

Africa Briefing

Crisis in Côte d'Ivoire: which way out?

Paris, 25 January 2011, 14h00 – 17h00

Institut d'Études de Sécurité de l'Union Européenne
43, avenue du Président Wilson
75775 PARIS CEDEX 16

Concept note

Côte d'Ivoire has recently plunged into a political and institutional deadlock when both candidates claimed to be the winner of the 28 November presidential elections in Côte d'Ivoire. On 2 December 2010, the Independent Electoral Commission declared winner the opposition leader Alassane Ouattara. These results were invalidated the following day by the Constitutional Court, which proclaimed, after having annulled a large number of votes from Ouattara's northern strongholds, the incumbent president Laurent Gbagbo as the winner of the election. Since then, both candidates have sworn themselves president and named their own government. While Alassane Ouattara has received wide international and regional support, with the UN, the AU, the EU, and ECOWAS recognizing him as president, Laurent Gbagbo has been put under increasing international and regional pressure to leave power.

Violence has been escalating since the election, following M. Ouattara's call on his supporters to march on the state television building in Abidjan on December 16. More than 200 people have been killed, presumably by forces and militias loyal to Laurent Gbagbo. Recent clashes in Abidjan have prompted fear of renewed post-electoral violence. Outside of the capital, the situation remains tense, specifically in the western part of the country where outbreaks of communal violence have taken place. UN peacekeepers have also been targeted, and thousands of Ivoirians have fled the country. Despite its growing isolation – both ECOWAS and the AU suspended the country – M. Gbagbo has been resisting calls and mediation efforts for a peaceful transition and refused to stand down. He has been claiming electoral fraud, taxing international actors with being pro-Ouattara and urged on the UN and the French troops to leave the country. Seven weeks after this long overdue presidential election, Côte d'Ivoire is still at a dead end, and the specter of civil war resurfaces.

The Côte d'Ivoire presidential elections, which have been delayed several times since the end of the civil war in 2004, were supposed to bring stability and to promote national unity in a country faced with a decade long crisis, and to prove that the conflict had actually been resolved. The Ouagadougou political agreement, brokered by a Blaise Compaoré mediation in 2007, put an end to the five-years conflict between the South-based Laurent Gbagbo's Government and the Guillaume Soro's Forces Nouvelles insurgents from the North. Despite the formation of a power-sharing government, the outcome of the national reconciliation process remained highly elusive. Major issues that have led to the civil war and the de facto partition of the country in 2002 are still unsolved.

Citizenship, identity and political legitimacy of those in power are central issues of the current crisis in Côte d'Ivoire. The "*ivoirité*" issue has plagued the country for years, specifically since the mid 1990s when it came to be used by former president Henri Konan Bédié as a political tool to discriminate against populations from the North in restraining their access to political participation and competition. This issue is still salient in the public and political debate, as recent tensions surrounding the voting registration have shown. Despite the Ouagadougou agreement, Côte d'Ivoire is still a highly divided country and there is only a partial unification of the government administration throughout the Ivoirian territory.

Another issue refers to the political participation of the Ivoirian youth, represented by the long-standing opponents Guillaume Soro, M. Ouattara's prime minister and Charles Blé Goudé, leader of the Jeunes Patriotes, a nationalist militia supporting Laurent Gbagbo. The various armed groups of the country (military and militias) remain a great source of uncertainty, since each side has the capacity for violence. The disarmament of the rebels is not completed, while a considerable amount of weapons is still in circulation in the country despite the 2004 UN arm embargo. Indeed, for the last ten years, the political scene in Côte d'Ivoire has become increasingly militarized.

International and regional actors have reacted quickly to the Côte d'Ivoire crisis and have been speaking on a united front. The UN rejected the ultimatum posed by M. Gbagbo, while France and the United States have called him to resign and accept the results of the polls. The EU has resolved to impose sanctions on trade, and to freeze M. Gbagbo and his supporters' assets. The UN mission, whose mandate has been prolonged for six months, has also indirectly appealed to the EU for a military support, and a decision should be taken shortly. The AU and ECOWAS, which both suspended M. Gbagbo, have imposed their own sanctions. While ECOWAS mediation efforts have proved unsuccessful so far, they were talks about the possibilities of a military intervention in Côte d'Ivoire. Several members of ECOWAS, notably Ghana have however warned the organization against a military solution.

Seven weeks after the beginning of the crisis, the effects of international and regional actions remain so far uncertain, and there is no easy exit strategy on the way. Given the high degree of polarization and the long-standing antagonisms between Alassane Ouattara and Laurent Gbagbo, the formation of a new government based on power sharing seems unlikely. Besides, Laurent Gbagbo is still in control of large sections of the state apparatus, and seems to benefit from the support of the military. Beyond its national frontiers, the Côte d'Ivoire crisis and its aftermath will have important consequences for the region and the continent. Its resolution, in any other way, might well stand as a test case for the various ongoing democratization processes on the continent.

Programme

By gathering key experts and representatives from a large range of states and organizations involved in the Côte d'Ivoire crisis management, this Africa briefing will explore the main challenges surrounding the current political crisis. The following issues will be discussed:

- 1/ Root causes (political and socio-economic) of the crisis and prospects for stability
- 2/ Possible scenarios and their consequences for sustainable peace
- 3/ Regional and international implications

The event will take place in Paris on Tuesday 25th of January in partnership with the *Observatoire de l'Afrique*. Participation is on invitation basis. Participants are requested to register to Mrs Sylvie Devèze, (Sylvie.Deveze@iss.europa.eu).

The working language will be French. Chatham House Rule applies.

Chair : Observatoire de l'Afrique member

Panel :

Dr Richard Banégas, University Paris 1, Panthéon Sorbonne

Rinaldo Depagne, International Crisis Group

ECOWAS representant (*tbc*)