

Zimbabwe: Beginning of a new era?

Following the forced resignation on 21 November 2017 of President Robert Mugabe, after 37 years in power, the new President, Emmerson Mnangagwa, was sworn in on 24 November 2017. President Mnangagwa has since then expressed his commitment to free and fair elections, his willingness to fight corruption and to re-engage with the international community in order to attract foreign investment and revive the economy.

Background

The developments of recent months have raised hopes of a new and brighter era in a country crippled by corruption, a deep [economic crisis](#) and sky-high unemployment (estimated at 90 %). Those problems are the [legacy](#) of almost four decades of the authoritarian regime of President Robert Mugabe, characterised by economic isolationism, grave human-rights abuses and a total breakdown of social services.

Beyond renewed rhetoric of [national reconciliation](#), the first concrete moves by the new president include a three-month amnesty for the return of state funds taken abroad; [change](#) at the head of the highly corrupt police, and the promise to compensate the white farmers who have been evicted from their land. Indeed, since 2000, thousands of white farmers, who mostly bought their land from the government after independence in 1980, have been forced off their lands under [Fast Track Land Reform](#), leaving thousands of farm-workers unemployed and the country's agricultural sector moribund. However, despite calls from civil society for an inclusive and broad transitional cabinet, the government appointed by the new president – who is a ruling party (ZANU-PF) hardliner, does not include opposition figures. Some [commentators doubt](#), if what they call an internal ZANU-PF coup will bring long-awaited, deep democratic reforms. The treatment of Mugabe is a bad sign: instead of facing judicial, or at least moral, accountability for his grave human-rights violations, including massacres and torture of thousands, the former ruler is taking a 'golden retirement'.

EU policy: between sanctions and support for the population

From 2002, the EU has imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe, including an embargo on arms trading, restriction of entry and freezing of personal assets of high-ranking regime members, and the suspension of development cooperation with central government (but not of humanitarian aid and support for civil society through non-governmental channels). After successive revisions, the [sanctions](#) now in effect concern only the ex-presidential couple and an embargo on arms (excluding explosives for mining). [Development cooperation](#) was relaunched for the 11th European Development Fund (€234 million for 2014-2020) with health, food security and governance being priority sectors. On 22 January 2018, the [Council of the EU](#) reaffirmed its availability to engage in political dialogue with the new authorities, to review its policies towards Zimbabwe when progress is achieved, and to send an election observation mission, if [invited](#), for the election expected before July 2018.

European Parliament position

In several resolutions the European Parliament has taken a stand against the misdeeds of the authoritarian Mugabe regime, including the forced evictions, in a specific [resolution](#) of 21 October 2010. In a [resolution](#) adopted on 15 September 2016, the Parliament reiterated its call for a peaceful transition of power based on a free and fair electoral process.

The Parliament is expected to discuss the situation in Zimbabwe during the February I plenary session ([2017/3022\(RSP\)](#)) after a statement by the Vice President of the Commission/ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

