

Ivory Coast - From Stability to Collapse. Failed States in Time of Globalisation

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Abstract

The number of states that can be considered as failed is growing. Such a phenomenon occurred as one of the results of globalisation processes. Our paper examines the case of Ivory Coast as an example of how global changes turned a relatively prosperous country into a failed state.

Key words: democratization, failed state, globalisation, Ivory Coast

Currently, to explain conflicts in Africa that lead to the collapse of a state, the argument most frequently used is the ethnic heterogeneity of such artificially created units. In relation to that, one could expect the creation of separatist movements or movements for the integration of ethnic groups divided by a border, which, however, in Africa, is not a more frequent event than in other parts of the world. It is therefore possible to assume that the reasons for the destabilisation of African states are more complex and require a deeper analysis.

A number of countries that we find on the political map of Africa, basically as states as we know them from our European empirical experience, no longer work. Governments have not been able to secure for the population the basic functions of a state – safety, the rule of law or a functional economic system. Those states were gradually carved out between local rulers, who control their territories militarily and economically. Such a catastrophic scenario has found and is finding its realisation in a number of African countries. None of the fighting sides has been able to enforce the legitimacy of the state, so the ‘government’ has often controlled only the capital.

Such a development has also affected countries that, until the 1990’s, were distinguished by their political stability. They also include Ivory Coast, which had been considered to be one of the most stable countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa just ten years ago. Today’s situation is quite the opposite. On the basis of the last *failed states index*, published annually by the *Foreign Policy* magazine, Ivory Coast has occupied the 11th place among the countries in which the situation is the worst in terms of the stability of the state and in 2005 it was even at the first place.

For many years, Ivory Coast was considered to be a country that, according to the African standards, achieved a political and economic miracle. Like in other African countries after the declaration of their independence, also in Ivory Coast a one-party system, led by the ‘founding father’ Félix Houphouët-Boigny, was created and it was based on the elimination of the opposition. That seemingly secured inter-ethnic peace and stability as well. In reality,

however, it only suppressed future problems. Such regimes were supported by both sides of the bipolar global system.

In the territory of today's Ivory Coast, the French influence started to spread from the 17th century. The territory of today's Ivory Coast was constituted as a French colonial territory in March 1893. In 1904 it was included into a system of colonies, called the French West Africa. It was part of that union until 1956, when it was divided into autonomous colonial units, which also included Ivory Coast. From the French perspective, that reform was advantageous, as the smaller units were more dependent on the colonial metropolis. Ivory Coast maintained its position of the economically most significant French dependent territory in West Africa.

The local political leader F. Houphouët-Boigny, who occupied a ministerial position in the after-war French governments, was aware of that position. The economic level of the country played a significant role in the period of the disintegration of the French colonial system. Ivory Coast, under Boigny's leadership, was aware of its economic significance and tried to confirm its dominant position among the former French West African colonies also by its refusal to join the French Commonwealth at the moment of gaining independence. Despite that fact, France maintained significant influence in the country, which showed not just in the mutual diplomatic relations, but also in the military presence in the colonial capital, even after the decolonization of Ivory Coast. Besides that, President Boigny, in contrast with other African leaders, did not eliminate the French presence in the country. That presence contributed to the effectiveness of the functioning of the economy, with the support of an authoritative regime and power and political monopoly (see Řehák 2003).

After the declaration of independence on 7 August 1960, France thus maintained its political, military and economic influence in Ivory Coast. A relatively large French community, consisting mostly of highly qualified experts, continued to live in the country. The government's economic strategy in the first decades of the independence focused on the modernisation of agriculture (especially of export industries), while the industrialisation (with the exception of food and wood-processing industries) was put off to a later time. The colonial economic structure, which was reflected especially in the structure of the foreign trade, was thus effectively preserved.

From the political perspective, the country was characterized by its stability, whereby it differed from other countries for more than thirty years, not just in West Africa, but also around the whole continent. That stability was provided by a system of one party – the Democratic Party of Ivory Coast (*Parti démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire*, PDCI) headed by a strong leader, as Boigny was. In the course of the development, that system successfully strengthened itself. The political stability contributed significantly to the economic development, which encouraged the government-supported immigration of the workforce from the poorer neighbouring countries, in particular from Upper Volta (later renamed to Burkina Faso). The creation of a populous immigration community, however, created preconditions for the disruption of the political stability in the country.

