

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

Côte d'Ivoire Monthly Briefing March 2024

Côte d'Ivoire Summary 28 March 2024

Digital transition minister Kalil Koné creates a crisis cell in response to severe disruptions of virtually all internet services on 14 March following a cable failure. A second major offshore oil find, announced on 7 March prompts mines oil and energy minister Mamadou Sangafowa-Coulibaly to announce his prediction that Côte d'Ivoire will soon join the Organization of Oil Producing Countries (OPEC). Former president Laurent Gbagbo (2000-2011) on 9 March announces his candidacy for the 2025 presidential elections. Cocoa producers' unions threaten general strike action starting 28 March over what they consider bad management of the sector by the regulatory body Conseil du café-cacao (CCC) and its director Yves Brahim Koné.

Internet interruption hits Côte d'Ivoire and disrupts business

In the early morning of 14 March, virtually all internet services in Côte d'Ivoire were cut, disrupting services in all sectors, ranging from banking, healthcare, transport, trade and other business¹. The immediate cause was unknown until **France**-headquartered **Orange**, one of three operators in the country, announced that afternoon that a multiple cable failure off the coast of **Senegal** was suspected to be at the origin of the disruption while other explanations mentioned cable failure off the coast of Côte d'Ivoire itself.²

At least ten other countries were affected but Côte d'Ivoire was hardest hit, with connectivity reduced to 4% of normal capacity.³ **South Africa**-headquartered **MTN**, the other major operator was similarly affected. Only **Morocco**-headquartered **Moov**, a much smaller actor, was unaffected since it relies on satellites.

The damage to the economy has yet to be calculated but was severe enough for digital transition minister **Ibrahim Kalil Konaté** to create a crisis cell to deal with the situation.⁴ MTN and Orange set up stopgap measures, which slightly improved the situation the following days but both operators warned that restoring full connectivity could take at least two weeks.⁵ Mobile phone services performed as normal. The crisis has prompted IT experts and Koné to reflect on diversifying the country's over-reliance on underwater cables for the quasi-totality of its internet connections.

Energy ministry predicts Côte d'Ivoire will join OPEC after second major discovery

At a meeting with the **Groupement Professionnel de l'Industrie du Pétrole** (professional group of the petroleum industry) (**GPP**) on 15 March in Abidjan, mines, oil and energy minister **Mamadou Sangafowa-Coulibaly** announced that very soon Côte d'Ivoire would be able to join the **Organisation of Oil Producing Countries (OPEC)**:

*"If, yesterday, our country imported crude, with these discoveries we shall shortly be a net exporter of oil products. This is the criterion for becoming an OPEC member."*⁶

¹ Le Matin, 15 Mar 2024

² L'Infodrome, 19 Mar 2024

³ L'Inter, 15 Mar 2024

⁴ L'Infodrome, 19 Mar 2024; Abidjan.net, 19 Mar 2024

⁵ L'Infodrome, 19 Mar 2024

⁶ L'avenir, 18 Mar 2024

Coulibaly referenced the discovery of a second deep-sea offshore oil reserve, as announced by Italy-headquartered **Eni's** CEO **Claudio Descalzi** and President **Alassane Ouattara** (2010-present) on 7 March. The discovery, called **Calao**, is estimated to contain between 1 billion and 1.5 billion barrels of crude oil.⁷ Government spokesman **Amadou Coulibaly** indicated that this second field would start production in 2026.⁸ Eni, which is partnered with state-run company **Petroci** in the exploration of Ivorian oil reserves, is also working on the **Baleine** oil field, which it discovered in September 2021. Both fields also contain significant quantities of natural gas.⁹

Mamadou also announced the introduction of bills related to local content that would guarantee the full implication of the national private sector in Côte d'Ivoire's extractive industry, a proposal the GPP said it would like to subject to an impact study before the bill becomes law.¹⁰ Given earlier signals from the mines, oil and energy ministry that it is not satisfied with the current levels of local content in the extractive sector, there is a likelihood that legal and moral pressure on the international entities active in the oil sector will increase.¹¹

