



REPUBLIC OF BENIN



ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST
AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS)

ECOWAS PARLIAMENT

**SECOND ORDINARY SESSION FOR THE YEAR 2019
ABUJA, 20TH NOVEMBER TO 14TH DECEMBER 2019**

BENIN COUNTRY REPORT

BENINESE DELEGATION

Honourable Sani GLELE Yibatou

Honourable GBAHOUNGBA David

Honourable HOUANGNI perfect

Honourable Sado Nazaire

Honourable YOUSOUFOU ABDOURAMANI Bida Nouhoume

November 2019

INTRODUCTION:

Your Excellency, Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament

Your Excellencies, Members of Bureau of the ECOWAS Parliament

Dear Colleagues

It is a real pleasure for me to address this distinguished assembly, to present the summary of the situation in Benin. This report is part of the 2019 Second Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Parliament, which is being held from 20th November to 14th December 2019 in Abuja, Nigeria.

It should be noted that this is the last session of this legislature, and the Beninese delegation would like to use this opportunity, to congratulate the Speaker of Parliament, Rt. Hon. Cissé LO, for his sound leadership at the helm of the ECOWAS Parliament for four years. May the Almighty reward him and protect him and his family. Honourable Speaker of Parliament, remain abundantly blessed.

This country report is prepared in accordance with the established outline.

I. POLITICAL SITUATION

1.1 - Legislative Elections

The Electoral reforms was the highlight of these elections, with the formation of large political groups to henceforth prevent numerous political parties (about 200 political parties identified before the reforms) This situation, has led to the disappearance of a lot of parties fr which requires the merging of political parties, has led to the removal of many parties from the legislative race, as it involves the merging of parties. While the 2015 legislative elections recorded twenty contenders, in the 2019 elections, only two were able to meet the requirements of the new law, which resulted the reforms voted by the seventh legislature. The elections were held on schedule, despite demonstrations from the opposition, requesting postponement of the elections. According to the Beninese Ministry of Interior, there were mishaps in seven cities on the voting day. Hence voting could not

take place in 39 of the Country's 546 districts. These elections were marked by low voters turnout and violence.

Regardless of these events, the new legislature was officially instated, on the 16th of May 2019, to commence its new duties. To improve the socio-political atmosphere following the parliamentary elections, the Government took the initiative to organize a Political Dialogue which brought together most of the country's major political actors.

1.2- Organization of the political dialogue

After the April 2019 legislative elections, the atmosphere was tense and there was feeling of frustration from political groups who were unable to participate in the legislative elections, due to the inability to meet the requirements of the new law on the constitution of political parties. For this reason, the Government organised a political meeting, to discuss and find possible solutions to defuse the situation. After three days of discussions, the political dialogue involving eight parties, including the "Forces cauris pour un Bénin émergent" (FCBE - opposition), ended with a set of recommendations that President Patrice Talon has pledged to respect.

After the general elections, the political parties' charter and the Electoral Code were tidied up, an amnesty law was passed (release of prisoners involved in the electoral crisis, charges against some personalities were dropped, etc.). These are the main agreed recommendations of the national political dialogue.

The 96 delegates on this platform, which was designed to defuse the electoral and post-electoral crisis in Benin, also adopted measures to promote the public financing of political parties, the statutes of the opposition and better representation of women in decision-making bodies.

1.3- Revision of the Constitution and other Laws

While it does not mark the advent of a "New Republic", the constitutional revision includes major changes. After two unsuccessful attempts under the current presidential mandate, a major constitutional review was finally approved by the National Assembly, on the 31st of October 2019, and has been promulgated by the Head of the State.

The main points of these various reforms can be summarized as follows:

- The organization of general elections from 2026;
- The revision of the number of seats of MPs of the National Assembly from 83 to 109, for a population of nearly 14 million;
- The improvement of women representation in the Assembly;
- The limitation of the number of mandates of MPs to no more than 3,
- The precision on the two terms of office of the President of the Republic (no citizen in his or her life must hold more than two terms of office),
- The creation of the of a Vice-President of the Republic position,
- Sponsorship for Presidential election candidates,
- Enhancing Opposition statutes and improvement of public financing of political parties;
- Abolition of the death penalty;
- The creation of the Office of the Auditor General;
- Make flexible the Political parties charter.

