

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN MALI | THE FIRST STAGE IN A LONG TRANSITION



While the first round of the presidential elections will take place on Sunday 28 July, the campaign is underway in Mali. But the transition is only beginning, with military operations still going on and the hand over from the Misma (ECOWAS) to the Minusma (UN).

On 28 July the first round of the Malian presidential elections will take place. Only a few days before the ballot, it remains difficult to forecast if Malians will be able to vote in calm conditions or to predict the electoral results themselves even if, at present, the date chosen was criticised by several observers and Malian players involved. Nonetheless, behind this important rendezvous for the political normalisation of the country and its reconstruction, the transition process is only starting, imposing an effort in time for all Malian players and the international community, in particular from African people whose capacity of military management of crises must be further reinforced.

Contested elections | On 7 July, the presidential election campaign officially kicked off. From the thirty-six candidates standing for the first round, the Constitutional Court approved twenty-eight cases complying with the conditions defined by the law of 4 September 2006: a payment of a 10 million CFA francs caution (i.e. about €15,200) – refunded up to 50% if a target of over 5% of the votes is obtained in the first round – and, obtaining the backing of at least ten MPs or five district officials in each region of Mali and in the district of Bamako.

Several "old timers" from Malian politics have chosen to stand. Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, aged 68, was Prime Minister from 1994 to 2000, under the presidency of Alpha Oumar Konaré (1992-2002), and President of the National Assembly. Soumaïla Cissé, aged 63, was Minister of Finance, also before the accession to power of Amadou Toumani Touré. Injured by the instigators of the coup in April 2012, he is a fierce opponent of the junta. Tiébilé Dramé, aged 58, was Minister for Foreign Affairs in the transition government from 1991-1992. An unlucky candidate with less than 5% of the vote in the 2002 and 2007 presidential elections, he negotiated the ceasefire signed on 18 June with the Tuareg rebels in Ouagadougou (1). Soumana Sacko, aged 63, was Minister of Finance in the 1980's and Prime Minister during the military transition of 1991-1992, before backing Amadou Toumani Touré during the 2002 and 2007 ballots. Finally, Modibo Sidibé, was Prime Minister under Amadou Toumani Touré between 2007 and 2011, whose heritage he continues to defend (2).

The elections schedule was criticised several times. On 26 June, *International Crisis Group* openly called for a postponement of "at the most for three months" in order to allow "the majority of the electors wanting to vote to be able to do so" (3). Two main reproaches were voiced: the choice of date (rainy season, beginning of Ramadan) and the lack of time to organise the ballot (to distribute new national identity cards, updating of the electoral lists to allow refugees and displaced persons to vote). On 17 July, Tiébilé Dramé even announced his withdrawal from the campaign, considering that the conditions for a regular election had not been met in the absence of representatives of the Malian administration in the Kidal region between 5-25 June, a period defined by the Government for updating electoral lists by local commissions (4).

Criticisms to be clarified | Behind these standpoints, the picture is not however as dark as it seems, as French Senators Jean-Pierre Chevènement and Gérard Larcher recalled in a report published by the Senate on 3 July (5). Of course, the present electoral roll – made up from the RAVEC file (Civil Status Census) of 2010 the reliability of which was considered sufficient – counts 265,000 electors abroad against more than 700,000 in the former version, and more than 20,000 electors are registered without anyone knowing where they reside and have therefore not been taken into account (6). But according to General Sangaré, the general delegate for the elections in Mali, a postponement of a few weeks or a few months would not have permitted to correct these shortcomings in order to allow elections to take place in 2013. Then, the rainy season, which makes the roads barely practicable and the Ramadan might "impair the conduct of the presidential elections", but these do not constitute insurmountable obstacles. Anyway, the Malian people have already voted several times during the rainy season, as was the case of the last legislative elections.

If the refugees and displaced persons amount to more than 400,000, they should also vote. For displaced persons within Malian territory, the Malian authorities have envisaged the possibility of voting away from the offices where they are registered. As for the 175,000 refugees, in the countries bordering Mali, the authorities from Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso – countries where most of them are staying – have given their consent for the organisation of the ballot on their territory. Niger went as far as offering financial and material support for the future operation.

