

PREPARATORY CONFERENCE
RELATING TO
THE REGIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY
OF ECOWAS
NARRATIVE REPORT



HOTEL TERROU BI from the 24th to 25th FEBRUARY, 2025. DAKAR



Conférence régionale préparatoire sur le Cinquantenaire
Thème : "La CEDEAO 50ans après , Changer ou Périr"

50
ans

24 - 25 Février 2025 Terrou-Bi Dakar



INTRODUCTION

Afrikajom Center took the initiative of organizing a preparatory conference on 24th and 25th February 2025 at the Terrou-Bi Hotel to celebrate the jubilee of fifty years of ECOWAS independence by bringing together representatives from ECOWAS Member States, regional institutions, academics, members of the civil society, the private sector and youth organizations.

The main objective of the preparatory conference was to define the strategic orientations, themes, list of guests and speakers, key points of the Conference, establishment of the scientific committee and the choice of the final date of the Regional Conference.

During the two-day workshop, six (6) panels were organized on the following themes:

- The current state of affairs and ECOWAS Vision 2050;
- The successes and achievements of ECOWAS;
- The failures of ECOWAS;
- The challenges facing ECOWAS ;
- What sort of ECOWAS after the departure of the ASS States?
- The strategic orientations and format of the conference
- The identification of the themes of the Colloquium

In addition to these panels, there were working groups on:

- the economic challenges of regional integration in West Africa (economic integration, common currency, free movement of people and goods, etc.);
- political challenges in the region (democracy, governance, elections, human rights, etc.);
- What security strategy is needed for the region?
- How can we move from an ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of peoples?

The organization of **the Regional Conference on the Fiftieth Anniversary of ECOWAS: Change or Perish** will be supported by a coalition of West African and international civil society organizations that will join and extend the **Afrikajom Center** initiative.

Finally, it is necessary to collectively create the objective and subjective conditions for the realization of the **ECOWAS of Peoples**.

Strong recommendations were made, there were rich debates and discussions on interesting issues during the pre-conference, its panels, working groups sessions and workshops in order to identify the themes and strategic orientations of the upcoming conference.

PRE-CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Working on a conference format that is as inclusive as possible with greater participation of representatives of all Member States, the youth and the West African Private Sector;
- The format of the conference should be designed in such a way that the participants, especially the youth and the private sector, can organise side events;
- The conference must create the conditions for the emergence of an ECOWAS of the peoples and a sub-regional public opinion capable of having a concrete influence on ECOWAS' decisions;
- Strengthening the representativeness of civil society for better consideration of the concerns of the populations and a more inclusive action by ECOWAS;
- Encouraging greater engagement of the private sector in ECOWAS activities to enable it to fully play its economic role and support regional integration;
- Promoting education for regional integration and the engagement of the youth, raising awareness among young people about the challenges of regional cooperation and ensuring a sustainable dynamic for the future;
- Resolving the issue of ECOWAS funding through the establishment of sustainable and effective funding mechanisms in order to ensure its proper functioning;

DAY 1 OF 24th FEBRUARY 2025

I. OPENING CEREMONY AND WELCOMING SPEECH

In his welcoming remarks, the Founder of Afrikajom Center, Mr. Alioune TINE, began by recalling that the initial objective of ECOWAS was the economic integration of member countries and that the expansion of its scope and prerogatives took place in 1993 following the political crises and violent conflicts in the sub-region (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, etc.)

These crises also led to the adoption, from 1999-2000, of a Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security and its Additional Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in 2001 (Dakar Protocol), which is today a genuine Constitution for the Member States.

With regard to the preparatory conference, Mr. Tine recalled that its purpose was to define the strategic orientations of the regional conference on the fifty (50) years of ECOWAS, to reflect on the themes that will be addressed, to develop the list of guests and speakers, as well as the choice of the date of the Regional Conference.

The meeting was prompted by the challenges that ECOWAS is currently facing and which accentuate its vulnerability and profoundly affect the effectiveness of its action and mandate, including:

- the withdrawal of the countries of the Alliance of Sahel States from ECOWAS (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger);
- the multiplication of political crises;
- Transnational crimes ;
- Institutional weaknesses ;
- Social fractures and inequalities ;
- The lack of attractiveness of ECOWAS

Mr. Tine concluded his speech with recommendations for a new horizon of peace, development, stability and inclusion.



Mr. Alioune Tine, Founder of Afrikajom Center

M. David Dosseh, Coordinator of Tournons la page Togo, in his intervention, he insisted on the turbulent areas that ECOWAS is going through with the exit of the Member States of the Alliance of the Sahel States. This event is a logical development considering the internal contradictions in the regional organization its lack of perspicacious leadership, the hegemonic position of the Heads of State and Government which imprints a rigid and undemocratic regime on the institution.

He also stressed the inability of ECOWAS to implement series of reforms, to proceed with the transformation towards ECOWAS of the peoples that would have increased its aura, its credibility and would have allowed it to benefit from the support of the peoples. It is in this context that the civil society organizations want to set up a new dynamic in order to bring ECOWAS, on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary, to carry out quality reforms, including the adoption of an Assembly of Heads of State and to create mechanisms that will better meet the aspirations of the people.



M. David Dosseh, Coordinator of Tournons la page

Mr. Constant Gnacadja, Head of Division, Mediation and Coordination of Regional Political Affairs of ECOWAS, who is also the representative of **Mr. Abdel-Fatau Musah, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security**, warmly welcomed the initiative and believes that it is in line with what ECOWAS is currently doing in the face of the challenges it faces.

ECOWAS is currently experiencing turbulent areas with unprecedented moments of geopolitical disruption. The trajectory of ECOWAS is not linear, it is marked by upward and downward curves in a context where the institution is struggling for its survival.