1.4- Closure of the Benin- Nigeria borders

For over 2 months, trade transactions between Benin and Nigeria have been virtually impossible, due to Nigeria's unilateral closure of its borders. This situation which negatively affects the Community's economy has not been ignored by top authorities of the State. In fact, the Government has made several unsuccessful mediation attempts. On the 4th of November 2019, the ECOWAS Task Force on free movement of persons and goods, took a mission to Benin to assess the situation. This action has triggered a wave of negotiations between the administrations of the States concerned. To this end, a meeting between the Ministers in charge of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Finance was held on 14th November 2019 in Abuja.

II- SECURITY SITUATION:

2.1- Specific Measures to Combat Terrorism

Benin has merged the public security forces, i. e the Police and the Gendarmerie, now called the Republican Police. This operation is being carried out to better combat the growing insecurity and terrorism.

To solve the problems of border conflicts, smuggling and major criminality , there are plans to :

- Strengthen efforts to defend the integrity of the national territory and secure border areas;
- Develop cross-border cooperation to foster Integration;
- Make the cross-border zones genuine areas of national and local development, thereby contributing to peaceful management of the borders and the fight against poverty. Development of essential infrastructure for community development in all cross-border areas.

2.2- Status of operation of the National Maritime Safety Commission

There is no National Maritime Safety Commission in Benin Maritime security is ensured by the Naval Forces of the Beninese army, who are regularly supported by their French and American peers, to ensure peaceful traffic for sea users.

Regular missions are organised for this purpose and Benin also participates in the Community plan to combat maritime insecurity It is worth mentioning that a Norwegian company announced on the 2nd of November 2019, that nine of its employees were abducted on one its ships while it was docked off Benin's coasts. This pirate act took place at the harbour of Cotonou's Port. An investigation is ongoing and other crew members, who are safe and sound, have been interviewed.

III- HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION:

3.1- State of Operation of the National Human Rights Commission/ Agency

The Beninese Human rights Commission created by law No. 2012-36 adopted by the National Assembly at its 17 December 2012 session, functions normally.

With regard to the re-appointment of the members of the commission for a new term of office; the Parliament appointed its members to be represented in the Commission.

The members of the said Commission have already been sworn in.

3.2- Situation/specific measures relating to:

a) The protection of the rights of persons with disabilities

The right of persons with disabilities is a priority not only for the government but for the nation as a whole. This national priority was reflected by the unanimous vote of the MPs present, regarding the law on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities in the Republic of Benin. It must be noted that there is a significant number of persons with disabilities in the Beninese administration.

b) Protection of women's rights

Women's rights protection is a common feature in management practices in Benin. Several laws have been passed to this effect.

The 31st October 2019 constitutional revision, took this aspect into consideration, by enabling increased involvement of women in the National Assembly.

c) Situation of Refugees and Stateless persons

The situation of refugees and stateless persons is of paramount importance to Benin. This is evident from the presence of many refugee sites in Benin and the good collaboration between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee and the High Council of Beninese Abroad.

IV- STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY TEXTS

4.1- Status of Ratification of Community texts

Under ECOWAS, the status of Benin's ratifications ECOWAS treaties, conventions and protocols is as follows:

- Number of treaties, conventions and protocols adopted by ECOWAS: Fifty-four (54);
- Number of treaties, conventions and protocols signed and ratified by Benin: Thirty-eight (43);
- Number of treaties, conventions and protocols not ratified by Benin: Eleven (11);
- Number of treaties, conventions and protocols not ratified by Benin, but already authorised by the National Assembly: four (04) ;
- Number of treaties, conventions and protocols not yet ratified by Benin, but whose ratification procedure has been initiated: two (02).

However, discussions are currently ongoing at the ministerial and institutional levels to accelerate and ensure better coordination in the implementation of the ratification process of ECOWAS protocols and conventions.

4-2- situation or specific measures relating to:

4.2.1- Free Movement of Persons and Goods

As part of the search for solutions to facilitate the free movement of persons and goods in the West African sub-region, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has initiated, a regional programme to facilitate inter-State transport and road transit, for the benefit of Member States.

This programme includes the construction of the Sèmè-Kraké Joint Border Posts (JBPs) between Benin-Nigeria border. This infrastructure which was inaugurated on 23rd October 2018, is in its second phase, which is that of equipment provision.

