

The situation in Guiné Bissau, following the coup d' État of April 12

Last Friday, May 25, I organised a meeting, at the EP office in Lisbon, with the ousted President and Prime Minister of Guiné-Bissau, Mr. Raimundo Pereira and Carlos Gomes Junior. All Portuguese political forces represented at the EP were present, since all Portuguese MEPs were invited.

President Pereira referred to the events that led to his and PM Gomes Junior's arrests by the authors of the military coup on April 12, 2012 - significantly on the eve of the campaign for the second round of the presidential elections, thus interrupting the electoral process. (In the first round of the presidential elections, it should be noted, current PM and presidential candidate Carlos Gomes Junior obtained 49% of the votes).

The President and PM refuted the pretexts invoked by the putschists to execute the coup d' État, claiming against the presence of the Angolan military forces (300 men) and their allegedly heavy equipment: they recalled that the Angolan military were in the country in response to a request by the legitimate authorities, duly approved by the Guinean National Parliament, and were scheduled to start leaving the country on April 14, i.e., just two days after the coup was carried.

They also recalled that the Angolan military support - necessary given the vulnerability of the civilian government, following the murders of the then President Nino Vieira and the Armed Forces Chief of Staff Batista Tagme Na Waie - was officially requested when the Security Sector Reform CSDP mission was withdrawn by the EU in 30 September 2010, precisely as a reaction to the said politically motivated murders. And the Angolan troops were requested as a last resource, since the promise made then by ECOWAS/CEDEAO of sending to Guiné-Bissau military supporting troops actually did not materialize.

President Pereira and PM Gomes Junior expressed concern over the position lately assumed by ECOWAS, despite in words condemning the coup: while helping release both of them from prison, ECOWAS representatives had also tried to persuade them to sign declarations of resignation from office (which they both refused). And afterwards ECOWAS seemed to be endorsing the coup's authors move to install an illegitimate "government" in Bissau, in clear contradiction with UN Security Council Resolution 2048 , of 18 May and UNSC Presidential Statement 10617 of 21 April, which "demanded that the Military Command take immediate steps to restore and respect constitutional order by reinstating the legitimate authorities and ensuring that all soldiers return to barracks, making way for the completion of the disrupted electoral process"; and also the "immediate restoration of constitutional order and the reinstatement of that West African nation's legitimate Government".

They stressed that the imposition of economic sanctions to Guiné-Bissau (as called for by ECOWAS initially) was not the solution, as the problem is the military apparatus refusing to submit to the civilian democratically elected authorities.

They also stated their commitment to the democratic process and their confidence in their people's determination to return to the constitutional order, underlining that the current illegitimate "government" has no capacity to deliver minimal governance to the country.

They expressed serious apprehension with the social and humanitarian situation in the country, as the leaders of the military coup and their puppet government have no plan to address basic needs of the people. Garbage collection has stopped and the piling up of garbage in local markets poses a serious threat to public health with the rainy season rapidly approaching. All the efforts undertaken by the government, in the last three years, in ensuring a situation free of cholera outbreaks, will be gravely undermined. The main hospital in Bissau is currently operating minimum services only, due to shortage of supplies and even daily.

The President and PM reiterated that it is of the interest of the EU to have a trustworthy partner in Guiné-Bissau, since it is the security of the EU that is targeted by the narco-traffic networks instrumentalising the military in Guiné-Bissau, and the coup authors in particular. They stressed the links between narcotraffickers and other organized criminals active in the

region, including terrorism in neighbouring Sahel and in Nigeria. Only with the effective return to constitutional order in Guiné-Bissau, can these threats be effectively fought by the international community. Lawlessness and reward for putschists would create a dangerous precedent with repercussions beyond Guiné Bissau and Mali, where the same seems to be occurring with ECOWAS/CEDEAO blessing.

In the discussions that followed, questions were asked about the role played by Nigeria, disputing influence with Angola in Western Africa, and Senegal, with a longstanding maritime disputed border with Guiné-Bissau in an area known to be oil-exploitable. Replies by the President and PM were guarded, but not excluding relevance in ECOWAS positioning in support for putschists.

President Pereira and Prime Minister Gomes Junior informed they were planning to be in Brussels on the 7 of June and stressed the crucial importance of the EU in supporting the restoration and consolidation of democratic rule in its ACP partner that Guiné-Bissau is. They both appealed to the EP, for its contribution in pressing that international law, UNSC resolutions and democratically elected authorities be respected in Guiné-Bissau.