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## The Republic of Senegal at a Political Turning Point as President Faye Takes Office

Klaus Grütjen

### Summary

On 24 March 2024, presidential elections were held in Senegal, with opposition politician Bassirou Diomaye Diakharr Faye, who was 43 at the time, emerging as the winner. On 2 April 2024, he was sworn in as the fifth President of the Republic of Senegal. This event may mark a turning point in the country's recent history. It once again demonstrates Senegal's special position in the overall political context of the West Africa/Sahel region, in which military coups have increasingly taken place in recent years. This election runs counter to the current trend of increasing autocracy – at a global level too.

During the three years prior to the election, Senegal suffered a deep political crisis that tested the constitutional state to its limits. Although the state institutions demonstrated their stability and resilience during this period and the achievements of democracy and the rule of law were able to be secured for the time being, due in large part to the country's strong civil society, weaknesses became apparent during this crisis in connection with the judiciary, freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Security forces used violence to stifle protests and demonstrations by parts of the population against what they saw as the illegal arrest and imprisonment of opposition politicians. Dozens of people died and several hundreds were injured as a result of these measures. Well over a thousand people were imprisoned without a proper trial. Up until ten days before his election as president, Faye himself was still in prison under these conditions. This makes it all the more remarkable that – and how – Senegal managed

to overcome this crisis. The present article examines the political, social and constitutional factors that led to what now looks set to be a positive outcome of this conflict.

The crisis, which has been overcome for the time being, and the new president's programme suggest that Senegal, too, is following a trend observed for some years now in the West Africa/Sahel region involving a redefinition of the state and of its duties, powers and services – and is doing so by democratically sound means.

Faye and his partners have been battling the long-established political class. They promised their voters fundamental reforms of the state institutions and a rationalisation and streamlining of the public administration. Moreover, they vowed to take resolute steps to fight corruption, clientelism and embezzlement of public finances, goods and resources, which have all been increasing considerably in recent years. The unambiguous election result has given them a clear mandate to do so.

The inauguration of President Faye will also partly alter the balance of power within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In the years ahead, there will be further shifts towards a younger generation of political elites in various countries in the region. In future, Germany and the European Union will need to pay greater attention to the fact that the African states are placing more emphasis on their own cultural identity and are increasingly asserting their own sovereignty in political discourse.

## Senegal as an anchor of stability in the West Africa/Sahel region

On 24 March 2024, the opposition politician Bassirou Diomaye Diakhary Faye was elected the fifth President of the Republic of Senegal. Turning 44 the next day, Faye is not only the youngest candidate to date to have taken up the country's highest office. This is also the first time that a new presidential candidate gained the necessary majority of at least 50% of the votes cast in the first round of voting, obviating the need for a run-off between the two candidates with the most votes. Another first in this election was the fact that a Senegalese president, Macky Sall, organised the election for this office but did not stand for election himself.

Senegal is a special case among the West African states: since gaining political independence on 4 April 1960, it is the only country in the region that has not undergone a coup. The transition of power in 2000 and 2012 also took place on the basis of democratic elections, as it did in the elections of 24 March 2024. Senegal has thus once again confirmed its position as an example of a living democracy with functioning republican institutions. These achievements have certainly been tested to the limit recently, however, because the country has undergone a phase of political crises and unrest during recent months, which has also had an impact on its prospects as a business location. The fact that Faye was able to take up office as president on 2 April 2024 – on the date prescribed by law – is another indication of the resilience of the democratic, constitutional state under the rule of law in Senegal. It was further proof of what might be referred to as the 'Senegalese miracle'.

There have already been several military coups in most of the neighbouring states, and the contrast between the political developments in these countries and in Senegal raises the question as to the reasons behind the latter's model of success. What are the unique features of this political and social system? What conclusions and recommendations might be able to be drawn for state

and civil society actors in other countries in the region and for their partners from the example of Senegal with a view to finding solutions to existing political and social crises in the region?

