

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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Côte d'Ivoire Summary 30 September 2016

Press sources reveal an alleged conversation between presidential adviser Mamadi Diané and Gabonese opposition leader Jean Ping, igniting accusations of interference. President Alassane Ouattara (2010-present) sacks Diané, reconciles with the Gabonese government officials, and commits to set up an inquiry. The Autorité de Régulation des Télécommunications de Côte d'Ivoire (ARTCI) (telecommunications regulatory authority) authorises the Libyan Post, Telecommunication and Information Technology Company's (LPTIC) mobile licence, making it the fourth operator in Côte d'Ivoire. The national security council announces it will re-open land borders with Côte d'Ivoire's neighbours Guinea and Liberia, following the end of the Ebola epidemic.

Ouattara's presidential adviser accused of foreign interference

Press sources on 30 August reported that an adviser to president **Alassane Ouattara** (2010-present), **Mamadi Diané**, had sought to support **Gabonese** opposition candidate **Jean Ping** in the country's elections on 27 August.¹ Press reports claimed that Diané had sought to employ hackers in Gabon in order to publish verbal procedures and government data. He also attempted to influence opposition members on the Gabonese **Commission Électorale Nationale et Permanente (CENAP)** (electoral commission) to resign following the announcement of the election result.² Ouattara immediately sacked Diané, with a press release from the presidency stating that,

*"The Ivoirian presidency condemns this act of interference and reassures the authorities and Gabonese people that it has strict respect for the sovereignty of the Gabonese people."*³

Diané and Ping have reportedly known each other for over 50 years.⁴ The two reportedly met in **London (United Kingdom (UK))** in 1967 as students.⁵ The relationship appears very close, as there are reports that Ping's wife, half Ivoirian **Jeanne-Thérèse Ping**, refers to Diané as Ping's younger brother.⁶ Diané is an influential businessman, who founded **AMEX International** consultancy, initially a **United States (US)**-based export firm.⁷ AMEX expanded rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s by securing contracts with the **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** and the US department of agriculture for food supplies in **Africa**.⁸ Diané reportedly has strong ties to the **US Democratic Party**, and press sources allege that he worked for the **Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)**,

"[Former Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)] president Mobutu Sese Seko (1965-1997) introduced Diané to the CIA. Diané then openly became an agent for the CIA. He took part in half a dozen coup attempts in Ghana... AMEX and Diané were even involved in the assassination of French judge [Bernard] Borrel in Djibouti... He managed to get his US ambassador of choice in Côte d'Ivoire, to execute the destabilisation plan against former president Laurent Gbagbo

¹ Jeune Afrique, 30 Aug 2016.

² Jeune Afrique, 30 Aug 2016.

³ Jeune Afrique, 30 Aug 2016.

⁴ www.lephantdechaine.net

⁵ www.lephantdechaine.net

⁶ www.lephantdechaine.net

⁷ Multiple sources: www.amexdc.com; www.imatin.net

⁸ www.amexdc.com

[2000-2011]. He had the intention of putting Ping in place by force, by using his mafia network as he did in Côte d'Ivoire. He is a powerful man, but mostly dangerous.”⁹

Gabon’s interior minister **Pacôme Moubelet-Boubeya** met on 14 September with Ouattara, ostensibly to reconcile following the Diané scandal.¹⁰ The meeting shows Côte d’Ivoire does not wish to tarnish its relationship with president **Ali Bongo Ondimba** (2009-present). Moubelet-Boubeya did not make accusations against Ouattara, rather claiming that Diané and his alleged accomplice **Jean-Marc Zoé** had acted independently,

“It is certainly the case that these people, who work for their own gain, acting for themselves, found themselves involved in activities affecting the entire Gabonese electoral process. And the Ivoirian president simply took decisions which led to there being no possible doubt of interpretation on the fact that these people worked at the Ivoirian presidency.”¹¹

The press also supported these claims,

“Diané is too powerful to act under anybody’s authority. He’s the one who made the bed for Ouattara to become president, so it’s more a case of Ouattara being grateful to him. It is clear that Ouattara had nothing to do with this.”¹²