The one-party rule, however, resisted the destabilisation of the regime until the 1990s, despite the sporadic manifestations of discontent. Despite that, it can be stated that, already at that time, preconditions for later problems were created. In particular there was non-symmetrical re-distribution of state investments, which were directed preferentially to the southern parts of the country. The ethnic and confessional differences between the north and the south of the country created background for the discontent among the population in the north of Ivory Coast, which interpreted the slowing of the development of that region as a consequence of ethnic discrimination.

By the end of the 1970s, Ivory Coast maintained a stable economic growth and only in the 1980, under the effect of changes in the world prices of export commodities (especially of

cocoa), a crisis in Ivory Coast's economy and protests of the population started. A decrease in revenues from exports was also accompanied by a rise in the servicing of the debt, which significantly complicated the economic situation of the country. After 1980, Boigny's regime reacted to that development with limited democratising measures and economic reforms (diversification of agriculture, growth in investments into the previously neglected northern regions). Despite that, manifestations of the civil discontent occurred (student demonstrations in 1982), which, however, did not endanger the stability of the regime.

The attempted democratisation of Ivory Coast meant a destabilisation of the country. The first free elections took place in November 1990 and were won by until-then-governmental party PDCI, led by until-then-President Boigny. In the presidential election, he defeated the representative of the opposition, Laurent Koudou Gbagbo, who had been his political opponent since the start of the 1980s. After his death, his office was taken over by Henri Konan Bédié, who was supposed to be at the helm of the state until the next election in October 1995. He was confirmed in that position in the election. The PDCI also maintained its dominant position. The opposition boycotted the election because of the condition that only a person of Ivorian descent of his parents and with a five-year uninterrupted residence in Ivory Coast could run for presidency.

President Bédié's government was composed mainly of politicians from the southern central part of the country. Representatives of the mostly Muslim north were marginalised, which created internal political tension. In 1994, Alassane Dramane Ouattara stood in the lead of the Muslim opposition. The government, however, questioned his Ivorian origin, so he did not run as a candidate in the elections in 2000 and 2005.

In December 1999, the democratically elected President H. K. Bédié was overthrown and the National Public Salvation Committee, headed by general Robert Guéï, came to power. At the same time, France's military intervention in the development in Ivory Coast started. In October 2000, general R. Guéï, was stripped of his power after a presidential election, in which he declared himself to be the winner. After widespread demonstrations, L. K. Gbagbo, the founder of the Ivorian Popular Front (*Front populaire ivoiren*, FPI) was inaugurated into the presidential office.

In the context of the conflict in Ivory Coast it should be stressed that all three politicians (H. K. Bédié, R. Guéï and L. K. Gbagbo) belonged to the Christian community. The tension between the Christian south and the Muslim north grew gradually. The political instability was the triggering mechanism for the escalation of the conflict. The defeated candidate R. Guéï started to organise opposition against Gbagbo in his exile in Benin.

The first clashes between the government's forces, controlled by Christians, and the Muslim opposition erupted as early as in 2000. In March 2001 they were ended by an agreement between Gbagbo and Ouattara, which secured the participation of four Muslim politicians in the government. That caused discontent among some representatives of the Christian elite. In the two years that followed, two unsuccessful military coup attempts occurred. The second one, which took place in September 2002, led to a civil war. The Muslim mutineers argued it was a struggle against a dictatorship, the government pointed to the danger of the victory of Muslim fundamentalists, supported by the neighbouring Burkina Faso. The insurgents gained the main support in the north and northwest of the country, where populous domestic and immigrant Muslim communities lived.

The necessity of a peaceful solution to the complex situation in the country resulted from the danger of the internationalisation of the conflict. The Muslim mutineers were supported by the neighbouring Burkina Faso (from which most of the immigrants came) and Liberia intervened in the conflict as well. Besides that, President Gbagbo recruited mercenaries in South Africa and in France (see Kubiak 2007). On the basis of the experience

with the developments in the region of West Africa, there were concerns over the possible repetition of the Liberian or Sierra Leonean scenario.

