



NATO Foundation
Defense College

Africa June 2017

The Gambia: the beginning of a new era?

Last December elections marked an epochal turning point for The Gambia. The 51-year-old property developer Adama Barrow won the presidential elections, bringing to an end the 22-years dictatorship of the outgoing president Yahya Jammeh. Despite the turbulent post-elections path to the inauguration, occurred in the Gambian embassy in Dakar on the 19th of January, now Barrow is the 4th president of The Gambia.

Jammeh indeed, after recognizing the defeat, did an about-turn denouncing anomalies in the vote and demanding for new elections. This abrupt halt in the transition process has led to the mobilisation first of Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Liberia's Heads of State and then of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, which had invited Jammeh to recognise the clear expression of the Gambian popular will [Communiqué of the 647th meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council on the post-election situation in the Islamic Republic of the Gambia, 13 January 2017].

After six-weeks political crisis Gambia's new president Barrow, who welcomed "a new Gambia" during the oath ceremony in Dakar, returned to his country initiating a new era. It was the first time, since the independence in 1965, "that the country has changed the government through the ballot box", as Barrow stated [Tweet on the official Adama Barrow Twitter profile].

The Gambia is progressively moving forward to a new democratic era as proved also by the first parliamentary elections last April, that saw the victory of the UDP (United Democratic Party), the newly established president party and also the largest opposition force to Jammeh's party. The fact that Gambian people can start to change things through their vote could be regarded as a success [V. Haiges, The Gambia gears up for post-Jammeh polls, Deutsche Welle, 5 April 2017] and a positive countertrend in comparison with the electoral outcomes throughout the continent.

According to Amnesty International document in his first 100 days in office Adama Barrow did momentous steps for human rights, marking a decisive break with the country's brutal past. He has already ordered the release of people imprisoned simply for expressing their opinion. The long-term tenure of Barrow presidency will indeed be measured also and above all through the Gambian authorities effort to strengthen the justice system and to reform the security forces, as urged again by Amnesty International [A. Tine, Gambia: Progress in first 100 days of Barrow government requires major reform to break with brutal past, Amnesty International, 27 April 2017].

Barrow's government fired five army high rank officials and appointed Masanah Kinteh, once elite official of former dictator Jammeh and later redeployed to the Foreign Service, as security aide to the president and Gambia's Army Chief of Defense Staff [Lt. Gen. Masaneh Kinteh Is Gambia's Army Chief Of Defense Staff; Ousman Badjie Out!, Freedom Newspaper, 26 February 2017]. This criticised

decision could be probably part of Adama Barrow strategy, whose actions will be carefully scrutinised internally and externally, to conduct this transition and a decisive change in the small West African country, trying not to entrench past divisions [S. M. Jaw, All Gambians need to rebuild their country, even members of the old regime, The Guardian, 30 January 2017].

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