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West Africa

West Africa: rivalry and division between leaders

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Within hours of each other, two summits of West African countries were held. The first, that of the Alliance of Sahel States, bringing together Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, each led by military juntas; the second, that of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) bringing together the 13 other countries.

A new confederation

On Saturday 6 July 2024 in Niamey, the capital of Niger, the three Sahelian countries met to announce the creation of the Confederation of Sahel States. The aim is to strengthen their ties by forming a joint force to combat rebellions, particularly jihadist ones, and by adopting a mutual defence pact. Other measures have been adopted, such as the pooling of resources for agriculture, transport, energy and water. The introduction of a common currency was mentioned. There are also plans to set up an investment bank and a stabilisation fund. In addition, local languages are to be promoted in the national media.

Some observers point out that weaknesses do not add up to strength. The economic and security situation is deteriorating. The incessant power cuts in the capitals and inflation are far from being overcome. Recently, Bamako airport in Mali was paralysed for lack of fuel to refuel aircraft.

In all three countries, the jihadists are succeeding in carrying out deadly attacks against the armed forces, while the latter, with the participation of their Russian auxiliaries, are constantly committing acts of violence. In Takalote, for example, Malian soldiers and Russian mercenaries killed eight people. These were not Islamists, but members of the pro-government militia led by General El Hadj Ag Gamou, the current governor of the Kidal region. The Confederation summit ended with an official break with ECOWAS, which was deemed to be too close to the West, and France in particular.

A decried ECOWAS

In response to coups d'état, ECOWAS has illegally instituted an economic blockade and even envisaged military intervention in Niger. Some are talking about the risk of ECOWAS breaking up. Senegal's brand new president has been tasked with trying to bring the three Sahelian countries that have seceded back into the fold. His sovereigntist stance should help to renew the dialogue, even if success seems unlikely.

ECOWAS leaders are also facing the same problems, particularly on security issues, with jihadists increasingly intervening in coastal countries, particularly in Benin and Togo. The project for a joint armed force of around 5,000 men faces a major difficulty, that of funding, estimated at nearly 2.6 billion dollars. Finally, the President of Nigeria, Tinubu, has been re-elected to the presidency of ECOWAS, although he seems more concerned about his country's catastrophic economic situation.

Pan-Africanism by and for the people

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The Confederation and ECOWAS are instruments against the people. The former brings together coup plotters who intend to stay in power for ever. Their confederation was founded without any debate in their respective countries, all of which suffer human rights violations.

As for ECOWAS, it has never ceased to endorse electoral farces and other constitutional manoeuvres designed to keep presidents in power for life or to organise dynastic successions.

The implementation of a genuinely pan-Africanist policy cannot be done without the full and complete participation of the people, favouring respect for democratic rights, which is the antithesis of ECOWAS or the Confederation, since one is nothing more than a friendship of (mostly) badly elected presidents, the other a union of coup plotters.

PS:

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