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Medias Status Report: Niger

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I. AN UNSTABLE POLITICAL CONTEXT

1990 marked the end of the hegemony of State media in Niger with the creation of *Haské*¹, the first truly independent newspaper, and yet Niger passes for one of the countries in French-speaking Africa where the press has developed the slowest.

Niger has above all revealed itself as one of the most politically unstable countries in Africa. In this 1,265,000 km² country with an estimated population of only 10 million inhabitants, no elected President nor any National Assembly has completed their terms of office. All have seen their mandates cut short by exceptional events—coups d'état or national conferences against a backdrop of social and political tension.

During ten years of pluralism, Niger has known four periods of exception: the 1991 Sovereign National Conference (SNC), the 1992 post-SNC democratic transition and two military transitions following the coups d'état in 1996 and 1999.

Voters were called to the ballot boxes 14 times in one decade. These elections, most of which were controversial, were the basis of all the serious political crises.

Niger—currently in its fifth republic, established in December 1999—is therefore a country in more or less perpetual re-foundation. This military territory which became a colony and then a Republic in 1958 is still seeking its path towards good governance. With their passion-filled sometimes violent and even bloody episodes the quarrels over public management (or, to use the local expression, “cutting the cake”), the country had simply ceased to be credible and was outlawed by the Bretton Woods institutions. It is only very recently, with the arrival of the Fifth Republic, that Niger has once again “re-entered society”. This is not to say, however, that donors have completely overcome their hesitations when it comes to the Nigerien political classes.

¹ “Light” in Hausa

II. THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

From Scarcity to Abundance

The principal consequences of the democratisation process launched in 1991 in Niger were the liberalisation of the communication sector and the consecration of freedom of expression. The foundations and origins of the awakening of desire for liberty and democracy were a national aspiration of the Nigerien people but its translation into fact owes much to national and international press.

Independent Niger's first thirty years were marked by the lone voice of State media: one single newspaper, one single public radio station and one single public television channel, after the fashion of the political monolithism *de rigueur* at the time.

Independent press is barely ten years old if one excludes the corporatist bodies in the 1970s and rural press experiments such as *Gangaa*.

1. Written Press

1.1 State Omnipotence

Today, as in the 1960s, governmental written press still has two newspapers—a daily, *Le Sahel*, and a weekly, *Le Sahel Hebdo*, which comes out on Fridays. Despite the financial cocoon provided by the State, the publication of these two newspapers was interrupted for two years in 1991 and 1992 before starting up again, strengthened by a printing works. The qualitative changes made—in particular in the areas of technical equipment, staff training and management—have not, however, noticeably improved the quality of the product.

In December 1989, the governmental directorate for written press became the National Publishing House and Press Office (ONEP), in parallel with the National Radio and Television Office (ORTN) for broadcasting. This reform was not however sufficient to alter the behaviour of ONEP journalists: half of the eight pages of the national daily newspaper contain only games, advertisements and communiqués. The editorial content of public newspapers remains prisoner to the hearings of the Chief of State, the President of the National Assembly or the Prime Minister, and the minutes of seminars and workshops—when it does not contain interviews with ministers or the managing directors of State companies. The Opposition can find no room for expression.

1.2 The Dramatic Rise of the Private Sector

The independent written press in Niger has exploded in every sense in one decade: fecundity and disintegration of newspapers.

The first independent newspaper dates from May 1990—the weakly *Haské*. In its beginnings, it reached record circulation numbers of 12,000 copies. It was the first newspaper in Niger to bring contradiction and debate to a sector where only the government point of view had prevailed. Nevertheless, this pioneer rapidly moved from apogee to decline, mostly because the professionalism of the editorial staff was not supported by management.

Since 1990, roughly fifty newspapers have appeared in the news-stands. Some, at best, surviving for a maximum of three to ten issues². Some appear without warning such as *Moustique*, the first Nigerien satirical newspaper, *Le Soleil*, *Le Flic*, *L'Enquêteur*, *Le canard libéré*³, *Sahel horizon*, *Kybbia*, *La voix du citoyen*, *Le paon africain*, *Le Témoin*, etc. Others that were for a while examples of regularity have become punctual in the publication of issues, such as the bi-monthly *Anfani* and the weeklies *Tribune du peuple* and *Alternative*.

