

Langer, Arnim

**Working Paper**

## Côte d'Ivoire's elusive quest for peace

Bath Papers in International Development and Wellbeing, No. 11

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

Centre for Development Studies (CDS), University of Bath

*Suggested Citation:* Langer, Arnim (2010) : Côte d'Ivoire's elusive quest for peace, Bath Papers in International Development and Wellbeing, No. 11, University of Bath, Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Bath

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/128107>

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**BATH**

bath papers in international development

ISSN 2040-3151

**Côte d'Ivoire's elusive  
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Working Paper no. 11  
December 2010



Bath Papers in International Development  
A working paper series of the  
Centre for Development Studies, University of Bath  
<http://www.bath.ac.uk/cds/>

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Published by:  
The Centre for Development Studies  
University of Bath  
Claverton Down  
Bath, BA2 7AY, UK  
<http://www.bath.ac.uk/cds/>

ISSN 2040-3151

Series Editor:  
Graham K. Brown



bath papers in international development

# CÔTE D'IVOIRE'S ELUSIVE QUEST FOR PEACE

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*Arnim Langer, University of Leuven*

**Bath Papers in International Development no. 11**

**December 2010**



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# Côte d'Ivoire's elusive quest for peace

Arnim Langer

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# **Côte d'Ivoire's elusive quest for peace**

**Arnim Langer**

## **Abstract**

The October 2010 elections in Côte d'Ivoire were supposed to bring lasting peace to a country that has been split since a rebellion of predominantly northern forces in September 2002. Instead, disagreement over the electoral results has pushed the country back to the brink of civil war. The Ivorian electoral debacle adds to the long list of failed peace agreements and initiatives that have been undertaken since the 2002 violent rebellion. The main objective of this paper is to analyse why restoring peace and stability in Côte d'Ivoire has proved to be so difficult. On the basis of this analysis, it will be shown that the Ivorian electoral debacle should not have come as a surprise because the same dynamics and factors that were responsible for the failure of previous peace agreements and initiatives are again at play.

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## 1 Introduction

In the light of its economic and political achievements, international observers often referred to Côte d'Ivoire in the 1960s and 1970s as an 'oasis of peace' and an 'African miracle'. However, at the beginning of the 1980s, the Ivorian success 'model' slowly started to unravel; first economically and then politically. The sad low point of Côte d'Ivoire's political and economic demise was the emergence of a violent conflict with clear ethno-regional undercurrents in September 2002. The conflict started on 19 September 2002 when a group of soldiers with predominantly northern origins attempted to overthrow the regime of President Laurent Gbagbo. While the coup d'état failed to remove the Gbagbo regime, by the end of September 2002, the insurgents firmly controlled the northern part of the country and referred to themselves as the *Mouvement Patriotique pour la Côte d'Ivoire* (MPCI).

The military intervention by the French forces (the former colonial power) intervened militarily within three days after the eruption of the violence, abated large-scale fighting. Yet, despite France's rapid intervention, several thousands of people have died and over 700,000 fled their homes during the course of the conflict. While the deployment of a large contingent of international peacekeeping forces successfully prevented the resumption of large-scale, open warfare, serious flare-ups of fighting between government and rebel forces as well as between both of them and the international forces was common in the period between 2003 and 2007.

While the adversaries have signed a string of peace agreements since the violent rebellion erupted in September 2002, a durable resolution to the conflict remains elusive. Moreover, the November 2010 presidential elections, which were supposed to constitute a major step in the process of restoring peace and stability to Côte d'Ivoire, have instead pushed the country back to the brink of civil war. Indeed, the disagreement over the election outcome has resulted in a standoff with each side declaring their presidential candidate winners.

The main objective of this paper is to analyse why restoring peace and stability in Côte d'Ivoire has proved to be so difficult. On the basis of this analysis, it will be shown that the Ivorian electoral debacle should not have come as a surprise to the international community because the same dynamics and factors that were responsible for the failure of previous peace agreements and initiatives are clearly at play in this situation.

To explore the dynamics and roots of the conflict, the next section will discuss the causes of the violent conflict in Côte d'Ivoire. This will be followed by an analysis of the main peace agreements and initiatives that have been undertaken since the outbreak of the Ivorian crisis in September 2002. In Section four I will analyse the underlying dynamics and arising complexities in the settlement processes.

## 2 From Ivorian miracle to violent conflict

Côte d'Ivoire is a multiethnic country with approximately 40 different ethnic groups that can be grouped into five larger socio-cultural or ethno-linguistic groups: Akan, Krou, Northern Mandé, Southern Mandé and Voltaic. While the largest ethnic group is the Akan, with approximately 42 per cent of the population, the two northern ethnic groups, Northern Mandé and Voltaic, together constitute about 34 per cent of the population (see Table 1). Moreover, migration and

immigration have kept population dynamics and political relations constantly changing. For instance, although Northern Mandé and Voltaic originate from the north, extensive north–south migration both in the colonial and postcolonial period, have their proportion growing in the south. In addition, immigration promoted by the French colonial administration and perpetuated by the postcolonial regime resulted into a large inflow of people from the Upper Volta, today's Burkina Faso, to work in the cocoa and coffee plantations in the south, initially as forced labourers.

**Table 1: Ethnic composition of the Ivorian population (percent), 1975–1998**

	1975	1988	1998
Akan	42.5	41.8	42.1
Krou	15.9	14.6	12.7
Southern Mandé	12.0	10.7	10.0
Northern Mandé	13.6	15.9	16.5
Voltaic	15.4	16.3	17.6

Source: République de Côte d'Ivoire (2001: p.68)

Note: Ethnic composition shown here taken into account only Ivorian nationals

Although the French Assembly abolished forced labour in 1946, Côte d'Ivoire continued to attract large numbers of immigrants from neighbouring countries still in demand to work the plantations. The country's first president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, promoted the influx of foreign workers by introducing liberal landownership laws, under the slogan 'the land belongs to those that develop it' (Gonin, 1998: 174). As a result, the origin of a large proportion of the people in Côte d'Ivoire, in both the current and previous generations, is from outside the country. In 1998, such 'foreigners' accounted for over 4 million people or roughly 25 per cent of the population (see Table 2). About 50 per cent of these 'foreigners' or 'non-Ivorians' were born in Côte d'Ivoire. The ethno-cultural and religious background of these non-Ivorians is very similar to that of the northern ethnic groups.

**Table 2: Country of origin of foreign population, 1998 and 2000**

Country of origin	1988		1998	
	Population	%	Population	%
Burkina Faso	1,564,650	51.5	2,238,548	56.0
Mali	711,135	23.4	792,258	19.8
Guinea	225,845	7.4	230,387	5.7
Ghana	167,783	5.5	133,221	3.3
Other countries	369,624	12.1	605,633	15.0
Total	3,039,037	100.0	4,000,047	100.0

Source: République de Côte d'Ivoire (2001: p.71).

Religion, one of the dividing lines in Côte d'Ivoire exhibits a clear influence of immigration. As Table 3 indicates, although the number of Muslims and Christians is roughly equal, the vast majority (70%) of non-Ivorians is Muslim. Their presence in Côte d'Ivoire tilts the religious balance in favour of Muslims at the national level. The Muslim/Christian balance becomes 39/30 if foreigners are included.

**Table 3: Religious composition (percent), 1998**

	Only Ivorian nationals	Including foreigners
Christians	33.9	30.4
Muslims	27.5	38.6
Traditionalists	15.3	11.9
No religion	20.7	16.7

Source: Data based on République de Côte d'Ivoire (2001: p.60)

Significantly, religious differences appear to some extent to reinforce ethno-regional differences. Table 4 shows the religious composition of the five major ethnic groups. While the Akan and Krou are predominantly Christian, the northern ethnic groups, Voltaic and Northern Mandé, are mostly Muslim. Consequently, almost 50 per cent of the people in the north (comprised of the Savanes, Vallée du Bandama, Zanzan, Denguélé, Worodougou and Bafing regions) are Muslim. This percentage increases to 63 per cent, if one excludes the most southern northern region, Vallée du Bandama. Although the north is predominantly Muslim, about 70 per cent of all Muslims live in the south. In 1998, if one includes foreign nationals, Muslims were the largest religious group in the South with about 35 per cent of the population against 34 per cent of Christians. Excluding foreign nationals, however, Christians were the largest religious group. While these figures clearly suggest a more nuanced picture of the religious north-south divide, the general perception that exists in the country (as well as in the international media for that matter) is that the North is basically Muslim and the South is Christian.