Though the regional institution is going through difficult times, it has made concrete achievements and has met challenges within the framework of its vision (**ECOWAS 20-50 Vision**).

Presently, two major questions deserve to be asked:

- What prevents **ECOWAS** from being the community of peoples?
- Do we still have free media, vibrant civil society organizations, and is good governance being promoted in our states?

In reality, what happens in the Member States has repercussions on ECOWAS. Thus, if the States are sick, ECOWAS will inevitably be sick.

For Mr. Gnacadja, ECOWAS must be supported in its role by its member States and the civil society organizations with the view to enhancing its proper functioning. Indeed, the states only call on ECOWAS when it suits them and if it is necessary they insist on their sovereignties. He welcomes the initiative of Afrikajom Center and perceives it as a means of working collectively in order to improve the peaceful coexistence of the states and their peoples.

Mr. Gnacadja informs that ECOWAS is contemplating revising its protocol on democracy and good governance because it faces challenges of constitutional changes. Considering these realities, he is convinced that it is difficult for ECOWAS to undertake and implement strategies and practices to ensure its proper functioning. Currently, ECOWAS is facing challenges in Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone, whose former President is currently staying in Nigeria.

ECOWAS has also initiated the ECOSSOC project due to the failure of WACSOF in order to strengthen the West African Civil Society. Regarding its desire to improve its strategies of communication, the institution is working with the youth and women.



Mr. Constant Gnacadja, Head of Division, Mediation and Coordination of Regional Political Affairs, ECOWAS

Mr. Mamadou Moustapha SECK, Deputy Coordinator of the ECOWAS National Office, opened the pre-conference. In his remarks, he revisited the introspection of ECOWAS. He asserts that every year, ECOWAS organizes a golden jubilee, which provides an opportunity for all the actors, to reflect on the successes, failures, current and future challenges of the regional organization.

Since its creation in 1975 in Lagos, a lot of initiatives and efforts have been made by the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government. Thus, ECOWAS has made considerable progress with respect to regional integration. Its Protocol on Free Movement, Community Citizenship Code, Trade Liberalization Scheme, Common External Tariff, the implementation of major infrastructure projects as well as its mechanisms on good governance, peace and security can be cited as examples.

Despite these significant achievements, ECOWAS continues to face challenges. The most recurrent of which are: human insecurity; political instability; harassment and non-tariff barriers; infrastructural deficit and its corollary, the low volume of trade. Presently, there is the risk of the dismantling of the institution due to the withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.

Mr. Seck also examined the relative failure of the **ECOWAS 20-20 Vision** which was adopted in 2007 and replaced by the **20-50 vision** which promotes an "ECOWAS of the Peoples built on Peace and Prosperity for all". This vision has been accompanied through the reduction of the Commission's Departments from 15 to 7 Commissioners and has been the dealing with the upsurge of coups d'état since the commencement of its implementation. Cash flow difficulties

are also worsening and the implementation of major projects is still very slow. Thus, the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of ECOWAS should be an opportunity to review in depth certain issues.

Today, the survival of ECOWAS is being threatened by the unilateral decision regarding the withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger from ECOWAS and Togo's intentions to defect and join the Alliance of Sahel States in a sub-regional context characterized by the pervasiveness of terrorism and insecurity.

Their decision to withdraw is increasingly problematic because the authorities, who took this initiative, lack the legitimacy of universal adult suffrage given the fact that they did not take any step to ratify a popular act of such magnitude. These military regimes are, in principle, only provisional regimes. **What will happen when the transitional processes end in these countries?**

The defection of these countries poses a serious problem of preventive diplomacy, early warning and appropriate responses and it also raises the question about the full implementation by ECOWAS of its own legal instruments, especially the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, **the 1999 Mechanism**, and the 2008 ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework. West African public opinion is no longer able to accept the double standard of sanctioning military coups d'état and ignore electoral coups d'état.

Mr. Seck also mentioned the intention of the current Senegalese government to carry out an initiative on the reformation of ECOWAS through the strengthening of its Parliament, Court of Justice and the reduction of the predominance of the Authority of Heads of State and Government. **This interest of the new Senegalese authorities in integration has been materialized through the change of the name of the Ministry in charge of ECOWAS Affairs and the appointment of President Bassirou Diomaye Faye by his Peers as mediator in the dispute between the Alliance of the Sahel States and ECOWAS.** Additionally, his mandate as well as that of the Togolese President, Faure Gnassingbé, were extended by the Conference of Heads of State on December 12, 2024 in Abuja in order to continue their mediation until the end of the transitional process set for July 29, 2025 regarding the return of the three countries (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger).

In the same vein, **Mr. Seck** is of the conviction that these steps do not mean that these countries are giving up their alliance, but are seeking to preserve what is essential. Thus, why not consider the option of an **ASS** within **ECOWAS**?

The Golden Jubilee will be an opportunity for ECOWAS to make an uncompromising self-criticism by not hiding these essential issues:

- the need to refocus ECOWAS around its initial objectives, namely economic integration first;
- the urgency of reviewing the institutional architecture of ECOWAS and proceeding with a judicious distribution of powers and prerogatives to its institutions;
- a reviewing, or even an audit, of ECOWAS texts;
- the adoption of an approach that is likely to strengthen the commitment of Member States, some of which feel marginalized. Etc.

Following these remarks, he declared the pre-conference open.



Mr. Mamadou Moustapha SECK, Deputy Coordinator of the ECOWAS National Office

TRENDS AND ECOWAS VISION 2050

Introductory note by **Mr. Ibrahima Kane**, President of the Scientific Committee of the Afrikajom Center, moderated by **Mrs. Penda Mbow**, historian, former minister.

He started his presentation through the elucidation of the concept of regionalism. Indeed, regionalism is a form of multidimensional integration encompassing economic, political, social and cultural aspects. It aims to promote a coherent regional identity and is based on strategies implemented by regional institutions.