One can however note the stability of a few weeklies, the most regular of which are *Le Républicain* (created in June 1991 and whose owner is also the owner of the largest printing works in the country, the Nouvelle imprimerie du Niger (NIN, new printing works of Niger)) and *Le Démocrate*, resisting since its creation in May 1992.

The proliferation of short-lived newspapers was favoured by the liberal option in vigour in Niger in terms of the creation of written press bodies. Indeed, in conformity with article 23 of edict n° 93-029 of 30 March 1993 governing the freedom of the press, “general information periodicals may be published freely, without prior authorisation”. The same article of the same law demands only that they “be the object of a declaration to the office of the public prosecutor of the Republic”. The simple formality of the publication declaration (containing the identification elements of title and the names and address of the managing editor) suffices to practice as publisher in Niger.

The only obligation is the 24 hour delay imposed in article 30 as the compulsory legal registration delay, before publication, of “two copies of the newspaper or written periodical with the office of the public prosecutor of the Republic”. While it is difficult for daily papers to respect this delay, one should note that no periodicals respect it. At best, the legal registration is done when the periodicals are placed on sale.

The enemy of private publishers is the generalised financial crisis within the country and poor management, not to say absence of management or refusal to manage. Except for *Le Républicain* and *Le Démocrate*, rare are the newspaper owners who make it their duty to pay journalists salaries. In Niger, when politicians call journalists “food journalists” and their press organisations “food press”, it is not an empty accusation⁴.

The context surrounding private press is increasingly precarious and difficult—only a handful of newspapers have head offices (*Le Républicain*, *Le Démocrate*, *Anfani*, *Tribune du peuple*, *Alternative* and just recently *Le Canard libéré*). In Niger, as in other countries on the continent, only a minority can read (77% of men over the age of 15 are illiterate and 92% of women) and/or buy a newspaper. Publishers are constantly suffocated by very high printing costs⁵ and costs for electricity, rent (100,000 CFA francs—1,000 FF— on average for a small house downtown), etc. They are also weakened by a significant advertising drought, to such an extent that announcers buy advertising space not because of advertising needs but out of sympathy. In addition to this, there is the weakness of production means characterised by the

² See the annexe for the list of newspapers.

³ Another satirical newspaper in the same vein as “*Canardo*” which is under suspension by the National Communication Observatory (ONC), the communication regulatory authorities.

⁴ The problem with this proliferation of titles is that many private journalists sell their services and easily accept to destroy reputations in exchange for a few banknotes. Most newspapers are specialised, furthermore, in analysis and commentary rather than hard news.

⁵ Thus, printing costs vary between 170,000 CFA francs (1,700 FF) and 150,000 CFA francs (1,500 FF) for 1,000 copies of an 8-page tabloid.

dilapidation of equipment and the insufficiency of editorial staff and administrative staff training.

It is in this not very encouraging landscape that the independent written press welcomed new arrivals in the year 2000: *Les Echos du Sahel*, a quarterly magazine specialised in news on development and the rural world, and two weekly tabloids (*La Roue de l'histoire* whose owner and managing editor is also the head of a political party and *Le Canard déchaîné* a satirical newspaper born out of the October 2000 split among the editorial staff of the *Canard libéré*).

2. News and Communication Agencies

2.1 The Nigerien News Agency

Niger has only one news agency, the Nigerien News Agency (ANP); it is a government body created on 23 July 1987 with the status of industrial and commercial public establishment (EPIC). Its mission is to spread Niger's voice abroad and also to collect information abroad and within the country and distribute it to Nigerien media and to certain administrative services.

ANP, which mostly relays Agence France Presse (AFP) briefs, receives the least subsidies of State media and is often disconnected from its information sources for lack of payment. Despite proper equipment obtained from notably UNESCO and Nigerien-German overseas aid, its offer remains very slim in relation to the demand.

The agency works with a telex network in six regional offices implanted in Agadez, Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua and Zinder. It has three switchboards with 12 lines each and a satellite antenna installed by AFP, its principal supplier.

2.2 Communication Agencies

It is difficult to distinguish between the agencies that offer exclusively communication services and multi-service agencies that are in reality marketing agencies. One should note, however, the attempts of *Anfani* and *Echos du Sahel* to launch new services by relying on their publishing and broadcast production bodies.

3. Radio

In a country as vast as Niger with an unequally distributed and mostly rural population, radio appears to be the proximity media *par excellence*.