Nonetheless Mali remains a country where the participation rate is traditionally low, between 20% and 40%. During the 2007 presidential elections, the national average participation was

thus 36.24%, and furthermore with a high number of void ballots. Moreover, the rates of participation were the highest in the North, with more than 50% in the Tombouctou, Gao and Kidal regions (compared to 24.5% of voters in the district of Bamako). In fact, whereas in these areas, society is still structured into "noble" and "slave" ethnic groups, "some looking to keep their hegemony, while the others fighting to free themselves from it forever", the participation in the electoral processes is a means to call into question – or to preserve – the grip of the traditional authorities (7).

A process that will be lengthy | A proper control of the ballot lies in part on the security measures provided by Malian and international forces. After the opening of the campaign several candidates have in fact asked to be protected when traveling. Not without reason: on Saturday 20 July, six persons, including electoral agents and an elected member in the locality of Tessalit, were kidnapped during an operation to distribute electoral cards before being released the next day (8). However, the presidential elections are only one stage in a wider process of reconciliation, reconstruction of the State and settlement of old tensions. "The deep causes of the present crisis, recalled by the International Crisis Group on 26 June, go far beyond the failings of electoral democracy. Even a credible and technically successful election will not be enough to rebuild democracy, reconstruct the political system and the security apparatus and reconcile the Malian society with itself" (9).

On 1 July, the Misma let the Minusma accompany the Malian authorities in the political transition process. For their part, the French forces remain independent, according to an articulation defined by a technical agreement signed on 13 July, with a mission focussed on anti-terrorist operations and the possibility, "in the event of serious and imminent threat to elements, infrastructures or property" of the Minusma, to intervene to support the latter (10). Nonetheless, France is not absent from the UN forces: Paris participates with about fifteen soldiers in its staff, with General Vianney Pillet as Chief of Staff. Also, French liaison and support detachments are present with the Peacekeepers to articulate and coordinate the action of the two forces, but also to support the African units in the command, logistics, information and fire support areas.

This technical agreement falls into a double perspective. On the one hand, the French units wish to keep their autonomy as far as their deployment and independence are concerned on the Malian scene. On the other hand, it is a question of stimulating the soldiers of the Minusma to rely as little as possible on the Serval force, and to remind Mali's international partners of the need to reinforce the Minusma while armed groups continue to constitute a threat (11). As was decided by the Security Committee, in resolution 2100 of 25 April 2013, the international contingent must in fact have a maximum of 11,200 soldiers and 1,440 policemen as well as an adequate civilian structure. But during the transition between the Misma and the Minusma, the international numbers amounted to 6,200 soldiers, i.e. the contingents of the Misma, at least those deployed – including Chadians – of the 8,000 originally envisaged.

Reinforcing African crisis management | This difficult mobilisation of the African players in the Malian case testifies the need to reinforce their response capability to crises. At the end of 2012, only two ECOWAS countries had an available battalion: Niger, which benefited in particular from cooperation efforts from France for two years – loan of equipment and

constitution of an air-land force of helicopters monitored in situ since December 2012 – and Togo which was getting ready to take over the mission of the UN in the Ivory Coast. But the difficulties are not limited to these questions of numbers. In fact, if the ECOWAS staff were able to constitute a first stage of operational planning for the military intervention in Mali, the deployment of soldiers from the Misma was only made possible because of French and Western logistic means.

These shortcomings are not new at all. In the Ivory Coast, in 2003-2004, the ECOWAS units did not have sufficient planning capabilities and logistic means, and the African force relied almost exclusively on foreign loans of equipment, communication means and air transport for its deployment (12). Thus, the support is ensured by thirty French soldiers, the work of whom was made difficult because of the ageing Recamp vehicles (13), the absence of tool sets and repair kits, but also the small number of specialised mechanics within the ECOWAS mission in the Ivory Coast (MICECI) (14).

Therefore, the respons of the ECOWAS in the Malian scenario reveals the challenges faced by the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the limits of the initiative recently undertaken by the African Union at the summit of Addis Abeba on 25 May 2013, to constitute a "rapid intervention force". Of course, this force is an intermediary stage in the constitution of the "African Standby Force" the implementation of which initially envisaged for the end of 2010, and which "could not realistically be implemented at best before 2015" (15). But its creation must not make the international community or the African people forget the efforts they must make to develop a capability of a truly autonomous management of the African crisis.