**Table 4: Religious affiliation by ethnicity (percent), 1998**

Religion	Akan	Krou	N. Mandé	S. Mandé	Voltaic
Christians	51.5	52.2	1.4	23.1	16.4
Muslims	5.0	2.6	95.6	5.6	44.7
Traditionalists	18.7	7.5	0.6	30.1	19.2
Without religion	21.7	31.7	1.9	38.4	18.7

Source: République de Côte d'Ivoire (2001: p.67)

Note: The data shown here only take into account Ivorian nationals.

## 2.1 Post-independence politics

When Côte d'Ivoire became independent in August 1960, a one-party system was adopted. The Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) was founded by the Baoulé tribal chief Houphouët-Boigny in 1946. This party had an uninterrupted control of the Ivorian political system for over three decades between 1960 and 1999. Houphouët-Boigny was elected the first president of Côte d'Ivoire and remained in power until his death in December 1993. During the first 20 years of his presidency, Côte d'Ivoire achieved remarkable economic growth with real annual GDP growth rates of more than 7 per cent. In addition to its strong economic progress, Côte d'Ivoire also benefited from a relatively stable political environment in these years. As mentioned in the introduction, because of the country's impressive economic and political achievements, Côte d'Ivoire was often referred among international observers as 'Le Miracle Africain'.

While the favourable economic environment contributed significantly to Côte d'Ivoire's relatively stable political environment, other factors also played a crucial role. Some scholars have stressed the importance of Houphouët-Boigny's approach to politics, which was characterized by a culture of dialogue, compromise, rewards, punishment, forgiveness and reintegration (see, for example, Akindes, 2004). Another crucial aspect of Houphouët-Boigny's approach –or what Akindes (2004) has termed 'Le modèle Houphouétiste'– was his use of economic incentives to co-opt actual and prospective political challengers into the system (Zartman and Delgado, 1984). The robustness of the economy provided sufficient resources for Houphouët-Boigny's patronage system to defuse most sources of discontent (Gyimah-Boadi and Daddieh, 1999). Houphouët-Boigny was, however, uncompromising about the need to maintain order and stability in order to secure national economic development (*ibid.*). His willingness to use force in order to secure such order and stability was demonstrated on several occasions, most notably during the secessionist revolt of the Sanwi king in December 1969 as well as during the Guébié crisis in November 1970. Another factor which contributed to maintaining political stability was Houphouët-Boigny's 'system of ethnic quotas', which was aimed at establishing a balance between different regions and ethnic groups within the main state institutions (Bakery, 1984).

While Côte d'Ivoire's outward-oriented agricultural development strategy (with cocoa and coffee as its two main exports crops) produced impressive economic results in the 1960s, the 'model' had an endogenous tendency to favour the southern areas over the northern areas because most plantations and other natural resources were located in the South. Subsistence farming was the main economic activity in the North. From the late 1960s, however, the Ivorian government started promoting commercial food production in the North in order to reduce food imports (which constituted a serious drain on the country's foreign currency reserves) (Hinderink and Tempelman 1979). The more active role of the Ivorian state in the northern economy helped to reduce the socioeconomic inequalities between the north and south in the period 1965 and 1975 (see Table 5).

Table 5: Income per capita by region (constant 1965 CFA franc), 1965 and 1975

	Monetary income per capita			Total income (including auto-consumption)		
	1965	1975	% change	1965	1975	% change
Abidjan	33,600	47,100	40.2	60,500	66,000	9.1
South	19,500	26,000	33.3	31,500	40,100	27.3
Central West	10,000	18,300	83.0	19,000	31,700	66.8
West	5,800	9,000	55.2	13,400	17,900	33.6
North	3,800	8,900	134.2	16,000	22,800	42.5
Center	12,800	13,600	6.3	28,100	30,100	7.1
East	10,800	9,400	-13.0	23,400	24,300	3.8
Southwest	6,500	8,800	35.4	15,300	17,800	16.3
Côte d'Ivoire	11,000	15,300	39.1	23,200	29,200	25.9

Source: Bresson (1980: p.78)

Despite the reduction of inequalities between the North and South, the north-south divide persisted. For instance, in 1975, income per capita in the north was about 22 per cent lower than the national average and as much as 65 per cent lower than in Abidjan. These sharp inequalities increasingly threatened Côte d'Ivoire's ethno-regional harmony (Gyimah-Boadi and Daddieh, 1999).

In response to the increasing discontent of the people in the northern regions regarding their relative socioeconomic situation, Houphouët-Boigny made several highly publicized visits to the north in 1974. During these visits, he promised the local population increased public investment in order to attain equality with the south. The president fulfilled his promise by initiating the Programme du Nord, which allocated about CFAF20 billion to investment programs in the north (Den Tuinder, 1978). Another measure was 'to alternate Ivorian independence festivities between Abidjan and the different prefecture capitals' (Gyimah-Boadi and Daddieh, 1999: 137). The massive facelifts that these capitals would undergo in preparation for this event created a considerable number of jobs.

However, public investment in the north was curtailed by economic hardships hitting the country at the end of the 1970s. The sharp decline in the commodity prices of coffee and cocoa clearly exposed Côte d'Ivoire's vulnerability to international commodity markets. Throughout the 1980s, the economy was stagnant and the socioeconomic north-south divide remained as severe in the mid-1980s as it had been in the mid-1970s.

The global decline in commodity market in the 1980s not only substantially reduced the standard of living in the country, but also had its toll on the political relations. In particular, due to the sharp decline in government revenue, the Houphouët-Boigny regime was no longer able to provide cosy state jobs to large numbers university students, which in turn led to serious student protests. Indeed the Houphouët-Boigny patronage system was seriously undermined by a declining resource base. More importantly economic problems exacerbated tensions between indigenous and immigrants on the one hand and between migrants from the North and locals in the affluent south. Since in the south a considerable population has migrated from the north,

the communal tensions were increasingly perceived as a conflict between north and south. As Dembélé (2003: 36, my translation) argues, 'the communal conflict between north and south was mainly related to land issues sharpened by the presence of too many migrants from the centre and north in the rural economy in the south-western regions and the urban economy in the south.'

In April 1990, the economic crisis resulted in major demonstrations by the still officially illegal political parties. In an attempt to restore social and political stability, in May 1990 Houphouët-Boigny decided to abandon one-party rule and legalize a multi-party system. The first competitive presidential elections took place in October 1990. Houphouët-Boigny won the elections with a considerable margin against the main opposition party candidate, Laurent Gbagbo. However, the most significant aspect of these elections was the introduction of ethno-nationalism and xenophobia into Côte d'Ivoire's electoral politics. In particular, during the 1990 elections, Côte d'Ivoire's main opposition party, Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI – Ivorian Popular Front), initiated a political campaign around the message that 'the PDCI was a partial regime which had systematically favoured the interests of particular Ivorian ethnic groups – Baoulé and groups from the north – and of foreigners' (Crook, 1997: 222). While ethnicity had occasionally been used in the Houphouët-Boigny era as a way of naming and shaming certain individuals and groups that were going against the will of the regime in charge, it had never been explicitly used to mobilize people in an electoral contest.

In an important change, Alassane Ouattara – a Malinké, a subgroup of the Northern Mandé ethnic group – was appointed to the newly created position of prime minister following the elections. As a former African director at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and governor of the Central Bank for West African States (BCEAO), Ouattara was chosen mainly for his economic management skills and international reputation. However, by appointing Ouattara as prime minister, 'the conflicts between the forest people from the south and the northerners in the land and economic sphere shifted to the political sphere' (Dembélé, 2003: 36, my translation). Although hardly surprising - given his old age (93 years) - the death of Houphouët-Boigny on 7 December 1993 was to radically transform Ivorian politics. Power struggles between the prospective political leaders contributed substantially to the disintegration of the Ivorian state a decade later. In accordance with the 1960 Constitution, Henri Konan Bédié, a Baoulé, succeeded Houphouët-Boigny for the remainder of his presidential term.

