

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING Côte d'Ivoire Briefing April 2018

Côte d'Ivoire Summary 23 April 2018

President Alassane Ouattara (2011-present) and former president Henri Konan Bedie (1993-1999) officially agree to a merger of the political parties that currently form the ruling coalition, into a single political party, le Rassemblement des Houphouëtistes pour la Démocratie et la Paix (RHDP). Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) party vice-president Jeannot-Ahoussou Kouadio is elected as the first president of the newly formed Ivorian Senate. The World Bank forecasts that Cote d'Ivoire will have the second highest economic growth rate in Africa in 2018, at around 7%. President Ouattara meets France's President Emmanuel Macron (2017-present) and Kuwaiti emir Sheikh Sabah al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah (2006-present) in separate visits to strengthen bilateral ties.

Ruling coalition formalises plans to establish a single political party

President **Alassane Ouattara** (2011-present) and former president **Henri Konan Bédié** (1993-1999) officially agreed to a merger on 17 April of the political parties that currently form the ruling coalition, into a single political party.¹ The increasing likelihood of municipal, regional and senate elections taking place in 2018 may have hastened the political parties to finalise their alliance (see *ARC Briefing Cote d'Ivoire February 2018*). The name of the party will be **Le Rassemblement des Houphouëtistes pour la Démocratie et la Paix (RHDP)**.² It will consist of the ruling **Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR)** led by Ouattara, **le Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI)** led by Bédié and which ruled Côte d'Ivoire from 1960-1999, and four other coalition parties.³ These include **l'Union pour la Côte d'Ivoire (UPCI)**, **le Parti Ivoirien du Travail (PIT)**, **le Mouvement des Forces d'Avenir (MFA)** and **l'Union pour la Démocratie en Côte d'Ivoire (UPDCI)**.⁴ The official announcement clarifies the political agreement that the leaders of the six coalition parties signed on 10 April, stipulating that they agreed to the formation of a unified party in principle. The RHDP released their "**Accord Politique**" (political agreement) on 12 April, which sets out the modalities according to which the new party will be organised.⁵

Influential members of the PDCI such as spokesperson **Jean Louis-Billon** and the PDCI youth branch have expressed their reservations about the merger, amidst concerns the PDCI will lose its relevance in a unified party.⁶ The RDR and PDCI have dominated the Ivorian political scene since the end of the post-electoral crisis of 2011 (see *ARC Briefing Cote d'Ivoire February 2018*). However, the two parties chose to form separate parliamentary blocs after the December 2016 legislative elections (see *ARC Briefing Côte d'Ivoire April 2017*). There were reportedly too many divisions between the PDCI and the RDR's supporters, after the PDCI perceived the RDR as reneging on a promise to put forward a PDCI candidate for the 2020 presidential elections (see *ARC Briefing Côte d'Ivoire April 2017*).

¹ Jeune Afrique, 17 Apr 2018.

² Jeune Afrique, 17 Apr 2018.

³ Jeune Afrique, 17 Apr 2018.

⁴ Jeune Afrique, 17 Apr 2018.

⁵ Jeune Afrique, 16 Apr 2018.

⁶ Jeune Afrique, 12 Feb 2018.

Although PDCI leader Bédié was the first to raise the prospect of a unified party in October 2015,⁷ two years passed before the idea to merge the coalition parties became a concrete plan. A meeting took place at PDCI headquarters on 4 December to create a committee to outline the terms under which the merger would take place, followed by a second meeting at Ouattara's RDR headquarters on 8 January.⁸ Public disagreements soon emerged between the PDCI and the RDR as to how the merger would unfold.⁹ There were rumours in local media that the PDCI and RDR would not collaborate in the inaugural senatorial elections that took place in March (see *ARC Briefing Cote d'Ivoire March 2018*). However, after multiple negotiations the two parties agreed to contest the elections together and subsequently captured 50 of the 66 available seats.¹⁰

Assemblée nationale (national assembly) president and RDR member **Guillaume Soro** acknowledged that there is a need for more dialogue concerning the party merger.¹¹ The RDR wants the merger to take place immediately, followed by a 12-18 month transition period, while the PDCI wants it to take place after the 2020 presidential elections (see *ARC Briefing Cote d'Ivoire April 2018*). Despite the political accord, and in response to protests by the PDCI youth wing about the merger, Bédié announced on 20 April that the PDCI will present a candidate for the 2020 presidential elections.¹² Bédié said that since the PDCI supported the RDR presidential candidate in 2010 and 2015, it is only natural that they would present a candidate for 2020.¹³ In response, Ouattara stated anyone is allowed to present a candidate and the best one will be chosen.¹⁴

The interaction between the RDR and the PDCI is likely to dominate the Ivorian political scene, especially since the opposition is almost non-functioning. The PDCI and former president Bédié will do their utmost to ensure the RHDP's presidential candidate for 2020 is from the PDCI. The upcoming local elections (date yet to be confirmed) will be important. There will be more at stake compared to the senatorial elections that took place in March (see below), and uncertainty with respect to cooperation between the PDCI and the RDR in the elections is likely to continue.

