

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

## Senegal Monthly Briefing August 2024

## Senegal Summary 21 August 2024

*Senegal's media organisations stage a media blackout on 13 August, not publishing any newspaper or broadcasting via television or radio, in protest of threats to media freedom. Prime minister Ousmane Sonko arrives in Bamako (Mali) on 12 August for a friendship and working visit as tensions persist between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), of which Senegal is a member, and the recently formed Alliance des États du Sahel (AES). The Gambia's vice president, Mohammed Jallow, arrives in Senegal for a two-day working visit on 5 August, days before high-level delegations from the Gambia and Senegal are called on to mediate a border dispute.*

## Media organisations stage blackout amid tensions with government

Senegal's media organisations staged a media blackout on 13 August, not publishing any newspaper or broadcasting via television or radio, in protest of threats to media freedom. The **Conseil des diffuseurs et éditeurs de la presse au Sénégal (CDEPS)** (council of press distributors and publishers) said in an editorial on 12 August that the media was experiencing the freezing of bank accounts for non-payment of tax, seizure of production equipment and the unilateral or illegal termination of advertising contracts with the government.<sup>1</sup>

CDEPS president **Mamadou Iba Kane** called these "hostile acts" by the government against media organisations and said that most media companies are nearly bankrupt. Sports dailies **Stades** and **Sunu Lamb** ceased publishing at the end of July after over 20 years due to economic challenges.<sup>2</sup> Since coming into power, the new administration has adopted several tax collection measures, with which the media sector has been unable to comply, leading to the freezing of bank accounts. CDEPS said in its 12 August editorial that the government acts were intended for "control of information" and the "taming of media professionals".<sup>3</sup>

eMedia Invest managing director **Alassane Samba Diop** said in an interview on 12 June that former president **Macky Sall** (2012-2024) had committed to wipe out the tax debt of press companies up until December 2023, worth approximately 40 billion FCFA (\$67.78m), but that he had never officially implemented this.<sup>4</sup>

CDEPS also singled out prime minister **Ousmane Sonko** as threatening media. Sonko said in a 9 June address that he saw misappropriation of public funds in the media industry by media company owners who do not pay their social security contributions. Sonko added that newspapers often write what they want under the guise of press freedom without reliable sourcing.<sup>5</sup> The media viewed Sonko's 9 June speech as an attack on the press, sparking the stand-off between the government and the sector.

International media watchdog **Reporters sans frontières (RSF)** (reporters without borders) has urged the government to safeguard press freedoms. In a June report, RSF noted that Senegal has slipped from 49<sup>th</sup> to 94<sup>th</sup> place in its **World Press Freedom Index** and that between 2021 and 2024, more than 60 journalists were arrested, assaulted, questioned or detained.<sup>6</sup> Opposition **Benno Bokk Yakaar (BBY)** parliamentary group president **Abdou Mbow** (a journalist by training) also denounced

<sup>1</sup> RFI, 13 Aug 2024

<sup>2</sup> Jeune Afrique, 8 Aug 2024

<sup>3</sup> RFI, 13 Aug 2024

<sup>4</sup> Jeune Afrique, 12 Jun 2024

<sup>5</sup> Jeune Afrique, 15 Aug 2024

<sup>6</sup> RSF, 6 Jun 2024

the situation, highlighting that the press is a key presence in a democracy and that freedom of the press is an essential criterion for international organisations that support democracy.<sup>7</sup>

A press release from President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye** (2024-present) on 14 August called for appropriate corrective measures and dialogue with the press sector, noting that:

*“A professional, responsible press that respects the rule of law remains a major pillar of democracy.”<sup>8</sup>*

No further information has been made available on what these corrective measures will be.

### Sonko visits Mali

Prime minister Ousmane Sonko arrived in **Bamako (Mali)** on 12 August for a friendship and working visit as tensions persist between the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** and the **Alliance des États du Sahel (AES)**. The AES is made up of Mali, **Niger** and **Burkina Faso**, which declared in January they would leave ECOWAS. ECOWAS appointed President Faye as the mediator in talks with the AES and visited Mali at the end of May to discuss the return of the three countries to ECOWAS (see *ARC Briefing Senegal May 2024*).

Sonko’s trip to Mali focused on Senegal’s ties with Mali, calling the two “*brother countries*” that should continue to strengthen ties.<sup>9</sup> Sonko, whose pan-**Africanist** attitude and focus on sovereignty is a popular sentiment among AES members, denounced the sanctions that ECOWAS placed on Mali in 2020 before lifting them in 2022, highlighting that they occurred under the former administration. To this point, he said, “*no one will go through Senegal to destabilise Mali or impose sanctions.*”<sup>10</sup>

Sonko stated that ECOWAS, with the AES states, must do everything to preserve the bloc but did not push beyond this. Despite Faye and Sonko’s visits, there has been little change in the AES member states’ attitude towards ECOWAS.

### Trade with the Gambia resumes as border tensions resolved

**The Gambia’s** vice president, **Mohammed Jallow**, arrived in Senegal for a two-day working visit on 5 August, a few days after the Gambia hosted the **Senegal-Gambia Joint Military Committee** meeting and the 10<sup>th</sup> bilateral meeting between Gambian and Senegalese customs on 23 and 24 July.<sup>11</sup> Senegal and the Gambia share strong ties, even attempting to merge in 1981 under the **Senegambia Confederation**, which was subsequently dissolved in 1989.<sup>12</sup>

More recently, following the election of the Gambia’s **Adama Barrow** (2017-present) as president, Senegal deployed a peacekeeping mission to support Barrow after former president **Yahya A.J.J Jammeh** (1996-2017) refused to hand over power. The peacekeeping mission remains in the Gambia.<sup>13</sup> Faye visited the Gambia in May to meet with Barrow and take stock of ties while Jallow met with Sonko during his recent visit.

