

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

## Senegal Monthly Briefing August 2023

## Senegal Summary 23 August 2023

*Interior minister Antoine Diome announces on 31 July that his ministry will dissolve the opposition political party **Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTE)** led by **Ousmane Sonko**. The **Assemblée nationale** (national assembly) on 5 August passes an amendment to the electoral code that allows any person who was previously convicted but then pardoned or given amnesty to run for office. Human rights organisations, including United States-headquartered **Human Rights Watch (HRW)** and France-headquartered **Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme (FIDH)**, express concern over the state of human rights in Senegal. Foreign affairs minister **Aïssata Tall Sall** confirms on 3 August that Senegal will contribute soldiers if the regional bloc **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** decides that military intervention is required in Niger following the coup d'état there on 26 July.*

**Sonko's party dissolved**

Interior minister **Antoine Diome** announced on 31 July that his ministry would dissolve the opposition political party **Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (PASTE)** led by **Ousmane Sonko**, saying that the party has frequently called on its supporters to take part in “*insurrectionary movements*” that have had serious consequences including loss of life, injuries, ransacking and looting.<sup>1</sup> The announcement came two hours after Sonko was charged with various crimes including calling for an insurrection.<sup>2</sup> This was the third legal proceeding against Sonko, who was sentenced on 1 June to two years in prison for “*youth corruption*” and on 8 May to a six-month suspended sentence in a defamation trial.

Sonko was arrested on 28 July after he took a phone from a policeman stationed outside his home, saying that the policeman was filming him without his permission.<sup>3</sup> The charges against him sparked protests and in **Ziguinchor**, where Sonko was Mayor, at least two people died in protests. In response to the protests, the digital economy ministry announced that it would restrict internet access citing “*dissemination of hateful and subversive messages related on social networks in a context of disturbance of public order*”.<sup>4</sup> **United Kingdom**-headquartered **Amnesty International** denounced this move, calling it an attack on freedom of information, and was later joined by other rights groups who denounced not only the internet restriction but the dissolution of PASTE (see below).

The move has wider ramifications for Senegal's political space, as PASTE forms part of the opposition coalition **Yewwi Askan Wi (YAW)**, which has 56 seats in the **Assemblée nationale** (national assembly). Sonko, who ran in the 2019 presidential election, came third with his party garnering 15.67% of the vote and was elected as mayor of Ziguinchor, the largest city in **Casamance** region. This marks only the second time that a party has been dissolved in Senegal, with the last such occurrence in 1960. YAW has lost a key party in its coalition, and on 10 August, also cut ties with opposition party **Taxawu Sénégal**, led by former **Dakar** mayor **Khalifa Sall**.<sup>5</sup> This has left the official opposition in disarray just six months before the election, and once again painted Senegal as a former beacon of democracy that is backsliding.

<sup>1</sup> Le Quotidien, 2 Aug 2023

<sup>2</sup> Le Point, 31 Jul 2023

<sup>3</sup> RFI, 31 Jul 2023

<sup>4</sup> Sika Finance, 31 Jul 2023

<sup>5</sup> Africanews, 10 Aug 2023

## Former convicted individuals cleared to run in election

The Assemblée nationale on 5 August passed an amendment to the electoral code that allows any person who was previously convicted but then pardoned or given amnesty to run for office.<sup>6</sup> The amendment was a recommendation stemming from the national dialogue between political actors held in May and June which Sall launched.

The amendment is significant as it could clear the way for former Dakar mayor Khalifa Sall and former president **Abdoulaye Wade's** (2000-2012) son, **Karim Wade**, to run in the February 2024 presidential election. Sall was convicted of forgery and fraud and sentenced to five years in prison on 30 March 2018; however, on 29 September 2019, President Sall issued an executive order for Sall's release. Wade was convicted of corruption in 2015 and sentenced to six years in prison. Previously, Article 131 of the electoral code stipulated that any individual who has been handed a prison sentence amounting to five years and above is removed from the electoral register and cannot be a presidential candidate. However, this has been amended to allow the reintegration of people imprisoned or fined five years after the completion of their sentence duration.<sup>7</sup>

In a subsequent development, the opposition YAW coalition opened a case on 11 August with the constitutional council, which oversees applications and rules on appeals for the presidential and legislative elections.<sup>8</sup> YAW has asked that the council annul this amendment. Another issue with their candidacy has also been raised in the media – both may not have the required tax clearance to be a candidate as they have not paid the fines imposed upon them at sentencing.<sup>9</sup> Thus far, there has been no outcome to these two issues, and the status of their candidacies remains unknown. Justice minister **Ismaila Madior Fall** noted that despite the amendment, Sonko remains ineligible to run.<sup>10</sup>