Jeannot-Ahoussou Kouadio voted first president of newly formed senate

PDCI party vice-president **Jeannot-Ahoussou Kouadio** was voted as the first president of the newly formed Ivorian Senate at its first session on 5 April.¹⁵ Kouadio obtained 65 of 66 votes, with one abstention (98.4%).¹⁶ The ruling RHDP coalition won 75% of the 66 available seats in the 24 March senatorial elections.¹⁷ Kouadio is the constitutional successor to President Ouattara and the second highest-ranking political figure in Cote d'Ivoire. Kouadio was widely expected to become senate president in the lead-up the March senatorial elections (see *ARC Briefing Cote d'Ivoire March 2018*).¹⁸ Kouadio served as prime minister in 2012, and since 2013 has been minister of state at the presidency for political dialogue as well as a member of parliament, positions which he will resign from as a result of his new responsibilities.

The opposition boycotted the March senatorial elections over the indirect voting system that appears to give the ruling government a significant advantage in voting power within the senate (see *ARC Briefing Cote d'Ivoire March 2018*). Establishing a senate was one of the key reforms stipulated in the

⁷ Jeune Afrique, 23 Oct 2015.

⁸ Jeune Afrique, 12 Feb 2018.

⁹ Jeune Afrique, 12 Feb 2018.

¹⁰ Jeune Afrique, 25 Mar 2018.

¹¹ Jeune Afrique, 4 Apr 2018.

¹² Jeune Afrique, 20 Apr 2018.

¹³ RFI, 20 Apr, 2018

¹⁴ BBC Afrique, 20 Apr 2018.

¹⁵ Le Pays, 5 Apr 2018.

¹⁶ Le Pays, 5 Apr 2018.

¹⁷ Jeune Afrique, 25 Mar 2018.

¹⁸ Jeune Afrique, 21 Feb 2018.

2016 Constitution, which Ivorians voted to introduce in a November 2016 referendum.¹⁹ However, opposition members called the 2016 constitution in the lead-up to the referendum “*monarchical*”²⁰ and a “*constitutional coup d’état*”.²¹ The 2016 constitution provides that the president (in this case Ouattara) names 40 senators directly, while MPs, regional and municipal council members vote for the remaining 80.²² However, the recent election concerned only 66 senators, two for each region and autonomous district (**Abidjan** and **Yamoussoukro**).²³

Kouadio’s appointment as senate president enables the PDCI to increase its political influence as senate vice-president **Donald Kablan Duncan**, Cote d’Ivoire’s third most important political figure, is also a PDCI member. The newly introduced senate may also reduce the political weight of current president of the national assembly and RDR member Guillaume Soro, who has gone from the second to the fourth highest ranking official in state protocol since the institution of the 2016 constitution. This may affect Soro’s chances if he intends to run as RDR candidate in 2020.

One of the main criticisms of the new constitution was that it would strengthen presidential powers by creating near seamless passing of legislation through parliament’s two chambers.²⁴ Without opposition representation, the senate will essentially serve as a rubber stamp chamber. The president’s choice of directly appointed senate members will give a better indication of the significance of the senate in the current political context.

World Bank maintains strong growth projections for Cote d’Ivoire ...

