



## COTE D'IVOIRE UPDATE

### The Road to October 2020 (rev)

*(Comments produced in response to a client enquiry)*

① Yesterday, as they lifted a few of the drastic containment measures<sup>[1]</sup> implemented in March, the authorities announced that they are proceeding with arrangements to hold the **elections on October 31<sup>st</sup>, as scheduled**. The official statement did however include the politic observation that the process would be driven by the Electoral Commission<sup>[2]</sup>.

② For each of the main parties, the identity of the **eventual standard-bearer** in the presidential election is **yet to be determined**, viz.:

#### ■ PDCI

**Bédié** has never made any secret of his **ambition to regain the *fauteuil présidentiel*** from which he was ignominiously ejected in 1999, so he will naturally be seeking the party's nomination. But, to his great credit, he has announced that the **primary election will be open to all party members**<sup>[3]</sup>.

The most prominent of his prospective challengers are brothers-in-law<sup>[4]</sup> **Thierry Tanoh**<sup>[5]</sup> and **Jean-Louis Billon**<sup>[6]</sup>, but it is unclear whether either would prevail against the Sphinx of Daoukro.

#### ■ FPI

Although the case against **Gbagbo** collapsed more than a year ago the Prosecutor has since contrived<sup>[7]</sup> to keep the former President **in a state of legal limbo** and unable to leave the Belgian capital.

As a result, the FPI flag will almost certainly be flown by **Pascal Affi Nguessan**, whose leadership of the divided party has never been accepted by the large pro-Gbagbo wing. This virtually consigns the FPI to the same virtual irrelevance it demonstrated in the 2015 legislative elections<sup>[8]</sup>.

#### ■ RHDP

Officially, **Amadou Gon Coulibaly** remains the party's nominee-designate, subject to ratification by the party Congress<sup>[9]</sup> scheduled for June/July. However, the coronary event for which he is still undergoing treatment in Paris raises **serious questions about his ability to continue** discharging the duties of prime minister, let alone run a gruelling national campaign.

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<sup>[1]</sup> For example, the lock-down order has been lifted nation-wide, with the exception of Abidjan, where a curfew remains in place (though now only now from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m.), while venues such as bars and restaurants remain off-limits.

<sup>[2]</sup> As it happens, the opposition parties have been unanimous in their criticisms of the CEI. At a forum convened by the UN office in Abidjan last week, they objected to the Commission's composition - overly weighted in favour of the Government - as well its refusal to extend the June 14 deadline for voter registration by more than 14 days.

<sup>[3]</sup> He has gone so far as to instruct his campaign team to decamp from the party headquarters and to remove all posters promoting his candidature.

<sup>[4]</sup> Each is married to a daughter of Charles Gomis, one of CIV's longest-serving diplomats and current ambassador to Paris.

<sup>[5]</sup> A former CEO of Ecobank, he was appointed Petroleum minister in Jan. 2017 - but, as a PDCI heavy-weight, became one of the first casualties of the breakdown in the relationship between Ouattara and Bédié two years later.

<sup>[6]</sup> After serving as Ouattara's Trade minister between 2012 and 2017, Bédié made him chief spokesman of the PDCI.

<sup>[7]</sup> I.e. through a succession of appeals and related procedural manoeuvres.

<sup>[8]</sup> The party won only of 3 of the 255 seats in contention.

<sup>[9]</sup> Ouattara's apparent insistence on forcing through his protégé's candidature stands in embarrassing contrast to the free democratic process under way in the PDCI.

There are **three challengers waiting to step into his shoes**: Hamed Bakayoko[10], Marcel Amon Tanoh[11] and Albert Mabri Toikeusse[12]. Combined with AGC's indisposition, a field this crowded would seem to increase the likelihood of an RHDP primary significantly. In that event, we remain convinced that that **Tidjane Thiam** would quickly emerge as the strongest candidate[13].

