

## **Military coup d'état at Burkina Faso**

Burkina Faso has become the third state in the last 18 months, in the Western African region that had a military coup d'état in January 2022, after Mali (on August 2020 and May 2021) and Guinea (in September 2021). It was the seventh coup organized by the army, after gaining independence in 1960.

On January 23, 2022, as a result of a fierce gunfight in Ouagadougou, the rebel soldiers have taken control of the military base in the country's capital. The unrest took place one week after the arrest of 11 military personnel, accused of preparing a takeover. They made several demands, among which were the dismissal of the Chief of Staff and the Head of Intelligence Services, as well as deployment of supplementary troops on the frontline of the northern and the north-eastern territories close to the border, improvement of living conditions of the wounded soldiers and their families. However, their demands were not met.

On January 23, disturbances have also taken place in the barracks in two military camps of the capital-Sangoulé Lamizana and Baba Si. The general army HQ and prison are in the first camp. On January 24, the soldiers under the command of lieutenant colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba have surrounded and taken over the national television building. On air, they declared that they took the power in the country, put under arrest president Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, dissolved the government and the parliament, suspended the Constitution until the further notice, and closed the air and land borders. In the declaration, pronounced from the name of Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (Le Mouvement Patriotique pour Sauvertage et Restauration- MPSR), it was said that the coup was organized «without violence and the detained individuals are safe».

Burkinabians that came out into the streets of Ouagadougou greeted the overthrow of M.Kaboré, who has seemingly lost public support. At the same time, the unknowns have set individuals on fire in the headquarters of the ruling party - The People's Movement for Progress.

Without any doubt, this coup, had common causes with the other countries from this region - poverty (40% of Burkina Faso's population is living below the poverty wage), a crisis in the healthcare and education, especially during COVID-19 pandemic, but also had its own features. Security problems led to economic and domestic political difficulties. They caused the growing tension among the population and in the army.

First comments concerning the coup name, among the main causes, the authorities' inability to confront the violence of jihad groups in 2015, which were acting on the Northern and North-Eastern border territories of the country. As the result of the militants' attacks, which are coming from the «Islamic State in the Greater Sahara» (composing the «Islamic State» prohibited in RF) and «Ansar-al-Islam», more than 2000 people died in the last 6 years in the villages of this region 1,5 million had to leave their houses, fearful of violence, 1000 schools were closed. 3 out of 21 million of the country's inhabitants are starving due to the droughts and relentless violence.

The biggest irritation among Burkinabians was caused by the weakness of the central authorities in aiding the population, which was the victim of jihadists, and the army, of troops which were sent to the border regions to fight the terrorist groups. The situation did not correspond to the pre-electoral promises of M. Kaboré (who was re-elected for the second term on November 20, 2020) to make an anti-jihad fight his priority in the domestic policy. The lack of decisive actions couldn't not undermine the army's loyalty to M. Kaboré's regime. Its rage was unleashed after the death of 53 out of 120 soldiers and 4 civilians in the attack of a group of radicals, connected to «Al-Qaeda» in the locality of Inata on November 14, 2021. This event caused street protests, where demands for president to resign were made.

Four months before this event, on June 2021, in the North-East of the country in Sohana, more than one hundred civilians from this village were killed. However, M.Kaboré has shuffled in the army command and sacked the prime minister only after the assassination of soldiers in Inata.

The military presence of France on their territory was another reason for discontent for Burkinabians. Performing the not-so-successful «Barkhan» operation to fight the jihadists since 2014, this country has lost the confidence of the local population. From 2021 there were more and more demands to withdraw the French troops, which, as the local population thinks, were only «imitating» the fight with the jihadists and had no impact regarding solving problems of eliminating the militants. M. Kaboré's lack of will and aspiration to solve this problem could not but affect the military elite of the country.