In addition, Benin applies:

- The 1982 Convention on Inter-State Road Transit (ISRT) of Goods on the establishment of customs road transit regime between ECOWAS Member States to Facilitate the Movement of Goods;
- The ECOWAS Convention regulating Inter-State Road Transportation, known as the 1982 IST Convention, defining the condition under which road transport between ECOWAS Member States must be carried out (technical standards for vehicles, routes, etc.).
- The Accra Memorandum of Understanding of 11th September 2007, between ECOWAS and the Member States of the Abidjan - Lagos corridor (Benin, Togo, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Ghana) and the Abidjan - Lagos Corridor Organisation (ALCO), on the facilitation of transportation and road transit on the Abidjan- Lagos Corridor.

Also, according to the latest report prepared by the "Task Force", Benin is the only country of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to comply with the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons and Goods.

With regard to the fight against cross-border crime, the ECOWAS Commission, in partnership with its various Technical and Financial Partners (TFPs), launched the National Biometric Identity Card in all its Member States in December 2015, following the recommendations of the 46th session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, held in Accra, Ghana on 10 July 2014.

For Benin, which is firmly committed to this process, the National Biometric Identity Card was validated by ECOWAS during its visit to Cotonou from 17 to 21 February 2019. As part of this process, an advocacy and sensitization campaign was conducted from 23 to 26 April 2019 in Benin.

4.2.2 - Fight against corruption and Money Laundering

Following the emergence of the “change regime”, several audits have been carried out, regarding the management of the State over the past ten years. The change Government has decided to preserve the presumption of innocence of the persons pin pointed in the various audit reports requested, . This is done as a measure to preserve social peace. Recently, the fight against corruption has intensified with the creation of a Special Court (CRIET).

V- STATE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

The evaluation covered three (03) projects for a total amount of 64.2 million. Regarding these projects, it should be noted that data on the physical progress and the disbursement rates are not accessible.

With regard to the scholarship project, there were 19 beneficiaries for the 2014-2015 academic year and 10 for the 2015-2016 academic year.

The programme "Support for women with obstetric fistula" has still not started.

The programme Support for dynamic women's groups involved in the processing of agricultural, fisheries and craft products has a 100% disbursement rate. Three (03) groups were supported.

In addition, it is important to note the Government's efforts with regard to the free movement of goods and persons, in particular the 100% abolition of checkpoints inside the country.

VI- ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SITUATION

The Benin Government of Benin has just adopted the draft 2020 financial management law. The draft budget is estimated at nearly 2000 billion FCFA. An increase of 109.367 billion FCFA compared to 2019, with an increase rate of 5.8%. The draft law projects a budget deficit of around 1.8% of GDP, an improvement of 0.4% compared to the level expected at the end of December 2019, and controlled inflation rate. The IMF has just ranked BENIN as Africa's 4th most prosperous economy (MAY 2019). Thus, in view of this national economic situation and outlook, the growth rate stands at 7.6% in 2019 compared to 6.7% in 2018.

This year, Benin became the leading African cotton producer, ahead of Mali and Burkina Faso. In the 2018-2019 season, Benin's production far exceeded 700,000 tons of cotton seed.

The State therefore affirms its commitment to begin the structural transformation of the Beninese economy, so as to diversify it, increase productivity and put it on a more stable footing, for significant improvement of the living conditions of the population.

The operationalisation of development poles, acceleration of the implementations of ongoing projects, aimed at ensuring good overall fibre optic network in the country, and availability of broadband and very high speed internet, are part of the priorities of the Government. There is also the valorisation of national touristic potential, construction of infrastructure to promote culture, continuation of actions aimed at modernising the road network and living environment. The government will also focus on the Insurance to Build Human Capital (ARCH) project, without forgetting the operationalisation of the International City of Innovation and Knowledge. Attaining universal and sustainable access to safe drinking water is also one of the government's priorities.

The Government has considered a series of social measures under the 2019 general budget. To substantially improve the living conditions of the Beninese population, a financial envelope of 485.5 billion FCFA (approximately US\$ 7.76 million) was allocated to capital expenditure in 2019, compared to 439 billion FCFA in 2018.

This financial provision is intended, among other things, to better combat poverty through the strengthening of social programmes such as micro-loans for the poor, launch of the

operational phase of the Insurance to Build Human Capital (ARCH) project, the expansion of free measures in the health sector (free caesarean section, the care of the poor...) the construction of reference hospitals, the construction of palliative care homes and the strengthening of the resources of the "school canteens" programme, not forgetting the provision of drinking water all over the country, the construction of 20,000 social housing units, etc.