Broadcasting was the object of a specific edict—edict n°93-031 of 30 March 1993—that affirms the freedom of radio and television communication in its first article before specifying in its 10th article that “the Superior Council of Communication delivers the authorisations to exploit radio, television or other private broadcast communication services”, and above all that it “defines the terms and conditions”.

Nevertheless, article 20 gives “public and private” broadcast communication companies the right to enjoy “freedom of expression” and to fix “their programming alone”.

3.1 *La Voix du Sahel*

Created in 1958, *Radio Niger*, re-named *La Voix du Sahel* in 1974, is the only national radio station, covering the whole country by a system of relays and regional stations broadcasting on FM, short wave and medium wave. *La Voix du Sahel* is also the only radio station to offer programs in eight languages (national languages and the official language, French). 65% of its broadcasts are in national languages for approximately 6,290 hours of annual programming.

It should be noted that in recent years a German Overseas Aid programme made it possible for seven regional stations⁶ to obtain broadcasting autonomy and to broadcast in FM. Generally, competition between independent radio stations also broadcasting in FM has forced regional stations to perform better.

3.2 The First Generation of Private Radio Waves

- *R&M, Anfani, Suda*

Of more modest scope, private FM radio stations started to broadcast in Niamey before attempting the regional adventure where sources of income are almost non-existent. Most of their programming is based on music; it is also characterised by chronic amateurism: most journalists and disk-jockeys have only received on-the-job training and, most of the time, have received very little schooling.

Three radio stations inaugurated the entrance of the private sector in radio broadcasting in Niger. First, in 1994, the radio station *R&M* (radio and music) which initially privileged musical programming before being forced to include news bulletins in order to withstand the competition. Its news programme is enriched by the retransmission of BBC news in French and Hausa. It was also the first to attempt decentralisation in 1998, by opening an antenna in the south of the country in Maradi. However, the absence of commercial perspectives in this region raises doubts as to the continuation of the experience.

The radio station *Anfani*⁷ was born in January 1995; its owner is also the owner of the bi-monthly newspaper of the same name. Supported by the American Embassy in Niger, the promoter of this radio station is without the slightest doubt the one person in the Nigerien press milieu who has received the most support in his enterprise. His radio station is also the station that has forged its reputation for radio freedom abroad, even though it is probably not totally independent, like the other local media.

Anfani is above all in the process of succeeding in its gamble to be present all across the country. After Maradi, Zinder and Diffa, the main secondary cities in Niger, conquered in the space of two years with the FM radio stations, the city of Tahoua is the next target for *Anfani* where it will offer, as with its first radio station in Niamey, local programmes and rebroadcast newscasts in French and Hausa from the Voice of America and the Voice of Germany.

The third radio station in this first generation is the least well endowed. *Suda*, born in 1996, has a powerful, but already ancient, 2 kW radio transmitter in the image of all of the station's technical infrastructure. Despite the dilapidation of the equipment and the station's limited range, its promoter nourishes expansion projects, notably in Dosso.

⁶ Agadez, Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabéri and Zinder

⁷ "Well-being" in Hausa and in other languages of the country.

In the space of five years, the first generation private radio stations managed to steal listeners from *la Voix du Sahel*. Young people above all identify with these radio stations, 75% of whose programming offers music and entertainment. Older listeners are not far behind. When one wants to find contradictions to government theses, one must turn to the private airwaves. In an excess of zeal perhaps and undoubtedly because of the appeal of an easy scoop, private radio stations rapidly got caught up in the spiral of political quarrels that delights their listeners. To such an extent that each was rapidly labelled as a branch of this or that Opposition party and sometimes even of the authorities. *Radio Anfani* was thus given the nickname “presidential radio station” in 1995. In reality, the Nigerien public opinion simply associated private radio stations with the *Voix du Sahel*’s idea of protest.

Finally, everything in Niger happens as if the media could not truly be independent. The announcement of the creation of a new radio station necessarily calls for investigation and rumour in order to affix a label to it.

3.3 The Second Generation

- *TFM, Tambara, Saraounia*

Thus, *Radio Ténéré FM (TFM for short)*, created in January 1998, was rapidly designated as a presidential radio station simply because its promoter happened to be the brother-in-law of the Chief of State at the time, General Baré. The challenge facing this new-born station was thus to prove its neutrality, which was indeed quite a challenge. Its reporters were forbidden to cover Opposition demonstrations. *TFM* nevertheless hooked listeners by innovating in its news programming by offering hourly news flashes between its morning, mid-day and evening news programmes until 10 p.m. with its last full bulletin. This was the touch that made the difference between it and its predecessors who only broadcast one mid-day and one evening news programme. Less than two months later, *Anfani* and *R&M* in turn adopted this programme.