## **2.2 The post-Houphouët-Boigny period and the North-South divide**

Although the combination of several years of structural reforms and the 1994 CFA franc devaluation led to a significant recovery in economic growth, most people did not benefit from the economic recovery (see, for example, Azam, 2004). Discontents and ethnic tensions also built up particularly in the lead-up to the October 1995 presidential elections.

Growing northern consciousness was an important change that contributed to the escalation of ethnic tensions at the beginning of the 1990s. The distribution of an anonymous document called 'Le Charte du Grand Nord' (Charter of the North) in 1992 illustrated the changed attitudes of the north regarding the socio-political system in general and the Baoulé group in particular. The Charter 'called for fuller recognition of the Muslim religion [...], more efforts to reduce regional inequalities, greater political recognition of the north's political loyalty during the

upheavals of the 1980s and [...] an end to Baoulé nepotism in recruitment to public jobs' (quoted in: Crook, 1997: p.226).

Northern grievances and dissatisfaction were not limited to the economic and political sphere, but also had a 'cultural status' or religious dimension. The call for greater recognition of Islam in Côte d'Ivoire clearly illustrated this. While Côte d'Ivoire's 1960 constitution had a secular character, a direct consequence of Houphouët-Boigny's long stay in power as head of state was a growing blurring in perceptions of the separation of religion and state. Although northerners/Muslims were included in various state institutions, the construction of a Basilica in Yamoussoukro on Houphouët-Boigny's instructions in the late 1980s was perceived by many Muslims as a clear indication of the superior position given to Christianity (in particular Catholicism) in Côte d'Ivoire.

The emergence of a new opposition party, *Rassemblement des républicains* (RDR), in 1994, reflected a further split among Côte d'Ivoire's political elite. The RDR aimed to draw support from people with a northern and/or Muslim background, predominantly found among the Voltaic and Northern Mandé ethnic groups. Alassane Ouattara – working in Washington – would soon assume leadership of the RDR. The RDR posed a serious threat to the PDCI's electoral support in the north (Crook, 1997). In response, as Richard Crook notes, 'Bédié's initial strategy was familiar to any student of electoral politics: he stole the opposition's clothes, and adopted a policy of Ivorian nationalism, under the slogan of the promotion of "Ivoirité" (Ivorianness)' (Crook, 1997: p.227).

Although Bédié claimed that the concept of Ivoirité was solely aimed at creating a sense of cultural unity among all the people living in Côte d'Ivoire, it is widely recognized that it was introduced for a specific political reason: to prevent Alassane Ouattara (the RDR leader with northern origins) from participating in the presidential elections in 1995. Ivoirité changed the electoral code, requiring both parents of a presidential candidate to be Ivorian. The new 1995 electoral code further stipulated that the candidate himself must have lived in the country for the past five years. Consequently, Ouattara was effectively excluded from participating in the October 1995 presidential elections, which in turn disenfranchised an important part of the northern population. The introduction of the ideology of 'Ivoirité' had however an impact far beyond the political sphere because it led to a general erosion of northern Ivorians' social standing and cultural status, de facto making them secondary citizens in Côte d'Ivoire.

As a result of Ouattara's exclusion, the RDR boycotted the October 1995 presidential elections. The leader of the FPI Laurent Gbagbo also decided to boycott the elections, claiming that the electoral process had been manipulated. Due to the absence of his main rivals, Bédié won the October 1995 elections with a landslide. Until the coup d'état in December 1999, the two opposition parties RDR and FPI together formed the Front Républicain. In sharp contrast to Houphouët-Boigny, Bédié almost completely stopped the efforts to balance the different ethno-regional interests and parties, and started favouring people from his own ethnic group, the Baoulé (Dozon, 2000). This came to be termed as the 'baoulisation' of the state institutions.

The baoulisation of the political-administrative sector was extended to other sensitive sectors, including the military (Contamin and Losch, 2000). The ethnic tensions that stemmed from favouritism towards the Baoulé were compounded by general discontent in the armed forces



due to a gradual decline in their status during the 1990s, mainly arising from reduced expenditures following from the precarious financial and economic situation (Kieffer, 2000).

The grievances within the armed forces triggered a coup d'état in December 1999, initiated by a group of non-commissioned officers. The main grievance was failure of the government to pay them on their return from an international peacekeeping mission in Central Africa (Kieffer, 2000). This protest quickly turned into a large-scale mutiny, at which stage more senior officers got involved. Although the coup d'état appears to have originated initially from individual grievances, these grievances and fears of exclusion cannot be separated from what was happening in the rest of the society. As Kieffer argues, the opposition parties' discourse of exclusion and Baoulé domination of the Ivorian state is likely to have had an important impact on the attitudes of the young non-commissioned officers involved in the coup d'état (Kieffer, 2000). At the time of the coup d'état in December 1999, underrepresentation of the north in government was at the peak.

Following Bédié's removal from power, the military forces established the Comité national de salut public (CNSP), headed by General Gueï, a Yacouba - one of the ethnic groups belonging to the Southern Mandé ethnic group. In line with 'Le modèle Houphouétiste', Gueï initially promoted the ideals of national integration and reconciliation, and openly opposed the ideology of Ivoirité (Akindes, 2004). After negotiations between the various political parties and the military junta, a transitional government was installed on 4 January 2000. This transitional government had a very inclusive character with a reasonably fair distribution (in terms of relative demographic weights) of power among the major ethno-regional groups. However, after several months in office, Gueï's political objectives and strategy changed drastically. In contrast to his earlier statements, Gueï decided to participate in the next presidential elections. Further, without explicitly using the term, he also began to use the ideology of 'Ivoirité' in order to gain political support and exclude political opponents, in particular Alassane Ouattara and his RDR party (Akindes, 2004).

The presidential elections of October 2000 were marked by chaos and violence. Gueï's contentious victory sparked massive street demonstrations by FPI supporters as well as members of the security forces. The military forces supporting these demonstrations were mainly of northern origin (Banégas and Losch, 2002). The official results proclaimed by the national electoral commission stated that Laurent Gbagbo had won the elections with 59.4 per cent of the votes (Le Pape, 2002). Following the exclusion of their presidential candidate Alassane Ouattara for 'nationalité douteuse' (nationality in doubt), the RDR refused to recognize the legality of the results and demanded new elections. To support their demands, RDR supporters started to organize large-scale street protests, which led to violent confrontations with both the FPI supporters and security forces. This forced Gueï to flee the country paving the way for Laurent Gbagbo to assume the presidency.

Laurent Gbagbo originates from the western town of Gagnoa. He is a Bété, one of the ethnic groups of the Krou family. In line with his anti-Ouattara and anti-RDR and therefore anti-northern rhetoric, Gbagbo allocated most government positions in the January 2001 government to his own party, the FPI. Northerners were largely excluded from his government. Indeed, the northern underrepresentation in his first government was considerably worse than in any government of Bédié. This obviously aggravated the feelings of political exclusion among

the RDR supporters. Paradoxically, the same military forces that had toppled Gueï attempted to overthrow Gbagbo's regime in January 2001 (Banégas and Losch, 2002). However, the coup d'état failed and the military personnel involved were forced into exile.

Like his predecessors, Bédié and Gueï, Gbagbo wanted to change the ethnic composition of the military forces to favour his own ethnic group. In order to achieve this, Gbagbo planned to demobilize two contingents that predominantly consisted of soldiers who had been recruited during the brief reign of Gueï (Banégas and Losch, 2002). In response to the planned demobilization, these soldiers supported a mutiny which quickly turned into a more organized rebellion, which was led by officers that had gone into exile either because of the military purges during the Gueï regime or because of their involvement in the failed coup d'état in January 2001 (Banégas and Losch, 2002).