VII- STATE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MACROECONOMIC CONVERGENCE CRITERIA

The national economic situation in the first six months of 2019 was marked by the continuation of the Paving project in Benin's major cities, the implementation of several flagship projects of the PAG (Benin Government Action Plan) as well as preparations for the national holiday on 1st of August 2019. In terms of business climate, the Turnover Price Index (TPI) rose by 9.0% at the end of June compared to the same period in 2018. This increase was driven in particular by the "trade" (23.2%) and "banking" (10.6%) divisions. Similarly, the synthetic indicator of the balance of opinion came out positive at 0.03, confirming the improvement in the national economic situation.

Thus, in view of this national economic situation and the projections for the rest of the year, the growth rate will stand at 7.6% in 2019 compared to 6.7% in 2018.

For 2018, in terms of convergence, it shows that, with the exception of the budget deficit criterion (including grants), all other primary and secondary criteria were met. Benin will comply with all the convergence criteria for 2019 in the future.

- C- Primary Criteria

The ratio of the overall budget deficit, including grants/ nominal GDP This ratio is set at -4.0% of GDP at the end of December 2018

The average annual inflation rate is estimated a -0.8% at the end of December 2018, below the Community standard of 5.0% maximum retained in the multilateral surveillance mechanism

Budget deficit financing by the Central Bank in percentage of previous year's revenue is Zero, in accordance with the WAEMU directory suspending statutory advances

Gross external reserve in months of import cover are estimated a 4.6 at the end of December 2018, in accordance with the Community Standard

- C- Secondary Criteria

The ratio of public debt/ nominal GDP is estimated at 55.7% of GDP at the end December 2018, still below the Community threshold of 70% maximum, as adopted by the Community

The Variation of the nominal exchange rate. This ratio is estimated at 4.4 at the end of December 2018

Overview of the convergence situation at the end of December 2018

Ratio	ECOWAS standards	2016	2017	2018	Observations
Primary Criteria					
Overall budget deficit including grants (commitment basis) / GDP (%)	≤ 3%	4.9	5.9	4.0	-
Annual average inflation rate	≤ 5%	-0.8	0.1	-0.8	<i>Respected</i>
Budget deficit financing by the Central Bank /previous year's revenue*	≤ 10%	0	0	0	<i>Respected</i>

Ratio	ECOWAS standards	2016	2017	2018	Observations
Gross external reserve: in months import cover*	≥ 3	4.4	4.3	4.6	-
Secondary Criteria					
Public debt ratio/GDP	≤ 70%	49.5	54.3	55.7	<i>Respected</i>
Real exchange rate stability	± 10%	4.1	2.1	4.4	-

Source: CNC/CSIR/MEF, February 2019

VIII- PAYMENT OF PROCEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY LEVY (CL)

8.1- Transfer of proceeds of the community levy

According to data from the latest ECOWAS mission to Benin on the monitoring of the application of the Protocol on Community Levy (CL), during which the CL summary statements produced by the General Directorate of Customs and Indirect Duties (DGDDI), the statement of the General Directorate of the Treasury and Public Accounting (DGTCP), the statement of the “Société de Gestion du Guichet Unique du Bénin (SEGUB)” and the ECOWAS Commission's CL Monitoring Table were compared. The amount of the Community Levy collected and transferred from July 2003 to May 2018 amounted to 56, 654, 421, 602 CFA, totally transferred. **Since February 2018, the proceeds of Community levies collected by customs have been transferred directly to the appropriate ECOWAS account opened at the BCEAO. As a result, there are no additional arrears since February 2018.**

8.2- Challenges in the transfer of the Community levy

The main challenge is the direct transfer of CL proceeds to ECOWAS accounts opened with BCEAO. Benin met this requirement since February 2018, where all CL proceeds collected by customs are transferred directly to ECOWAS' accounts at the BCEAO. This practice is the standard to this day.

8.3- Payment of the proceeds of the Community levy

It should be noted that Benin is making commendable efforts with regard to the implementation of the Protocol A/P1/7/96 on the conditions for the application of the Community levy. Since February 2018, the proceeds of Community levies collected by customs have been transferred directly to the appropriate ECOWAS account opened at the BCEAO. As a result, there are no additional arrears since February 2018.

IX- RESTITUTION OF THE WORK OF THE ECOWAS PARLIAMENT SESSIONS TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The various activities of the ECOWAS Parliament are regularly presented in plenary to the National Assembly. Also, restitution sessions for the populations are regularly organized after each ordinary session. This presentation generally opens with a very satisfactory discussion among Parliamentarians, who are spokespersons of the ECOWAS Parliament to the populations of their respective constituencies.

Thank You

Je vous remercie

Obrigado