By capturing the power, the army announced the creation of the Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (MPSR), which, according to Reuters, includes all the rebellious military divisions. The movement led by P.H. Damiba, who after the publication of the country's Basic Law on February 1, became the president of Burkina Faso. In this document, the events of January 24, 2022, that have led to the resignation of president M.Kaboré, solution of the government and the parliament, as well as the transfer power to the military forces and the security organs are characterized as the legitimate and popular

The Basic Law confirms commitment to democratic values, respect for civil rights, and fundamental liberties. It is important to note that, in this document, the State guarantees freedom of associations, meetings, manifestations. MPSR (article 26) is the central organ, that determines the economic and social policies, responsible for the security and territorial integrity of the State, secures the continuity of administration of Burkina Faso. Thus, the adopted Basic Law confirms de facto by its articles the functions of Constitution suspended on January 23, 2022.

Paul-Henri Sandaogo Dambia, proclaimed as the country's president by MPSR was born on 1981 in Ouagadougou. He studied in a military school in Paris; he has a rank of lieutenant colonel as well as a Master's degree in criminology from the French National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts. He has a certificate as an expert in defense in the field of management, command, and strategy. He is considered a student of the famous French criminalist and lawyer Alain Bauer, who advised Nicolas Sarkozy on the questions of security and terrorism. A. Bauer is a member of the masonry movement – Grand Orient de France - and was its head for some time.

During the Blaise Compaoré's rule, P.H Damiba was Security officer for the Head of State. In 2015 he took part in the coup attempt that had led to the overthrow of the temporary government. Later (2019), he appeared in a court as witness in the coup plotter's case. After the events of 2015, he left the country to continue his education. There is no information about his stay abroad during that period. P.H Damiba is an experienced officer who participated in different counter-terrorist operations. Burkinabian political scientists call him «an officer with brains». Before the coup of December 2021, he was appointed by president M.Kaboré as the commander of the Third, the most important, military district in Burkina Faso. It is composed of the cities of Ouagadougou, Manga, Koudougou, Fada N'Gourma.

In 2021, P.H. Damiba published a book «West African Armies and Terrorism: Uncertain Answers?». There, he shared his views regarding the fight against the Islamist threat on the territory of Burkina Faso, where he doubts the anti-terrorist strategies used in the region of Sahel. Immediately after the events of January 23-24, 2022, international community has condemned the military coup in Burkina Faso collectively. UN appealed to the militia which captured the power, to lay down arms and to protect the physical integrity of M.Kaboré. USA and European Union have also requested his immediate release. Emmanuel Macron declared that France, together with the regional organization

ECOWAS, condemns the military coup in Burkina Faso. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared its «concerns about significant complications in the country's internal situation» and hope for a rapid stabilization. Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged the Burkinabian people to resolve the differences for the sake of national interests through a peaceful dialogue. ECOWAS and the African Union suspended Burkinabian's membership in these organizations until the constitutional order would be restored in Ouagadougou.

However, despite these declarations, the UN and ECOWAS emissaries have arrived at a meeting with the soldiers who captured the power in the country on January 31. Among these special envoys were the ministers of foreign affairs of Ghana, Gambia, Benin, special representative of the UN in Western Africa, and two high-ranked officials of ECOWAS. One of them, Jean-Claude Cassie Bru, said that there is no need to impose sanctions on Burkina Faso. The day before, P.H. Damiba met with the Chief of Staff of ECOWAS. In the name of MPSR, he confirmed adherence to a partnership with the subregional and international organizations. On February 4, it became known that during the session, ECOWAS postponed the imposition of sanctions, but asked to «provide a reasonable timeline for a country's recovery from crisis».

The country's civil society has not yet declared its support for the new regime. Serge Bambara, known under the pseudonym - Smokey, one of the leaders of the civil protest movement «Balai citoyen», which played a substantial role during the popular uprising in October 2014, which led to the overthrow of president B.Compaoré, in power for 27 years, also does not condemn the military coup. Despite that, Smokey pays attention to the fact that the civil community organizations from his country are committed to the rule of law and democratic values and rejects the military and constitutional (changes in the articles to stay in power) coups. However, they «take notice of the current situation in the country». Leader of «Balai citoyen» stated: «For us it is important to follow the political process and let the young generation to come to power, to serve the true interests of revolution». This point of view is also shared by the former opposition parties under M. Kaboré's regime, including the most important one: Congress for Democracy and Progress.