The acknowledged importance of news programmes has above all allowed the population of the capital to give itself greater balance in interpreting national events. Starting at noon and roughly every quarter hour, listeners hop from one wavelength to another. Listeners prefer the international radio stations, RFI or Africa N° 1, for international news.

The only radio station that escapes classification appeared early in 2000, *Radio Tambara*, the promoter of which is a woman who from the start proclaimed that her domain was “women”. A new radio station, *Radio Saraounia*, joined the airwaves at the end of 2000.

- *Radio Nomade FM*

The distinction among commercial radio stations goes to *Nomade FM*, who broadcasts from Agadez. It was created in November 1998 with the support of French Overseas Aid to Niger. It has formed a partnership with RFI and the Voice of America. Located where advertising can not ensure satisfactory inflows of cash, *Nomade FM* has been obliged to invest in the production of programmes on command for projects that intervene in the area and to offer programmes in the five languages spoken in the region⁸ and in French.

⁸ Hausa, Tamahaq, Zarma, Tassawa, and Arab

3.4 Rural Radio Stations

The year 2000 saw the appearance of a new type of radio station tied to development projects—rural radio stations, the first of which was implanted in a village in the west of the country, Bankilaré⁹ in September 1999 and the second in April 2000 in Gaya¹⁰ in the south. They share a desire to meet the proximity needs of rural populations and their position of being under the supervision, for their first steps, of a development project and an overseas aid mission, respectively. They are, however, near opposites when it comes to their capabilities and structures.

- *Radio Gomni*¹¹ in Bankilaré, the First Solar Radio Station

Radio Gomni in Bankilaré was presented as the trial run of an ambitious project to install 200 to 300 radio stations country-wide. The ambition of its initiators is to implant one radio station every 50 to 60 kilometres in the country.

Radio Gomni aims to be a community radio station. It was supported by the African Centre of Meteorology Application for Development (ACMAD), the United Nations Development Programme for Niger (UNDP) and the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) for Niger. This radio station, run using solar energy, also ensures the relay of programmes provided by Worldspace.

The geographic coverage of this type of radio station has caused much frustration: out of the 60 km radius announces, barely 20 km or so receive broadcasts, a fact that the promoters promise to improve. However, the installation procedures prior to any official authorisation and above all the structuring of village organisations to operate and manage these radio stations are more problematic. While it can not be denied that this radio project is irreproachable as a proximity information tool, it may be feared, however, that the project lacks sustainability. After Bankilaré, nine other radio stations¹² were installed in the same conditions of non-preparation of housing and management structures.

- *Radio Fara'a* in Gaya

Radio Gaya, called *Fara'a*¹³, inaugurated on 19 April 2000, is another radio experiment in the rural milieu funded by Swiss Overseas Aid in Niger. The originality of this radio station is to have been handed over to professionals for management in the same aims of proximity as the solar radios of the UNDP, ACMAD and SNV. For the first time in Niger, an overseas aid mission gave a media “keys in hand” to professionals with the single requirement to serve the rural cause. In exchange for programmes for the rural world, Swiss Overseas Aid supports the station by providing an operating subsidy for 2 to 3 years.

Similarly to *Radio Fara'a*, Swiss Overseas Aid also supports other rural radio stations—this time community-type radio stations—in the same zone as Bankilaré. Three radio stations should make it possible to cover the western part of the country where Swiss Overseas Aid is active with its development project, CADELTA (development support unit, Tillabéri). For close to six months, this project has endeavoured, in the villages concerned by these radio stations,

⁹ 250 km from Niamey

¹⁰ 300 km from Niamey

¹¹ “Kindness” in Songai

¹² In Aderbissanat, Ingall, Bermou, N’gourti, N’guigmi, Douméga, Belbédji, Tchintabaraden and Goudele in the suburbs of Niamey.

¹³ “Hospitality” in Hausa

to create management structures and organise training for young people in the operation and basics of radio broadcasting.

4. Television

4.1 Télé Sahel

From the experimental television station in 1964 to 1999, television in Niger was the State's private domain.

