

Briefing on the situation in Guinea Bissau

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Tomorrow (11 June) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to hold a briefing session on the situation in Guinea Bissau. The PSC is expected to receive update from the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on the political stalemate in the country following the March 2019 parliamentary. Apart from the representative of Guinea-Bissau, the representative of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and representatives of the UN and the EU, who form part of the group of five international partners of Guinea-Bissau, are expected to make statements.

Guinea Bissau has been in political crisis for a number of years. Apart from the instability the country has faced from the military's intervention in politics, in the aftermath of the 2014 elections, the major source of the crisis has been the power struggle between the various centers of power, notably the President, the Prime Minister and Parliament. In Guinea- Bissau's semi-presidential system, the president is the head of state, with the power to appoint the prime minister. The prime minister, while accountable to the president, is the head of government from the party with the most seats in parliament and is vested with most of the executive power. The dismissal by President Jose Mario Vas in 2015 of Prime Minister Domingos Pereira plunged the country into political paralysis. According to the preliminary report of the AU Election Observer Mission, it led to a 'de facto shut down' of the National People's Assembly. It was only after a protracted mediation effort of ECOWAS that the NPA has resumed parliamentary work and the date for election was set.

After delays from the initial timeline of November 2018, the parliamentary elections were held on 10 March. The votes were held in a stable and free atmosphere. The peaceful legislative elections were considered free and fair by AU and other international observers. In the elections, the ruling the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) won the highest number of seats in the NPA, giving it the power to form government. However, since PAIGC won only 47 of the 102 seats of the NPA, other parliamentary parties, notably the PAIGC breakaway party Movement for Democratic Change (MADEM), currently led by the president also play a role for appointment in parliament.

While many hoped that the elections would resolve the political instability, the various parties that secured seats in parliament, particularly the victories PAIGC and its rival MADEM have been unable to agree on appointments. Another stalemate emerged when the majority in parliament led by PAIGC rejected the candidacy of Braima Camará, who is the coordinator of the MADEM, as the second vice-president of the NPA. With the MADEM insisting on the candidacy of Camara for position of second vice-president, the resultant stalemate has hindered the full establishment of the office of the National People's Assembly (NPA), the appointment of the prime minister and the formation of a new government. The president has made the appointment of a new prime minister conditional on resolving the NPA impasse. This raises suspicions that he's trying to block Pereira – as head of the majority PAIGC alliance – from again becoming prime minister.

This new round of political deadlock now threatens the Stability Pact that was signed in February 2019 and the progress achieved under the Pact reflected in the convening of the peaceful and credible parliamentary elections held in March 2019. Instead of the commitment for the consolidation of the politics and institutions of the country based on the popular vote from the elections envisaged in the Pact, the

political parties and their disagreement have returned the country back to the paralysis that ensued after the dismissal of the then prime minister.

The situation also presents further threats to the already precarious socio-economic and security situation in the country. The threat from drug trafficking in particular has increased. On 9 March, while the country was in the middle of the electoral campaign, police made a record seizure of 789 kg of cocaine. On 30 April, 72 kg of cocaine from Guinea- Bissau were seized by Senegalese customs in the Tambacounda region in eastern Senegal.

The current post-election stalemate also feared to affect the electoral calendar for the election of the president. The end of the constitutional term of the current President is on 23 June. If this timeline comes and passes without the formation of the new government, it is feared that this will result in a power vacuum.

On 24 May, the group of five international partners of Guinea-Bissau – the AU, CPLP, ECOWAS, European Union, and the United Nations – issued a statement expressing concern for the new political impasse and call for the “urgent” appointment of a new prime minister and government respecting the “sovereign will of the people of Guinea-Bissau” expressed in the 10 March legislative elections. They also encouraged the “urgent appointment of a new prime minister and the subsequent formation of a new government. Furthermore, the date of the presidential election must also be set to take place in 2019.”

The expected outcome of the session is a communique. It is expected that the PSC will urge the Guinea Bissau political actors to prioritize the national interest and proceed with the formation of a new government reflecting the sovereign will of the people expressed in the parliamentary election before the end of the constitutional term of the president.