

REPORT ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION IN BURKINA FASO DURING JULY 2002

July 2002 was dominated by three major events:

- The continuation of the political dispute framed by the Collective of democratic organizations and political parties ("the Collectif")
- The rise of the trade-union dispute
- The diplomatic initiative of President Compaoré in the conflict of Liberia.

1. The continuation of the struggle of the "Collectif"

One remembers that the "Collectif" joined together in general assembly last February had refused to give its support to the parties members, in fact the parties of the opposition known as radical (PDP/PS, UNIR/MS; PDS). Whereas for these parties, the fight against impunity should be carried out on a double face, as well in the "street" through the pressures exerted by the "Collectif", but also at the national assembly. But for the leaders of the "radical civil society", who direct the "Collectif", any participation in elections is inappropriate, estimating that the political conditions were not met, particularly the commitment of President Compaore to end the impunity. They took note of the G14 to take part to the legislative.

So, in spite of the opposition of the Bureau of the "Collectif", the parties members of G14 took part to the legislative of May 5. This participation was finally more than honorable, since these parties carried out a remarkable opening. Indeed, G14 which did not lay out that of 6 deputies under the previous legislature gained 16 seats at the national assembly. The good overall organization of the legislative elections, as well as the remarkable results obtained by the whole of Burkinabe opposition were perceived by many observers as a reverse for the "Collectif", which was opposed to the participation of its militants in the poll. One can even wonder whether the "Collectif" politically did not weaken if we took into account the chorus of praises, as well at the national level as at the international level which followed the legislative, greeting the remarkable progress of the Burkinabe young democracy. Some diplomats such as the ambassador of France and some politicians of the majority do not hesitate any more to openly say but the political crisis, which the country passed through since the assassination of Norbert Zongo in 1998 is finished. Others more prudent, admit that it is in the process of finish. Anyway, all admit that a page has been just turned, that of a hegemonic and arrogant ruling party, which will have to take into account from now on a strong parliamentary opposition. Vis-a-vis this new order, many observers even wonder about the future of the "Collectif".

On last 26 June, the president of the "Collectif", Halidou Ouédraogo, at the time of a press conference, recognized that assets had been garnered. For example, he quoted the freedom of expression and opinion enjoyed by the citizens, the awakening of the citizens, less and less willing to undergo arbitrary public authorities without balking. For him, even the political and institutional reforms conceded by the government are a point in favour of the "Collectif" which, by its pressures obliged the power to more widen the field of freedoms and the democracy. President Compaoré himself recognized implicitly the "Collectif"s contribution, and even estimated in a recent interview that "the "Collectif" does not really apprehend very well the positive role that it has played". But for the president of this movement, the progress recorded should not occult the bitter reality of the political situation of Burkina. And to denounce the delaying tactics of the government, prompt to make "solitary so-called reforms". According to him, there is a need for continuing active resistance. The president of the "Collectif" does not exclude however to reconsider his strategy, and admitted that his movement is obliged to refine more its sales leaflet to convince its militants and sympathizers of the need for continuing the fight. The task became more complex, he recognized, due to the fact that "some chancelleries do not cease congratulating the power for the elections which they consider transparent". For him, the participation of the parties members of G14 in legislative of May 5 by no means weakened the cohesion of the "Collectif". Moreover, the fight of the "Collectif" will be prolonged at the national assembly. It will also continue in the "street", since the "Collectif" called for a meeting and demonstrations on June 29, 2002. "With the pressure, you will see that all the delayed files will be regulated" said Mr. Halidou Ouédraogo. The goal of this demonstration is "to recall to the government that our claiming platform is always of topicality, and that it must meet us to discuss it". This claiming platform relates in particular to the fight against impunity of crimes, and on the reform of justice. On these points, the "Collectif" estimates that it did not obtain large-thing up to now, and invites the government to return to the table of negotiations. But it is not certain that the government will join again the dialogue with the "Collectif", president Compaoré having declared recently, in an interview not wanting to deal with sterile polemic. About possible negotiations with the "Collectif", he asserted: "*that depends on what there is like question to treat. You know that me, I do not close my door to somebody. But if is to make theatre, that is not used for nothing. But if there are topics to discuss OK*". On its side, the "Collectif" intends to continue its pressures in the street, without great hope to see them succeeded. Thus on June 29 it organized its first demonstration of after legislative of May 5, which drained a few thousands of people, among whom number of the deputies of the parties members of the "Collectif". For the leaders of the movement, it was about a success, which shows that "*the crisis is there and*

well there", and that it "*deepens day in day because of the antisocial policies of the successive governments of president Blaise Compaoré*"; thus referring to the conflict relationships that maintain these last months the government and the trade unions workers.