The government television station, *Télé Sahel*, that today covers most of the national territory was originally a simple experimental school television station. It seized on the 1978 World Cup soccer tournament to take a stab at broadcasting for the general public. Starting from this, the State began to convert it into a national television station. In November 1988, it began to broadcast every day of the week, but only for four hours each evening.

Télé Sahel covers 85% of the territory with a network of 13 TV broadcast centres and 6 retransmission centres.

4.2 The Breakthrough of the Private Sector

- *Télé Star Network*, a Distribution Channel

In 1996, a private operator who already owns *Radio R&M* created *Télé Star Network*. It acts in fact as a relay distribution channel rather than producing its own programmes. Purely commercial, it distributes a package of twelve channels including *RTL9*, *Festival*, *MCM*, *Manga*, *Planète*, *CFI*, and *Canal Plus*. The public applauded the announcement of its creation but enthusiasm rapidly waned because of high access costs: first one must obtain a TV5 antenna sold for 70,000 CFA francs (700 FF), then buy a decoder for 110,000 CFA francs (1,100 FF) and finally pay the monthly subscription fee of 19,500 CFA francs (195 FF). *Télé Star Network* therefore has only a minority audience.

- *TV Ténéré*, the First Private Television Station

In February 2000, *Télé Ténéré* began to broadcast for the Africa Nations Cup. This channel truly positions itself as a competitor to *Télé Sahel*, all the more so because its promoter (who is also the promoter for *Radio Ténéré FM*) affirms that it will not be encrypted. It innovated by broadcasting during the day and its influence can already be felt in *Télé Sahel*'s offer—the national television station has already improved its programming of films in the evening.

5. Production Studios

As is the case with communication agencies, several companies claim to produce television programmes. The production studios worthy of the name—structured and with high-performance staff and logistics—can be counted on the fingers of one hand: the most professional is probably the *Centre audiovisuel de la mission catholique* in Niamey. In the near future, the radio and television production studios *Anfani* and *Les Echos du Sahel*, still in the process of acquiring equipment, should join the scene.

III. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

1. An Excess of Laws in Favour of Freedom of the Press

The emergence of private and independent press manhandled certain principles that had governed the profession during the long years of monolithic or military regimes.

The texts of law have been re-worked multiple times since the first law on freedom of the press in Niger, edict n°135 of 25 July 1959, amended by law n° 276 of 26 April 1974, which was itself replaced by edict n° 77-13 of 21 July 1977. These laws governed until the Estates-General of Communication convened in 1992 and whose texts were adopted and promulgated in March 1993.

Since then, modifications have been made to edicts n° 93-029 of 30 March 1993 governing the freedom of the press, n° 93-030 governing the repression of offences committed through the press or any other means of communication, n° 93-031 governing broadcast communications, n° 93-021 governing the composition, organisation, attributions and operations of the Superior Communication Council, and n° 59-135 legalising freedom of the press and ensuring freedom of expression.

At the heart of this perpetual re-working of laws one of course finds political ups and downs but one also finds the excesses of certain media “professionals”.

- Press Indoctrination Attempts

If one looked only at the principles contained in the texts of law, ignoring concrete situations and practices, one could affirm that the Nigerien institutional system for communication is among the best in the world and that the press of this country is among the most free. However, there you have it, between the proclamation of principles and the reality of the situation in which they are applied or that determine them, there is a wide gulf. These texts of law are unfortunately and at best only a proclamation of intent.

The new law of 25 July 1997 proclaims without any ambiguity the principle of freedom of the press: “written and broadcast press as well as diffusion and printing are free. Citizens have an inalienable right to information.”

At the same time, with liberalisation, re-found speech resulted in a mushrooming of publications that, in the first years, worked in full independence without government interference. Despite certain—sometimes serious—abuses, Nigerien media more or less provided proof of their ability to play the indispensable role of political mediator, the catalysis of true social democracy, on the basis of real participation in all decision-making processes.

The return to an exceptional regime in January 1996 brought to a halt the advances made during the period of democratic transition. The press had been an integral part of the country’s political institutions and the suspension of the constitutional framework favourable to it effected it and the legislation governing it.

- A Repressive Reorganisation

The new legal code on information that arose from the re-working of the 1993 texts not only installed new relations of suspicion and distrust between the authorities and the press, it also

created new offences and alterations in the status of media businesses and their staff and introduced new mechanisms of repression for press misdemeanours.