It would appear, therefore, that Moubelet-Boubeya made the visit to Côte d’Ivoire to rebut accusations that Ouattara influenced Diané, and to re-affirm the diplomatic relationship between the two countries. As one local source states,

“Whatever happened, Gabon had in some way accused Côte d’Ivoire of interference, which in interstate relations is a bad accusation. Hence they needed to explain to Ouattara the content of this charge.”¹³

Ouattara has committed to set up an inquiry to investigate the case further, but made no clear indication of the date or body which would carry out the investigation.¹⁴

LPTIC becomes fourth mobile operator

The **Autorité de Régulation des Télécommunications de Côte d’Ivoire (ARTCI)** (telecommunications regulatory authority) on 14 September confirmed that the **Libyan Post, Telecommunication and Information Technology Company (LPTIC)** has acquired a 4G mobile operating licence, which includes all lower generation technology frequencies.¹⁵ The announcement makes LPTIC the fourth operator in Côte d’Ivoire, together with France-based **Orange**, South Africa-based **MTN** and **Moov** (subsidiary of Morocco-based **Maroc Telecom**).¹⁶ There were seven operators at the beginning of 2016.¹⁷ However, ARTCI retracted the licences of four operators in April, due to their failure to pay the government FCFA 80 billion (\$137m) in debt.¹⁸ These were **Lebanese-owned Comium/Koz**, **Libyan-owned GreenN**, subsidiary of **Groupe Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates)**, **Warid**, and locally-owned **Café Mobile**, which together held just 4.2% of the market.¹⁹ The mobile telecommunications market, in accordance with regional and global trends, grew exponentially in the

⁹ www.imatin.net

¹⁰ Gabon Review, 15 Sept 2016.

¹¹ Gabon Review, 15 Sept 2016.

¹² www.imatin.net

¹³ Source, member of government party, Abidjan

¹⁴ Multiple sources: RFI, 15 Sept 2015; Source, member of government party, Abidjan.

¹⁵ Jeune Afrique, 14 Sept 2016.

¹⁶ Jeune Afrique, 14 Sept 2016.

¹⁷ Abidjan.net, 4 Apr 2016.

¹⁸ Abidjan.net, 4 Apr 2016.

¹⁹ Abidjan.net, 4 Apr 2016.

last decade, increasing from 16 million to 25 million users between 2012 and 2015 alone.²⁰ It now accounts for 8% of national gross domestic product (GDP).²¹

Following the investment, there remain very few details concerning LPTIC's operations, business model or even management. ARTCI refuses to release any details.

*"There is information that we cannot communicate... We refuse all forms of communication on potential management."*²²

The level of investment was not made public, though competitors paid approximately FCFA 100 billion (\$171m) for the licence in December 2015.²³ LPTIC will take over GreenN and Comium's former assets, though it is unclear to what level LPTIC will make additional investment into new corporate and network infrastructure.²⁴ Telecommunications minister **Bruno Koné** stated that the choice to give LPTIC the licence was made largely because of the company's experience in "difficult environments".²⁵ According to Koné, the decision was made on the basis of LPTIC's business plan, economic model, expected profit margin, internal profitability rates, financial structure and backing, and insurance on the recovery of GreenN and Comium's assets.²⁶

However, other sources do not see LPTIC being truly competitive,

*"There is not much competition to fear from this new company, unless it offers truly discounted services. Orange and MTN are equally positioned in the low-cost segment, with credit bonuses of up to 400%. Unless they have their own satellite network, they will only be fighting for the remaining 5% of the market that is available... There could certainly be a novelty factor if the company is able to launch a good communication campaign, together with preferential services. However this would not last very long."*²⁷

Côte d'Ivoire re-opens border with Guinea and Liberia

The government's **Conseil National de Sécurité (CNS)** (national security council) on 8 September formally announced the re-opening of Côte d'Ivoire's land borders with **Guinea** and **Liberia**, which had both been closed since 2014 due to the **Ebola** epidemic.²⁸ The Liberia border had been closed since 2012, due to non-health related security concerns (see *ARC Briefing Côte d'Ivoire January 2016*). Ouattara had promised to re-open the Liberian border by March, following a meeting with president **Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf** (2006-present) in January (see *ARC Briefing Côte d'Ivoire January 2016*). However, after a flare-up of the disease in March in **N'Zérékoré** (Guinea), Ouattara delayed the re-opening of the borders until the risk of the disease significantly reduced. Liberia immediately closed its border with Guinea following the flare-up (see *ARC Briefing Guinea March 2016*).