The economic, social and political problems in Senegal do not differ fundamentally from those of its neighbouring states in which the military has assumed power over the past four years. Like Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger and like Guinea (Conakry), too, Senegal faces considerable structural problems, including the impacts of climate change and youth unemployment. The situation is exacerbated by a lack of prospects for economic and social development, which in turn leads to dissatisfaction with the prevailing political and social conditions. Corruption is on the rise, the effects of which are being widely felt, and frustration is growing in the face of the increasingly numerous and extensive cases of nepotism and the acceptance of bribes in recent years. As in the countries cited as examples above, dissatisfaction with the established political class has also been growing in Senegal among the majority of the population. It seemed inevitable that these trends would need to be corrected in Senegal too.

This new start was anything but simple, however. It was preceded by one of the country's most serious political crises to date. Just a few weeks ago, what now looks set to be a positive outcome could not be predicted with certainty.

Based on an overall review of the events and of the factors that determined these developments, recommendations on courses of action can also be drawn for German and European foreign and development policy, which faces the challenge of countering the growing influence of Russia, China and Iran in recent years (Demirdirek & Talebian, 2022). To do so, concepts and perspectives are needed for mutually beneficial cooperation better suited to the new general conditions and expectations of the African partners.

## The difficult road to the elections of 24 March 2024

As in most francophone African countries, there have been discussions in Senegal, too, in recent years about whether the text of the constitution allows the current president to stand for another term in office. These debates were prompted in each case by amendments to the constitution relating to the duration and limited number of presidential mandates, because – in line with the legal opinion held by many renowned experts on state and constitutional law in French-speaking countries – they enabled the incumbents to argue that the amendments created a new constitutional regime in which they could stand for a ‘first term of office’ one more time. This political device has not worked in every case, however. In Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré, the former president, planned to stand for another term after 27 years in office but was toppled by a popular uprising on 30–31 October 2014 (Grütjen, 2018).

Senegal’s constitution of 22 January 2001 limits the number of times a person can serve as president to two terms. The amendment to the constitution adopted under President Macky Sall on 5 April 2016 reduced the term of office as president from seven to five years. This new rule subsequently sparked discussions about whether Macky Sall was starting his second and hence last term in office when he was re-elected in 2019 or whether this amendment meant that this was the start of a ‘new first mandate’.

Despite public debate, Macky Sall left the question of whether he would stand for office again unanswered for some time, creating room for speculation which did not end until 3 July 2023, when he gave a much-anticipated televised speech announcing that he would no longer be running in the 2024 presidential elections. He failed to clarify whether the wording of the constitution would have allowed him to stand, however, so the question as to his interpretation of the relevant provisions of the constitution remained unanswered.

President Sall’s announcement on the afternoon of 3 February 2024 – only hours before election campaigning was due to begin – of his decision to postpone the presidential elections scheduled for 25 February 2024 for an indefinite period thus provoked a widespread and fierce response. In many places, thousands of people took to the streets to demonstrate against what they saw as a breach of the constitution, with some calling it a ‘constitutional coup’.

Sall took his decision after a parliamentary commission had been convened to investigate the allegation of manipulation of the election process by two judges of the Constitutional Council, Senegal’s highest constitutional court. He announced that he would be setting up an open ‘National Dialogue’ in the meantime to ‘create the conditions for a free, transparent and inclusive election’. This happened against the backdrop of doubts that had already been expressed about whether Sall really intended to hand over power to his elected successor – doubts that Macky Sall did not specifically fuel but did not eliminate either. The opposition and large sections of the population thus saw these measures and announcements as nothing more than attempts and manoeuvres by the state leadership to play for time in the hope of preventing the handover of government to the opposition, which had a clear lead in the polls, or at least of delaying it as long as possible. One of the ways of achieving this was to allow one of the opposition candidates seen by the government as being less ‘radical’ – Karim Wade, the son of Sall’s predecessor Abdoulaye Wade – to stand for election. Karim Wade had been excluded from the previous presidential elections because at the time he filed the paperwork necessary to stand for election, he was not only a Senegalese national but also still had French citizenship through his mother. The constitution did not permit the president to hold dual nationality.