Regional integration is also indicative of the revival of the concept of nation-states in the context of globalization and diversity of state constructions on a global scale.

Economic integration is seen as a situation and a process that takes place in several stages: free trade area, customs union, economic and monetary union.

The political, economic and social situation in West Africa is characterized by poverty, climate change, different forms of discrimination, political instability (coups d'état, civil wars, etc.) and the impact of religion on people's lives, etc.

After this conceptual elucidation, he revisited the origins of ECOWAS by exploring the history of certain pan-African conferences and unions, especially, the creation of the West African National Secretariat by Nkrumah, Wallace-Johnson and the West African delegates. *This secretariat, which was "part of the Pan-African Federation", aimed at "raising awareness among the populations and the working class of the imperialist countries about the problems of West Africa, the threats of artificial territorial divisions, and the importance of striving for the unity and harmony of West Africans who were opposed to imperialism for the national independence of a united West Africa."* Other Associations, such as **the Pan-African Conference in Kumasi (1953), the West African Economic Union, the Mali Federation, the West African Customs Union (1959), the Council of Entente (1959) and the Union of African States, were also mentioned etc.**

On May 28th, 1975 in Lagos, ECOWAS was created as a tool for regional integration, wealth creation between and among its member states, prosperity and power. It is also a process that makes it possible to prioritize the stakes of political struggles but also a privileged means of fighting poverty through prosperity and peace through the market. *Article 1 of the 1975 founding Treaty defines its objectives as follows: "The aim of the Community is to promote cooperation and development in all fields of economic activity, particularly in the fields of industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, trade, monetary and financial issues and in the field of social and cultural affairs with the aim of raising the standard of living of its peoples, increasing and maintaining economic stability, strengthening relations among its members and contributing to the progress and development of the African continent".*

Despite these ambitious objectives, the organisation encountered its first difficulties at its first ministerial meeting in Accra **in July 1976 for the adoption of 5 protocols:**

- Contribution of the Member States to the ECOWAS budget;
- Cooperation, Compensation and Development Fund;

- Assessment of the revenue losses of the Member States in the event of liberalization of trade within the Community;
- Definition of the origin of the product;
- Re-exportation of imported products within ECOWAS

In its early days, ECOWAS also encountered other challenges, including:

- non-liberalization of trade
- The problem of common external tariff
- the harmonization of economic and fiscal policies
- The creation of the monetary zone
- the method of funding the institution
- the failure to ratify the protocols

Other difficulties encountered are:

- Lack of a culture of integration and a coherent development paradigm;
- the proliferation of subregional organizations;
- political instability in the region;
- interference by powers outside Africa;

Lack of leadership: 1980 expulsion of 3 million West Africans from Nigeria

The legacy of colonial economic policies and the conditions for economic decolonization were among the problems that were not raised in the discussions.

In April 1980, the **Lagos Plan of Action** was adopted for the economic development of Africa until 2000 and the **Lagos Final Act**. This action plan raises 6 processes:

- the integration of physical, social and institutional infrastructure;
- integration of production structures;
- market integration;
- conflict resolution;
- the stability of the States;
- The creation of a business-friendly environment and facilitation of cross-border trade and mobility.

The fall of the Berlin Wall also had an impact on the evolution of ECOWAS with the Addis Ababa Declaration which led to the implementation of the revised treaty of 1993 which stipulates in its Article 2: *"The Community shall aim to promote cooperation and integration with a view to achieving an Economic Union for West Africa with a view to raising the standard of living of its peoples, maintaining and increasing economic stability,*

strengthening relations among Member States and contributing to the progress and development of the African continent."

The vision of the ECOWAS Agenda 2050 promotes a "Community of peoples fully integrated in a peaceful, prosperous region with strong institutions that respect fundamental freedoms and work for inclusive and sustainable development". *Is this realistic in the current context of ECOWAS? This is the major issue that must also be included in the agenda of the regional conference.*



Mr. Ibrahima Kane, President of the Scientific Committee of the Afrikajom Center

PANEL 1: ECOWAS' SUCCESSES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Introductory note by Ambassador **Mr. Babacar Carlos Mbaye**, moderation by **Mr. Paul Osei Kuffour**, Program Manager CDD, Wademos Coordinator.

In the beginning of his speech, Mr. Mbaye recalled the founding ideals of ECOWAS. These ideals focused on improving the standard of living of peoples, promoting the harmonious economic development of states, integrating member states into a viable regional community, collective victory over current and future political, economic and socio-cultural challenges, and expanding the region's productive capacity rapidly and optimally.

He also referred to some of the objectives that ECOWAS had set for itself, including the harmonization and coordination of national policies and the promotion of programmes, projects and activities in almost all areas; the promotion of the creation of joint production enterprises; the creation of a common market; the creation of an Economic Union, including through the creation of a Monetary Union, etc. The pursuit of these objectives, with the ideals that underpin them, has enabled ECOWAS to achieve results, some of which are perceived as real successes.

Mr. Mbaye also insisted on the tension and mistrust that characterized the first meetings of ECOWAS bodies gradually gave way to an atmosphere of frank camaraderie during these meetings. This development, which may seem trivial, even self-evident, is in fact the first success of ECOWAS in terms of predictions: in addition to having remained alive, the organisation has offered its member states a framework for fruitful exchanges and joint decision-making that are mutually beneficial.

Among the successes of ECOWAS is also the creation of a legal framework and the implementation of concrete actions to ensure the free movement of persons and goods, the right of residence and establishment, and the establishment of mechanisms to deal with human rights issues. the fight against corruption and cooperation with civil society organizations and the perception of ECOWAS by citizens as a forum where they can have their rights and interests safeguarded.

