

## CASAMANCE CONFLICT

### KONFLIKT U CASAMANCE-U

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper provides a background of conflict in Casamance and gives details on the beginning of the conflict, the parties and the actors to the conflict, it discusses the attempts of the conflict from the beginning to present, and discusses the nature of the conflict. The conclusion provides some lessons learned from the Casamance conflict, attempts to solve this conflict and recommendations for the management of the conflict. Besides the fact that it provides some knowledge on the Casamance conflict.

*Keywords: Casamance, conflict, Senegal*

#### SAŽETAK

Ovaj rad pruža pozadinu sukoba u Casamance-u i daje detalje o početku sukoba, stranama i akterima u sukobu, razmatra pokušaje sukoba od početka do danas i raspravlja o prirodi sukoba. Zaključak daje neke lekcije naučene iz sukoba Casamance, pokušaje rješavanja ovog sukoba i preporuke za upravljanje sukobom. Pored činjenice da pruža određeno znanje o sukobu Casamance.

*Ključne riječi: Casamance, konflikt, Senegal*

#### INTRODUCTION

The Casamance conflict is part of numerous civil wars of post-colonial Africa. The conflict opposes the Senegalese State and the Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC). The MFDC has been fighting for the independence of Casamance province since 1982, but to this date, has failed to achieve this goal.

Despite its similarities with other contemporary African conflicts, the Casamance conflict presents some particular aspects: the regional dimension of the conflict which related to the landlocked position of The Gambia inside the Senegalese territory and the border with Guinea Bissau. The conflict is above all a separatist conflict. Little is known about the conflict as compared to other ones that have taken root in West Africa. The objective of this paper, therefore, is to discuss the Casamance conflict in order to provide some knowledge and a better understanding of the conflict which has been going on for 34 years.

This paper provides a background of conflict and gives details on the beginning of the conflict, the parties and the actors to the conflict, it discusses the attempts of the conflict from the beginning to present, and discusses the nature of the conflict. The conclusion provides some lessons learned from the Casamance conflict, attempts to solve this conflict and recommendations for the management of the conflict. Besides the fact that it provides some knowledge on the Casamance conflict, this paper refers to a conflict theory.

In order to fulfill the purpose of this study the following research question has been formulated: what, when and where is the Casamance conflict? who are the parties of this conflict?

#### BACKGROUND

Casamance is located in the Republic of Senegal, which is situated in the western part of the African continent. It is bordered by Mauritania to the north, Mali to the east, Guinea and Guinea Bissau to the south and

the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The Republic of The Gambia is an enclave stretching into the southern part of the Senegalese territory, separating the Casamance from the rest of Senegal. Senegal is a former French colony. The country was first invaded by the Portuguese in the 15th century. For the next three centuries, other European states, such as France, Great Britain and Portugal, battled for the control of Senegal's natural resources, territory and slave labor<sup>6</sup>. In the mid-19th century, the French solidified their rule over a large part of West Africa, including Senegal, forcing the Portuguese out of the Casamance, pushing them into what is now Guinea Bissau. Despite resistance from the Senegalese people and in particular from the Casamançais, French colonial rule continued until 1960, when Senegal became independent and a sovereign state with its capital Dakar

Launched in 1982 and led for years by Catholic priest Father Diamacoune Senghor, the Movement of Democratic Forces for Casamance (MFDC) tapped into historical, cultural and geographical differences between Senegal's lush, isolated south and the rest of the largely arid, Muslim-dominated north. Resentment among the southern Diola people against the Wolof, Senegal's dominant ethnic group who have traditionally wielded more economic and political clout in the capital Dakar, has helped stir the rebellion. Initial violent attempts by Dakar to stamp out the rebels also brought it new recruits. The rebels have sometimes stepped up raids towards the end of the year to commemorate their founding in late 1982. A recent spate of attacks, which killed about 15 soldiers and left five in rebel hands, could also be an attempt by the forest insurgents to raise their profile ahead of potential talks mediated by the Catholic Church's Sant'Egidio Community.

Senegal's army has launched "mopping up" operations but after years of stagnation, few in the south believe in a military solution: "If Senegal had the military means to resolve it, they would have done it in the last 30 years,"

a senior Senegalese official told Reuters, asking not to be named. "If we have failed to resolve the crisis it is because the army and the state underestimated the rebellion," the official said. "They moved from hunting rifles to AK 47 (assault rifles). Now people have realized they have heavy weapons." The source said the Casamance rebels' arsenal now includes 12.7 mm machineguns and rocket launchers. Three sources also said one of the Senegalese military's helicopter gunships had been grounded by damage from rebel fire in fighting in February. Over the years, a string of peace deals have been signed but never implemented amid the splintering of factions within the insurgent camp and perceptions in Casamance that Dakar has never taken any peace process seriously anyway. A common complaint is that officials dispatched by Dakar - nicknamed "The Casamance Men" - have sought to buy peace by paying off rebels, rather than addressing the root causes of the rebellion, and then have ignored the conflict once back home. Cisse said the MFDC has long been weakened by rifts, but this cash over the last decade had fuelled even more splits as rebels vie for a share. "This money has given birth to the entrepreneurs of the conflict ... it has complicated things. It has crystallized divisions (David Lewis, 2012 ) no : 81O9c20120225 .