This led to unprecedented scenes in Senegal. The plenary session of the National Assembly on the evening of 5 February 2024 is likely to go down in

the history of parliamentary democracy in Senegal as a warning. In order to enable their previously barred candidate Karim Wade to take part in the presidential elections, the opposition party PDS (Parti démocratique sénégalais) joined forces with the party of President Macky Sall, APR (Alliance pour la République), to which the majority of the members of parliament belonged. Together, they voted in favour of a law to postpone the presidential elections until 15 December 2024. This took place under unprecedented circumstances, however: after they had attempted to demand a parliamentary debate before the voting took place and to prevent it from happening before such debate, the representatives of the other opposition parties, all of which opposed the intended postponement of the elections, were removed from the parliamentary chamber – by the *gendarmérie* (i.e. by military force) called by the President of the National Assembly by right of his authority to police parliament. As a result, only the members of parliament of the ruling APR party and those from the opposition party PDS voted on the law while all other members of parliament were excluded. The subsequent demonstrations provided an outlet for people's indignation at this course of action too.

On 23 February 2024, President Macky Sall once again, as announced, convened a National Dialogue, which met in Diamniadio on 26–27 February 2024, a newly established town 30 km south of Dakar. Several ministries, other government authorities and international organisations have moved their offices to Diamniadio in recent years. The 'vital forces of the nation' (*Forces Vives de la Nation*) now regularly invoked in the context of the recent political developments in West Africa – representatives of the political parties, religious communities, the private sector and civil society – were to take part in this National Dialogue. As the opposition and hence 17 of the 19 candidates admitted by the Constitutional Council to stand for election decided to boycott the event along with a large number of civil society organisations, it was

questionable whether this ad hoc body was in fact representative and thus had the necessary legitimacy.

The National Dialogue nevertheless went ahead and advocated holding the first round of the presidential elections on 2 June 2024. There was claimed to be a 'far-reaching consensus' that these elections could not take place before the president's mandate officially ended on 2 April 2024.

## The key role of the Constitutional Council

As the conflict came to a head, one of the decisive factors in solving it were the decisions taken on the matter by the Constitutional Council (Soma, 2024; Tuekam Tatchum, 2024).

Two members of the National Assembly invoked the Constitutional Council in their own name and on behalf of 38 other members of parliament to rule on the constitutionality of the law (no. 4/2024) adopted on 5 February 2024 to postpone the elections. The Constitutional Council combined these proceedings with a petition by seven of the 19 presidential candidates calling for a ruling on the constitutionality of decree no. 2024-106 of 3 February 2024, which had repealed the decree of 29 November 2023 setting the presidential elections for 25 February 2024. In its decision (no. 1/C/2024) of 15 February 2024, the Constitutional Council accepted both petitions and declared both the contested law of 5 February 2024 and the decree signed two days previously (no. 2024-106) to be unconstitutional. Only a day later, on 16 February 2024, the Office of the President of the Republic issued a communiqué stating that the president would comply with and implement the Constitutional Council's decision.

The president did not initially follow up on this announcement, however. On 26 February 2024, 16 of the 19 candidates admitted to stand for election submitted a petition, on the basis of which the Constitutional Council set the date of the election for 31 March 2024 (decision no. 6/E/2024 of 6 March 2024), acting by way of substitute

fulfilment in place of the president due to the president's failure to do so. It was only after this ruling that President Macky Sall cleared the path for the elections to be organised to determine his successor. In two decrees dated 6 March 2024 (nos. 2024-690 and 2024-691), he set the election date for 24 March 2024. In a communiqué issued on 7 March 2024, the Constitutional Council confirmed that these two decrees were valid and hence that the elections would be held on 24 March 2024, emphasising that the president was responsible for setting the election date and that it had undertaken this measure solely because the relevant body – the president – had failed to do so. By way of a trade-off, it was accepted that the election campaign would be shorter than prescribed by law.

The combination of these decisions by the Constitutional Council and the growing pressure from civil society and public opinion tipped the scales. Against the recommendations made by the National Dialogue on 26–27 February 2024, the president ultimately cleared the way for the presidential elections to be organised before the end of his term in office on 2 April 2024.