The freedom to create newspapers was regulated in order to curb what the new government saw as the taking of liberties. It was even demanded of newspaper owners that the majority of journalists working in their newspapers as well as their managing editors have Nigerien nationality.

The new measures pertaining to the conditions for the practice the profession of journalist had very considerable consequences for journalists and for this profession. The 1997 law stipulates in article 12: "A professional journalist is one who has earned a diploma in the field of journalism..."

Already long in the former law, the list of misdemeanours and offences likely to be committed through the press was lengthened. A little over half the measures in this new law are dedicated to misdemeanours and offences and to their repression.

In particular, it restricts journalists' right to criticise the State, its institutions and all civil servants in charge of running its service. For example, according to the text of article 54 of the new law, journalists are forbidden from quoting, "in reason of their functions or if their office, by one or more members of government, one or more members of the National Assembly, depositories or agents of public authorities, citizens invested with a public service or mandate, whether temporarily or permanently, members of juries or witnesses in regards to their depositions".

The new law purely and simply deleted the former measures that formed the guarantees against arbitrary sanctions and the protection of freedom of the press. Thus, someone who committed the misdemeanour of offence vis-à-vis the President of the Republic could not under any circumstances benefit in court from attenuating circumstances (law n° 97-26, art. 55, paragraph 4).

In general, an aggravation in sanctions can be observed.

Beyond the stepping up of sanctions, the new texts provide for new offences. The first is listed in article 51, paragraphs 2 and 3: the offence of false news which is punishable by 1 to 5 years' imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 to 5,000,000 CFA francs. This measure made it possible to condemn the owner of the newspaper *Enquêteur* to an 8-month prison sentence and a fine of 500,000 CFA francs on 13 November 2000.

Even those who sell, distribute or post the press can henceforth be prosecuted for complicity in press crimes and misdemeanours.

Evidently, when it entered into vigour on 25 July 1997, law n° 97-26 caused a general outcry that was unprecedented in the history the press in Niger.

Far from promoting the freedom and independence of Nigerian media, the new measures tend rather to hamper them and the number of victims has since been growing.

The new legislation indeed has considerable repercussions on Nigerien political life, the status of press businesses and their activities, the exercise of the profession of journalist and, generally, on freedom of the press.

It has also caused the appearance of new dividing lines among the press: on one side the private independent press allied with civil society and on the other the government and its institutions including public written press and broadcasting.

What this law fights is a certain idea and form of journalism called investigative journalism. By wanting to protect individuals and institutions from press abuses, the law ended up placing journalists in an insupportable position of too few rights in exchange for many responsibilities and heavy repression.

2. Regulation and Self-Regulation Bodies

The agreement, reached on 3 November 1991, creating the Superior Council of Communication (CSC)¹⁴ is the result of the long protest of Nigerien news professionals who seized the opportunity presented by the National Conference.

On trial nevertheless, CSC seems mined from the inside by the political obedience of its members. CSC is above all suffering from a crisis of legitimacy mainly because four of its seven members are named by the authorities, in other words by the President of the Republic and the Presidents of the National Assembly and Supreme Court. It furthermore lacks the administrative and technical staff needed to function and has neither financial nor material means.

More serious yet, this so-called constitutional body for the regulation of communication, one of whose fundamental missions is to “ensure the independence of media vis-à-vis the State and facilitate its access to all legally acknowledged opinions and movements”, does not have the power to impose sanctions on the leaders of the public press. CSC has never been able to fulfil its terms and conditions. It was, for example, unable to establish a functional Press Council which would have been precious for the detection and repression of ethical failings among other things. Finally, CSC’s exploit is to have, as recommended by the National Conference, succeeded in organising, with the support of the Panos Institute, the Estates-General on Communication in 1992. The Estates-General on Communication, held in a perspective of reconciliation, were both a framework for reflection and collective self-criticism for the profession.

Paradoxically, CSC has been missed for the past year since it was replaced, as a result of the coup d’état in April 1999, by the *Observatoire national de la communication* (ONC, the National Communication Observatory), a regulation body cut to measure by the military junta in power at the time.

ONC is even less able to command respect than CSC. News professionals do not identify with this institution and have, for example, refused to have their professional credentials renewed by ONC. *Radio Tambara*, born after ONC’s creation, has also ignored its ban on broadcasting.