Laurent Gbagbo declares his candidacy

On 9 March, the central committee of **Parti des peuples africains – Côte d'Ivoire (PPA-CI)**, the party of former president **Laurent Gbagbo** (2000-2011), endorsed Gbagbo as the official PPA-CI candidate for the 2025 presidential elections, the first party to do so. The central committee also directed attention to reforming the **Commission Électorale Indépendante** (independent electoral commission), which has been a campaign issue for Gbagbo since he lost the presidential election in 2010 and the compilation of a new voters' roll, from which he was excluded.¹²

Gbagbo returned to Côte d'Ivoire in June 2021 after the **International Criminal Court (ICC)** acquitted him on charges of human rights abuse linked to the post-electoral violence in 2011. However, he still faces a 20-year prison sentence in Côte d'Ivoire for robbing the **Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (BCEAO)** (central bank of west African states) during the post-electoral violence in 2011.¹³ This conviction, handed down in 2018 while he was imprisoned in **The Hague (The Netherlands)**, resulted in the loss of his civic and political rights and therefore his removal from the electoral roll in June 2023, ahead of the September 2023 local elections (*see ARC Briefing Côte d'Ivoire Jul 2023*). Gbagbo was unable to vote in the September elections and at present, it is unclear if CEI will re-add him to the roll so he can run.

Opposition **Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI)** leader **Tidiane Thiam**, continues to position himself as a potential political mediator and/or kingmaker, as he leaves communication open to all sides. On 11 March, he saw Ouattara at the presidential palace for discussions, during which the two men highlighted the similarities between the two parties - Ouattara was the vice-president of the PDCI when he was prime minister between 1990 and 1993.¹⁴ Keeping all his options open, Thiam also maintains his party in a loose electoral alliance with Gbagbo's more left-leaning PPA-CI and had a meeting, on 7 March, with the leader of the opposition group **Mouvement des générations capables** led by Gbagbo's former wife **Simone Ehivet Gbagbo**¹⁵.

An unknown group, the **Union les leaders pour la candidature d'ADO en 2025**, organised a meeting on 12 March in Abidjan with the explicit demand directed at Ouattara to put in a fourth term bid. The group's leader, **Sanogo Kakou Serge**, said it was for reasons of stability and prosperity that

⁷ Le Jour, 11 Mar 2024

⁸ L'Avenir, 14 Mar 2024

⁹ Le Jour, 11 Mar 2024

¹⁰ L'Avenir, 18 Mar 2024

¹¹ Ivoire matin, 24 Mar 2024; L'Infodrome, 21 Mar 2024

¹² Le Direct, 11 Mar 2024

¹³ www.news24.com, 30 Jun 2023

¹⁴ Le Rassemblement, 14 Mar 2024

¹⁵ 7info, 8 Mar 2024

he had launched his petition¹⁶. One week later, on 18 March, public works minister **Anne Désirée Ouloto** added her voice to the group demanding a fourth term from Ouattara.¹⁷

It is not possible to assess right now whether there is an amount of orchestration present within the ruling **Rassemblement des Houphouetistes pour la Démocratie et la Paix (RHDP)** and if so, who is responsible. However, there is an increasing push for a fourth Ouattara term and the RHDP-linked **Rassemblement** newspaper has taken to carrying articles entitled ‘Four reasons that justify the candidacy of Ouattara’. These articles appear at the personal initiative of the paper’s editorial secretary-general, **Ambroise Tietie**, but whether he was instructed to do so remains unclear.¹⁸

Agricultural unions demand the departure of CCC director general

Two local agricultural producers’ unions, **Syndicat national Agricole pour le progrès (Synapci)** and **Association nationale des producteurs de Côte d’Ivoire (Anaproci)**, organised a press conference on 13 March demanding the departure of **Conseil du café-cacao (CCC)** (cocoa and coffee council) director general **Yves Brahim Koné**.¹⁹ The unions have accused Koné of ignoring their interests, saying that the cocoa producers end up benefiting the least from sales compared to the middlemen or the processing industries active in Côte d’Ivoire. On 12 March the CCC issued a statement warning against surplus payments “*by certain actors*” that go beyond the government-stipulated producers’ price of 1,000 FCFA (\$1.64) per kilogramme (kg).²⁰ The CCC threatened heavy sanctions, including fines, stock seizures and even loss of licences to operate in the sector to those found to be engaging in this practice.²¹ It was this note that prompted the unions to state that they no longer believe the CCC is there to defend producers’ interests.