The Casamance Conflict is a low-level civil war that has been waged between the Government of Senegal and the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) since 1982. On May 1, 2014 the leader of the MFDC sued for peace and declared a unilateral cease-fire.

The MFDC has called for the independence of the Casamance region, whose population is religiously and ethnically distinct from the rest of Senegal. The bloodiest years of the conflict were during the 1992–2001 period and resulted in over a thousand battle related deaths.

On December 30, 2004 an agreement was reached between the MFDC and the government which promised to provide the

voluntary integration of MFDC fighters into the country's paramilitary forces, economic recovery programmes for Casamance, de-mining and aid to returning refugees. Nevertheless, some hard-line factions of the MFDC soon defected from elements of the MFDC who had signed the agreement and no negotiations took place following the breakdown of talks in Foundiougne on 2 February 2005.

Fighting again emerged in 2010 and 2011 but waned following the April 2012 election of Macky Sall. Peace negotiations under the auspices of Saint Egidio community took place in Rome and on 14 December 2012, President Sall announced that Casamance would be a test-case for advanced decentralization policy. But the conflict in Casamance considers intractable because the goal of MFDC didn't achieve yet even after last peace negotiations.

## THE PARTIES OF CONFLICT

### THE MFDC

The MFDC is basically composed of two main parts : a political and a military wing , which can also be described in its current state as moderate and extremist factions . The political wing has both local and external branches championing the course of the MFDC's quest for independence. At the local front , the Catholic Priest , Father Augustin Diamacoune Senghor , who became the Secretary- General in 1991 and subsequently the President, was the main architect and inspirational leader until his death in January 2007 . Prior to his death , Father Diamacoune played a key role in denouncing the Bissau Accord that sought to restore peace between the protagonists. He subsequently formed the southern Front ( French: Front sud ) with Léopold Sagna , who took over from Sidy Badji as head of the group . A notable challenge that confronted the Southern Front was internal divisions despite the relative success in moving the agenda of the organization. Another major

division occurred between Léopold Sagna and Salif Sadio . As a leader of the Southern Front, Sagna made a conscious effort to meet president Diouf , apparently to undertake fresh negotiations. However, because he failed to consult with the wider organization, a basically attain independence. The MFDC restored to violence against the Senegalese government ( GOS ) from 1982 under the leadership of a Diola Catholic Priest, Augustine Diamacounne Senghor ( N . Okai , M. Abdallah , L. Amedzrator , S. Brewoo , F. Okyere , 2014 , Finland ) p. 65

### 3 . 2 . The Senegalese State

The Casamance rebellion is about the struggle of ethnic groups (the majority being Diola) against the Senegalese state. Since the beginning of the conflict, two governments have managed the Casamance conflict: the Government of Presidents Abdou Diouf and Abdoulaye Wade. The position of both presidents has been the same regarding the refusal to grant independence to Casamance. However, their conflict management style differed. Upon his coming to power in 1981, Diouf was confronted with the sudden outburst of the rebellion and responded to it in a repressive way. When the military solution become inefficient, then he tried negotiating with the MFDC, granted amnesty to MFDC members who were jailed after the 1982 and 1983 demonstrations in Ziguinchor. Under his leadership, external actors such as The Gambia and Guinea Bissau were very much involved in the negotiations. Wade, upon his arrival to power after the February 2000 presidential elections introduced a new strategy of 'direct' discussions with the armed wing of the MFDC and limited the role of neighbouring Guinea Bissau and The Gambia . Subsequently, in December 2000, he issued a general warning to the national press that the dissemination of information collected from the MFDC would be considered as attempts to derail the Casamance Peace Process and would be prosecuted under the Penal Code. Apart from the main protagonists of the conflict, it is worthy to mention other national actors such as the

civilian population of the Casamance region which is usually the victim. Sometimes, it is either attacked by rebel forces or is forced to flee for fear of being trapped by the fighting. Local Non-Governmental Organizations have been usually aiding civilians, helping in integration, providing education and demining efforts ( Aïssatou Fall , 2010 ) p. 19

### **REGIONAL ACTORS: THE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES OF GUINEA-BISSAU AND THE GAMBIA**

At the regional level the Republics of Guinea Bissau and The Gambia have become actors to the conflicts. Due to the inter-connections between the ethnic Diolas, Balantes and Mandingos of Northern Guinea Bissau and the troubled Casamance region of Senegal, Guinea Bissau's role is crucial in the conflict. Some governments in Guinea Bissau find themselves aiding the MFDC campaign efforts in the Casamance just as in the case of the Military Junta led by the Late General Ansumana Manneh (Minteh, 2009). The same interconnection makes the role of The Gambia very crucial. President Yahya Jammeh was on numerous occasions alleged to have provided assistance to the MFDC in the Casamance. The MFDC rebels are predominantly President's Jammeh's ethnic kinsmen and his active role in the crisis has been questioned in numerous fronts. There are also reports indicating that weapons used by rebels in the Casamance are from The Gambia with the assistance of the Government (Minteh, 2009).