## **The outcome of the election in the context of the political tension and conflicts**

On the evening of the election, a clear victory by the anti-establishment opposition candidate and pan-African Faye was already becoming apparent shortly after the polling stations closed. The official election result confirmed that Faye had won 54.28% of the votes cast, thus obviating the need for a run-off. The candidate of the governing majority party APR, former Prime Minister Amadou Ba, gained 35.79% of the votes. The other 16 male candidates and Anta Babacar Ngom, the only woman standing for election for the highest state office, came in far behind with results in low single figures. Aliou Mamadou Dia came third with 2.80%, followed by the former mayor of Dakar, Khalifa Ababacar Sall (Parti socialiste – PS), with 1.56%. All other candidates

received less than 1% of the votes. Voter turnout was 61.3%. Of the 7,371,890 registered voters, 4,519,253 cast their vote, of which 33,991 were invalid. The result was confirmed by the Constitutional Council on 29 March 2024. The relatively poor result obtained by Amadou Ba can be partly attributed to the tensions and rifts that were already becoming apparent within the majority party APR. Despite being the candidate of the governing party, Amadou Ba had come to be seen as lacking the support of the party leader Macky Sall in the final weeks before the election.

This result impressively demonstrates the determination of the people of Senegal to use the democratic rights accorded to them by the constitution and to reject the traditional establishment.

The consistently calm and peaceful atmosphere in which the elections were ultimately held marked a break with the events in the run-up to these elections – events that lasted around two years and were a stress test for Senegalese society.

Another reason why Faye's election as president was so remarkable is that he was still in prison only ten days before the election.

The institution of criminal proceedings against the opposition politician Ousmane Sonko was one of the factors that triggered the political conflict that escalated dramatically until shortly before the elections and led to them being postponed by a month. As already mentioned, Sonko was originally a civil servant in the Directorate General of Taxes and Government Property and was one of the founders of the autonomous union of civil servants in this area. He set up the African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics and Fraternity party (*Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité* – PASTEF) in 2014. His criticism of the government caused a stir when he and his supporters made allegations of fiscal and budgetary irregularities. Among other things, Sonko investigated the questionable approach by Senegalese authorities and certain sections of the private sector in developing the large oil and natural gas fields that had been discovered in Senegal's coastal waters. These investigations

led to his dismissal from government employment 'on account of breach of official confidentiality, without suspension of pension entitlements' in August 2016. This decision was confirmed by Senegal's Supreme Court in December 2019.

Bassirou Diomaye Diakhar Faye was born on 25 March 1980 in Ndiagianiao (department of Mbour, Thiès region). He belongs to the Serer people, the majority ethnic group in that region, and abides by their traditional and cultural values and the Muslim faith. He grew up in a rural area with his parents, an established and well-respected family.

Faye attended a private Catholic primary school and a secondary school (*collège*) in his home village. He spent the last three years of his secondary education at Lycée Demba Diop in Mbour. He began studying law in 2000 at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, gaining a master's degree in 2004, after which he studied at the National School of Administration (*École Nationale d'Administration – ENA*) until 2007.

Like Ousmane Sonko (Prime Minister of Senegal since April 2024), Faye initially worked as a senior civil servant in the Directorate General of Taxes and Government Property (*Direction Générale des Impôts et des Domaines*). He and Sonko were active in the union for employees in this sector. Faye was one of the driving forces behind the PASTEF party ever since it was founded in 2014. While Sonko was the party's figurehead, Faye was its leading policy expert. He worked on the political doctrine and on organisational matters within the party. In October 2022, Faye became secretary-general of the party but stepped down from this office after becoming president.

These disclosures and revelations resulted in a high degree of widespread popularity for Ousmane Sonko and his political allies. As leader of PASTEF, he was a member of Senegal's National Assembly from 2017 to 2022. In 2019, he stood as a candidate for the presidential elections and won 15.67% of the votes, coming third behind Macky Sall and Idrissa Seck. In February 2022, he was elected mayor in the local elections in his home town Ziguinchor in Casamance in southern Senegal.