In October 2002, President Gbagbo agreed with signing an agreement on the cessation of fighting. From November 2002, direct negotiations between the government and the insurgents from the Patriotic Movement of Ivory Coast (*Mouvement patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire*, MPCI), led by Guillaume Kigbafori Soro, started in Togo. The situation, however, complicated itself by the appearance of two new anti-government armed fractions (Ivorian Popular Movement of the Great West (*Mouvement populaire ivoiren du Grant Ouest*) and the Movement for Justice and Peace (*Mouvement pour la justice et la paix*). The peace process culminated on 26 January 2003 by the signing of an agreement, entered into in Linas-Marcoussis, near Paris, which was based on a compromise in the form of the participation of representatives of insurgents in the government (among other things, they won the positions of the ministers of defence and interior), the awarding of full civic rights to Muslim immigrants on the basis of a change to the constitution and the observation of the truce until the presidential election, which was to take place in October 2005. On the basis of a peace agreement, the French units created a buffer zone between the hostile sides. That development implied that the splitting of the country into two parts – the south, controlled by President Gbagbo's government – and the north, controlled by the insurgents, was to be frozen for two years.

On the basis of further negotiations, on 7 July 2003, an 'End of the War' declaration was adopted, in which Gbagbo was recognized as the President and agreements from Linas-Marcoussis, signed earlier in January that year, were implemented. Within it, a project of demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration of refugees, which were nearing a million, was also agreed. It should be stressed that the returns to the negotiation table are related with the fact that neither of the fighting parties won a decisive prevalence over the opponent. A significant role here is also played by the fact that neither of the parts can function independently from the long-term perspective.

The optimism generated by the discussions between the hostile sides and by the signing of the piece agreements, which were supposed to stabilise the situation in the country, was not well-founded. Nor the presence of the peace forces of the UN, ECOWAS and French troops, numbering about 10,000, could secure a long-lasting peace and cooperation of the relevant political forces under the given conditions. The tension gradually escalated and led to the resumption of fighting in 2004, to which the UN reacted by the adoption of a Resolution No. 1572, which introduced sanctions against Ivory Coast. The fighting started by the government's ground offensive against the insurgents. The offensive was also supported by the government's air force, which, however, due to until-now-unclear reasons, attacked the positions of the French peace forces in the city of Bouaké on the line of the truce. The response was the destruction of the government's planes by the French forces, by which Gbagbo lost the only means of military prevalence over the insurgents.

After some pressure from the African Union, Ivory Coast's parliament granted voting rights to about 700 thousand people. But it refused to change the law on the election of the president. The Christian elite was thus determined to defend its privileged position in the country at all costs. The resolution of the conflict was therefore beyond reach and the articles of the peace agreements were not fully honoured. On 6 April 2005, an agreement on ending the hostilities was signed in Pretoria. Gbagbo agreed with Ouattara's candidacy in the presidential election. Its date, however, was postponed several times.

By the end of 2004, demobilisation of the insurgents started and their representatives started to participate on the government again. In May 2009, a date for the presidential election was set to 29 November 2009. The main candidates for the President are considered to be Gbagbo, the incumbent president and leader of the FPI; Ouattara, leader of the Rally of

the Republicans (*Rassemblement des Républicains*); and Bédié, leader of the Democratic Party of Ivory Coast – African Democratic Rally (*Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire – Rassemblement Démocratique Africain*).

On March 2007, an agreement was signed between President Gbagbo and the insurgent leader G. K. Soro, according to which Soro will act at the position of the Prime Minister. That agreement stabilised the situation in the country. The buffer zone was removed and the government started to perform the state administration in the territory controlled by then by the insurgents. From the start of the civil war, there was, in fact, no effective administration there, the legal and social system disintegrated completely. Like in other African countries affected by a civil war, warlords, who were actually absolute rulers of their territories, prevailed in that area.

