

## The DA, opposition politics and the markets

LAST week we said developments in the Democratic Alliance would only become relevant to the financial markets if a new coalition came into being, between the ANC and parts of the DA. This is now happening.

The following scenarios are likely:

- A new provincial government will be formed in the Western Cape between the ANC and the NNP.
- In the Cape Town unicity a new ANC/NNP administration will only be possible once the constitution has been amended to allow for elected councillors crossing floor and joining other parties.
- The ANC has indicated that such a constitutional amendment would only be temporary – if matters turn out the way the ANC is planning it, the DA will be the only party to be hit by current developments. Its members will cross the floor to the NNP and ANC and perhaps other parties. The DA will be considerably weaker and smaller. The ANC is talking about “finishing off” the DA.
- This “finishing off” process may mean that some NNP leaders will become deputy or full ministers.
- If the planned constitutional amendment is not temporary, all parties will in due course be affected by it. It will put the ANC alliance under severe strain; it will affect the IFP; it will in due course result in the NNP disintegrating as its members join the ANC and opposition parties.

### *So what?*

- A substantial number of Afrikaans-speaking voters (whites as well as so-called coloureds) will follow the NNP to a position closer to the ANC.
- This will help to counter racial polarisation. The very strident anti-ANC rhetoric of the DA will be countered by a more co-operative style from the NNP.
- Already Pieter Mulder of the Freedom Front and Cassie Aucamp of the Afrikaner-Eenheidsbeweging have warned on separate occasions during the past week that the social needs of blacks have to be addressed if “whites want their issues to get onto the agenda”.

- Co-operative government and less strident opposition will help to build a broader consensus for social and transformation policies. For example, free basic water and electricity for poor households will probably become a non-issue as more and more former political adversaries buy into it.

### ***Conclusion***

So the trade-offs are clear: less opposition, more co-operation between particularly the ANC and Afrikaans-speaking SA, more agreement on the basic direction of the country. That will be good for confidence and will counter Afro-pessimism.

It will, however, be bad for democratic politics. Unless, of course, the constitutional amendment is not reversed, resulting in other elected representatives crossing the floor. Then the real political realignment will become possible and the real debate will emerge: between the centre and the left and not, as is currently the case, between the centre and the right.

Everything depends on that constitutional amendment.

*First published on 29 October 2001.*