population – among other things this suggestion means to finally stop the massive embezzlement of public funds. Only if this can be ensured and the state meets its responsibility to provide a public infrastructure (including security for the local population), the Islamist forces will sooner or later lose ground.

b) During all stages of the conflict there have been grave violations of human rights, carried out at first by the Tuareg-rebels of the MNLA, later by Islamist forces and at last by several entities of the Malian army. These soldiers brutally abused or killed suspected collaborators, among them in particular people of Arabic origin and members of the Tuareg. Against this background, the invitation explicitly warns against a so-called "amalgam", respectively an equation of rebels, terrorists and drug dealers with Tuaregs and Arabs. This demands for an intercommunal

dialogue on three levels: Among the Tuareg themselves (considering the discrimination of black Tuareg – the so-called Bellah), among the several population groups of the North and among Malis entire population. The aim of such a dialogue is a new “social contract” between the people and the government, respectively the entire political sphere, as a representative of the Malian section of Afrique-Europe-Interact pointed out.

c) Under the pressure of the international community the transitional government of Mali has established a 33-member commission for reconciliation and dialogue. However, this commission is almost exclusively staffed with figures of the previous political establishment. Thus the invitation asks for a true participation of all the different population groups, regardless of ethnicity, skin colour, or religion to restore a republican and laicistic-oriented Mali. Otherwise, social cohesion, as a prerequisite for a lasting peace, is hard to imagine.

The international community promises a renewal of the development cooperation, which was stopped in March 2012, only if elections will be held in July 2013. (The background to this is the fact, that after the putsch against the former president Amadou Toumani Traoré, a putsch which was appreciated by large parts of the population, there is now only a transitional government in office.) This early election date, however, is severely criticized in Mali: Firstly, because the necessary organizational conditions are not at hand yet, including an electoral register, which ensures the participation of all eligible voters. Secondly, because an early election date puts new political actors at a disadvantage (as unlike the political establishment they need more time to set up their own candidates). Thirdly, because the main rainy season is in July and the people will primarily be busy with agriculture at that time and fourthly, because the Malians have not chosen this date themselves. The Malian population favours a later date, especially to open up a debate about the fundamental problems of the Malian society and thus lay the basis for a truly contentful electoral campaign.

Basically, the Civic Meal should only be the beginning to a long-term organizing process within the Malian civil society. It is therefore not only intended to compile a list of specific demands addressing the transitional government (with the core demand to postpone the election date) but it is also planned to hold additional followup meetings.

In this sense, we continue to call for donations for the peace efforts of the Malian section of Afrique-Europe-Interact – as the Civic Meal could be realized with 7000 Euros which had originally been donated for the White March.