The violent conflict in Côte d'Ivoire started with simultaneous attacks against the military installations in Abidjan, Bouaké and Korhogo on 19 September 2002. By the end of September, the rebels firmly controlled the northern part of the country and were referring to themselves as the Mouvement Patriotique pour la Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI). The main grievances put forward by the insurgents related to the land ownership laws, the criteria of eligibility for presidential elections, the question of identity cards and the political domination of the north by south (Dembélé, 2003). Although the vast majority of its forces had a northern background, the MPCI claimed to have no specific ethnic, regional or religious affiliation.

### **3 From Linas-Marcoussis to the electoral debacle, 2003—2010**

Only days after the violence erupted, French military forces intervened in the conflict (in order to evacuate its nationals) and effectively stopped the rebel advance towards the de facto capital of the country, Abidjan. In the western part of the country, however, large-scale violence between rebel and government forces continued unabated. On 17 October 2002 there was a noticeable improvement in the security situation when the MPCI unilaterally decided to stop their offensive. The ECOWAS member states subsequently agreed to dispatch a peacekeeping force in order to oversee the ceasefire. France agreed to monitor the fragile ceasefire until the arrival of the ECOWAS forces. With a ceasefire in place, ECOWAS brought the conflict parties together in Togo. The peace negotiations in the Togolese capital, Lomé, constituted the starting point of the political and diplomatic efforts to resolve the Ivorian conflict, which will be focus of the next section.

The Lomé peace talks under auspices of ECOWAS started on 1 November and were expected to last for several weeks. Yet, on 11 November 2002, the rebels suspended their participation following the killing of Dr. Benôit Dacourey-Tabley, the younger brother of the MPCI external relations coordinator, Louis Dacoury-Tabley, by forces close to the Gbagbo regime. The assassination of Benôit Dacoury-Tabley was by no means an isolated case. In the months following the initiation of the rebellion, hundreds of people are estimated to have been murdered in Abidjan and other areas in the south-western part of the country by deaths squads composed of members of the state security forces and pro-government vigilante groups (see, for example, Amnesty International 18 December 2002; Human Rights Watch 2002; Human Rights Watch 2003; International Crisis Group 2003; Le Monde 7 February 2003). Most people that were killed belonged to the opposition parties or were presumed to support the insurgents.

At the end of November 2002, the Ivorian crisis was further complicated by the emergence of two new rebel groups in the western part of the country: Mouvement pour la Justice et la Paix (MJP) and Mouvement Populaire Ivoirien du Grand Ouest (MPIGO). The MPIGO came into existence with the capture of Danané, a town close to the Liberian border, on 28 November 2002. It has a strong affiliation with the Yacouba, an ethnic group predominantly found in western regions of Côte d'Ivoire and also in Liberia. The military leader of the movement, Félix Doh, killed in an ambush in April 2003, claimed that his movement had been set up to revenge the death of General Robert Gueï who had been killed in the rebellion in Abidjan. The MJP is a small rebel movement and is an offspring of the MPCI, with which it maintained very close relations. In December 2002, the three rebel movements formed a political coalition (with the MPCI as the dominant entity), which became known as the Forces Nouvelles (New Forces).

Attempts by ECOWAS to rekindle the Lomé peace talks were unsuccessful. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), 'divided by internal rivalries and petty quarrels and with no funds to support a peacekeeping force,' the ECOWAS leaders 'left France with little option but to take both the military and political roles more directly in hand' (International Crisis Group 2003: 27). However, the French diplomatic intervention was complicated from the outset because both the Ivorian government and rebel movements accused France of favouring the other side. The rebels blamed France for obstructing their advances towards Abidjan and San Pedro (a major port city), thereby preventing them from achieving an outright military victory, and the Ivorian government claimed that France favoured the rebels by not doing enough to help them defeat the insurgents. Some influential members of the ruling FPI-party even accused France of being behind the rebellion. However, Dominique de Villepin, then France's Minister of Foreign Affairs, dismissed these accusations and insisted that his country's military intervention had saved the Gbagbo regime and prevented the loss of many lives.

France decided to bring the main political parties and rebel movements together for peace negotiations in Linas-Marcoussis, a small town south of Paris. These negotiations lasted from 15-24 January 2003 and resulted in the signing of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement. Seven political parties and three rebel groups were invited to the talks: the FPI (i.e. the ruling party), *Rassemblement des Républicains* (RDR), *Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI) and *Union des Démocrates de Côte d'Ivoire* (UDCI), each had five delegates; the *Mouvement des Forces de l'Avenir* (MFA), the *Parti Ivoirien des Travailleurs de Côte d'Ivoire* (PIT), and the *Union Démocratique et Citoyenne* (UDCY), each had one delegate; the MPCI had five delegates, and the MJP and MPIGO each had two delegates.

The principal provision of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement was the creation of a Government of National Reconciliation, headed by a consensus prime minister and comprised of ministers designated by the parties in attendance at the negotiations. Seydou Diarra, a northerner with no particular political affiliation, became the new prime minister. It was further agreed that while President Gbagbo would remain in office until the presidential elections of October 2005, he had to delegate significant executive powers to the new prime minister who would be in charge of the implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement. Other provisions of the agreement included the revision of the existing procedures to identify Ivorian nationals and issue national identity documents, the reform of the Independent Electoral Commission, the revision of the rules of eligibility for the presidency, the revision of the Citizenship Code, the revision of the 1998 rural land ownership law, the demobilization of all forces recruited after 19 September

2002 and the establishment of an international follow-up/monitoring commission. According to the International Crisis Group, the 'Marcoussis accords not only made the rebel forces participants on an equal footing with the political parties, but disavowed Gbagbo's political program since coming to power' (International Crisis Group 2003: p.31).

Arguably the three most important and politically sensitive legal reforms envisaged under the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement dealt with the eligibility criteria for the presidency, the 1998 rural land ownership law and the citizenship code/naturalization bill. First, with regard to the rules of eligibility for the presidency, the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement stated that Article 35 of the Constitution of the Second Republic was to be amended in such a way that a person with an Ivorian father OR mother would be allowed to participate in the presidential and parliamentary elections. The proposed constitutional amendment was intended to reverse the changes made under Bédié and Gueï aimed at maintaining 'pure' Ivoirité and preventing Alassane Ouattara from participating in the presidential elections.

The second set of reforms focused on the 1998 rural landownership law, which had introduced citizenship as a precondition for owning land. The Linas-Marcoussis Agreement stipulated that this law had to be amended so that foreign landowners who acquired their land before 1998 would be able to pass on their holding rights to their heirs.

The third area of reform focused on the citizenship code. The 1961 Law on Ivorian Citizenship determined that all people who resided in Côte d'Ivoire at the time of independence had the right to obtain Ivorian citizenship. However, in 1972, the 1961 citizenship code was amended and from then on people who were not born in Côte d'Ivoire and who had not requested Ivorian citizenship in the preceding twelve years lost their citizenship rights. The Linas-Marcoussis Agreement stipulated that the Government of National Reconciliation was to introduce a naturalization bill which would give people who had not exercised their right to obtain Ivorian citizenship before the amendment of the citizenship code in 1972, the right to claim Ivorian citizenship retrospectively.

The signing of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement was 'welcomed' in Abidjan by four days of violent anti-French protests. The demonstrations were led by the militant pro-government youth organisations, known as the Alliance des Jeunes Patriotes pour le Sursaut National or simply the Jeunes Patriotes (Young Patriots). These 'patriotic' youth movements emerged after the rebellion of 19 September 2002 and initially managed to rally tens of thousands of people at pro-government demonstrations in Abidjan. While these rallies were at first attended by a wide cross-section of the population, 'the increasingly ultranationalist, xenophobic, and pro-FPI discourse very rapidly discouraged the participation of more moderate populations and militants from other parties' (Marshall-Fratani 2006: 30). Ruth Marshall-Fratani further notes that after a couple of months, the Young Patriots developed into 'urban militias forces working for the Gbagbo regime, charged with surveying the opposition. These youth became a very crucial source of information for the regime. With the backing of the regime they terrorized people in Abidjan, even assisting the "death squads" responsible for numerous disappearances and summary executions' (Marshall-Fratani, 2006).