However, these ties were disrupted in August over a trade dispute that required mediation from both sides. The Gambia imposed a new tariff of 16,000 FCFA (\$27.11) to be paid by trucks every time they pass through the border.<sup>14</sup> The decision sparked protests among truck drivers and led to a build-up of traffic at the border.<sup>15</sup> At one point, 353 Senegalese trucks were delayed at the border.

<sup>7</sup> Le Quotidien, 15 Aug 2024

<sup>8</sup> Jeune Afrique, 15 Aug 2024

<sup>9</sup> Jeune Afrique, 14 Aug 2024

<sup>10</sup> AFP, 12 Aug 2024

<sup>11</sup> APA News, 5 Aug 2024

<sup>12</sup> APA News, 5 Aug 2024

<sup>13</sup> Le Quotidien, 22 Apr 2024

<sup>14</sup> Le Quotidien, 11 Aug 2024

<sup>15</sup> APA News, 13 Aug 2024

On 13 August, high-level delegations from both countries came together for talks to address the issues. The delegations decided that the new tariff would no longer be imposed and instead charges would apply only to certain products and could be paid in either CFA Francs or Gambia's currency – dalasi. Senegal also agreed to increase from 10 days to 30 days the validity of documents Gambians require that allow for duty-free movement of goods subject to specific taxes.<sup>16</sup> The delegations also worked on a framework for consultation that should allow for the passing of other agreements aimed at facilitating the movement of people and goods.

These agreements and diffusing the border dispute bode well, not only for the two countries' already strong ties but also for the trade and transit cooperation agreement the two signed on 20 July to strengthen commercial and economic ties.<sup>17</sup> Trade between Senegal and the Gambia totalled \$187m in 2023, less than 5% of their total trade volumes, indicating there is room for growth, which it is hoped these agreements will provide.

### Planner

Q3 2024 **(Senegal) Grand Tortue Ahmeyim (GTA)** offshore gas field production of natural gas is set to begin;

1 Dec 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) French President Emmanuel Macron** to visit Senegal

2027 **(Senegal) Yakaar-Teranga** gas project set to begin production;

### Chronology

19 Aug 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) Reuters**. Prime minister **Ousmane Sonko** announces that government has set up a commission of legal, tax and energy sector experts to review Senegal's oil and gas contracts;

19 Aug 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) Sika Finance**. Economy and planning minister **Abdourahmane Sarr** signs a financing agreement worth 2.5 billion FCFA (\$4.22m) with **Italy's** ambassador to Senegal, **Caterina Bertolini**, to be used for a programme that aims to improve opportunities for socio-economic inclusion of young people;

18 Aug 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) Africanews**. President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye** confirms Senegal has successfully launched its first satellite from **California (United States)**, making it one of 12 **African** nations with their own satellite;

14 Aug 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) AFP**. President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye** calls for recovery measures to be taken for the press sector following strikes by the media over economic pressures and threats to press freedom;

14 Aug 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) APA News**. President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye** dissolves the **Commission Nationale du Dialogue des Territoires** (national commission for territorial dialogue) created in December 2015 by former president **Macky Sall**, reportedly because it is considered wasteful;

12 Aug 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) APA News**. Prime minister **Ousmane Sonko** arrives in **Mali** for an official visit;

10 Aug 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) AFP**. Former ruling **Alliance pour la république (APR)** claims the new government is preparing a "witch hunt" after President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye** appointed several judges replacing those viewed as favourable to the previous government;

9 Aug 2024 **Dakar (Senegal) APA News**. **Intergovernmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA)** meets with experts from Senegal, **Burkina Faso, Mali** and **Niger** to strengthen their capacities on mechanisms to combat the financing of terrorism;

<sup>16</sup> North Africa Post, 16 Aug 2024

<sup>17</sup> Energy Capital & Power, 29 Jul 2024

5 Aug 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA News*. **The Gambia's** vice president, **Mohammed BS Jallow**, arrives in Senegal for a two-day working visit;

5 Aug 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Le Jecos*. **Agence nationale de la statistique et de la démographie (ANSD)** (national agency for statistics and demography) reports GDP decreased by 2.2% in the first quarter of 2024 compared to the previous quarter;

3 Aug 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *AFP*. Senegal summons **Ukraine's** ambassador to Senegal, **Yurii Pyvovarov**, for publishing a video on social media in support of recent attacks against the **Malian** army and **Russia's Africa Corps** by **Tuareg** rebels;

1 Aug 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Bloomberg*. Workers at **Canada**-headquartered **Endeavour Mining's Sabodala-Massawa** mine go on strike over overtime payment disputes;

30 Jul 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA News*. Senegal intercepts over 400 migrants in two days, mainly from the **Gambia**, Senegal, **Sierra Leone**, **Mali** and **Guinea** travelling to reach **Europe**;

29 Jul 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Sika Finance*. President **Bassirou Diomaye Faye** publicly declares his assets, confirming that he is paid a monthly salary of 4.8m FCFA (\$7,953) as president of Senegal;

29 Jul 2024 **Dakar (Senegal)** *The Africa Report*. **Open Society Foundations (OSF)**, the world's largest private grant-making network, announces it will allocate \$400m over eight years to its new **Economic and Climate Prosperity** programme, which includes Senegal;

### About Africa Risk Consulting:

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