③ As previously reported, we believe that **Soro shot his bolt with the mutinies he orchestrated in 2017**. Shortly after the May 2017 discovery of a weapons cache in the Bouaké residence of the then Speaker's chief of protocol[14], **Ouattara replaced the Defence minister** Richard Donwahi with one of his closest loyalists, Hamed Bakayoko. At the same time he **redeployed no fewer than four of Soro's former Forces Nouvelles comrades-in-arms**[15] then serving in senior positions in the armed forces.

Because of these pre-emptive moves, it is not clear that the erstwhile *enfant terrible* was ever in a position to make good on his August 2017 boast that,

*"On est dans la garde du Président; on est dans la garde du Palais; on est positionné un peu partout ... Il y a les 8,400 soldats [ex-Forces Nouvelles], et puis d'autres jeunes; on a l'armée, hein ... [Le jour J] Ils vont basculer ... dans ce genre d'action, c'est la puissance du feu qui rallie tout le monde."* [16]

### Post scriptum, May 15th

The pretence that the Bédié campaign is looking forward to the October election with anything approaching equanimity was firmly dispelled by the **bogus communiqué** issued earlier this week by persons impersonating "Les Amis de Tidjane Thiam".

The statement denounced as unfounded the rumours of ongoing negotiations between the former banker and the ruling party, insisting in tones too breathless to inspire credibility, that

*"La candidature de Monsieur Tidjane Thiam, que nous appelons de tous nos vœux, ne peut s'admettre en dehors du PDCI-RDA, parti de Paix, de Dialogue, de Rassemblement, de Développement ..."*

Even more tellingly, the statement did not even appear on the **Facebook page** that has always been the principal communication platform of the pro-TT group. Shortly thereafter, and with the insouciance of one swatting a fly, the group posted **a laconic rebuttal** that is definitely worth a read.

[10] Upon AGC's evacuation to Paris the minister of state for defence, whose presidential ambitions have only recently come to light, lobbied Ouattara to be named acting prime minister.

[11] This former son-in-law of the late Houphouët-Boigny resigned his position as foreign minister in apparent protest at the way AGC was selected as the RHDP candidate by its Politburo, rather than in a primary election by the party congress.

[12] The leader of the UDPCI (the second largest party to have merged into the unified RHDP), he was the only Politburo member to openly challenge the manner of AGC's selection. Although his supporters in the Tonkpi region of the Grand Ouest have declared their endorsement of his undeclared candidacy for president, it is significant that he himself has chosen not to withdraw the UDPCI from the RHDP so as to run as its standard-bearer. This is almost certainly because he anticipates a vacancy arising within the ruling party.

[13] This is subject to two minor impediments. First, the loss of his son Bilal, a 24-year old associate with Glencore, who died last Sunday "after a long illness"(?) Secondly, the fact that Article 55 of the Constitution requires prospective presidential candidates to be "of exclusively Ivorian nationality". My assumption is that TT will have already negotiated a repo-like arrangement with the Quai d'Orsay whereby he relinquishes his French citizenship against the assurance of its prompt reinstatement at the end of his prospective term(s). [See our April 27<sup>th</sup> Note, "**Tidjane Thiam - a dark horse, still in the running**" for a discussion of his 'stealth' campaign.]

[14] I.e. Souleymane Kamaraté, better known by the *nom de guerre* he acquired as a Forces Nouvelles rebel, 'Soul to Soul'. The cache was located after Soro was heard (on an intercepted phone call), instructing mutineers where they could obtain the heavy weapons they would need to hold their own against the reinforcements being dispatched to subdue them.

[15] I.e. Issiaka Ouattara (a.k.a. Wattao'); Ouattara Zoumana (a.k.a. 'Zoua'); Touré Hervé Armand Pelikan (a.k.a. Vetcho'); and Cherif Ousmane (a.k.a. Papa Guépard).

[16] A recording of his conversation between Soro and colourful French businessman Olivier Bazin, featured prominently in the Dec. 2019 announcement of Soro's indictment by Prosecutor Christophe Richard Adou.

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