While the FPI leadership portrayed the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement as an attack on Côte d'Ivoire's sovereignty, they also opposed the Agreement because they feared that the provision for naturalising immigrants born in the country before 1972 and by extension their children,

could substantially increase the electoral support for the RDR and its leader, Alassane Ouattara (International Crisis Group 2003). The naturalisation of large numbers of foreign immigrants could also undercut FPI promises to its south-western constituency that land held by foreigners was going to be returned to its original owners (Marshall-Fratani 2006). The FPI leadership therefore decided to block the full implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement.

On his return to Côte d'Ivoire on 27 January 2003, Gbagbo all but repudiated the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement by stating that the accords were only a set of proposals. He also refused to delegate executive powers to the consensus prime minister, claiming that it was unconstitutional. Throughout 2003, no real progress was made towards the implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement. The rebels' dissatisfaction with the lack of progress towards the implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement was shared by a number of opposition parties, in particular the PDCI, RDR, UDPCI and MFA. On 7 March 2004, these four opposition parties formed a coalition with the three rebel movements that became known as the 'G7' or 'Coalition des Marcoussistes'. Soon after the formation of this coalition, the Marcoussistes suspended their participation in the Government of National Reconciliation.

In an attempt to resolve this impasse, the conflict parties met in Accra at the end of July 2004. At this meeting, they not only reaffirmed their commitment to the legal reforms envisaged under the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, but also committed themselves to adopting these reforms before the end of August 2004. In addition, President Gbagbo committed himself to delegate significant executive powers to the consensus prime minister (in accordance with the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement). The rebels agreed to demobilize from 15th October 2004. In the wake of the Accra meeting, the Marcoussistes decided to rejoin the Government of National Reconciliation. Yet, political progress soon stalled again because the FPI parliamentary caucus blocked nearly all the envisaged legal reforms. Furthermore, President Gbagbo announced on 12 October 2004 that he would only submit the amended Article 35 to the National Assembly once the rebels had disarmed. In response, the rebel forces refused to meet the 15 October deadline to start disarming.

In November 2004, the Ivorian Air Force bombed the main rebel strongholds in the north, in the process killing nine French peacekeepers. In response France conducted a number of air strikes, which almost completely destroyed the Ivorian Air Force. This in turn provoked widespread anti-French protests in Abidjan and other major cities in the southern part of the country. The UN Security Council strongly condemned the actions of the Ivorian government and imposed an arms embargo on Côte d'Ivoire. It also made it clear that it would impose travel sanctions and freeze the financial assets of individuals who continued to obstruct the implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis and Accra Agreements (see UNSC Resolution 1572 of 15 November 2004).

Soon after the violent confrontation between the Ivorian government and French forces, a new mediation mission, headed by South African President Thabo Mbeki, began a series of meetings with the Ivorian conflict parties. With the encouragement of the South African-led mediation team, the FPI-controlled National Assembly adopted some of the legal reforms envisaged under the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement in late December 2004, most notably the amendment of Article 35 concerning the eligibility criteria for the presidency. But a new controversy arose when President Gbagbo announced that the amended Article 35 had to be endorsed by a national referendum. The Marcoussistes challenged Gbagbo's position and called upon the President to

use his discretionary powers to promulgate it. They also rejected the legal reforms of the Independent Electoral Commission and Citizenship Law for not being in conformity with the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement (UN Secretary General 18 March 2005). The persistence of violent clashes between the rebels and government forces in the western part of the country derailed the peace process.

In order to resolve the political deadlock in time for the presidential elections of October 2005, President Mbeki convened a meeting in Pretoria in April 2005. This resulted in the signing of the Pretoria Agreement on 6 April 2005. As part of this agreement, the parties agreed, among other things, to stop all violence immediately, to make further amendments to the composition, organization and functioning of the Independent Electoral Commission, and to invite the United Nations to assist in the organization of the elections. While the parties were unable to resolve their disagreements concerning the amendment of Article 35, they decided to accept President Mbeki's adjudication on this matter. On 26 April, in line with Mbeki's adjudication, President Gbagbo declared that he would use his special powers (conferred on him by article 48 of the Ivorian Constitution) to allow all candidates nominated by the political parties signatory to the Pretoria Agreement to participate in the forthcoming presidential elections (UN Secretary General 17 June 2005). In the weeks following the signing of the Pretoria Agreement, the Ivorian parties also agreed a new disarmament and demobilization timetable.

Yet, several disarmament deadlines slipped by as the rebels refused to start disarming. They continued to accuse Gbagbo of failing to implement the legal reforms envisaged under the Linas-Marcoussis and Pretoria Agreements. The two main opposition parties (i.e. RDR and PDCI) were also critical of some of the legal reforms that had been adopted after the signing of the Pretoria Agreement. In particular, the amendment of the law on the Independent Electoral Commission was criticized by the opposition parties for failing to establish the primacy of the Independent Electoral Commission over the National Institute of Statistics in the electoral process (UN Secretary General 26 September 2005). Both the opposition parties and rebels distrusted the National Institute of Statistics and feared that, without direct oversight of the Independent Electoral Commission, it would distribute voting cards in favour of Gbagbo supporters (IRIN 18 August 2005). The rebels and opposition parties were also critical of the revised Citizenship Law because it still deprived certain sections of the population of citizenship rights and it introduced new criteria, which had not been previously agreed upon (UN Secretary General 26 September 2005). Due to the persistence of these disagreements, the planned presidential elections of 30 October 2005 had to be postponed.

Realizing the danger of the power vacuum that would emerge once Gbagbo's mandate expired on 30 October 2005, the African Union (AU) proposed to extend the mandate of the sitting president for 12 months. The AU's proposal also envisaged the appointment of a new and more powerful prime minister charged with carrying out the disarmament and demobilization process, resolving the citizenship issue, and organizing presidential elections no later than 30 October 2006. On 21 October 2005, the UN Security Council endorsed the AU's proposals (see UNSC Resolution 1633 of 21 October 2005). After weeks of negotiations between the key political players, Charles Konan Banny replaced Seydou Diarra as prime minister on 7 December 2005.

Following the recommendation of the International Working Group on Côte d'Ivoire that the mandate of the National Assembly was not to be extended, violent anti-United Nations riots

erupted on 16 January 2006. The riots were led by the Young Patriots and paralyzed the southern part of the country for several days. At the same time, the FPI called for the departure of the French and UN peacekeeping forces, accusing them of supporting the rebels (Africa Research Bulletin 2006a). In response to the riots, the UN Security Council decided to impose a travel ban and asset freeze on two youth leaders, Charles Blé Goudé, the leader of the Young Patriots and Eugene Djué, the leader of *L'Union pour la Libération Totale de la Côte d'Ivoire* (Union for the Total Liberation of Côte d'Ivoire) (Africa Research Bulletin 2006c). Sanctions were also imposed on Martin Kouakou Fofié, a rebel commander in the north (Ibid.).

At the initiative of Prime Minister Banny, the main political leaders met in Yamoussoukro on 28 February 2006. At this meeting, the Ivorian leaders not only agreed a set of new procedures to identify Ivorian nationals and issue national identity documents, but also decided that the identification of Ivorian nationals and disarmament processes were to be conducted simultaneously. The identification programme was a key demand of the rebels who claimed that hundreds of thousands of first, second and third generation immigrants and northerners had been refused citizenship and had no voting/nationality papers or had them confiscated by the state security forces (Africa Research Bulletin 2006b). As part of the identification programme, mobile courts (deployed throughout the country) were to receive citizenship applications and determine those eligible for citizenship.

The identification programme came under fire from FPI supporters who claimed that the issuing of nationality certificates by mobile courts was unconstitutional. They also claimed that hundreds of thousands of foreigners were likely to obtain nationality documents fraudulently, which would enable them to vote for the opposition in the subsequent elections (Africa Research Bulletin 2006b). With the encouragement of the FPI leadership, the identification operation was disrupted by large numbers of Young Patriots, soon after the mobile courts commenced their work on 17 July 2006 (UN Secretary General 17 October 2006). In response the rebels suspended their cooperation in the disarmament process. With the peace process in deadlock again, the presidential elections scheduled to take place in October 2006 had to be postponed once more.