In February 2021, Sonko was accused of repeated rape and death threats by Adjil Sarr, a young employee at a massage parlour that Sonko regularly frequented, which dealt a blow to his political career. Due to Sonko's growing popularity, the case attracted considerable attention among the population. It is regarded as the key factor that prompted a series of far-reaching and long protests, which were suppressed by force by the security forces. In February 2021, the National Assembly lifted Sonko's parliamentary immunity. On 1 June 2023, he was acquitted of the accusations made against him by Adjil Sarr in the principal proceedings. However, as his accuser was under the age of 21 at the time of the events, Sonko was nevertheless convicted of 'seduction of a minor' (under the age of 21 under Senegal's criminal law) and received a two-year prison sentence. In addition, in November 2022, the Minister of Tourism, Mame Mbaye Niang, reported Sonko for defamation, public insult, forgery of documents and use of forged documents. According to Niang, Sonko had accused him of corruption. The case, which has since become public, concerned the embezzlement of funds of the National Programme for Community Agricultural Estates (PRODAC). Sonko received a two-month suspended sentence and was ordered to pay CFA 200 million (around EUR 304,900) in damages. From the end of May 2023, Ousmane Sonko was placed under guarded house arrest and was sent to prison two weeks later.

When the then Secretary-General of PASTEF, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, criticised Sonko's treatment by the judicial authorities, he himself was remanded in custody on 14 April 2023 for 'spreading false news, contempt of court and defamation of a legally established body (professional group)'. Faye, Sonko and other members and supporters of PASTEF were not released until 14 March 2024. In contrast to Sonko, who was imprisoned on the basis of a valid conviction, no charges were brought against Faye during his 11-month imprisonment.

In order to take away the main legal and organisational basis of Sonko and his allies and

supporters, PASTEF was banned and dissolved by decree on 31 July 2023 for breaching the constitution and the Political Parties Act.

In hindsight, the measures taken against Sonko, Faye and their allies did in fact do more to increase their popularity rather than reduce their public visibility and suppress their campaigns. Their treatment by the judiciary and the security forces led to protests and riots in many places on several occasions. They were suppressed by the police and the *gendarmerie*, in some cases using brutal violence involving teargas and live ammunition. In the last two years of this crisis, dozens of people died and hundreds were injured in Senegal. Well over 1,000 people were detained during this period, in some cases arbitrarily, without a proper trial ever being opened against them.

From today's point of view, it does not seem very likely that the human rights violations committed in this context and the events that were incompatible with the principles of the rule of law will ever be fully investigated because on 6 March 2024, as a way out of the crisis was already beginning to become apparent, Senegal's National Assembly adopted a law (94 in favour, 49 against, three abstentions) granting an amnesty covering 'all acts that may be classified as a criminal or correctional offence committed between 1 February 2021 and 25 February 2024, either in Senegal or abroad, relating to demonstrations or politically motivated actions.'

This law is strongly criticised by opposition circles and civil society because it prevents the security forces that were involved in the acts of violence described and those politically responsible, on whose orders they were acting, from being held accountable. Amnesty International has called this amnesty 'an affront to victims claimed by the demonstrations', while Human Rights Watch criticised that it 'opens the door to impunity for serious crimes'. At the same time, this law was the legal basis upon which Sonko and Faye were released along with hundreds of other prisoners.

President Macky Sall, who initiated and supported this measure, justified the amnesty: 'Over and

above the legitimate concern for justice, responsibility and accountability, I hope that amnesty and forgiveness, with their salutary virtues for the nation, will help us to overcome these difficult times, so that our beloved country can reconcile with itself, restoring all its vital forces around the essentials,' adding that he had taken this decision in order to pacify the political arena and to further strengthen national cohesion. 'I want to leave behind me a country that is reconciled with itself,' he emphasised once again.

The standing and reputation of Senegal's judiciary and of its security forces have suffered lasting damage, as have the freedom of expression and freedom of press, which were considered exemplary until a few years ago. The evident and unsanctioned violations of basic rights have revealed weaknesses in the system. The loss of faith in state institutions and services that this has engendered will only gradually be able to be rebuilt through concrete reform measures.

Private television and radio broadcasters that reported directly and frankly on the actions of the security forces and the judicial authorities were banned from broadcasting for several days or weeks. The broadcasting signal of the media company Walfadjri, known for its critical reporting and well-regarded among the public, was interrupted on multiple occasions and for lengthy periods of time. At the beginning of February 2024, its licence was even 'permanently' withdrawn (although this measure has since been revoked). In addition, the state authorities instructed all mobile internet connections to be shut down in several situations that they deemed to be critical. This was designed to make it more difficult for organisers of demonstrations and the protest movements to communicate and hence coordinate their activities.