Successes that appear to be of greater benefit to States include the adoption of common policies, the creation of a legal framework conducive to the strengthening of democracy and the preservation of stability, followed by concrete actions in this direction, and the establishment of important milestones to ensure regional security. Speaking about ECOWAS' successes, we should mention the adoption of certain common policies, including: **the ECOWAS Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP), the Regional Water Policy, the Common Industrial Policy for West Africa (PICAQ); Quality Policy (ECOQUAL), etc.**

Mr. Mbaye also addressed the issue of the free movement of persons and goods, as well as the right of residence and establishment. The creation of a common market is a step towards the removal of obstacles to the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital as well as the rights of residence and establishment in the member States.

The two legal instruments relating to the right of residence and establishment and the law on the ECOWAS Citizenship Code, adopted on 29 May 1979 and 29 May 1982 respectively, define the concept of ECOWAS citizen and specify that such a citizen has

the right to enter, reside and settle in the territory of the Member States, that is to say, to enjoy free movement within the geographical zone of the Regional Community.

The desire expressed in this way is already a very important step forward, but the Member States have added measures likely to make the free movement of people and goods effective. Among the measures added are: the abolition of the entry visa (and the residence permit in some countries); the establishment of a small group known as the "Task Force" **for the removal of obstacles to free movement of persons and goods.**

In the same vein, Mr. Mbaye also cited the establishment of a legal framework favorable to the strengthening of democracy. Indeed, Article 4, (j), of the 1993 Revised ECOWAS Treaty cites the *"promotion and consolidation of a democratic system of government"*

as fundamental principles that must guide the Member States in the pursuit of the objectives of this organisation. This mechanism is reinforced by the **Additional Protocol to the Protocol on the ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution and the Maintenance of Peace and Security, on Democracy and Good Governance**, adopted in Dakar on 21st December 2001.

ECOWAS has not limited itself to setting out in its Founding Treaty and other legal instruments principles that aim to protect and promote human rights, anchor democracy and the rule of law in the West African region and effectively combat corruption.

It has gone further by setting up internal mechanisms and tools to address human rights issues, the fight against corruption and cooperation with civil society organizations. Moreover, the **Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance** contains provisions that assign specific responsibilities to the **ECOWAS Commission** aimed at deepening respect for human rights and the rule of law.

The ECOWAS Commission established a Network of National Human Rights Institutions in West Africa (**RINDH-WA**) in 2009. Similarly, the Commission facilitated the establishment of the **Human Rights Monitoring Network of Civil Society Organizations**; this network serves as an advocacy platform to support ECOWAS' efforts to promote and protect human rights, in particular to monitor and report on the human rights situation in Member States.

In his intervention, **Mr. Mbaye** also noted the establishment and operationalization of the ECOWAS legislative and judicial institutions. These institutions, which have already been set up, are in a position to function. Thus, the ECOWAS Parliament exists, with its 115 members responsible for promulgating uniform laws and legislation to contribute to the creation of a borderless, peaceful, prosperous and coherent region built on good governance.

En ce qui concerne **la Cour de Justice de la CEDEAO**, elle a pour rôle majeur d'assurer le respect du droit et des principes d'équité dans l'interprétation et l'application des dispositions du Traité révisé ainsi que d'autres instruments juridiques subsidiaires adoptés par la Communauté.

In terms of regional security and stability, ECOWAS has a peace and security architecture. To this end, the **Mediation and Security Council adopted Regulation MSC/REG.1/01/08** of 16 January 2008 on the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework and **an ECOWAS Guide to Mediation** was drawn up.

With regard, especially, to the quest against terrorism, it should be recalled that in 2013, ECOWAS adopted a **Regional Counter-Terrorism Strategy and a Plan** for its implementation.

In September 2019 in Ouagadougou, the extraordinary session of Heads of state and Government led to the adoption of a **Priority Action Plan** aimed at eradicating terrorism.

The plan covered the period **2020-2024** and covered eight priority areas ranging from pooling efforts and coordinating counter-terrorism initiatives to promoting inter-community dialogue, and preventing violent extremism; a **budget of 2.3 billion US had been earmarked for its implementation.**

Regarding health issues, through its agency, the **West African Health Organization (WAHO)**, ECOWAS played a decisive role in the eradication of the Ebola virus disease through four axes: advocacy and resource mobilization; communication and social and community mobilization; capacity building in affected and non-affected countries; coordination and monitoring of the management of the epidemic. It is in the same spirit that the regional organization responded to COVID-19, especially through the mobilization of both internal and external financial resources to increase the quantities of medical materials and equipment essential for the prevention, monitoring and fight against the pandemic, as well as the broadening of the scope of support for the efforts made by the States.

After exploring the successes and achievements of ECOWAS, **Mr. Mbaye** was keen to put into perspective its achievements, stating that a certain modesty is required in the face of the successes of ECOWAS in view of the progress that could have enabled its members move towards a true integration of West African States.



Ambassador Babacar Carlos Mbaye

PANEL 2: ECOWAS FAILURES

Following Panel 1 on ECOWAS successes and successes, Panel 2 focused on ECOWAS difficulties or failures. It was facilitated by Mr. Mathias Hounkpe, Regional Director of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems Gabon and moderated by Mr. David Dosseh, Coordinator of Tournons la page.

Mathias Hounkpe examined the various challenges that ECOWAS has been facing in recent years and which, if nothing is done, could threaten its existence in the long term. These challenges are often linked to security, the decline of democracy, the rule of law, etc.

Thus, the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of ECOWAS should offer the opportunity to conduct in-depth retrospective reflections on its journey since its creation and, on the basis of the lessons learned, to propose a prospective analysis as well as the ways and means for its revitalization.

He then set out the plan of his intervention structured around three points: the major difficulties encountered by ECOWAS, important nuances but also recommendations to remedy them.

