

Briefing on the situation in Guinea Bissau

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Monday (18 November) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to hold a briefing session on the situation in Guinea-Bissau. The briefing is taking place in line with the PSC communiqué of the 892nd session, which decided 'to review the situation in Guinea Bissau on 18 November 2019'. Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission (SRCC) for Guinea Bissau, Ambassador Ovidio Pequeno is expected to brief the Council.

On 29 October, following the dismissal of the entire cabinet of Prime Minister Aristides Gomes by President Jose Mario Vaz, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) issued a communiqué labelling the President's decree as illegal. It also threatened to take punitive measures against individuals that hinder the election scheduled to take place on 24 November.

At its session held on 6 November 2019, the PSC received a briefing from the SRCC. It also heard statements from the Minister of Justice of Guinea-Bissau, Niger, as chair of ECOWAS and the African members of the UN Security Council (UNSC), A3. In the communique it adopted following the session, the PSC declared 'null and void' what it termed 'the unconstitutional Decrees issued by President Vaz'. It called on the newly appointed officials to recuse themselves from their assigned positions and recognized Aristides Gomes's government as the only legitimate government of the country. It fully endorsed ECOWAS's warning to apply punitive measures against individuals undermining the peace process and affirmed the inviolability of the 24 November schedule for holding the presidential elections.

On 8 November, the Extraordinary Summit of the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government was held in Niamey, Niger. The communiqué, which deemed the President's move as unconstitutional, demanded the immediate resignation of the new Prime Minister Faustin Fudut Imbali who was appointed by President Vaz on 29 October. While this precipitated the resignation of Imbali on the same day, ECOWAS also urged the legally instituted Prime Minister Gomes to resume his work.

As part of the decision of the ECOWAS extraordinary Summit, a high-level mission of Heads of State and Government is dispatched to Bissau on Saturday 16 November. The mission led by Niger, Chair of ECOWAS involves Heads of State of Cote D'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea and Nigeria. The mission is expected to meet with President Vaz.

In addition to the political negotiation and as part of its preventive efforts, ECOWAS has also decided to strengthen its military presence in the country. To this end it has decided to increase the number of troops 'to respond to all challenges, before, during and after the elections'. Before the heads of states and government visit, the missions of ECOWAS Chiefs of Defence Staff have already began their engagement with President Vaz, Prime Minister Gomes and other political actors.

While Prime Minister Aristides welcomed the move of ECOWAS to increase its military presence as a measure required to secure the presidential elections, some opposition parties including former Prime Minister and candidate to the presidency of the country Umaro Sissoco Embaló and the Social Renewal Party (PRS) have voiced their disapproval over what they considered as an invasion and interference in national sovereignty. The Prime Minister has also met with the Chiefs of Defence Staff of Niger, Nigeria and Togo ahead of the high-level mission's arrival.

Apart from providing support for the electoral process, the

move by ECOWAS also aims at preventing any form of unconstitutional change of government and military coup. Guinea-Bissau, which has experienced successive military interventions including most recently in 2012, has the conditions that make it vulnerable to similar risk. Although in its communiqué ECOWAS, like the PSC, encouraged the security forces to remain neutral, it is also preparing for any security risks and threatened sanction against individuals that may compromise the constitutional order. The ECOWAS Commission is also tasked to submit a list of individuals that disrupt the electoral process to undertake immediate measures.

The interference of drug trafficking and related crime in the political process of the country is also another major concerning security issue. After several allegations on one of the leading political parties, the PAIGC, its leader and candidate in the presidential elections on 24 November Domingos Simões Pereira, recently stated that the resources utilized by the party in the electoral campaign are not financed through organized crime. However, the government's capacity in curbing organized crime has been limited, hence making drug trafficking a key security area that requires the support of neighbouring countries.

Despite the crisis affecting the country, the Deputy Executive Secretary of the National Electoral Commission (CNE), Idrissa Djaló, has confirmed on Tuesday 12 November 2019, that all the necessary technical and financial conditions are fulfilled in order to conduct the presidential election on 24 November. Djaló has given his statement after visiting the Commission's materials warehouse in the capital including model ballot papers with all the details of the candidates competing in the elections.

Indeed, apart from the constitutional crisis and the multipronged efforts of ECOWAS, another area that would be of interest for members of the PSC in tomorrow's session is the technical and logistical preparations for the 24 November

elections. This is an area in respect of which the AU Commission including the SRCC are expected to update the PSC on AU's engagement to support the electoral process.

Right after the ECOWAS extraordinary summit, the UNSC members held consultations on 11 November. They concluded by issuing press elements expressing support and welcoming the efforts of ECOWAS. Earlier on 4 November the UNSC adopted a presidential statement endorsing the efforts of ECOWAS and welcoming the press statement of the AUC Chair.

The expected outcome of the session is a communiqué. The PSC may commend ECOWAS's efforts particularly the dispatch of the high level mission on Saturday and the meeting of Chiefs of Defence Staff. It is also expected to endorse the communiqué of the ECOWAS extraordinary summit held on 8 November. It may call on the political actors in Guinea Bissau to support the efforts by ECOWAS leading up to the 24 November elections. It may underline that any attempt of unconstitutional change of government will not be tolerated as established by various AU instruments and may urge political actors to refrain from any activities that may derail the political process. In this respect, it is expected to endorse ECOWAS move to increase the number of troops as important preventive measure. The PSC may also call on the government to strengthen its efforts in fighting drug trafficking, which continue to interfere in the efforts aimed at bringing lasting peace in the country. Given the short time remaining to the election, less than 10 days, the PSC may task the AUC to enhance its support for the electoral process working in concert with ECOWAS.