## **Analysis and evaluation in the current political context**

The occurrences described demonstrate that the events and developments in Senegal have much in common with those in the neighbouring states in the Sahel region, both politically and socially.



There is a key difference, however, in that the problems highlighted here are being solved through democratic processes.

Like the other countries in the West Africa/Sahel region, Senegal has also entered a phase of state reformation and has begun a process of nation and state building (Grütjen, 2024). In contrast to those countries under military rule, however, Senegal has a democratically legitimised government. Here, the development lines of legality and legitimacy thus run parallel and are largely homogeneous. In the interplay between the country's state institutions, as set out in the constitution and implemented in reality, these institutions have once again demonstrated their resilience against attempts at taking unconstitutional action. The consistent stance adopted by the Constitutional Council in this case deserves particular mention. Based on strict application of the constitution, its decisions were ultimately accepted even by the president. Many of the events observed suggest that the president and his political allies intended to retain and exercise state authority or at least did not want to hand it over to the opposition, whose declared goal was to break away from the established system. This is exactly what has now happened, however, due to the resilience of the Senegalese system. Senegal's democracy and constitutional state are likely to emerge from this process in a stronger position.

The factors that played a crucial role in the positive outcome of the crisis include efforts to achieve understanding and consensus, which are a particular feature of Senegalese society, transcending ethnic and religious affiliations. Another factor was the fact that the armed forces do not take sides in political conflicts, strictly adhering to their republican mandate.

In Senegal, PASTEF may mark the start of a political movement similar to the broad-based political parties found in countries such as Germany (in other words, parties that attempt to expand their voter base to win as many votes as possible in order to achieve strategic majorities, aiming to attract broad sections of the electorate

across different social classes and combining different ideologies, representing the diversity of their interests by striking a balance between them [Nohlen, 2010]). PASTEF's popularity and success may have been largely due to its charismatic leader, Ousmane Sonko. Yet after its structures did in fact survive the formal ban and almost reduced it to insignificance, PASTEF showed – not least by appointing Faye as its presidential candidate – that individual candidates for office can be replaced and hence that the goals and ideas pursued by the organisation take precedence. Faye ran his campaign with a detailed programme called 'The project of a sovereign, just and prosperous Senegal' (Coalition Diomaye Président, 2024). In contrast, in many countries, political groupings are formed around a particular leader. Parties such as these often only last as long as their leader exercises political power or has the potential to do so. In Senegal, the opposition party PDS led by former President Abdoulaye Wade may be one such party and the previous majority party APR led by former President Macky Sall may be another.

Another structural difference between PASTEF and other Senegalese parties is that the movement is not dependent on funding from a particular group of people. It therefore does not depend on the material assets of individuals or groups and hence on their objectives. Instead, it is committed to a broader-based representativity and support at the level of the social basis.

Another key success factor was and is the fact that PASTEF has made the best possible use of means of communication, both for internal coordination and in public. PASTEF has a considerable advantage over the previous governing party APR in this area. In particular, PASTEF has had lasting success in using social media as communication channels. It even managed to distract the public's attention from the presentation of projects successfully implemented by the government, particularly in the field of infrastructure.

As in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, Senegal's old political class seems to have become obsolete and appears to be incapable of undergoing a

process of renewal. In Senegal, however, it was the people who determined the change of course and not the military. In contrast to the three countries mentioned above, the opposition in Senegal offered a real alternative to the long-established forces, an alternative that could be taken seriously.

After Sonko lost his right to be elected on account of his criminal conviction, it was only right that he and his supporters should nominate Faye, his close and long-standing ally, to succeed him as the party's presidential candidate in November 2023. In the absence of a criminal conviction on Faye's part, even though both he and Sonko were in prison at that time, it could be assumed that Faye – in contrast to Sonko – would not be excluded from the election. Faye thus assumed leadership of the Coalition Président Diomaye, with which he ran his election campaign. On 20 January 2024, the Constitutional Council announced the final list of presidential candidates. As expected, Sonko was not admitted as a candidate but Faye was. Two of the 19 confirmed candidates, Cheikh Tidiane Dièye and Habib Sy, withdrew their own candidacy after the list was announced and called on their supporters to vote for Faye.