Among the major difficulties encountered by ECOWAS are the difficulties in applying its texts and using its instruments. Indeed, ECOWAS has adopted a series of texts and put in place mechanisms aim at the:

- conflict prevention, mediation and management
- strengthening democracy and political governance in general (separation of powers);
- strengthening human rights and the rule of law,
- the guarantee of freedom of the press,
- strengthening the governance of natural resources, etc.

Unfortunately, these texts are not fully implemented and mechanisms are not sufficiently used. In this regard, Mr. Hounkpe gives the example of the Early Warning Mechanism, one of the best in Africa, but whose results do not lead, most of the time, to decision and action.

The other difficulty facing ECOWAS is the decline of democracy. The West African region is facing unconstitutional changes with the manipulation of constitutions to extend the presidential term as can be seen in Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and to some extent in the Gambia. ECOWAS has been unable to prevent them, and its diplomatic initiatives are often unsuccessful or unknown to the public. To these difficulties can be added those related to the restriction of civic space, the ineffectiveness of horizontal control mechanisms, the management of coups d'état with the indefinite duration of transitions, the inability to adapt to the evolution of the regional environment with the frustration of citizens with regard to democracy as well as the apathy of voters.

In terms of security, ECOWAS faces problems with respect to conflict prevention and management. Thus, ECOWAS has not been able to prevent the deterioration of the situation in Mali and has not been able to properly integrate the policies related to geo-strategy/geo-economics in the Sahel. Nor has it been able to get the United Nations to adjust MINUSMA's mandates to the needs of the situation in Mali. In Burkina Faso, and to a certain extent in Niger, ECOWAS has not been able to initiate operations like those at the beginning of the

Malian crisis. **The 2020-2024 action plan against terrorism, adopted in December 2019, has not yet been operational.**

From a communication point of view, **ECOWAS** also struggles to communicate adequately. According to the **ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF)**, ECOWAS' communication strategy is essentially guided by the desire to win the sympathy of citizens through a campaign around its achievements. From a communication point of view, ECOWAS also struggles to communicate adequately. According to **the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF)**, ECOWAS' communication strategy is essentially guided by the desire to win the sympathy of citizens through a campaign around its achievements.

It has not been able to adapt to the needs related to new technologies of information and their influences, to the proliferation of fake news and disinformation, the evolution of the issues of geo-strategy at the regional level, the needs in matters of crisis communication. It seems that ECOWAS lacks the necessary resources to respond to the information that has been disseminated about its subordination to external interests.

However, despite the difficulties encountered by ECOWAS, Mr. Hounkpe was keen to add some nuances. According to him, it is important to keep in mind that there are common challenges to almost all regional organizations:

- Political differences and sovereignty concerns (prioritization of national interest over regional objectives, resistance to regional integration to protect sovereignty);
- Security issues and conflicts (cross-border conflicts, terrorism that affects cooperation, lack of means to enforce peace agreements, etc.);
- Lack of strong mechanisms to ensure the implementation of regional decisions;
- Funding and resource challenges



Mr. Mathias Hounkpe, Regional Director, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, Gabon

PANEL 3: THE CHALLENGES FACING ECOWAS

Introductory note by **Mr. Constant Gnacadja, ECOWAS Headquarters Representative, moderated by Maria Do Rosario Pereira, President of the National Electoral Commission of Cape Verde.**

Mr. Gnacadja's presentation is structured around three points: the challenges at the level of the Member States, the challenges at the regional level and the challenges at the international level.

Regarding the challenges at the level of the Member States, it can be seen that an identity problem arises at ECOWAS. Indeed, the issues about the nature and existence of ECOWAS-**what is ECOWAS? Is it known?** remain without clear answers within the member states of this organization. Therefore, we must strive to set up groups in each State that will be responsible for conveying its identity, values, customs and missions. This effort, if made, will enable the populations to feel their belonging to the institution, move around the different states without any problem. In addition, there is the question about governance, because we have seen, for example, that during electoral periods, the leaders in power do not want to have competitors. Furthermore, they manipulate the electoral register, which in consequence leads to the creation of social movements such as "**y'en a marre**" in Senegal, the "**balai citoyen**" in Burkina Faso, etc. States must, therefore, agree to apply governance in all its forms to ensure strong cohesion.

At the regional level, the challenges are many and diverse. These challenges include governance and security challenges. Considering the growing insecurity situation in West

Africa, the Sahel, Gulf of Guinea, Lake Chad basin, etc., the authorities should work very hard to find sustainable solution to the security and governance problems.

The colonizer has long made us believe that it was up to them to ensure our security in exchange for favours. It is up to us to take back the reins in collaboration with **ECOWAS** member countries in order to allow the nationals of these countries to move freely and without fear.

At the international level, we are in a multipolar world that calls for close cooperation between and among partners. We need to be competitive on the financial market, to be up to date in new technologies such as artificial intelligence in order to have things to offer. If we cannot meet the challenges at these different levels, the **ECOWAS 20-50 Vision** will be a red herring.



Mr. Constant Gnacadja, Head of Division, Mediation and Coordination of Regional Political Affairs, ECOWAS

SECOND DAY OF 25th FEBRUARY 2025

The second day of the pre-conference was devoted to working groups on the following themes:

- **Theme 1:** The economic challenges of regional integration in West Africa (economic integration, common currency, free movement of people and goods, etc.);
- **Theme 2:** political challenges in the region (democracy, governance, elections, human rights, etc.);
- **Theme 3:** What security strategy should be framed for the region?
- **Theme 4:** How can we move from an ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of peoples?

The objective of the working groups was to suggest concrete recommendations for the drafting of an ECOWAS Advocacy Document.

In addition to these working groups, two panels were added relating to the strategic orientations and the identification of the themes for the regional symposium scheduled for **May 2025**. It ended with the reading of the general report and the closing remarks.