## Rights organisations raise red flags

Human rights organisations, including **United States**-headquartered **Human Rights Watch (HRW)** and **France**-headquartered **Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme (FIDH)**, have expressed concern over the deteriorating state of human rights in Senegal. HRW on 2 August wrote a report titled '*Senegal Slipping*' on the dissolution of PASTEF and the government's decision to shut down mobile internet services across the country.<sup>11</sup> The organisation expressed concern over these events, saying that they are occurring against a background of increasing instability in **West Africa**, implying that such events could spark further problems in Senegal.<sup>12</sup> HRW encouraged the government to not only restore internet services but pursue a path of dialogue over repression which is leading to violence in the country (see above).

The FIDH and its member organisations released a statement on 2 August expressing concern over the dissolution of PASTEF ahead of the February 2024 elections, saying that it should only be used as a last resort. The organisation noted that political pluralism is "*essential*" to democracy and that PASTEF's dissolution is an intensification of repression against the opposition in Senegal ahead of the 2024 elections. Senegal is facing increased pressure from international organisations, and any further democratic backsliding could risk backlash from international development partners who have always praised Senegal for its long-standing human rights and democratic record.

## Senegal will send soldiers for ECOWAS intervention in Niger

Foreign affairs minister **Aissata Tall Sall** confirmed on 3 August that Senegal will contribute soldiers should the regional bloc **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** decide that

<sup>6</sup> Jeune Afrique, 6 Aug 2023

<sup>7</sup> The Africa Report, 11 Aug 2023

<sup>8</sup> Le Quotidien, 17 Aug 2023

<sup>9</sup> Le Quotidien, 14 Aug 2023

<sup>10</sup> RFI, 6 Aug 2023

<sup>11</sup> HRW, 2 Aug 2023

<sup>12</sup> HRW, 2 Aug 2023

military intervention is required in **Niger** following the coup d'état there on 26 July. Sall noted that Senegal is a signatory to the regional bloc and must comply with its decisions – a sentiment not necessarily shared by other ECOWAS members such as **Ghana**.<sup>13</sup>

The defence ministers of ECOWAS member states on 30 July set a deadline of 6 August for the military junta in Niger to step aside and reinstate the civilian government.<sup>14</sup> This statement implied that the bloc was actively considering military intervention in Niger to forcibly reverse the coup, but the deadline came and went without further action, resulting in the leaders of the bloc holding a conference in **Nigeria** on 10 August during which they declared the “activation” of ECOWAS’ standby force.<sup>15</sup> Following this conference, President Sall said that he had thrown his weight behind the idea, noting:

*“We want lasting peace in Niger in an **Africa** without a coup. The priority of the continent must be the fight against terrorism, security and development with employment for young people. (...) This is why, within ECOWAS, we are firm, this (coup) is unacceptable.”<sup>16</sup>*

However, the possibility of using military intervention in Niger has divided politicians and other civil society actors. More than 170 people, including **Transparency International Senegal**’s coordinator **Birahim Seck**, former presidential candidate **Mamdou Lamine Diallo** and former prime minister **Aminata Touré**.<sup>17</sup> Independent member of parliament (MP) **Thierno Alassane Sall** also expressed his opposition to the idea, stating that ECOWAS has no legal basis to carry out a military intervention.

The ECOWAS defence ministers met again on 17 August in Ghana to discuss the coup and possible intervention, but no final decision was made. At the time of writing, there is still no decision, lessening the chances of such an intervention – it has been nearly a month since the coup, allowing the junta to begin making changes such as appointing a prime minister and ministers, cementing political power. There have also been several rallies in favour of the junta, and any potential military intervention could now backfire and flare tensions in the region, especially as **Mali** and **Burkina Faso** have made their support for the junta known and threatening to prevent any military intervention. The **African Union (AU)**, which holds the power to overrule such an intervention, has also not made its stance known. Nevertheless, Senegal’s commitment of soldiers to the ECOWAS stand-by force portrays it as a reliable partner in ECOWAS and ensures that it is still viewed as a prestigious partner in the organisation, especially by its new head – Nigerian president **Bola Tinubu** (2023-present).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> ARC Briefing Ghana Aug 2023