One local newspaper suggests that the CCC’s stance is because the regulatory body itself has taken to becoming an exporter and, by acquisition, the proprietor of a transformation unit.²² This would be the reason why the CCC now insists on sticking to the government-mandated price, despite the value of cocoa attaining unprecedented levels on the world markets, due in part to lower production levels in **West Africa**. In neighbouring **Ghana**, the price paid to producers stands at the equivalent of 2,000 FCFA (\$3.29) per kg. Others, however, defend the stance of the CCC as “*principled*” and accuse the unions of taking the role of cocoa buyers and those paying extra cash per kilo - one publication suggests up to 1,600 FCFA (\$2.63) per kilogramme - of false competition.²³ Nevertheless, the two unions announced a general strike starting on 28 March and confirmed their position during their annual general meeting in **Daloa** on 25 March²⁴. Industrial action on this scale would paralyse Côte d’Ivoire’s premier economic sector which is also the top supplier of cocoa worldwide.

¹⁶ Le Rassemblement, 14 Mar 2024

¹⁷ Le Patriote, 18 Mar 2024

¹⁸ Le Rassemblement, 18 Mar 2024

¹⁹ L’Inter, 14 Mar 2024

²⁰ L’Inter, 14 Mar 2024

²¹ Le Direct, 18 Mar 2024

²² Le Direct 11 Mar 2024 and 18 Mar 2024

²³ Ivoire matin, 18 Mar 2024

²⁴ L’Inter, 14 Mar 2024; Koaci, 26 Mar 2024; L’Infodrome, 26 Mar 2024

Planner

2025 (Côte d'Ivoire) Presidential elections

Chronology

- 26 Mar 2024 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Agence Ecofin*. **United States**-headquartered **Ivanhoe Electric** acquires a 60% interest in the **Samapleu-Grata** nickel and copper project in Côte d'Ivoire which has a lifespan of 16 years;
- 22 Mar 2024 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *APA News*. The first edition of **Canadian Week** in Côte d'Ivoire ends, offering an opportunity for Ivorian economic operators to exchange information with their Canadian counterparts and Canadian firms;
- 21 Mar 2024 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *APA News*. Mines, petroleum and energy ministry denounces international oil firms for not complying with local content requirements;
- 19 Mar 2024 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Fratmat*. Abidjan hosts a **United States-Africa** forum on green and sustainable financing organised by the **African Development Bank (AfDB)** and **United States Trade and Development Agency**;
- 16 Mar 2024 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *APA News*. The fourth edition of the **Cyber Africa** forum launches in Abidjan, attracting over 1,000 attendees;
- 10 Mar 2024 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *France24*. Former president **Laurent Gbagbo** agrees to run as his **Parti des peuples africains – Côte d'Ivoire (PPA-CI)** candidate in the 2025 presidential election;
- 8 Mar 2024 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *APA News*. Former first lady and president of the **Mouvement générations capables**, **Simone Gbagbo**, meets with leader of **Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI)**, **Tidjane Thiam**, prompting speculation of a possible political alliance;
- 7 Mar 2024 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Energy Intelligence*. **Italian** oil and gas major **Eni** announces it has made a major oil and gas discovery in the **Calao** field offshore Côte d'Ivoire;
- 29 Feb 2024 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *APA News*. Oil and gas company **Eni Côte d'Ivoire Limited** says preliminary exploration work underway in offshore oil blocks **CI-504, CI-526, CI-706** and **CI-708** has shown convincing indications of the presence of hydrocarbons;
- 28 Feb 2024 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *APA News*. **Air Côte d'Ivoire** resumes flights to **Niamey (Niger)** following the lifting of sanctions on Niger by the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**;
- 27 Feb 2024 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Agence Ecofin*. Customs data indicates that Côte d'Ivoire recorded a trade surplus of \$1.4 billion in 2023, with cocoa, petroleum products, unrefined gold and natural rubber accounting for 70.1% of total exports;
- 26 Feb 2024 **Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)** *Sika Finance*. Government lifts the temporary suspension of exports of key products after 38 days;

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