Despite that it can be stated that two fighting sides are competing for power in the country. They are supporters of President Gbagbo, who controls the army loyal to the President; then the nationalist and pro-Islamic Young Patriots (*Congrès Panafricain des Jeunes Patriotes*) youth organisation; and armed mercenaries from different countries. On the other side there is a coalition of the three mentioned rebelling movements, called the New Forces of Ivory Coast (*Forces Nouvellesde Côte d'Ivoire*), which are materially supported in particular from Burkina Faso and probably also from Gabon and Libya. The observation of the truce is supervised by peace forces, operating within the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and the mission of the Economic Community of the West Africa States.

The example of Ivory Coast shows that the democratisation processes highlighted the fact that African countries have not created such a political culture that would cope with ethnic, confessional and regional differences. The one-party rule, as it was in Ivory Coast before 1990, successfully suppressed ethnic and confessional disputes. In Ivory Coast, the governing party even declared as its goal the creation of an Ivorian nation and Boigny supported such an ethnic composition of the parliament that approximately corresponded with the ethnic structure of the population of Ivory Coast. The start of new political parties, as a prerequisite of democratisation, was often connected with a political representation of certain ethnic groups or confessions. An explosion of nationalism, which was suppressed during the rule of one party, occurred.

Such a development affects in particular countries divided not just along ethnic lines but also by religion. Ivory Coast is also one of them. At the beginning of the 1990, members of more than 60 ethnic groups belonged to Animists (about 60 %), Muslims (27 %), and Christians (20 %) (Liščák 2009). There is a tension in particular between the Muslim and Christian communities. The core of the Muslim settlement is in the north of the country, while the Christians live mostly in the south, where the economic center of gravity is. In Ivory Coast there are therefore many ethnic groups. None of them, however, has the sufficient weight to gain the hegemony and none of them feels to be historically superior to others (Řehák 2003). Such a situation would create conditions for the elimination of ethnic tension. Like in Nigeria, a significant role in the demonstration of identity in Ivory Coast is played by the affiliation to a religion.

A specific feature of Ivory Coast was also the fact that the economic development in the 1960s and 70s caused large-scale immigration from surrounding countries, in particular from Burkina Faso. Immigrants (mostly agricultural workers on plantations) settled in the territory of Ivory Coast and also brought their families with them. Currently they form about a quarter of the population of Ivory Coast. That has also strengthened the size of the Muslim community, which, through the immigrants from abroad, penetrated also the south, while they form a relatively populous layer also in Abidjan.

In 1995, the term *ivoirité*, was started to be used in Ivory Coast and it refers to the cultural identity of the "genuine" Ivorians, in contrast to immigrants and their descendants as

“not genuine” Ivoirians, who are thought to include especially immigrants from Burkina – the *burkinabè*. Some laws of a nationalistic character did not allow to hold positions in the state administration by the „non-genuine“ Ivoirians. Such tendencies are a classic example of a government diverting attention from the domestic, mainly economic, problems by supporting nationalism and pointing to an external enemy.

To explain the situation in Ivory Coast as an exclusively ethno-religious conflict, however, would be a mistake. Behind the disputes between the two religious communities stand the long-term unresolved social problems, in particular the increasing unemployment and the growth in the share of the population living below the poverty line. That phenomenon is connected with the country’s economic decline, related with a drop in the world prices of cocoa and coffee as the main export commodities of Ivory Coast. The government’s measures to maintain the level of the economy have led to increasing foreign indebtedness. The resulting growing differences in living standards have led to increased social tensions in the country. A significant role in the start of the conflict was played not just by political but also by economic ineptness of the political elites which continues to weaken the foundations and institutions of the state.

Besides that, the insurgents also pointed to the regional differences in the government’s investments. Since the winning of independence, the south of the country has been preferred in this context. The unevenness in the distribution of income is illustrated by the fact that in the time of Boigny’s government, just 25% of income was allocated to the 12 departments in the North. The rest was directed to the 12 departments in the south. The situation did not change substantially even after the democratization of the country. The differences between the north and the south therefore increased and were justly criticized, which contributed to the destabilisation of the country.

Because of that, the conflict in Ivory Coast is not exclusively an ethnic or ethno-religious. A number of inter-linked factors, which formed during the historical development of the country, contributed to its start. A very important function is played by the wider economic factors, which are secondary only apparently. In fact, it is a conflict between the north and the south, which erupted under the influence of the sharpening disputes of different characters, which had not been solved for a long time.

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