## Outlook

The winner of the presidential elections, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, had never held a political office at parliamentary or government level before, which meant that he took up office without being weighed down by anything from the past.

He faces considerable and complex challenges. At the first press conference after his election on 25 March 2024, Faye announced that his priorities would be national reconciliation, fundamental reform ('rebuilding') of the institutions and a significant reduction in living costs.

'I pledge to govern with humility and transparency and to fight corruption at all levels,' he declared. He assured Senegal's bilateral and multilateral partners that his country would remain a 'sure and reliable friend and ally' to all partners willing to

engage in 'virtuous, respectful and mutually productive cooperation'.

His institutional reform projects include the abolition of the High Council of Local Authorities (*Haut Conseil des Collectivités Territoriales*), the *Economic, Social, and Environmental Council* (*Conseil Économique Social et Environnemental*) and the High Council for Social Dialogue (*Haut Conseil du Dialogue Social*). This would already make a major contribution to reducing government expenditure. Moreover, it is hard to see how these bodies benefit the country as part of the system of state institutions. Faye intends to readjust and recalibrate the responsibilities, competencies and balance of power between the state institutions. In particular, in contrast to the model of France's Fifth Republic, he aims to limit the far-reaching powers of the state president and to introduce much greater accountability for the president's actions. Faye is also planning a fundamental reform of the election system. Within the state administration, funds, agencies and departments with similar and partly overlapping duties and services are to be merged to cut costs and become more economically efficient. The power of the state leadership to appoint political public servants is to be limited. Instead, the relevant posts (particularly heads of departments and divisions) are to be publicly advertised.

President Faye must and will do everything he can to live up to the hope the people of Senegal placed in him in the election. He has been given a vote of confidence upfront, but he now needs to start achieving successes soon to show people that they made the right choice.

Faye has reached out to his bilateral and multilateral partners to continue cooperation. They are now called on to shape the content of this cooperation with Senegal's self-confident new leadership in their mutual interest. If this project succeeds in Senegal, it may generate positive momentum for relations with the other countries in the West Africa/Sahel region.

On the day he took up office, President Faye already appointed Ousmane Sonko as Prime Minister. On 5 April 2024, Sonko presented his new cabinet, made up of 25 ministers, including four women. Two of the ministers belong to the Christian minority. There are also five junior ministers (*Secrétaires d'Etat*). The previous government under Prime Minister Sidiki Kaba, which was only in office for four weeks, had 34 members.

On the African continent, the largely smooth running of the elections and the result were welcomed across the board. Immediately after Faye was officially announced as the winner, Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission, congratulated his new partner on behalf of the AU on winning the election, wishing him every success for his mandate and assuring him of the AU's solidarity. Two days prior to that, Omar Alieu Touray, President of the ECOWAS Commission, congratulated Faye on his election. Three communiqués on 3, 6 and 16 February 2024 show that ECOWAS had been following closely and with concern the events that had taken place in this ECOWAS member state since President Macky Sall announced the postponement of the elections, calling for everyone involved to preserve the democratic achievements of this 'beacon country' (literally *pays phare*).

Germany and Europe have a considerable interest in strengthening Senegal's role, confirmed by the recent events, as an anchor of stability in the region and a counterbalance to growing influence of political powers such as Russia and Iran, whose ideas, interests and values are not compatible with the Western Atlantic model of democracy governed by the rule of law. The reform projects announced by Faye offer important starting points for a partial realignment of cooperation. If public services become more efficient and at the same time promising steps are taken to fight corruption, the country would also become a more attractive place for foreign direct investment. This would have a positive impact on the economy. As Senegal can act as a bridge,

successful continuation of cooperation with this partner country could also have a positive effect in terms of relaunching cooperation with the neighbouring states in the Sahel region. In this context, it will be important to observe how President Faye positions the country within the regional organisations (e.g. ECOWAS, WAEMU, AES) and in Senegal's relations with them.

Constructive support and assistance for the projects of Senegal's new leadership offer good opportunities to continue and expand cooperation in a partnership based on mutual respect that is beneficial to both sides.

President Faye's credibility and authority as a leader will depend not least on the degree to which he manages to step out of Ousmane Sonko's shadow in the weeks and months ahead.

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