2. The rise of the trade-union dispute

Would the rise of the trade-union dispute relay the political dispute framed by the "Collectif"? wondered a newspaper of the place. Anyway, the demonstrations organized at the end of June 2002 by the "Collectif" yielded the place to the trade-union dispute. During May 2002 and April, the trade unions organized two strikes to force the government to satisfy their claiming platform, without success. Thus, they planned to continue the fight by organizing another general strike scheduled for July 18, in order "to protest against the silence of the government vis-a-vis the claims of the workers". In front of such a threat, the Prime Minister met last 13 July the leaders of different trade unions of Burkina. He asserted during the meeting that he wished to inaugurate a new era with the trade unions, which his government wishes to consider as a partner, and to maintain relationship based on social dialogue. Concerning their claims a meeting between the two sides was scheduled for September. The trade unions nevertheless maintained their strike of July 18 to oblige the government to take them seriously. They denounced in particular the impoverishment which, according to them, striking the workers, and required in particular an increase of 25% of the wages and pensions of the workers, the execution of the judgments relating to certain conflicts of work, the abrogation of the statute of the civil service of April 28, 1998, the fall of 30% of the tax on treatments and wages, the stop of privatizations of the public offices, the implementation of a coherent policy of promotion of the informal sector. The integral satisfaction of some of these claims proves to be difficult, even impossible; what forecasts difficult negotiations between the two parts.

The strike scheduled for 18 July actually took place, and was accompanied by a demonstration of several thousands of workers through streets of the capital, followed by one meeting where the trade unions denounced the refusal of the government to satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the workers, and expressed their determination to continue the fight if the negotiations scheduled for September would not succeed.

3. The mediation of Burkina for the payment of the civil war in Liberia

Until recently, Burkina had not ceased supporting since the years 1990, the rebel Charles Taylor, who finally conquered the power. In spite of criticisms, the threats and the opposition of some circles as well inside as outside the country, president

Compaoré continued for a long time his support to his ally Charles Taylor. What was worth with the country a degradation of its external image and a certain diplomatic insulation, under the aegis of United Kingdom and especially the United States. To leave this diplomatic insulation, president Compaoré had to take his distances with his burdensome ally. Recently criticized for his support to president Charles Taylor, president Compaoré is trying to turn over the situation in his favour by presenting himself as a mediator in the Liberian crisis, after several failures of regional initiatives to reach a reconciliation between Liberians. His last diplomatic initiative on the Liberian file testifies some.

During four days, from the 8 to July 11, 2002, a group of political leaders and members of the civil society of Liberia discussed in Ouagadougou the crisis which currently shakes their country; a crisis marked inter alia, by the war between the governmental troops and those of the LURD. Whereas Burkinabe mediators were expecting the totality of the political sensitivities and associations of the civil society around the table of discussions on the reconciliation and the national rebuilding, the governmental part refused to attend the meeting. This absence is all the more regrettable as the meeting of Ouagadougou was to in theory be the occasion of a consensus to put an end to the war which tears Liberia. The "conference for peace in Liberia" was completed by a "declaration of Ouagadougou" requiring the return to peace and stability. The conclusions of the meeting stressed the following points:

- the organization of a cease-fire negotiated with the government of president Taylor
- the support of the international community to guarantee a lasting peace in Liberia through the establishment of a force of intervention
- the designation of Burkina Faso, of the United States, of Senegal, of France, of the United Kingdom and Nigeria like mediators of the crisis.

Unfortunately, the initiative seems likely to fail because of the absence of the government of Charles Taylor. The participants in the meeting indeed do not have the means of imposing their requirements, the more so as the president Charles Taylor refused to take part in the discussions, unlike the rebels of the LURD, which fights him. However, the minister of State Salif Diallo, representing president Compaoré, seemed optimistic. "We reached unhoped-for results insofar as those which took the weapons today and those which are in exile have all agreed to seek the best conditions for peace in Liberia, to start with a cease-fire", adding that "the populations in suffering today can starting from this conference nourish a hope". On her side, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, head of Unity Party (opposition) and challenger of president Taylor during the last presidential elections was pleased with the

meeting, deploring nevertheless the boycott of the government and the majority party. For his part, Amos Sawyer, former president of Liberia and president of the meeting wanted to be optimistic, qualifying the meeting of Ouagadougou of "new departure for peace". "We call our compatriots who did not present themselves here to take this additional step in the research of peace", he launched. At the end of the meeting, the participants met president Compaoré to share their views with him. At the request of the Liberian political and civil society leaders, president Compaoré agreed to be their spokesman at the next meeting at the top which the CEDEAO should organize to consider the Liberian conflict.

But part of the opinion Burkinabe seems critical toward the recent diplomatic initiatives of president Compaoré, denouncing the sudden need for legitimation and international recognition of president Compaoré. Indeed, president Compaoré is suspected of trying to not only make forget his personal implication in the Liberian civil war, but also to convince the international opinion that the crisis which has affected Burkina is finished, at the point to offer himself like a mediator to solve outside conflicts. The fact that the meeting of Ouagadougou was not postponed in spite of the absence of the governmental delegation of Liberia, without which no agreement is possible, proved according to this opinion, that the meeting was an international operation of charm organized by the president to regain prestige. For his part, France, by the voice of its Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin, in a short visit in Ouagadougou from 20 to 21 of July, supported the idea of the formation of a contact group to try to solve the crisis in Liberia. This support was expressed at the end of a meeting of president Compaoré and the French minister, which was pleased "with the efforts for the reconciliation in Liberia" made by Burkina. Mr. de Villepin also greeted "the efforts made by Burkina Faso in political matters, efforts of democratic opening", and its "efforts to offer a rigorous, demanding management in economic and financial matters". Thus, as one can note it, Burkina seems, gradually, to find his place in the international community, after three years of diplomatic insulation.