

# The situation in Guinea Bissau

Automatic Heading TextDate | 6 November, 2019

Tomorrow (6 November), at 3pm the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will have a session on the situation in Guinea Bissau, which was postponed from the October program of work of the PSC. The representative of Guinea Bissau, Chair of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU), African Members to the UN Security Council (A3) Cote D'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and South Africa are expected participate in the session. The Director of Peace and Security Department and Director of Political Affairs to make statements on the latest political developments and the elections planned on 24 November.

The last time the PSC held discussion on Guinea Bissau was on 11 June 2019 where it urged 'the President of the Republic of Guinea Bissau to urgently initiate consultations, with a view to appointing a Prime Minister, in accordance with the will of the people, as expressed in the legislative elections of 10 March 2019 and, in due course, to announce the date of the presidential election scheduled for this year before the expiration of his current term on 23 June 2019'.

On 16-18 June the PSC, acting on its communique of 11 June, undertook a field visit to Guinea-Bissau. During the visit the PSC held consultations with various Guinea-Bissau political actors, including President Jose Mario Vaz. During the two days visit the delegation of the PSC urged the president to announce the date for Presidential elections before June 23rd, 2019 and appoint the Prime Minister. The delegation also pressed all parties to constitute the National Assembly and review the National Constitution.

On 18 June, the day the PSC concluded its visit, the President announced that presidential elections would be held on 24 November. He also appointed Aristides Gomes as prime minister on 22 June following a high-level mission of ECOWAS to Bissau on 19-20 June. ECOWAS had to mobilize further diplomatic efforts during its 29 June summit to have President Vaz accept the composition of the new government under Prime Minister Gomes. ECOWAS summit gave Vaz a deadline of 3 July to appoint a new government, based on the prime minister's proposal, and a new attorney general, to be chosen by consensus. In apparent exchange, the summit ECOWAS summit decided that Vaz remains in office, after expiry of his term, until the election, although the management of the affairs of the state was left in the hands of the new government under the new Prime Minister Gomes. On the same day, Vaz appointed the government and a new attorney general based on Prime Minister Gomes' proposal. The composition of the government mainly consists of PAIGC members and supporters.

With the political wrangling continuing unabated even after the formation of the new government, the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the AU, the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) and ECOWAS undertook a mission to Bissau. The communiqué of the 7 October joint field mission of these international bodies strongly urged for the presidential election to be held during 2019.

On 14 October, the Supreme Court of Justice of Guinea-Bissau announced the provisional list of 13 candidates for the upcoming presidential elections, including the incumbent President who is expected to run as an independent candidate after being unable to secure the nomination of the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MADEM-G15). Other candidates include former Prime Minister Domingos Simoes Pereira of PAIGC, who was the initial candidate to lead the new government formed on 29 June, and Nuno Gomes Nabian for the United People's Assembly – Guinea-Bissau Democratic Party

(APU-PDGB). Although Nabian's APU/PDGB is part of the governing coalition, it has recently formed an alliance with opposition Party for Social Renewal (PRS) to unite the Balanta ethnic group, which has strong links with the military, in support of Nabian's candidacy. The former Prime Minister Umaro Sissoko Embalo is to run under the flag of MADEM G-15.

Other issues of concern that are of interest to the PSC include the manoeuvring of some elements to delay the election and cause the breakup of PAIGC, whose candidate is considered likely to win. The incumbent President as well continues to speak on the need for major reforms including constitutional reforms before the holding of the presidential elections. This request may also stem from the intention of postponing the elections beyond 2019, since the proposed changes require a long period of time.

It is against the backdrop of these rising political tensions that President Vaz issued a decree on 28 October dismissing the government of Prime Minister Aristides Gomes and appointing a new Prime Minister. With only three weeks left for the election to take place later this month, the decision by the President has further aggravated the tense political situation in the country causing serious consternation. With the terms of President Vaz having ended but ECOWAS agreeing for him to stay on without executive power until the 24 November election, the contestation over the legality of the decree he issued dissolving the government has put the country in a constitutional crisis, giving rise to questions on the compatibility of this action with the AU ban on unconstitutional changes of government. On 29 October, ECOWAS issued a communiqué calling the President's decree illegal and reiterating its full support for Aristide Gomes and his government. Furthermore, it threatened to impose punitive measures against those found to be obstructing the upcoming election.

In his statement issued on 30th October, the AU Commission

Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat also expressed his deep concern regarding the Presidential Decree dissolving of the Government and reiterated his support for the efforts of ECOWAS calling on all the political actors to respect its decision and honour the commitments made in this regard. In the same vein, the UN Secretary-General issued a statement the same day expressing serious concern on the unfolding developments in Guinea-Bissau and calling on all political stakeholders to abide by the decisions taken by ECOWAS regarding the governance arrangements in Guinea-Bissau until the presidential election on 24 November.

The Chair of the 2048 UN Sanctions Committee on Guinea-Bissau, Ambassador Anatolio Ndong Mba of Equatorial Guinea has also been actively seized with the matter. He was in Bissau last week as part of the Committee's mission to the country in carrying out its mandate. The United Nations Peacebuilding Commission is also engaged on the situation in Guinea Bissau and the Chair of the PBC Configuration on Guinea Bissau, Ambassador Mauro Vieira of Brazil was in Bissau last week to encourage the holding of a free, fair, credible, transparent and peaceful presidential election on 24th of November. He has written a letter to the President of the Security Council on 30 October 2019, sharing his observations from the visit. The decree was issued to dissolve the government after he returned from his visit and he urged Bissau Guinean political actors to exercise maximum restraint and resort to dialogue to resolve their differences.

The United Nations Security Council met on 30th October under any other business to discuss the latest developments in Guinea-Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire as the penholder initiated a presidential statement. On 4 November, the UNSC adopted the presidential statement. In the Statement, the UNSC expressed its full support for the communiques that ECOWAS and AU Commission issued on 29 and 30 October respectively and the urgent need

to hold the presidential election on 24 November.

The expected outcome is a communiqué. The PSC may urge the government of Guinea Bissau and the other political actors to hold the election on 24 November as per the set timeline and work towards a fair, free and peaceful election come 24 November. It may express serious concern on the recent developments in relation to the dissolution of the government by President Vaz, which may constitute a breach of AU rules on constitutional governance, and reiterate its support to the ECOWAS efforts including its plan to take punitive measures. It may call upon all political stakeholders in Guinea Bissau to respect the ECOWAS decision, refrain from aggravating the already tense political situation in the country and exert every possible effort to resolve their differences in full compliance with outcome of the March 2019 parliamentary elections and the ECOWAS plan. The PSC may welcome ECOWAS's decision to extend the mandate of the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea- Bissau (ECOMIB) for a period of six months starting from 1 October 2019. It may request the AUC to strengthen support to the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission (SRCC) for Guinea Bissau and his office particularly in relation to the upcoming election. Apart from requesting the AUC to deploy electoral and human rights observers to the country, it could also consider appropriate action in accordance with the Lomed Declaration of 2000 and Addis Ababa Charter on Democracy Elections and Governance.