PANEL 4: STRATEGIC ORIENTATIONS: WHAT ECOWAS IN 2050 AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF THE ASS STATES FROM ECOWAS?

This panel, which was facilitated by **Mr. Thierno Souleymane Diop Niang**, Researcher in International Relations and Geopolitics, dealt with the strategic orientations of ECOWAS after the departure of the ASS countries from ECOWAS. It was moderated by **Mrs. Lucienne Kodou Ndione, Professor at UCAD**.

According to Mr. Niang, it is a real demographic revolution that is taking place in this region. It brings enormous opportunities that shape residents' perceptions. In the same vein, conjectures abound in the light of the reading of demographic issues.

The American academic Carroll Quigley thinks that demography is an inevitable economic lever to make an economy spin, while the demographer Michel Garenne thinks that departures, wars, famines, epidemics, are inevitable because "there will not be enough space and resources for everyone".

This difference in epistemological approach does not bias the postulate. Indeed, the region's demographics remain crucial because the millions of ECOWAS citizens, who live in the region, have legitimate aspirations that result from the evolution of any people and fundamentally expect ECOWAS to play its role with respect to supporting the socio-economic development of its citizens, regardless of their number. Perception has become a major lens of interactions on the international stage. It is not a purely sensory act. It is a psycho-sociological act, because it is a way of seeing and of being, state of mind, hopes and fears, needs, attitudes etc.

Nowadays, states, international organizations, NGOs, multinationals, communities, universities, ethnic groups act according to their religion, facts that are presented without nuance. ECOWAS is no exception to this trend.

ECOWAS is being judged twice. First, an exogenous narrative erected around the West African citadel by specialists. They borrow a shortcut for analysing its evolution through the magnifying lens of globalization and venture into tendentious schemes.

Finally, ECOWAS is subject to endogenous dynamics from the populations that live in the region. They are constantly growing, exposed to threats or challenges and are lost in a relative assessment of the situation.

With regard to strategic orientations, **Mr. Niang** suggests:

- The rewriting of the history of the institution. This means leaving the echo chamber that is invested by a small circle governing more than 400 million citizens and putting the cursor on the achievements that have been made since its birth in 1975, for the improvement of the living conditions of its citizens;
- Providing its citizens with the necessary information that can facilitate their understanding of the regional entity, its prerogatives, its organization, its vision... With significant investment in communication tools, artificial intelligence in order to restore confidence and equip the youths with intellectual means to enable them resist indoctrination and particularisms in contexts of crisis. Additionally, achieving long-term technological sovereignty is necessary;
- Investing in culture and education for the knowledge and understanding of its peoples. The curricula should include the BIAFRA war, the civil wars in Sierra Leone or Liberia;
- Dynamic leadership programmes to train and encourage voluntary commitment of ECOWAS youth, universities or West African think tanks;
- Striving to ensure the return of the ASS countries back to the regional fold, by making this organization an infra-institutional entity under the control of ECOWAS;
- A reform of the Parliament is fundamental to enable ECOWAS citizens to directly choose their representatives in order to accelerate the transformation of the institution from the ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of the peoples;
- A commission with more room for manoeuvre, relatively freed from the grip of the Conference of Heads of State which can balance decisions;
- The imminent establishment of a standby strategic military force;
- Move beyond electoral democracy, which cures temporary political fevers, remaining passive in the face of the real challenges and aspirations of the populations to participate in the formulation of public policies and the enjoyment of efficient educational and health systems.



Mr. Thierno Souleymane Diop Niang, Researcher in International Relations and Geopolitics

PANEL 5: IDENTIFICATION OF THE THEMES OF THE CONFERENCE

This panel was facilitated by **Ms. Mariama Davies, Program Manager of the Center for Research and Policy Development** and it was moderated by **Ms. Lucienne Kodou Ndione, Professor at UCAD**.

She began her presentation by exploring the economic situation in West Africa. Trade is an issue that should be explored in the sub-region in order to be able to develop and implement effective economic and trade strategies, given that trade between ECOWAS Member States is between 20 and 30 per cent.

Taking the example of The Gambia, which does a lot of trade with Ivory Coast, she explained that the problem of the sub-region is that it exports a lot of raw materials while importing just as many finished products.

Ms. Davies also stressed the importance of defending the collective interest of ECOWAS member states in economic negotiations and increasing the rate of trade between ECOWAS member countries in order to boost their economies.

In the negotiations, each member state tries to defend its own positions and interests to the detriment of the common interest of the organisation. Rather, Member States should defend and promote the collective interest of the community, as they must be a driving force for economic growth.

She also evoked the principle of comparative advantage, which implies that each Member State should examine and specialise in its area of excellence.

However, there are challenges to be addressed such as challenges related to common tariff standards and the free movement of people and goods. Member countries must not abandon these initiatives because they are good and they just need to be strengthened.

She recalled that ECOWAS depends on foreign funding. This funding is a short-term solution. To ensure ECOWAS' financial independence, a long-term solution is needed.

In the area of ICT, Ms. Davies suggests that emphasis be placed on local expertise given the high number of scholarships in this field. For example, countries such as The Gambia are consulting Indian and Chinese professionals who are likely to recruit specialists in Africa to do this work. Thus, if a country in the West African sub-region excels in the field of ICT, it should export its products and services to other ECOWAS member states.

Regarding public policies relating to education, she called on ECOWAS countries to draw inspiration from European countries where students can study for free. It is also important to integrate the study of regional trade and the realities of West Africa into higher education.

Ms. Mariama Davies notes the need to promote and involve women in decision-making processes at the ECOWAS level. It recommends that young people be allowed to become more involved in the development of projects that reflect their ideas and perspectives.