<sup>14</sup> DW, 4 Aug 2023

<sup>15</sup> RFI, 11 Aug 2023

<sup>16</sup> RFI, 11 Aug 2023

<sup>17</sup> RFI, 11 Aug 2023

<sup>18</sup> Anadolu Agency, 3 Aug 2023

## Planner

Q1 2023 **(Senegal) Grand Tortue Ahmeyim (GTA)** offshore gas field production of natural gas set to begin;

Q1 2024 **(Senegal) Sangomar** offshore oil field production set to begin;

25 Feb 2024 **(Senegal)** Presidential elections;

## Chronology

21 Aug 2023 **Dakar (Senegal) Agence Ecofin. Africa Finance Corporation (AFC)** says it will invest \$54.4m in the development of the **Sangomar** oil field;

20 Aug 2023 **Dakar (Senegal) Financial Afrik.** Presidential decree no. 2023-1710 raises the minimum wage by 11%;

18 Aug 2023 **Dakar (Senegal) Sika Finance.** Outstanding equipment for the 300-megawatt (MW) **Cap des biches** power plant arrives at the **Port of Dakar**, with full operation expected by January;

18 Aug 2023 **Dakar (Senegal) Le Quotidien.** Government confirms it will move the electricity tariff system towards one where citizens, regardless of area, will pay the same electricity price;

14 Aug 2023 **Dakar (Senegal) Sika Finance.** Economy ministry data indicates that the economy recorded a contraction of 5.2% year-on-year in June, driven by socio-political tensions that led to protests;

11 Aug 2023 **Dakar (Senegal) Le Quotidien.** Senegal raises 138.16 billion FCFA (\$228.49m) for construction of infrastructure through a bond issue on the regional financial market, **l'Union économique et monétaire ouest-africaine (Uemoa)**;

9 Aug 2023 **Dakar (Senegal) Le Quotidien.** **European Union** disburses 6.6 billion FCFA (\$10.91m) to Senegal under its youth budget support programme;

9 Aug 2023 **Dakar (Senegal) Jeune Afrique.** **United Kingdom**-headquartered oil major **BP** confirms that production of the offshore **Grand Tortue Ahmeyim (GTA)** gas field will be delayed until Q1 2024, citing operational reasons;

6 Aug 2023 **Dakar (Senegal) RFI.** Opposition leader **Ousmane Sonko** is admitted to hospital after staging a hunger strike to protest his detention;

6 Aug 2023 **Dakar (Senegal) RFI.** **French** lawyer **Juan Branco**, who was representing opposition leader **Ousmane Sonko**, is detained on charges of conspiracy, spreading fake news, and endangering public safety and is subsequently expelled back to France;

4 Aug 2023 **Dakar (Senegal) Africanews.** Foreign affairs minister **Aïssata Tall Sall** says Senegal will participate in a possible military intervention in **Niger** if the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** agrees to follow such action;

3 Aug 2023 **Dakar (Senegal) Agence Ecofin.** **Canada**-headquartered **Endeavor Mining** announces the construction of a \$55m 37 megawatt (MW) photovoltaic solar power plant that will provide power to the **Sabdoala-Massawa** gold mining complex the company operates;

1 Aug 2023 **Dakar (Senegal) Le Quotidien.** Gas station managers pause sales until 3 August, citing ongoing protests, with protests in June often targeting gas stations and more than 100 struck by looters;

28 Jul 2023 **Dakar (Senegal) APA News.** Opposition leader **Ousmane Sonko's** lawyers confirm he was placed in police custody on charges of stealing a mobile phone from a police officer parked near his home, using it to call supporters with a subversive message via social networks as his arrest sparks new protests;

25 Jul 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Le Quotidien*. A blockade erected around opposition leader **Ousmane Sonko**'s home is lifted after 60 days;

24 Jul 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Sika Finance*. Government prioritises aquaculture to mitigate climate change and illegal fishing, allocating a budget of 129 billion FCFA (\$217.65m) towards this strategy;

23 Jul 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *APA News*. Deputy mayor of **Ouakam** confirms a canoe carrying illegal migrants from Senegal capsized and has left at least 15 dead;

23 Jul 2023 **Dakar (Senegal)** *Le Quotidien*. Police arrest two members of opposition party **Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (Pastef)** who were arrested on charges of spreading false news and acts likely to compromise public security, a move former prime minister **Abdoul Mbaye** has welcomed, but described as an "*appeasement measure*", calling for the release of other political prisoners;



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