Although the UN Security Council had become disillusioned with Gbagbo's lack of commitment to the peace process, it had no alternative except to work with him. Gbagbo's mandate was extended for another year while the UN Security Council also decided to give more powers to Prime Minister Banny. In particular, in order to hold presidential elections by 30 October 2007, the Prime Minister was empowered to take all the necessary decisions by ordinances or decree-laws (see UNSC Resolution 1721 of 1 November 2006). In response to the UN Security Council's decision to boost the power of the prime minister, President Gbagbo decided to come up with his own peace initiative. On 19 December 2006, he publicly announced that he was prepared to hold direct talks with the New Forces. He stated that 'his initiative was aimed at finding a "home-grown" solution to the Ivorian crisis, as none of the solutions proposed by the international community had brought peace to the country' (UN Secretary General 8 March 2007: p.2). Representatives of Gbagbo and the New Forces began negotiations on 5 February 2007 in the Burkinabé capital, Ouagadougou. One month later, on 4 March 2007, President Gbagbo and the Secretary-General of the New Forces, Guillaume Soro, signed a new peace agreement that became known as the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement.

The Ouagadougou peace process differed in important ways from earlier peace initiatives. Firstly, none of the political opposition parties were invited to the talks and, secondly, for the first time President Gbagbo and Guillaume Soro held direct talks without the presence of an international mediator. Another important difference was that the negotiations were conducted over a period of month, while 'previous deals were rushed through and patched together in a matter of days under pressure from foreign countries' (The Economist 10 March 2007: 44). While the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement does not represent a break with the previous peace agreements or resolutions of the UN Security Council, it does provide a set of new approaches to the key issues, including the identification programme (aimed at issuing national identity-documents to those eligible); the disarmament of armed militias and rebel forces; the timing and organization of the elections; the presence of international forces; and, the composition of the power-sharing government (International Crisis Group 2007). With regard to the latter issue, an important move was that Guillaume Soro, the leader of the New Forces, was appointed prime minister of the new transitional government, which was formed as part of the agreement. Therefore, in contrast to earlier peace agreements, the responsibility of the implementation of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement was put in the hands of the main protagonists themselves.

Despite strenuous denials from both camps in the months following the signing of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement, the opposition press speculated that Gbagbo and Soro had agreed to form a secret alliance. Diplomatic sources in Abidjan interviewed by the ICG in April 2007 believed that the secret agreement entailed that the military and political leaders of the New Forces had 'received guarantees for their personal security and future and guarantees for the reintegration of their troops in exchange for the prime minister's active and passive political support for the presidential candidate Laurent Gbagbo' (International Crisis Group 2007: 15). Others claimed that the secret deal involves a trade-off between the identification process and the control over the organization of the elections (IRIN 29 June 2007).

The heads of state from the sub-region generally reacted positively to the signing of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement. One reason for their cautious optimism was that in addition to agreeing to hold elections within 10 months (a deadline that the conflict parties were not able to meet however), Gbagbo and Soro, the two key protagonists, had reached a compromise on the key issues of disarmament and identification. With regard to the identification of the population and the distribution of identity documents, they decided to simplify matters by combining the identification of Ivorian nationals and electors: 'Those on the electoral register will have the right to an identity card; to get on the register, a birth certificate is all you need' (Africa Research Bulletin 2007a: 17011). In order to issue duplicate birth certificates to all those entitled but without identity documents, they agreed to re-launch the mobile courts.

Furthermore, while the conflict parties agreed to disarm the urban militia which had emerged after the eruption of Ivorian crisis, they no longer foresaw the complete disarmament and demobilization of the rebel forces. Instead Gbagbo and Soro decided to integrate the rebel forces (or at least a substantial number of them) into a new national army, headed by an Integrated Command Centre composed of an equal number of officers from each side. The conflict parties also agreed to dismantle the UN-patrolled buffer zone, locally known as the 'zone of confidence'. In its place they decided to introduce 'a green line' of seventeen observation points, manned by international peacekeepers, who would be gradually replaced by mixed Ivorian patrols composed of an equal number of New forces and government troops. The



dismantling of the 'zone of confidence' was the first step towards the reunification of the rebel-controlled northern part and the government-controlled southern part.

The implementation of the Ouagadougou Agreement got off to a good start with the formation of the new transitional Government, the establishment of the joint military command, and some progress towards the dismantling of the 'zone of confidence'. However, on 29 June 2007, the Ouagadougou peace process was seriously rocked when Prime Minister Guillaume Soro's aircraft was attacked in the northern rebel stronghold of Bouaké. While Soro himself emerged unharmed, four of his travel companions were killed. Although some sources speculated on the involvement of two of Soro's senior commanders (in particular Chérif Ousmane and Zacharia Koné), the strongest suspicion fell on Ibrahim Coulibaly, one of the masterminds of the rebellion of 19 September 2002 (see, for example, *Jeune Afrique L'Intelligent* 8 July 2007; *Le Monde* 3 July 2007; *Le Patriote* 2 July 2007; *The Economist* 21 July 2007). Regardless of whether or not Ibrahim Coulibaly was behind the attack on Soro, the signing of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement deepened the existing differences and tensions between the leaders of the New Forces (International Crisis Group 2007).

Political tensions also increased as a result of the termination of the mandate of the High Representative for Elections (HRE) by the UN Security Council on 16 July 2007. While the underlying reasons behind this decision remain unclear, most observers agree that it was a significant concession to President Gbagbo who had demanded the elimination of this post two months earlier (IRIN 18 July 2007). Indeed, 'for some observers the resolution was nothing less than a capitulation to President Gbagbo who has often denounced international envoys in Côte d'Ivoire as meddlers in his country's internal affairs' (Africa Research Bulletin 2007b: 17152). While the responsibilities for monitoring the electoral process were transferred to the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), the opposition parties were fiercely opposed to the decision to remove the HRE and expressed serious concerns that this action might have a negative impact on the transparency and fairness of the next elections.

From October 2007, the Ivorian peace process entered into more quiet waters and in particular in the first half of 2008, some noticeable progress was made towards the implementation of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement. Thus, for instance, at the beginning of July 2008, 627,923 duplicate birth certificates had been issued as part of the identification programme; the conflict parties had finalized the modus operandi for the issuing of national identity cards and the voter registration process; and they had made some progress in preparation for the national elections (UN Secretary General 10 July 2008). The overall security situation had also improved considerably (despite several violent protests by quartered New Forces combatants over non-payment of their allowances), and consequently 16 out of the 17 observation posts along the green line were removed by the beginning of July 2008.

However, in contrast, very little progress was made with respect to the disarmament and dismantling of the militia and rebel forces and the creation of a new unified army in 2008. The main stumbling block was the continued disagreement between the Gbagbo and Soro camps on the ranks and numbers of the rebel forces to be integrated into the new national army (UN Secretary General 10 July 2008). The reunification of the country and the reinstatement of state authority in the rebel-controlled north was also not moving as planned. Voter registration process was seriously disrupted by violent attacks at registration centres by pro-government

youth movements. As a result, on 11 November 2008, President Gbagbo announced that the elections (scheduled to take place on 30 November) had to be postponed once again. After months of delay, the Ivorian government announced on 15 May 2009 that the long-overdue presidential elections would now take place on 29 November 2009.

In 2009, the conflict parties made some progress towards the implementation of certain key aspects of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement, including the completion of the identification and voter registration operations on 30 June 2009, and the beginning of the compilation of the provisional electoral list (UN Secretary General 29 September 2009). However, progress towards the implementation of other crucial aspects of the Agreement, such as the disarmament of former combatants of the New Forces and the dismantling of the militias, the reunification of Ivorian security and defence forces the effective deployment of State administration throughout the country, remained very slow (Ibid.). On 11 November 2009, President Gbagbo announced that the elections had to be delayed once more (for the sixth time) because the electoral list was not yet ready. Due to renewed tensions and disagreements among the government and opposition parties, it would take until early 2010 for a new elections date to be set; i.e. 31 October 2010.

