

Municipal Elections 2 - 14 September 2022

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Frelimo tried dirty tricks and fought to last minute to impose STAE head

Heavy pressure and attempted dirty tricks by Frelimo bosses to impose their choice of director general (DG) of STAE backfired, leading to a rebellion of three Frelimo-aligned members of the CNE at an all-day meeting last Thursday (8 September). Loló Correia, head of STAE in Tete and the choice of the selection committee, was elected 10-7, over the central Frelimo party choice Helena Garrine, who had come last on the selection committee list.

STAE (State Secretariat for Election Administration, Secretariado Técnico de Administração Eleitoral) runs the elections and the DG post is the most powerful in the electoral system. The Comissão Nacional de Eleições (CNE) has a normal 10-7 Frelimo majority, but the final total shows 3 members voted against Frelimo instructions in a secret ballot.

Two dirty tricks were rejected. Frelimo wanted the CNE votes to be hand written. This was used last year when the CNE voted to replace spokesperson Paulo Cuinica with Alice Banze. Those who voted for Banze were identified by their handwriting.

The last try was an unexpected Frelimo proposal that the official notification of Correia's election in Boletim da República (BR) should say that Garrine was next in line to replace Correia. This would have allowed later Frelimo pressure to force Correia to resign to be automatically replaced by Garrine.

Mobile phones give party heads control

The CNE has 17 members. Of those, 10 members are chosen by parliamentary parties - 5 Frelimo, 4 Renamo, 1 MDM. In addition there are 7 members chosen from civil society nominations, but for more than a decade the parties have agreed that "civil society" members should come from party-aligned civil society organisations (CSOs). In practice, 5 CSO members vote normally with Frelimo and 2 with the opposition, which gives Frelimo a 10-7 majority.

The law says the CNE is "independent and impartial" even though all members have party affiliation. But the meetings last week showed how most members see themselves as party representatives. The Thursday CNE meeting continued from 10.00 to 18.30, with frequent interruptions for Frelimo and Renamo CNE members to consult their party leaders. On the Frelimo side, Carlos Cauio, former President of the Bar Association, was responsible for consulting his party superiors. On the Renamo side, Fernando Mazanga talked to his party superiors.

Vote by X or writing name

The first Frelimo trick was a proposal that each of the 17 members of the CNE write down, on white paper, the name of the candidate they chose. This would allow Frelimo to identify the "traitors" by handwriting. This had occurred before and was rejected by other members of CNE, who demanded a ballot paper similar to the one used in the electoral process, with the names of all candidates and a small box next to their names where voters should only place X, using pens all with the same colour.

During the election of the CNE spokesperson on 18 March last year the handwritten names system was used. Frelimo backed the re-appointment of Paulo Cuinica, who had been in the post for two terms already, but Alice Banze won. The handwritten ballot papers were used to identify the Frelimo "traitors". Under pressure, Banze was forced to resign on 22 March. Cuinica, the defeated candidate, was reappointed to the position.

Rebels intervene

Loló Correia was the only main candidate who had no support from any party, but he was backed as best candidate by the selection panel. Frelimo had been split, with some supporting Garrine and a few supporting Mário Mubango Cossane from Gaza. Frelimo feared that splitting the vote would allow Correia to be selected by the opposition vote. So a caucus agreed Frelimo would not vote for Cossane, giving Garrine an automatic majority. But when the secret vote was tallied, Correia won because of the three rebels.

Frelimo failed to set up Correia to be pushed out

Frelimo then caucused and made an unexpected and unprecedented suggestion. They proposed that the wording of the final deliberation, to be published in the Bulletin of the Republic (BR), should say that "Loló Correia has been elected, but with Helena Garrine as alternate". The idea was to make it easier for Loló Correia to be forced to resign, and then Helena Garrine, would automatically be appointed.

This was opposed, and it was noted that the BR notice of the election the previous DG of STAE (Felisberto Naife) had not stated that he had a substitute. Thus if Correia does resign, there will have to be an entirely new recruitment process.

Frelimo 'business'?

Having Helena Garrine in charge would make it easier for Frelimo to steal the election. But Frelimo insiders say the main reason is not electoral fraud, but business. Local and general elections are sources of revenue for some of the companies of Frelimo's political elite. STAE's Director General is responsible for negotiating a huge range of contracts from the registration period until voting, which includes equipment, ballot papers and registration forms, fuel, and transport. The elections have a \$293 mn budget and Frelimo wants a DG who ensures that the electoral business is controlled by Frelimo business people.

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