*"We could not ignore the security risk. The affected countries struggled greatly to contain the disease. For example, a person carrying the disease could have crossed the border, and not exhibit any symptoms until 21 days after... The Ivoirian authorities must be applauded for their rapid response and sensitisation programme."*²⁹

However, other local sources claim that a fully effective prevention of the spread of the disease will always be difficult,

²⁰ Abidjan.net, 4 Apr 2016.

²¹ Abidjan.net, 4 Apr 2016.

²² Source, ARTCI commercial director, Abidjan

²³ Jeune Afrique, 14 Sept 2016.

²⁴ Jeune Afrique, 14 Sept 2016.

²⁵ RFI, 16 Sept 2016.

²⁶ RFI, 16 Sept 2016.

²⁷ Source, former KOZ employee, Abidjan

²⁸ VOA, 8 Sept 2016.

²⁹ Source, doctor at the Abidjan **Institut Pasteur**, Abidjan

“When we speak of border closure, we have to note that there was still activity between the countries. Trade was in fact never interrupted. Neither Côte d’Ivoire nor Guinea or Liberia could afford it in economic terms. Now that the re-opening of the borders is official, there will be trade growth of at least 30%. However, the main change will be in terms of the movement of people, as many will travel towards Côte d’Ivoire, providing cheap labour for Ivoirian businesses, for example.”³⁰

Health minister **Raymonde Coffie-Goudou** confirmed the government decided to remove all restrictive measures related to Ebola prevention, as the transmission period of the disease had ended.³¹ Over 220,000 people had fled Côte d’Ivoire as refugees in Liberia, during both the politico-military crisis in 2002 and the post-electoral crisis in 2010-2011.³² The majority of these returned to Côte d’Ivoire between 2011 and 2012, but there remain over 38,000 in camps along the border.³³ Local sources claim that the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** is required to assure repatriation for these once the border re-opened.³⁴ However, the UNHCR has so far made no commitment to uphold this.³⁵

“The re-opening of the borders will obviously incite the Ivoirian diaspora to return to their country. This process was largely interrupted when the border closed. The Ebola epidemic was even an important reason for these to wish to return, but they were unable to do so. It has now been several years since these refugees have been waiting to return.”³⁶

Implications

The revelation of Diané’s interference in Gabon’s elections has serious implications for the credibility of Ouattara’s government. There remain doubts over the mode of release of the sensitive information, however, it would appear that Ouattara was not involved in the act, as Ping and Diané were long-time friends. The rumours concerning Diané’s relations with the US and the CIA are speculation and difficult to prove, but AMEX did have contracts with several US government agencies. Moubelet-Boubeya’s meeting with Ouattara appears to consolidate a view that Ouattara is not implicated in the scandal.

LPTIC’s arrival into the Ivoirian mobile telecommunications market appears initially to be a sign of increased competitiveness in the low-cost segment. However, the size and strength of its competitors, which hold over 95% of the market, will make this difficult. The market remains highly lucrative, especially as demand for basic telecommunications services increases in rural areas, and data services in urban areas is rapidly expanding, with total penetration rates above 100% nationally.

The re-opening of the border with Guinea and Liberia could have a positive impact on intraregional trade, especially for the previously Ebola-affected countries. For Côte d’Ivoire, the potential access to cheaper labour is an attractive outcome of the increased movement of people across these borders.

³⁰ Source, business owner, Abidjan

³¹ VOA, 8 Sept 2016.

³² VOA, 8 Sept 2016.

³³ VOA, 8 Sept 2016.

³⁴ Abidjan.net, 8 Sept 2016.

³⁵ Abidjan.net, 8 Sept 2016.

³⁶ Source, doctor at the Abidjan **Institut Pasteur**, Abidjan

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