In fact, news professionals feel that there is an institutional void on this level and paid particular attention to the debates in the National Assembly on the rehabilitation of CSC on 1 December 2000. Another expectation among journalists is that the institution henceforth make greater room for the representatives of private press which has continued to expand. Instead of two head offices, it demands at least four. The number of CSC members on staff should increase to nine but journalists want this number to reach thirteen. Journalists are also concerned about the new repressive orientation that the authorities wish to give to the new institution.

¹⁴ Even though it was created in 1991, it was only with edict n° 93-021 of 30 March 1993 that its composition, organisation, duties and operational modalities were defined.

The media milieu above all anticipates conflicts of jurisdiction between CSC and CIMED, the *Centre indépendant des médias, de l'éthique et de la déontologie* (the Independent Centre for Media, Ethics and Deontology), created in September 1999 with the support of the United States Embassy to be a media self-regulation body. This institution which is supposed to have emanated from news professionals does not have the support of all.

IV. PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS

On paper, there are 10 associations and other professional organisations in the press sector in Niger but, in practice, very few can mobilise forces and the sector is among the weakest in the country. The media milieu suffers a great deal from division and suspicion among journalists and publishers and, consequently, their actions are always isolated and have little effect.

Professional press organisations' days of glory date from and are limited to the struggle for press freedom in the first hours of the democratic process. Today, the *Association des journalistes du Niger* (AJN, Niger Journalists' Association) is merely a shadow of its former self, out of its depth and absent from the debates on ethics, breaches in the exercise of press freedom and journalist training.

The roughly two hundred news "professionals" that had belonged to AJN have over time and with the disorganised expansion of the media dispersed and are now scattered among nine new associations and unions.

These are the *Syndicat des agents de l'information* (SAINFO, the News Agents' Union), the *Association des ingénieurs et techniciens de l'information* (AITI, the Association of News Engineers and Technicians), the *Association des professionnelles nigériennes de la communication* (APAC/Niger, the Association of Nigerien Communication Professionals), the *Association des journalistes de la presse privée* (AJPP, the Private Press Journalists' Association), the *Union des journalistes sportifs du Niger* (UJSN, the Niger Sports Journalists' Union), the *Association nigérienne des éditeurs de la presse indépendante* (ANEPI, the Nigerien Association of Independent Press Publishers), the *Association des promoteurs des radios privées du Niger* (APRPN, the Niger Association of Private Radio Promoters), the Nigerien section of the *Union internationale des journalistes et de la presse de langue française* (UIJPLF, the International Union of French-Language Journalists and Press) and the *Union des journalistes privés nigériens* (UJPN, the Union of Private Nigerien Journalists). This last organisation is one of the most active.

V. THE IFTIC TRAINING CENTRE

Niger seems lucky in that it has a Training Centre for News and Communication Techniques (IFTIC). In reality, this school does not escape from the general stagnation in the country's educational system. Future journalists enter the training centre with a low overall level and exit the centre without the professional baggage needed to carry out their profession.

The successor to the *Centre de Formation aux Techniques de l'Information* (CTFI, the Training Centre in News Techniques) since 1989, IFTIC has not in fact succeeded its

conversion from the epoch of civil servant journalists to that of the new media landscape in Niger. It also has difficulty keeping up with the rapid development of communication technology and techniques. However, adapting its teaching to new information and communication technologies is not the only challenge it faces. The graduates it placed on the job market are of low general and professional levels.

This is because entering the school is not a question of vocation. Every year high school graduates are arbitrarily oriented towards IFTIC by the Ministry of Communication. The largest “dead end job” sector is also clearly marked for graduates from this centre—the civil service. After three years’ training, young graduates are “sent on secondment” on the basis of a five-year contract to the different public media where they have civil servant status.

Finally, as with all the schools in the country, IFTIC cruelly lacks the sufficient means to provide quality education.

VI. CURRENT AID TO THE MEDIA SECTOR

Chapter VIII, article 47 of edict n° 93-029 of 30 March 1993, governing the freedom of the press stipulates, “the State has the duty to directly or indirectly aid news bodies that are in the general interest and that contribute to the exercise of the public’s right to information,” but this good intention has never become reality. On the contrary, in 1995, the Prime Minister forbade State companies from buying advertising space in the independent press.

Aid to the media sector—with the exception of the State’s duties towards its bodies, ONEP, ANP and ORTN—comes from foreign institutions via overseas aid missions. The aid that caused the greatest sensation was that provided by the German Embassy in 1993 to the new-borns of the independent written press—specifically, an equipment donation of an estimated value of 20,000,000 CFA francs (200,000 FF) to each of the existing newspapers at the time: *Anfani*, *Moustique*, *Tribune du peuple*, *Haské*, *Le Démocrate* and *Le Républicain*.