Civil society organizations demanded from the new authorities to continue the trial of the supposed murderers of Thomas Sankara, a progressive leader and pan-African icon, killed in 1987 during a military coup organized by B.Compaoré. It is known that on January 31, 2022, the military prosecutor's office announced a resumption of the legal process on the case of the assassination of T. Sankara, which stopped due to the military coup of January 23-24.

The bloodlessness of the military coup explains the neutral position which was taken by some members of the intellectual elite in its analysis. Executive director of the research institute Free-Afrik, in Ouagadougou, Ra-Sablga Seydou Ouédraogo, pointed out that though the military dictatorship had never led to the development in Africa, «in the country, in the current crisis, the population is experiencing a need in the strong men, not in the virtues».

However, it is difficult to say, how the military coup will influence people's daily life, and whether or not it will become a trigger for the military coups in other states of Western Africa, especially in those, where there is no institutional order (Niger, Togo, and others).

It becomes clear that the military coup dealt a heavy blow to the «Barkhan» operation, which as one of the crucial goals had the protection of the French own interests in the Sahel region. This operation covered the territories of five countries: Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad. Despite the declaration of E. Macron, made on June 2021, about its phased completion, the final withdrawal of the French troop is planned for early 2023. Anti-french behavior was apparent during large-scale rallies from January 26 to 28 in support of the army, when protesters burnt the flags of the Fifth Republic and demanded from the authorities the termination of the partnership with Paris.

Burkina Faso is not the richest state in Africa considering the resources. The mining industry is concentrated in the extraction of gold (3 tones are extracted annually). The country keeps fourth place on the continent regarding its extraction. Antimony and marble are exploited in small quantities. In the Far North-East, the deposits of manganese ore were discovered (14 million tons approximately), which, due to poor transport infrastructure in the area of the deposit, are not developed. The country has reserves of zinc, lead, nickel, silver, limestone, and phosphates. For the western countries, Burkina Faso is specifically interesting as a transit state for the «Trans-Saharan Highway» project, which makes possible the transfer of goods through the continent, from East to West.

The contacts between Burkina Faso and Russian Federation are friendly. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on February 18, 1967. An intergovernmental agreement on visa-free travel on diplomatic and service passports was signed in 2000. In 2003, an agreement was signed to settle the debt to Russia, according to which the country's debt was completely canceled. In 2017 a memorandum on understanding in the field of higher education between the Russian Ministry of education and science and the Burkina Faso Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Innovations was signed. In 2018 an agreement on the military partnership between the two countries was signed. During a long period, trade cooperation between the two countries was also developing. The trade turnover between them has grown from 7,8 million dollars in 2020 to 10,9 million dollars in 2021. Russia generally exports in Burkina Faso the chemical products, metals and articles made there from it, products of natural and animal origin, and others. In terms of trade turnover volume, the Russian Federation is far below to China, which occupies the first place in it, as well as many other countries.

It is necessary to pay attention to the fact that the situation that has developed in Burkina Faso cannot but affect events in the entire West African region. A lot of political scientists think that as a result of the military coup, the French «zone of influence» in Africa has suffered yet another loss (just after Mali). Noteworthy, the military came to power in the country under the slogans not only of regime change but also of a change in the orientation of the foreign policy, which supported strong French influence.

It should be also noticed that during the streets protests from 26 to 28 of January 2022, the Burkinabian citizens were appealing to the military authorities to cooperate with Moscow. They were shouting the slogan: «No to France, Yes to Russia!». A lot of participants of these events brought the Russian flags with them. This is explained by the fact that the state has been searching for alternatives to the French presence for a long time. Therefore, for many citizens, a country like Russia, without a colonial past and possessing large military-technical resources, is attractive. Possibly, the events, tied to the military coup could influence the bilateral relations between Russian Federation and Burkina Faso, especially in the sphere of military cooperation, considering the fight with a terrorist threat.

These yesterday`s Burkinabian rebels, which represents, today, the acting power, have openly expressed their support to current Mali`s authorities. Emmanuel Dupuy, a French expert, points that in Africa, during a social-political shock period, «the new axis» of military power is progress: from Algeria, where the Chief of Staff Saïd Chengriha keeps all the real power, to Mali with, Guinea with and, maybe, and Burkina Faso with Paul-Henri Damiba.

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