The **World Bank**’s bi-annual **Africa Pulse** report released on 18 April predicts that Cote d’Ivoire will have the second highest economic growth rate in **Africa** in 2018, at around 7%.²⁵ The World Bank attributes this positive scenario to robust public spending and infrastructure investment, which has supported economic activity within the country.²⁶

The World Bank has underscored its positive outlook on the Ivorian economy with its approval on 10 April of a \$200m loan to the government to improve cashew productivity and promote the cashew processing industry.²⁷ Cashew is Cote d’Ivoire’s highest generating export commodity after cocoa and refined petroleum products. Cote d’Ivoire is the world’s second largest cashew producer, producing 711,000 tonnes in 2017, which generated \$800m. The World Bank loan aims to benefit 225,000 farmers involved in this domain.²⁸

... as President Ouattara boosts links with France and Kuwait

In a further boost to Cote d’Ivoire’s economic activity, President Ouattara announced after meeting with **France**’s President **Emmanuel Macron** (2017-present) on April 20 the creation of a high-level committee to oversee the construction of the **Abidjan Metro Project**. The committee will comprise the ministries of economy and finance for the respective countries.²⁹ Ouattara and Macron launched the construction of the metro project on 30 November.³⁰ A collective of French public works firms is carrying out the construction work on the metro, with the French government financing the €1.4 billion (\$1.7 billion) project.³¹ The project is set for completion in 2021.³²

¹⁹ Jeune Afrique, 11 Oct 2016.

²⁰ AFP, 22 Feb 2018.

²¹ Source, LIDER member, Abidjan

²² Connection Ivoirienne, 27 Feb 2018.

²³ Jeune Afrique, 21 Feb 2018.

²⁴ Source, analyst, Abidjan

²⁵ World Bank, 18 Apr 2018

²⁶ Africa Pulse, April 2018.

²⁷ World Bank, 10 Apr 2018.

²⁸ World Bank, 10 Apr 2018.

²⁹ Presidence Ivorien, 18 Apr 2018.

³⁰ Jeune Afrique, 30 Nov 2017.

³¹ Jeune Afrique, 30 Nov 2017.

Ouattara also concluded a visit to **Kuwait** on 18 April where he met Kuwaiti emir **Sheikh Sabah al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah** (2006-present) and signed a memorandum of understanding between the Ivorian government and the **Kuwaiti Fund for Arab Economic Development**.³³ According to Ouattara, **Ivorian Chamber of Commerce** will visit Kuwait at a yet to be disclosed date, in a bid to further strengthen bilateral ties.³⁴

Planner

2020 **(Côte d'Ivoire)** *Abidjan.net*. Scheduled presidential elections;

2018 **(Côte d'Ivoire)** *Jeune Afrique*. Scheduled municipal, regional and senatorial elections;

Oct 2018 **(Côte d'Ivoire)** *Abidjan.net*. The **Conseil Café-Cacao** (coffee and cocoa board) makes its pre-season cocoa farmgate price policy announcement;

5 May 2018 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Jeune Afrique*. The ruling coalition member party, the **Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR)**, holds its party congress

May 2018 **(Côte d'Ivoire)** *Abidjan.net*. The **Conseil Café-Cacao** (coffee and cocoa board) makes its mid-season cocoa farmgate price policy announcement;

Chronology

22 Apr 2018 **Berlin (Germany)** *Abidjan.net*. **World Cocoa Conference** opens;

20 Apr 2018 **(Cote d'Ivoire)(France)** *Presidence Ivorien* President **Alassane Ouattara** concludes a visit to France where he met President **Emmanuel Macron** and established a committee to oversee the construction of the **Abidjan Metro**;

18 Apr 2018 **(Cote d'Ivoire)** *Kuwait News Agency* President **Alassane Ouattara** concludes a visit to **Kuwait** where he met Kuwaiti emir **Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah** and signed a memorandum of understanding between the Ivorian government and the **Kuwaiti Fund for Economic Development**;

18 Apr 2018 **(Cote d'Ivoire)** *World Bank World Bank Africa Pulse* predicts strong growth for Cote d'Ivoire;

17 Apr 2018 **(Cote d'Ivoire)** *Jeune Afrique* **Rassemblement des Houphouëtistes pour la Démocratie et la Paix (RHDP)** coalition announces its six constituent parties will merge to form a unified party known as **Le Rassemblement des Houphouëtistes pour la Démocratie et la Paix (RHDP)**

13 Apr 2018 **(Mexico)** *Cote d'Ivoire Economie* Cote d'Ivoire assumes the presidency of the **International Coffee Organization** at its 121st ordinary session and will be represented by **Aly Toure**; 5 Apr **(Cote d'Ivoire)** *Jeune Afrique* **Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI)** party vice-president **Jeannot-Ahoussou Kouadio** is voted as first president of the Ivorian Senate at its first session;

³² *Jeune Afrique*, 30 Nov 2017.

³³ *Kuwait News Agency*, 18 Apr 2018

³⁴ *Koaci*, 18 Apr 2018

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Please contact us by email info@africariskconsulting.com or call + 44 (0) 20 7078 4080

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