### **EXTERNAL FACTORS**

The external dimension often stems from the quest of a country's national interest , especially when it relates to the sovereignty and terrestrial integrity of a state. In some cases , the pursuit of individual interest to protect their regime 's security can be the basis for one state seeking to protect or undermine the security of another state. In the case of Casamance , the contiguous

natures of the region to Guinea-Bissau and The Gambia have been identified as underlying reasons for the conflict. In the Guinea-Bissau 's liberation fight with the colonial Portuguese, the people of Casamance played a critical role in support of the people of Guinea-Bissau against the Portuguese colonial domination. They, therefore, had some hope that they would benefit from the same support while fighting for the independence of the Casamance region from Senegal . Similarly, in The Gambia, the movement led by the opponent Kukoi Samba Sagna fought against the power of Daouda Diawara , former Gambian president. This was also a determinant factor in the sense that it convinced the people of Casamance that it was possible to challenge the state ( M. Abdallah & N . Okai , 2014 ) p. 64

Furthermore, the dense forest of Casamance , the rear bases in The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, and the presence of Casamançais veterans of the Indochina and Algeria wars as well as retired officers of the Senegalese Army, were an asset for the Casamance rebels. These among other factors precipitated the rebellion of the MFDC against the Senegalese state. The Casamance conflict is not like the conventional open armed conflict, but is rather complex due to structure and multiplicity of factions. All the same, the humanitarian impact has been grave over the last three decades since the conflict began in 1982 . It is approximated that over 5000 people have died, with at least 652 killed or wounded by landmines and unexplored ordnance. These statistics were updated in 2008 by The Center National d'Action Antimine ( CNAM ) , where the number of landmines victims rose to 748 and massive displacement was reported, with estimates of IDPs ranging between 10,000 and 40,000 in Casamance . In 2010 , an arms shipment from Iran, allegedly bound for the Casamance rebels, was intercepted in Nigeria. In December 2011 , rebels attacked the Senegalese Army, resulting in 12 deaths, ten of whom were Senegalese soldiers ( ibid ) p. 65 .

## THE ATTEMPTS OF THE PEACE

Since President Abdoulaye Wade came into power in 2000, there has been more or less direct contact with the Maquis in the course of peace talks. Following the abandonment of all preceding negotiations by his predecessor, Diouf, and Wade's announcement that he intended to resolve the Casamance conflict in 100 days, he appointed General Abdoulaye Fall as mediator in 2002. Using audio and video tapes, Fall attempted to contact the Maquis. He informed them that the army had been ordered to retreat and offered them amnesty in return for them laying down their arms. The Maquis, confused by Wade's new policy, returned to armed fighting. Wade responded with more stringent law enforcement and the destruction of rebel bases in 2003.

From September 2004 onwards, the situation appeared to have stabilized as a result of various meetings between the government and the MFDC. This temporary peace enabled many refugees to return home. People began to rebuild their lives. On December 30, 2004, new peace treaties were signed. However, not all MFDC factions were involved, resulting in renewed violent clashes. Wade felt betrayed and withdrew funding from the region. The conflict intensified once more. New peace talks on neutral soil in Fundjul in the Kaolack region in January 2005 were nothing more than political discourse, which was not followed by actions. Particularly since the death of Abbé Diamacoune Senghor in January 2007, who for many years acted as the link between the MFDC and the Senegalese government, the situation again has become more complicated. The Attika began fighting again on August 20, 2009. The current situation in the spring of 2010, with new reports of attacks in Casamance, shows that the conflict is far from being resolved. Wade's strategy is considered by observers as an awaiting of signs of fatigue in the MFDC (Stefan Gehrold / Inga Neu , 2010 ) p 99.

