

## **On the Present Situation Concerning Home Affairs and Security Policy in the Ivory Coast (Cote d'Ivoire)**

by Wolf Poulet

Since gaining independence from France in the year 1960, the Ivory Coast (Cote d'Ivoire) has for more than 30 years been ruled by a "strong man", Felix Houphouet-Boigny (FHB). This African leader, who died in 1993, will be entered into the history books as the prototype of a benevolent dictator, as a kind and benevolently disposed dictator, driving his country forward. He invested considerable amounts of the income from cocoa and coffee exports into the public infrastructure and institutions of the young republic. The Ivory Coast was in third place with regard to the per capita income of the states of this continent and stood out positively against the corrupt kleptocracies being established in many cases since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Within the two decades since FHB things quickly deteriorated. After the Islam-oriented North attempted secession from the mainly Christian South (2002), the conflicts having gone on violently for decades culminated in 2010/11 after dubious presidential elections in a bloody power struggle between the President of many years' standing, Laurent Gbagbo, and his challenger, Alassane Ouattara. Despite having been voted out, Gbagbo clung to power until he was arrested in his residence near to Abijan on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011 by French commandos after months of resistance. Since then, Alassane Ouattara rules who the year before had won the final ballot over the presidency.

Quattara is faced with the challenge to reunite the country and to re-establish the former economic successes. The World Bank index "Doing Business", having ranked the Ivory Coast as No. 177 (out of 185 countries) for years, also shows how important such a re-establishment is. The African "Moh-Ibrahim-Stiftung" also ranked the Ivory Coast none too highly in 2012 as No. 46 out of 52 African states. In the categories human rights, security and law, social security and quality of the state administration the country even came last.

In the course of the visit of our DGVN study group in Abidjan in May 2012 we were informed about the precarious situation by the then representative of the UN Secretary-General and former Dutch minister for development cooperation, Albert Koenders, and various experts from the Operation of the United Nations in the Ivory Coast (UNOCI). Further lectures from representatives of the German Embassy, African (e.g., ECOWAS) and international organisations (e.g., the World Bank) allowed us to gain a good overall impression of the sensitive and still tense situation in the country within a relatively short span of time. Additionally, we were able to spend a day at the UN branch in the centrally located town of Bouaké.

All partners in the talks named us equally three central challenges for the Ivory Coast:

1. the reconciliation of the enemy fronts regarding home affairs,
2. the introduction of a democratically controlled justice and security sector (SSR) and
3. the re-stimulation of the national economy having been impaired by internal conflicts lasting for years.

The insights gained by our travelling group about the political and economic situation of the country were confirmed on all points by a high-ranking delegation of the UN Security Council one day after our departure. The German member, UN Ambassador Peter Wittig, (see "Security Council mission to West-Africa - Ambassador Wittig's blog"), explained that during meetings of the delegation with President Quattara, the Prime Minister and numerous ministers, the following challenges facing the national policy were at the centre of the political discussion:

1. the stabilization of the still fragile internal security,
2. the reform of the security sector (military, police, justice, prisons),
3. the reconciliation of the two political camps, directed at persons,
4. the reintegration of refugees,
5. the security of the borders (with Mali as well),
6. the economic reconstruction,
7. the lifting of the sanctions of the Security Council.

Towards the delegation, the head of the UNOCI, Albert Koenders, took the view that the reform of the security sector was the "most urgent problem" of the country. The armed forces were a "dangerously heterogeneous organisation", having no cohesion and therefore showing problems with

leadership (command and control) and discipline. The soldiers of two (civil war-)camps and numerous rebel groups or militias would now have to be integrated. Around 40.000 men - most of them recruited during the violent conflicts after the election in 2010 - are only loosely linked with the army; their future is uncertain. Koenders declared the support of the security sector reform to be the top priority of the UN mission. The "DDR project (Disarmament, Demobilisation und Reintegration) having been carried out at the same time under control of the UN mission he attested at least some initial successes.

Doubtlessly, the government of the Ivory Coast is striving for an extensive reform of the security sector. The political elite appears to be quite aware that economic growth and the development into a democratic society in the broadest sense in which the fundamental rights apply to all citizens equally will only be possible in connection with a successful SSR.

The main obstacle lies in the still deeply engrained mutual mistrust between the followers of Gbagbo und Quattara which has meanwhile spread throughout the entire civil society. One indicator for this is the open division of the country's print media into two camps. Again and again reports are concerned with "abominable deeds", mostly grave violations of human rights, having been committed in large numbers by the troupes of one or the other of the two factions in the conflict. Hence, independent and objective reporting on the far-reaching problems of the country is not available.

The losers of the power struggle, followers of the former President Gbagbo who is imprisoned in Den Haag, lament quite rightfully that national justice and world opinion only condemn one party and that the equally grave violations of the other side have not as yet been sanctioned. During our visit in the summer of 2012 this deplorable state of affairs became clear to us. A high-ranking UN policeman, an East African, openly pointed out that leading "Ex-ComZones", former rebel commanders who should certainly also have to face a war crimes tribunal, are walking the streets freely in Abidjan.