The voter registration process was marred by contentions. President Gbagbo accused the chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission, Robert Mambe, of inflating the voter list by 429,000 people believed to be non-Ivorian. Opposition parties claimed that Gbagbo merely aimed to deregister anybody who would not vote for him. Tensions between the Government and opposition parties rose further when Gbagbo decided to dissolve the Independent Electoral Commission on 12 February 2010. In the wake of this decision, the opposition parties decided to leave the Government of National Unity. It was only after Gbagbo appointed a new Independent Electoral Commission with an opposition party member as its chair that the opposition parties returned in the government. In order to satisfy the concerns of the Gbagbo supporters regarding the manipulation of the electoral roll, the parties agreed that the nationality of 850,000 people on the electoral list was going to be double-checked. This special verification process started on 20 July 2010 and ended on 2 August. No major changes were made to the electoral list on the basis of this operation.

With the decision to postpone the disarmament of the rebels and the dismantling of the militia forces pending elections, the first round of the presidential elections went ahead on 31 October. Laurent Gbagbo scored 38% of the vote, Alassane Ouattara, 32% and Konan Bédié 25%. Since none of the contestants reached 50% of the vote a run-off between Ouattara and Gbagbo was necessary to determine the next president of Côte d'Ivoire. According to the Independent Electoral Commission, Ouattara had won this run-off with 54% of the vote against 46% for Gbagbo. However, Gbagbo claimed that there had been electoral fraud in the North and rejected the results. The Constitutional Court, which is headed by key ally of Gbagbo, decided to annul some of the results in the North, thereby giving Gbagbo a majority of the vote. The Constitutional Court subsequently inaugurated Gbagbo as the new president. Disgruntled, Ouattara swore himself in as president a couple of hours later. The international community has declared the elections by-and-large free and fair, and has supported uniformly Ouattara's claim to the presidency. In contrast, the Ivorian military supports Gbagbo's claim to the presidency. At the time of writing (20 December), the international community is still trying –so far unsuccessfully- to get Gbagbo to renounce his claim to the presidency and hand over power to

Ouattara. The next section will show that Gbagbo and his associates have good reasons to want to hold to power, and they therefore are unlikely to give in to international pressure easily.

## 4 Obstacles to peace in Côte d'Ivoire

More than eight years after the emergence of the violent conflict, Côte d'Ivoire remains a divided country. Moreover, following the electoral debacle a return of violence can no longer be excluded. An important question we need to ask here is why the Ivorian conflict parties have not been able to find a durable resolution to the conflict. In order to answer this question, I will use two important explanatory concepts from the conflict literature. The first concept is the presence of a security dilemma. This concept has its origins in the international relations literature where it was originally defined as a situation where one state's actions to improve its security are misperceived by another state as offensively motivated. The security measures taken by the second state in response are in turn perceived by the first state as threatening (see Herz 1950 and Butterfield 1951). Each state's behaviour is therefore seen by the other state as threatening. Since the mid-1990s, it has been increasingly recognized that the concept of security dilemma is also extremely useful for explaining and understanding the violent interaction between different ethnic groups or communities within states (see, for example: Hartzell 1999; Posen 1993; Walter 1997).

Caroline Hartzell is one the foremost authors who has hypothesized that security dilemmas can pose a problem for ending civil war: 'Ending a civil war calls for the reconstruction of central authority and the exercise of that authority by the state vis-à-vis society. The state, not rival groups, must now be vested with a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, must reconstitute political power and enforce rules for the management of conflict, and must make decisions regarding the distribution of resources. Yet, it is precisely these dimensions of state power that raise the spectre of the security dilemma for groups in conflict. Accustomed to providing for their own security during the course of civil war, groups in a divided society must now be concerned about the impact that the state's use of force, control of power, and regulation of economic resources will have on their security. More specifically, parties to the conflict wonder what guarantee they have that the national army and police forces, particularly if controlled by an opposing group, will not be used against them once they surrender their arms and disband' (Hartzell 1999: 5). Civil war opponents usually have three major security-related concerns when seeking to end a conflict through negotiations: that their opponent may gain control of the coercive apparatus of the new state; that their opponent may monopolize political power in the new state; and, that their opponent may gain an economic advantage in the new state (Hartzell, 1999).

In order to address these three major security-related concerns in negotiations, protagonists aim to construct institutions that balance power among the competing groups. However, the security dilemma may prevent conflict parties from arriving at a mutually acceptable or 'fair' power-sharing agreement. Conflicting parties may not be willing to embrace power-sharing practices because they think that this interferes with their objective of achieving a comprehensive military victory and with the option of total power which is sometimes offered by competitive elections (Sisk 1996; Sisk and Reynolds 1998; Spears 2000). In addition, even if conflict parties have agreed a power-sharing arrangement, it often fails because of the general

difficulties of individuals and groups cooperating on an ongoing basis after years of fighting and demonizing one and another (Sisk 1996; Sisk and Reynolds 1998; Spears 2000; Walter 2002).

In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, it appears that the security dilemma-logic is particularly useful for explaining the behaviour of the rebel forces, who refused to demobilize as long as the legal and political reforms envisaged under the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement had not been adopted and free and fair elections had been held. The New Forces feared that if they laid down their arms before the envisaged reforms had been implemented, the Gbagbo regime would continue to disenfranchise important sections of the northern population and to exclude the northern leader of the RDR, Alassane Ouattara, from participating in the next presidential elections. The opposition parties were similarly concerned that Gbagbo might manipulate the elections in order to stay in power. The country's powerful executive presidential system complicated matters in this respect because it basically turns the presidential elections into a winner-takes-all contest (see Linz 1990). The rebels' reluctance to demobilize was also increased by personal security concerns. These concerns were undoubtedly enhanced by the various attempts by the Young Patriots to attack the rebel ministers as well as the numerous killings of suspected rebel and opposition parties' supporters in Abidjan and other parts of the Southwest by death squads linked to the government. Gbagbo's reluctance to accept his defeat in the recent elections will surely have strengthened the rebels' mistrust towards the Gbagbo regime and will make them even more hesitant to demobilize any time soon. The fact that the Ivorian military is behind Gbagbo makes matters worse in this respect.

The second concept that might explain the Ivorian debacle is the presence of spoilers. In his seminal article *Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes*, Stephen Stedman defined spoilers as 'leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview, and interests, and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it' (Stedman 1997: 5, emphasis added). He further argued that 'spoilers exist only when there is a peace process to undermine, that is, after at least two warring parties have committed themselves publicly to a pact or have signed a comprehensive peace agreement' (Stedman 1997: 7). However, Stedman's definition of spoilers is too narrow in at least two ways. First, spoilers do not only come into existence once two or more conflict parties have committed themselves to a peace settlement, but they can also stand in the way of reaching such a formal or informal agreement in the first place. Second, in addition to using violence, spoilers often use non-violent means in order to disrupt peace processes.

On the basis of the broader definition of spoiling behaviour, a diverse range of spoilers can be identified in Côte d'Ivoire. While numerous rebel commanders displayed 'spoiling' behaviour at different times in the peace process, Gbagbo and his associates were the most powerful spoilers. The main reason why they obstructed the Linas-Marcoussis peace process was that it threatened their positions of power, and they had good reasons to want to hold to that. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, as elsewhere, political power is not only valued for itself, but also because it provides access to the extremely lucrative state patronage networks. Because transparency and accountability of the disbursement of public funds worsened dramatically during the course of the Ivorian conflict, having control of the state became even more lucrative. Many influential political actors 'found that war serves as an excellent means of enrichment, and they may be ill-served by the restoration of peace and security' (International Crisis Group 2004: 4). Because of

the sharp increase in oil revenues from 2002, state resources increased significantly and consequently state patronage networks became more lucrative.

Another reason why Gbagbo and his associates as well as some high-ranked rebel commanders and military leaders were determined to hold on to power has to do with the possibility that some of them could have to face the International Criminal Court (ICC) for their part in the widespread human rights abuses and war crimes which were committed in the course of the conflict. In January 2005, it emerged that the United Nations had compiled a secret blacklist of 95 people who were suspected of human rights abuses and who could eventually face trial before the ICC in The Hague, Netherlands. Radio France Internationale reported at the time that key personalities on the blacklist included Simone Gbagbo (the president's wife), Charles Blé Goudé (the leader of the Young Patriots) and Guillaume Soro (the leader of the New Forces) (IRIN 31 January 2005).