This was the only blanket aid granted to the private written press. Admittedly, many of the beneficiaries rapidly traded in their equipment for cold, hard cash.

The other aid granted to private press are partial or individual. Indeed, the search for aid is carried out alone and discretely.

In 1997, the trio of pro-FRDD¹⁵ newspapers (*Tribune du peuple*, *Le Citoyen* and *Alternative*), obtained joint aid in the form of equipment, training and a financial subsidy from the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives and the Canadian Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI). The *Tribune du peuple* and *Haské* also received joint funding from the United States Embassy for an awareness-raising campaign on Human Rights.

The newspaper *Alternative* obtained aid in 1999 from the Agence de la Francophonie’s *Fonds d’aide à la presse francophone du Sud* and from the NGO Solidarity Canada-Sahel.

¹⁵ The coalition of Opposition parties, called the *Front pour la restauration et la défense de la démocratie* (Front for the Restoration and Defense of Democracy).

Curiously, while all these newspapers were expected to become more dynamic, one observed the near-disappearance of the *Citoyen*, *Haské* and the *Tribune du peuple* from news-stands and *Alternative* became less regular.

Finally, in March 1999, the quarterly rural and development news magazine, *Les Echos du Sahel*, received aid from Swiss Overseas Aid in the form of logistic support for its launch.

VII. SUPPORT NEEDS

The media sector in Niger needs external support in several areas: training, economic reinforcement of press firms (notably through the reduction of production costs for newspapers by acting on printing works inputs such as paper and printing plates), support to structure the sector (distribution companies, press centres, meeting and documentation centres, etc.), and acknowledgement of the self-regulation framework.

However, three types of activities seem to be priorities for stakeholders:

- Improve Training in Journalistic Techniques and Practices and Promote Content Exchanges

While most journalists on staff in private and public media hold higher education degrees, the majority practice without ever having attended a truly professional school of journalism. Close to 70% of editorial staffs have not received adequate training to be able to carry out their professions correctly. There are newspapers in which no one—from the managing editor to the copywriters—has received appropriate training. Copywriters are trained on the job and in the framework of the few rare internships or seminars organised and funded locally or abroad by international organisations.

The lack of training explains not only the written shortcomings but also the repeated blunders committed by journalists.

In the IFTIC framework, one first activity could be to strengthen its curriculum by contributing to journalists' training via training seminars on writing techniques and by improved knowledge of their profession's legal environment: press law, rights and duties of journalists, ethical principles, etc.

It is necessary to strengthen the professional skills of working journalists by specialised short training courses that meet editorial needs.

- Elaborate Specific Criteria for Granting Press Credentials

Under current press credential attribution measures, journalists are defined as those who earn most of their income from practising journalism; and press credentials are obtained by sending a request to ONC containing one's birth certificate, criminal record, certificate of nationality, 2 photos and the sum of 1,000 CFA francs (10 FF).

Press credential attribution conditions do not focus on the real qualifications of the applicant. Regulations do not refer to the level of skills or the diplomas earned. Press firms have formed their editorial staffs as and how they could and some have even operated without editorial staff.

The question of regulation support is therefore raised—support that proposes more objective criteria that take into account both the level of professional training and real experience in the profession. This is one path towards sector professionalisation in parallel with training.

- Support the Re-Definition and the Acknowledgement of the Self-Regulation Framework

The border between CIMED and ONC should be more clearly defined. Jurisdiction would benefit from being more distinctly separated between the two entities in favour of CIMED, on the condition that the method of designating its members is revised and that the authority is acknowledged by the ensemble of the profession, including the professional associations who would be CIMED's primary partners. Indeed, it appears that CIMED's legitimacy is not completely established.

CIMED needs to find the means to provide itself with the tools it needs to function—first headquarters and support in equipment as well as institutional support to strengthen it so that it can become an active and acknowledged stakeholder in the sector. The great challenge facing Niger, however, remains the difficult task of uniting media stakeholders.

Finally, like the other self-regulation authorities in West Africa with which it is in contact, CIMED must be able to elaborate a reading grid, meet, write and publish its communiqués, and maintain regularity and rigour in its operations. It is not clear that this dynamic process can be undertaken without external support.