Ms. Mariama Davies, Program Manager, Centre for Research and Policy Development

CLOSING SPEECH

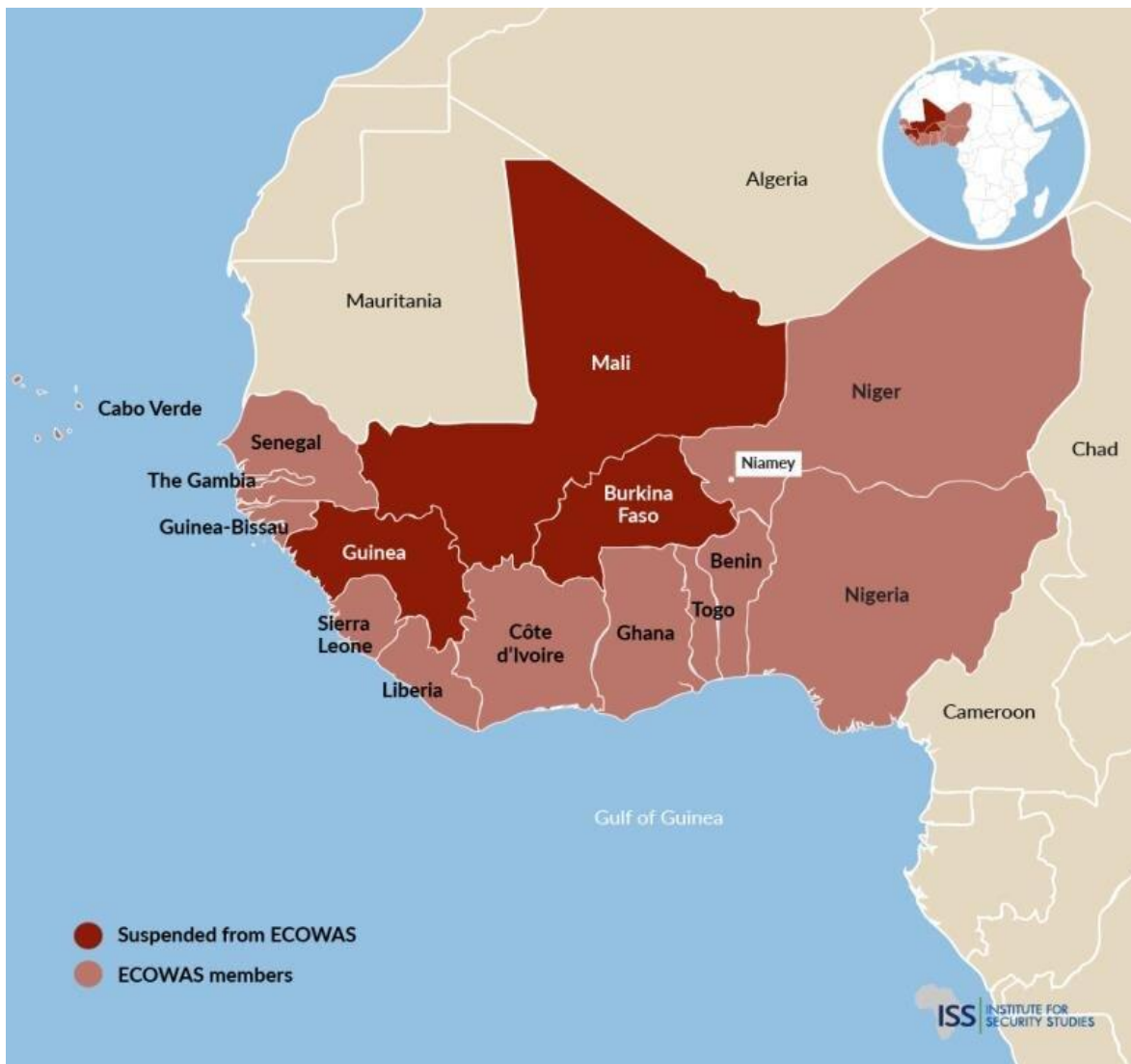
Mr. Alioune Tine called for reinventing, refounding, reforming, repairing and caring for the weak institutions of ECOWAS. He insisted that there are no other alternatives to save ECOWAS. He also suggested the strengthening of the dialogue with the ASS States, to engage necessary diplomatic initiatives with a view to reconciling ECOWAS with all its Member States and citizens, especially the youths, women and the actors of the private sector. According to him, the integration of political, economic and social development issues into security responses is vital.

Finally, **Mr. Tine** is of the conviction that there is an absolute need for a collective and sharp reflection on international strategic security partnerships, the development of **the geopolitics of ECOWAS** and the strengthening of the coordination between the member States of ECOWAS, civil society organizations and the private sector on all strategic issues.

Mr. Constant Gnacadja warmly welcomed the initiative of the pre-conference organized by the Afrikajom Center and commended the wealth of stimulating ideas emanated from the debates as well as the relevance of the recommendations ensuing from its sessions.

He recalled the importance of this pre-conference, which provided an opportunity to review the successes, failures and future challenges that ECOWAS will have to address. He affirmed that the pre-conference achieved its objectives by paving the way for the organization of a long-awaited regional conference to celebrate the fifty (50) years of ECOWAS which will certainly open up new perspectives for the regional institution and its citizens.