Over the course of the peace process, Gbagbo has proved himself to be an excellent political manipulator. He successfully used a range of 'spoiling' strategies to delay and obstruct the Linas-Marcoussis peace process. Firstly as noted above, he refused to delegate any meaningful executive powers to the consensus prime minister. Secondly he tampered with the allocation of ministries by appointing his own nominees to the Defence and National Security ministry portfolios (despite the fact that the conflict parties had established a procedure to identify these two key ministers by consensus). Thirdly, he instructed (or at least failed to prevent) his supporters to attack the rebel ministers on several occasions. Thus, Gbagbo ratified the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, including the power-sharing arrangement, not to make peace but as part of a strategy to buy time in order to rebuild and expand his armed forces, with the goal of defeating the rebels at a later stage. This view is supported by Gbagbo's continuous efforts to block the adoption of the most important legal reforms envisaged under the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement as well as his military offensive in November 2004.

An important reason why Gbagbo and his associates were so successful in delaying and disrupting the Ivorian peace process was the international community's mishandling of the Ivorian crisis. Despite his public repudiation of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, his refusal to delegate significant executive powers to the consensus prime minister, and his efforts to rebuild and expand his armed forces, the international community failed to recognize early on that Gbagbo was strongly determined not to implement the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement. The international community mainly employed 'inducement' and 'socialization' strategies (Stedman 1997: 12) in order to deal with his obstruction of the implementation process which had no impact, given the strength of his determination. For too long the international community perceived Gbagbo as a politically weakened president who had no choice but to make peace, rather than a politician who was prepared to use any means necessary, including violence, to stay in power. When they finally got fed up with his continued obstruction of the peace process and were willing to take a more coercive stand, Gbagbo had already planned his next move in order to stay in control of the 'peace' process: initiating direct talks with the rebels to find a 'home-grown' solution to the conflict.

The direct talks between the government and the rebels resulted in the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement. While this agreement appears to alleviate some of the obstacles that contributed to the failure of previous peace agreements, in practice, largely the same issues, obstacles and

actors continue to obstruct the Ivorian peace process. Thus, for instance, the decision to integrate a substantial number of rebel forces into a new national army (instead of a complete demobilisation as agreed in previous agreements) arguably mitigated the security dilemma that the New Forces faced. Yet, the inability of the conflict parties to agree on the number of rebel forces to be included in the new unified army showed the continued sensitivity and importance of this issue. From Gbagbo's perspective, the Ouagadougou peace process was very successful because it kept him in power even though his mandate had ended in October 2005. In light of the increasing pressure from the international donor community, however, Gbagbo recognised that elections had to be held. But free and fair elections brought considerable risks with them.

As Horowitz (1985) has pointed out, in divided societies elections often basically amount to ethnic censuses: people vote for ethnic parties, and the largest ethnic group, or coalition of groups, wins. Gbagbo understood this logic. Given that his ethno-regional support base (i.e. mainly the Southwest) was too small to guarantee him an electoral victory, he did his best to delay the elections as long as possible. Given the stakes, losing power was not an option for Gbagbo and his associates and they therefore had to develop a post-elections strategy. The strategy they came up with -- claiming electoral fraud in the north and getting the Constitutional Court to proclaim Gbagbo as winner of the presidential elections- is a familiar one and is likely to work well for Gbagbo because he either stays in power or at the worst he can negotiate the terms under which he leaves office.

## 5 Some conclusions

The Ivorian conflict can be traced back to the power struggle that was unleashed in 1993 following the death of Felix Houphouët-Boigny, who had ruled the country from independence. In order to gain political support, political leaders started to use a discourse of ethno-nationalism and xenophobia under the slogan of Ivoirité (Ivorian-ness), and all three presidents who came after Houphouët-Boigny —i.e. Konan Bédié, Robert Gueï and Laurent Gbagbo— adopted strategies of political monopolization by their own group and ethnic favouritism in appointments and resource allocation. The northern population was the main victim of this ethno-nationalist turn in Ivorian politics. At the time of the northern rebellion, northerners were largely politically excluded, in addition to being seriously disadvantaged in socio-economic terms. This is clearly a dangerous socio-political combination because in these situations the excluded political elites not only have strong incentives to mobilize their supporters for violent conflict along ethnic lines, but also are likely to gain support among their ethnic constituencies quite easily (Langer, 2005). The military insurgency that started in September 2002 is therefore in many ways the result of the failure of the country's political elites to agree on a new set of formal and informal procedural and distributional rules aimed at containing the elite competition for political power.

Due to the intervention of the French forces, the northern rebellion was not successful in dislodging the Gbagbo regime. Envisaging what would have happened if France had not intervened and blocked the rebels' advance towards Abidjan is obviously speculative. But it seems not unlikely that without the French intervention at the end of September 2002, the Ivorian crisis might have been much shorter. As stated by Edward Luttwak: 'Although war is a great evil, it does have a great virtue: it can resolve political conflicts and lead to peace' (Luttwak

1999: 36). France's intervention led to a situation where there was no clear winner or loser. It forced the conflict parties to seek a negotiated solution to their differences, which, once agreed, proved extremely difficult to implement, as illustrated by the string of failed peace agreements.

By using the security dilemma and spoiler-concepts, the analysis has shown why finding and implementing a durable resolution to the conflict has proven to be so difficult. Moreover, these concepts helped to explain the observed behaviour of the Gbagbo regime and the rebel forces as well as the resulting political deadlock. While the New Forces refused to demobilize as long as the legal and political reforms envisaged under the Linas-Marcoussis and other agreements had not been adopted, Gbagbo and his associates were reluctant to implement any political reforms that threatened their hold on power. In order to delay the implementation of various peace agreements and continue to hold on to power, Gbagbo used a range of 'spoiling' strategies, including refusing to delegate the necessary executive powers to the consensus prime minister for pseudo-legal reasons, using street mobs and vigilante group such as the Young Patriots to disrupt the peace process, and instructing FPI's Members of Parliament to vote against the envisaged legal reforms. While Gbagbo and his associates were the most powerful spoilers, matters were further complicated by the presence of a range of other spoilers, such as businessmen close to the Gbagbo regime, leaders of the 'patriot' youth movements and rebel commanders and government military leaders. All these 'spoilers' stood to lose financially and in terms of political power in a democratic and peaceful Côte d'Ivoire.

An important reason why Gbagbo and his associates were so successful in delaying and disrupting the Ivorian peace process was their continued mismanagement by the international community. For much too long, the international community perceived Gbagbo as a politically weakened president who had no choice but to implement the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, rather than a politician who was prepared to use any means necessary, including violence, to stay in power. The spoiler management strategies employed by the international community to deal with Gbagbo reflect this misperception. A more coercive stand at the time of the signing of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, for instance, might have changed Gbagbo's political calculus, or at least could have prevented him from acquiring the means to disrupt the peace process violently at a later stage. When they finally took a more coercive stand against Gbagbo's persistent obstruction of the peace process, Gbagbo reacted by initiating direct talks with the rebels, thereby staying in control of the 'peace' process.

The Ouagadougou Peace process worked well for Gbagbo, given that he was allowed to stay in power for nearly three more years without holding free and fair elections. Despite the risks to his regime posed by holding elections, Gbagbo recognized that elections had to take place sometime. In accordance with the logic of ethnic numbers, Ouattara won the run-off against Gbagbo with 54% of the vote. While international observers uniformly declared the elections by-and-large free and fair, Gbagbo claimed that there had been serious electoral fraud in the North. He subsequently got the Constitutional Court to proclaim him as the winner of the elections. Given Gbagbo's principal objective of staying in power, his decision to reject the results of Independent Electoral Commission should not have come as a surprise, and it is a strategy that is likely to work well for him. By dispatching Thabo Mbeki, the former South African president, as a mediator to Côte d'Ivoire, the African Union is playing into Gbagbo's hands and risks repeating previous mistakes. By now the international community should know that Gbagbo does not budge easily; something more drastic is needed for that. Without a united and coercive stand

from the international community, one can be sure that Gbagbo will not give in and the chances of Côte d'Ivoire slipping back into civil war will increase accordingly.

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