



DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES OF THE UNION
DIRECTORATE B
- POLICY DEPARTMENT -

Note for the attention of the Development Committee

Subject: The recent situation in Côte d'Ivoire

The national elections were scheduled for October 2005, when President Gbagbo's five-year term was set to end. But he invoked a law that allowed him, he said, to stay in power. This was followed by UN Security Council resolution 1633¹ which extended his mandate for one year. But the resolution set October 2006 as the ultimate deadline for general elections and required the appointment of a Prime Minister with strong powers. The resolution also sets up an International Working Group (IWG)² with more authority than previous structures. The IWG meets once a month in Côte d'Ivoire to monitor progress towards the elections. It held its first meeting on 8 November 2005. The 6th meeting was on 20 April 2006, and the next one will be on 19 May.

The country is at present relatively peaceful but the political situation is evolving slowly. Côte d'Ivoire remains split in two, and the situation is not likely to change in the near future since there are interests on both sides that are benefiting from the partition. Individuals from both sides have taken advantage of the conflict to accumulate power and wealth, which has made them progressively less interested in finding a solution. That is why further pressure from the international community should be strong enough to break the impasse.

On 4 December 2005, Charles Konan Banny was chosen by Nigerian President Obasanjo and South African President Mbeki, both asked by the UN to resolve the crisis, to lead a government of national reconciliation, after weeks of uncertainty. He formed a government of national unity, in which he established a strong Prime Minister's office by retaining for himself the finance and communications portfolios. His Cabinet was formed on 28 December and is composed of 32 ministers from the Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI) of Laurent Gbagbo, the Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) of Henri Konan Bédié, the Rassemblement des Républicains (RPR) of Alassane Ouattara³, the New Forces of Guillaume Soro, and from smaller political parties and from civil society. Although he was the second-ranking minister in the government, Guillaume Soro did not take his seat until mid-March 2006. He did not want to travel to Abidjan for security reasons. Even if Mr Banny's government has more authority than the previous one, President Gbagbo's camp is still able to influence policy, bypassing opposition ministers and giving orders directly to the civil service.

¹ Adopted on 21 October 2005, the resolution is based on an African Union proposal.

² It is composed of representatives from Benin, Ghana, Guinea, Niger, Nigeria, South Africa, France, the UK, the US, the UN, the African Union, the EU, ECOWAS, the Francophonie, the World Bank and the IMF.

³ Henri Konan Bédié, former President (1993-1999) and Alassane Ouattara, former Prime minister (1990-1993) are not members of the government. Mr Ouattara still lives in France although he came several times to Ivory Coast in the recent months.

Charles Konan Banny was appointed as "consensus" Prime Minister. Indeed, it had been agreed that the new transitional government should be led by a figure acceptable to all the parties. But finding such a person proved difficult for some weeks. Mr Banny is a relative of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the founding president of Côte d'Ivoire, and is a senior national figure close to the centrist PDCI. His moral authority is important and he was not directly involved in the conflict as he was away from the country in that period, being governor of the regional central bank, the Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (BCEAO), in Dakar. Mr Banny should not have any personal ambition as, under Resolution 1633, the interim Prime Minister is not allowed to contest the upcoming presidential elections. Despite some problems, Mr Banny succeeded in moving the process forward in a way that had not been possible before.

The first crisis of the new government arose in January, about the extension of Parliament's mandate, which expired on 16 December 2005. President Gbagbo decided to prolong the mandate, while the IWG recommended the contrary. The IWG took note, after demonstrations by the "young patriots", the militias loyal to Mr Gbagbo, of the expiration of the Parliament's mandate. The matter still remains unresolved and the National Assembly held a special session on 9 February, convened by its outgoing speaker, Mamadou Koulibaly.

On 28 February 2006 a meeting in Yamoussoukro was organised between the main political actors of the country. Mr Gbagbo and Guillaume Soro participated along with the two main civil opposition leaders, Alassane Ouattara (RDR) and Henri Konan Bédié (PDCI). At this meeting, the legitimacy of the electoral commission (Commission électorale indépendante) was finally recognised by all the parties, and its composition modified to incorporate a FPI vice-president.

It seems, however, unlikely that the elections can be organised as scheduled. They should be prepared well in advance in order to update voter rolls, to resolve citizenship and identification issues, and to deploy administration across a country divided in two. The establishment of the voter rolls was the cause of a new confrontation between President Gbagbo and Prime Minister Banny in late March. Mr Banny is in favour of an electorate identification process prior to establishing new voter rolls, while Mr Gbagbo found this plan too complicated and too time-consuming, and suggested the updating of the existing 2000 rolls. This solution is unacceptable to the supporters of the New Forces, who argued that many people whose parents migrated from a neighbouring country have been excluded from the voter rolls. Even the Prime Minister declared in mid-April that the election deadline might slip. Under UN Resolution 1633 Laurent Gbagbo has to leave the power in October 2006 and the Security Council should find another transitional solution if the elections are not organised in time. It seems unthinkable that Gbagbo could stay in office longer. It would then become a strategy for him to delay the elections. A "Plan B" is said to be under preparation by France or by Mr Banny, to install a collegial presidency after October 2006.

The main discussion in the Yamoussoukro meeting was the delayed disarmament process. Both the rebels in the north and the militias loyal to the President in the south must surrender their arms. But the operations have not really started yet. The rebels want to surrender their arms after the elections while President Gbagbo is not ready to accept elections as long as the rebels have not handed over their weapons. At the meeting the political leaders agreed that identification and disarmament are to be carried at the same time and concurrently. But by mid-April President Gbagbo seemed to have changed his mind and asked the New Forces rebels to hand over their guns before voter cards could be issued. In its last meeting, on 20 April, the IWG reminded the parties of their obligation to carry out both operations concurrently.

A.D – 1 May 2006.