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THE ROLE OF ECOWAS IN MAINTAINING PEACE IN WEST AFRICA

At the time of its creation in 1975 ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) aimed to promote the economic integration of its 15 member states. The civil war that broke out in Liberia in 1989, however, marked a turning point: an interposition force led by a Nigerian staff composed of nationals from several important member states was created under the name of ECOMOG (Ecowas cease-fire monitoring group). This strong approach has been formalized by the 1999 Protocol on Conflict Prevention, which explicitly linked economic development with peace, and the 2001 Additional Protocol on Good Governance, which states that «any accession to power must be done through free, fair and transparent elections». Among the other instruments used, ECOWAS uses information and election observation missions, the appointment of special representatives and mediators, sanctions and the establishment of international contact groups to resolve or prevent conflicts.

The dispatch of a peacekeeping force to Liberia in August 1990 by ECOWAS without the endorsement of the United Nations or the United States set a precedent in the history of peacekeeping operations around the world. However, after nearly three years of mission, the results of this mission were very mixed. According to the 1993 Human Rights Watch report, ethnic cleansing ceased in the fall of 1990 with the intervention of the regional force, but the failure to take into account other factors has mired the West African force in a conflict that went beyond it, to the point that it showed a bias in the resolution of the conflict. And it is finally after seven years of intervention, in 1997, that the 20,000 soldiers of ECOMOG put an end to that conflict.

As soon as the intervention in Liberia was over, it was the turn of the neighbouring Sierra Leone to receive the forces. In 1997 ECOMOG was largely redeployed in country, which had been in a civil war since 1991. The Nigerian ECOMOG contingent evicted a military junta from Freetown (1997–98) and reinstated the president Ahmad Tejan Kabbah in power. Then the ECOMOG, which numbered up to 11,000 men, gave way in 2000 to a UN mission.

After Sierra Leone, it was the turn of Ivory Coast to receive an ECOMOG intervention in 2003 composed of 1,300 soldiers, just after an armed rebellion in September 2002 divided the country in two parts. The Ivorian conflict was hardly over when Mali found itself in the grip of an armed uprising by northern jihadist groups in January 2012. But that time ECOWAS intervened at the 25th hour, after the French army helped the country to repel an invasion that would have inexorably grabbed the capital Bamako.

Thus, even when conflicts seem to be only the business of a single country, ECOWAS is actually concerned and challenged. Several of these reasons are included in its regional mandate in terms of peace and security. These include the regional spread of conflicts due to the porous borders of countries in cri-

sis and the existence of cross-border dynamics at the level of populations and actors of political or criminal violence; the transnational and regional circulation of fighters and weapons estimated at about 10 million in circulation in West Africa, half of which is held privately and beyond any form of public control; and also the civil war in Libya and the NATO intervention that aggravated the situation especially with the dissemination of more than 10,000 missiles from the arsenal of the Libyan defeated regime.

Moreover, although there is no denying of the leading role played by ECOWAS in the diplomatic, military and security fields to the service of peace in West Africa, its efforts are still insufficient to achieve the goals it has set.