Whatever the case, an international commitment could not replace either the reforms that must be carried out by the Malian authorities to enhance the governance and the relations between South and North as well as the various local groups, or the respect of the agreement of 18 June by all parties. The next presidential mandate therefore promises to be crucial, with the tricky task of pacifying Malian society; especially when on 18 and 19 July of this year, the town of Kidal was hit by violence between Songhais and Tuaregs.

Notes

- (1) The agreement of June 18th provides for a cease fire, the return of the Malian army to Kidal and a quartering of the Tuareg fighters on assembly points.
- (2) Besides those men, one may notice the presence of Dramane Demélé, backed by the Alliance for the Democracy in Mali, or also that of Cheick Modibo Diarra, Prime Minister between April and December 2012.
- (3) International Crisis Group, *Managing Mali's elections: a short delay would pay long-term dividends*, 26 June 2013, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/media-releases/2013/africa/managing-malis-elections.aspx>.
- (4) "Présidentielle malienne : Tiébilé Dramé renonce à être candidat", *Jeune Afrique*, 17 July 2013, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20130717125638/>. The Governor of Kidal only came back in the Northern region on 11 July, with the Prefect and Vice-Prefects.
- (5) Jean-Pierre Chevènement and Gérard Larcher, *Sahel : pour une approche globale*, Senate, Commission of Foreign Affairs, Defense and Armed Forces, Information Report n°720, 3 July 2013, pp. 37-40, <http://www.senat.fr/rap/r12-720/r12-7201.pdf>.
- (6) *Élections au Mali : un fichier électoral défaillant mais suffisant pour la Délégation générale aux élections*, RFI, 20 July 2013, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20130720-mali-fichier-electoral-sangare-election-28-juillet>.
- (7) Mohamed Traore et Sékou Mamadou Chérif Diaby, *Les élections au Mali. Pourquoi le taux de participation est-il toujours si bas ?*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, October 2011, pp. 21-22.
- (8) *Mali : enlèvement de cinq responsables électoraux et d'un élu à Tessalit*, RFI, 20 July 2013, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20130720-mali-enlevement-cinq-personnes-distribution-cartes-nina-tessalit>.
- (9) International Crisis Group, *art. cit.*
- (10) "Un accord avec l'ONU garantit aux forces françaises au Mali leur liberté d'action", *Le Monde*, 16 July 2013.
- (11) For example, between 24 June and 9 July, more than 600 soldiers from the Serval force took part in the Netero operation at the East of Gao, across more 10,000 km². The objective was to recognise and control the zone, and to destroy and disorganise "the terrorist networks" ("Mali: opération Netero", EMA, 13 July 2013, <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/mali/actualite/mali-operation-netero>).
- (12) Hugo Sada, "Le conflit ivoirien : enjeux régionaux et maintien de la paix en Afrique", *Politique Étrangère*, 2/2003, pp. 321-334, pp. 328-329.
- (13) The Recamp program (Reinforcement of the African capabilities for the maintenance of the peace) was initiated in 1997. Intended to prepare for their mission the battalions for the maintenance of the peace, not permanent but able to be brought together quickly, it lies upon three actions: training, joint exercises and availability of military support to African countries (vehicles and light weapons in a first place, pre-positioned on a French base of the sub-region and making it possible to equip a battalion). Recamp is completed in 1998 by the creation in Africa of national schools regionally orientated (ENVR) in order to train competent technicians. Placed under the responsibility of the Direction of the cooperation for Security and Defense (DCSD), which is under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are sixteen of them in 2013.
- (14) The units in Senegal, Niger and Togo have French equipment within the framework of Recamp. In Ghana and Benin they have equipment provided for respectively by the United States and Belgium.
- (15) Jean-Pierre Chevènement and Gérard Larcher, *op. cit.*, p. 153.



The expert | Research Fellow at the Thomas More Institute, holder of a Masters in Defense (Paris 2 University) and a Phd in the History of International Relations (Paris 1 University), Antonin TISSERON developed an expertise on geopolitical, defense and security issues of in the Maghreb-Sahel area. He worked also for the French Department of Defense for several years on the problems relating to the modernization of the armed forces and counter-insurrection.

With the Support