After the visit of the DGVN study group in May 2012 I revisited the Ivory Coast several times on my own account and was able to observe the seriousness of the Quattara government with regard to the reform of the internal security and was partly able to collaborate in this as well. In October 201, the National Security Council as organ of the Presidential Office of the republic at first publishes a draft of the "National

Strategy: Reform of the Security Sector." The government therein announces "a redefinition of the role and responsibilities of the security organs". With regard to this, the most important precondition for the success of an SSR process has to be emphasized: It concerns the political control of the security forces, including justice and the civil society. The Ivorian government is quite aware that this is necessary and thus shares the unanimous view of the United Nations, the OECD, the EU and all democratic states of the West. However, whether this democratic control can be attained quickly in the country in reality remains to be seen.

The holistic approach is also of great importance which in my opinion is underrated in many theoretical statements on the SSR. The precondition is the strengthening of an attitude and of institutions based on the rule of law without which individual reforms of the police or military forces would be doomed to failure. As is often the case in a highly complex political situation it is true here as well that a theoretical objective of an SSR is conceivable but that the practical implementation of numerous big and small steps in reforming, or, to put it another way: Modernization measures, fail due to the as yet inadequate organisational practice of the state authorities and institutions.

Due to the only slowly progressing implementation of SSR-relevant modernization measures, a dialogue forum on the subject SSR to advance progress emerged in Abidjan at the beginning of 2013 on initiative of UNOCI and the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation, called "Brown-Bag-Lunch" (BBL). The conference venue at the end of each month is the headquarters of ONUCI. This series of events can be rated as pointing the way for the immensely difficult transition of a still fragile developing country towards a stabilized transformational society. Apart from ONUCI and the German foundation the local NGO CERAP (Centre de Recherche et d'Action pour la Paix) also appears as co-organiser. The participants are the political parties as well as civil society organisations and human rights groups, meanwhile the Parliament as well. When I asked during one event at the beginning of 2013 why the uniformed security organs were not attending it was pointed out to me that so far no sufficient trusting relationship between the individual units of the armed forces had evolved. The police and the military would first have to improve their own structures. The

events during the first half-year 2013 were concerned with broadly defined topics, a.o., the reform of the army. On this subject, the Deputy Chief of the general staff, General Sékou Touré spoke. The General Secretary of the National Security Council, Alain Donwahi, explained the first plannings concerning the SSR process. The Chairman of the Defence Committee in the Parliament, Oulatta Gaho, also took part. Further important topics were the justice reform, the gender problem in the security sectors and the possibilities of democratic control of the security sectors.

The political will for transforming the Ivory Coast through democracy and rule of law towards better conditions seems to be there, as President Quattara also pointed out on the occasion of his visit to German Chancellor Merkel on the 16.01.2013 in Berlin. The realization necessitates an arduous and long-drawn-out process of reconciliation and rebuilding of institutions. Although the complicated conflict situation including ethnic, regional, religious, economic and personal aspects is calm at the surface but not as yet concluded. There are still reports about violations of human rights perpetrated by the government itself. Violations of human rights by actors close to the government are not resolutely enough stopped. These "irregularities" were visible throughout our visit in the numerous roadblocks by armed soldiers who coerced passers-by into giving them money for a "petit cafe". It is not easy for an observer with military occupational experience to understand why on the one hand such a self-degrading presentation of soldiers is tolerated and why, on the other hand, the population is constantly expected to suffer such an obvious lack of discipline in the army.

Instead of driving the reconciliation forward, the government ordered military units in autumn 2012 to randomly arrest young men from residential areas generally inhabited by Gbagbo supporters. They were taken to military barracks on military trucks without any legal procedure whatsoever. After having been tortured and without having been adequately cared for, the prisoners' release could then be paid for by their relatives days afterwards. In December 2012 the well-known opposition politician Mamadou Koulibaly wrote an open letter to the Chief of general staff in which he protested against the occupation of his farm by ca. 50 soldiers with Kalashnikovs who had searched his property (in vain) for arms and narcotics. Koulibaly wrote: "The army does not have the role to terrorize my parents and employees but to defend the country's borders." Here, a central weakness

of the Ivorian security becomes clear: The various units of especially the army have still not been integrated into a uniform troupe with a common command structure. Abuse of power by individual units can thus be explained. Hence the decision of the government appears appropriate to appoint one representative of both opposing sides to the military leadership posts at the different levels. However, for the consolidation of a uniform command structure trust is needed and trust needs time. Only if this has been achieved can be prevented that individual groups of uniformed persons do as they please without having to face the consequences.

The situation of the Ivory Coast regarding foreign policy and home affairs will still be "up in the air" for a long time. A speedy modernization of institutions and fundamental political attitudes is not on the horizon. But the will to modernize is perceptible in large parts of the elites , as well as the indispensable "ownership" for the reform of the justice- and security sector. Patience and unobtrusive support are needed from the international community and from friendly countries.

Reforms of the justice- and security ssetor, so it says in the basic documents of the OECD and the UN, are very labour-intensive, distinctly sensitive and take a long time. With this in mind, it could not seriously be expected that the government of President Quattara would be able to achieve the impossible within two years. Nevertheless, a large part of the population expects, as does the international community, that internal peace will finally be within reach. The international community should approach this goal, as before, with patience and be understanding of the precarious situation in the Ivory Coast but not without reminding the government in background talks of the continuation of the SSR process.

Especially we Germans should also not forget that a stable situation of internal and external peace in Central Europe only became possible in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century after two terrible world wars. We have paid a high price for peace and functionality of the security structures in our country. The Ivorians also deserve a life in full human security and our support on the way to it.

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