Appendix



Attendance List

N°	Name	Surname	Organization
1.	Constant	Gnacadjia	ECOWAS
2.	Babacar Carlos	Mbaye	Retired Ambassador
3.	Mamadou	Seck	Regional Office ECOWAS
4.	Mariama	Davies	CRPD
5.	Salomon	Ebobrah	University of Africa, Nigeria
	Babacar	Gaye	Retired General
6.	Vieux	Savane	Journalist
7.	Tadjoudine Ali	Diabacte	Retired Director in charge of Elections UNO
8.	Armando Lona	N’Nhinda	Journalist- Activist, researcher
9.	Lucienne Kodou	Ndione	AfrikaJom Center
10.	David	Dosseh Ekeré	Tournons la page
11.	Mathos	Houkpe	IFES Gabon
12.	Ibrahima	Kane	AfrikaJom Center
13.	Doudou	Dia	Gorée Institute
14.	Omar	Ndongo	Syto Senegal- UCAD
15.	Ibrahima	Silla	UGB-Saint-Louis
16.	Elhadji Mame Moussa	Sarr	Action Aid International Sénégal
17.	Pape Moussa	Pouye	Parti PUR- Peace Ambassador - Guinean Delegation
18.	Mouhamed	Cissé	FNDC Guinea
19.	Sabilla	Diallo	FRAP Senegal
20.	Alpha	Bayo	Corsoc GN Guinean Delegation
21.	Alpha Oumar	Bah	FRAP France Guinean Delegation
22.	Momar	Sourang	
23.	Sitapha	Badji	L’AS Quotidien
24.	Samba	Ndiaye	Etudiant UCAD
25.	Mbengue	Mbaye	Etudiant UCAD
26.	Saidou	Thioune	Etudiant UGB
27.	Saidou	Kebe	Programme Rule of Law- KAS
28.	Thierno Souleymane	Diop Niang	Legs Africa
29.	Sadikh	Niass	AfrikaJom Center
30.	Ndeye Amy	Ndiaye	University IRA Think-Thank
31.	Alioune	Sall	UCAD
32.	Cheikh	Fall	Africtiviste
33.	Sidy Moctar	Cissé	REPSFECO
34.	Ibrahima	Mbodj	AfrikaJom Center
35.	Pape Saliou	Sambou	CNDH
36.	Abdoul Lamine	Kamara	AfrikaJom Center
37.	Asta Walo	Babou	AfrikaJom Center
38.	Malang	Fickou	Jurist reseacher
39.	Alioune	Tine	Founder of AfrikaJom Center
40.	Salimata	Sy	AfrikaJom Center
41.	Suzanne	Diouf Mbodj	ECOWAS Club UGB
42.	Rokhaya	Toure	Interpreter
43.	Kwani	Wussinou	Interpreter

44.	Tieman Hubert	Coulibaly	Former MAE Mali
45.	Pape Ismaila	Sidibé	Technician
46.	Aicha	Ly	Technician
47.	Mouhamed	Diop	AfrikaJom
48.	Babacar	Diagne	
49.	Maurice	Toupane	Researcher ISS
50.	Maria do Rosario	Pereira Gonçalves	CNE Cap-Vert
51.	Paul Osei	Kuffour	CDD Ghana/Wademos

Date and Avenue : 25th Febuary 2025 at Terrou-Bi

Attendance List

N°	Name	Surname	Organization
1.	Constant	Gnacadja	ECOWAS
2.	Elhadji Mame Moussa	Sarr	Action aid international Senegal
3.	Alpha	Bayo	CORSOG-GN
4.	Malang	Fickou	Jurist, Researcher UCAD
5.	Arame Gueye	Sene	Social change factory
6.	Ndeye Aida	Sarr	Trust Africa
7.	Vieux	Savane	Journalist (Sud quotidien)
8.	Maria Do Rosario	Goncalves	President NEC Cape Verde
9.	Mohamed	Cissé	FNDC-Guinea
10.	Mariama	Davies	CRPD
11.	Saidou	Thioune	Student
12.	Alpha Oumar	Bass	Jurist
13.	Mathias	Tankoano	Lawyer
14.	Mathias	Hounkpe	IFES
15.	Maurice	Toupane	ISS
16.	Armando Lona	Ninhinda	INEP/
17.	Samba	Ndiaye	Student (UCAD)
18.	Mbengue	Mbaye	Student (UCAD)
19.	Sidy Moctar	Cissé	REPSFECO
20.	Thierno Souleymane Diop	Niang	Researcher in international relations and geopolitics
21.	Babacar	Gaye	Retired General
22.	Oumar	Ndongo	Professor UCAD
23.	Tiéman	Coulibaly	
24.	Solomon	Ebobrah	University of Africa, Nigeria

25.	Abdoul Lamine	Kamara	Afrikajom Center
26.	Latyr	Tine	Gorée Institute
27.	Lucienne Kodou	Ndione	FSJP-UCAD
28.	Momar	Sourang	CPTRS
29.	Ahmadou Aly	Mbaye	UCAD
30.	Ekoué David	Dosseh	Tournons la page
31.	Ndèye Amy	Ndiaye	University/IRA Think tank
32.	Ibrahima	Silla	UGB
33.	Ibrahima	Mbodj	Afrikajom Center
34.	Abdou Aziz	Cissé	Africtiviste
35.	Alioune	Tine	Founder of Afrikajom center
36.	Salimata	Sy	Afrikajom center
37.	Asta Walo	Babou	Afrikajom center
38.	Ibrahima	Kane	Afrikajom center
39.	Mouhamed	Diop	Afrikajom center
40.	Fatimata	Wane	Interpreter
41.	Kwami	Wussinou	Interpreter
42.	Pape Ismaila	Sidibe	Technician
43.	Penda	Mbow	Former Minister
44.	Doudou	Dia	Gorée Institute
45.	Elisabeth Dior	Sy	ATS
46.	Fatou Kane	Wathie	ATS
47.	Touty	Diallo	Global
48.	Sofia	Ba	La Plateforme
49.	Fatimata Kane	Sow	Lecturer- researcher FSJP- UCAD
50.	Ali-diabacte	Tadjoudine	Election Expert ONU
51.	Pape Moussa	Pouye	West Africa Peace Ambassador
52.	Aicha	Ly	Technician