## CONFLICT INTRACTABLE

There are various reasons behind the failure of all peace talks to date. On the one hand there are ideological factors on the part of the rebels, who do not want to see their goal – the independence of Casamance – abandoned. This is coupled primarily with the complex fragmentation within the Maquis, which has made negotiations almost impossible. The power relationships within the military wing have not been clarified and the individual factions are hostile towards one another. The military wing is almost independent from the political wing of the MFDC. Above all since the death of Senghor, the situation has become even more difficult: subsequent MFDC leaders have not been accepted by all members. The many internal splits also make it difficult to identify the negotiating partners. Those for the maquis, laying down arms also means returning to villages in which they may themselves have committed atrocities. revenge and forgiveness traditionally play an important role for the local people, particularly among the Jola. instructed to carry out the negotiations on the part of the MFDC often have no decision-making powers. Another problem is the dispersal of the Maquis across various countries (Stefan Gehrold / Inga Neu , 2010) p. 100.

There are also economic and psychological factors standing in the way of the Maquis simply laying down their weapons. After almost 30 years in the forests, it is very difficult for the rebels to change their lifestyle. Many have not learnt a trade or profession. Also, former agricultural workers who wish to return to society are confronted with various difficulties. During their absence, which often spanned a period of many years, their land was given to others. This leaves them with very few options for a new start. Many are hardly able, on account of their experiences of state persecution during the 1980s and 1990s, to settle again. Reintegration into the rural structures is also problematic. For the Maquis, laying down arms also

means returning to villages in which they may themselves have committed atrocities. Revenge and forgiveness traditionally play an important role for the local people, particularly among the Jola. Furthermore, many are traumatized, some have problems with alcohol and drug abuse. Moreover, fighters wishing to leave the Maquis face repercussions in the form of persecution or even murder ( *ibid*) p . 101.

## **CONCLUSION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

This analysis of the Casamance conflict suggests key lessons which will be briefly discussed in concluding this paper. First, the Casamance conflict reveals that the legitimacy and authority of the post-colonial African states are still being challenged by non-state actors who are claiming for their right to self-determination. Indeed, conflict of the Casamance kind shows that such demands for recognition can be self-perpetuating and prolong the civil war because self-determination and a state's sovereignty and territorial integrity are two conflicting demands.

Second, secessionist conflicts such as the Casamance rebellion take their root in history, in the colonial arbitrary boundaries that divided the same people, in colonial elite formation and ethnic identity, as well as economic, social and political grievances. This means that any attempt to manage the conflict that excludes these important parameters will result in failure, as shown by the unsuccessful peace agreements between the MFDC and the Senegalese state.

Third, the dynamics of the conflict indicates that there is shift in the agenda of the MFDC, having moved from independence claim to a greed agenda favoured by the circulation of money within the maquis, corruption of some of the factions, and a flourishing war economy based on cannabis cultivation and drug trafficking, arms and several other types of trafficking in goods along the borders with Guinea Bissau and The Gambia. Such moves

in the conflict constitute real stumbling blocks for the resolution of the conflict because of the interests of external actors to the conflict and MFDC factions relying more and more on the war economy that has developed to survive. The divisions that occurred in both the military and the political wings – split in several uncontrollable factions - make the prospects for peace very weak because of the difficulty to find credible MFDC interlocutors that can negotiate the peace with the Government of Senegal.

The Casamance populations have been the main victims of this conflict with the killings, the deaths perpetrated by landmines, and the number of displaced families and refugees in Guinea Bissau and The Gambia. Although they have initially blessed the rebel movement, today their aspirations is for peace and the economic and social development of the Casamance region. Certain moderate factions of the MFDC are also ready to go to the negotiation table with the Government of Senegal<sup>86</sup>. However any rounds of negotiation that will not address the real issues of the Casamance conflict – the status of the region, the land issue and the recognition of the specificities of the region- will be bound to fail.

Finally, the conflict has lasted too long with 'no end in sight'<sup>87</sup>. From a domestic level, it has moved to a transnational one with the spread of the conflict in the neighbouring countries of The Gambia and Guinea Bissau. The Casamance conflict triggered a civil war in Guinea Bissau and the territories of Guinea Bissau and The Gambia have been used by rebels to launch attacks on the Senegalese Army posts and Casamance's populations. The recent resurgence of violence in Casamance with MFDC attacks perpetrated on armed forces of the Senegalese army<sup>88</sup>, political assassinations of state's representatives in the Casamance region, the resurgence of military coups d'états or failed attempts in the unstable neighbourhood of Senegal (in Mauritania, Guinea Bissau, Guinea and The Gambia) and a development of a flourishing war

economy in drugs and arms all inform about the urgency to look for a definite settlement of the Casamance conflict because of its potential to destabilize the West Africa region still recovering from decades of civil war in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire. Recent attacks show that the movement, despite its internal divisions, still has some strong supporters. Given the nature and dynamics of regionalisation of domestic civil wars and the fact that African states are inextricably locked into security complexes, there is a need to manage the conflict and involve all the actors<sup>89</sup> that are key to its successful settlement. This calls for a regional concerted strategy initiated by Senegal (including all civil society actors), supported by the Gambia, Guinea Bissau, France and regional organizations such as ECOWAS, the AU, and at a global level the UN.

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