

1 June 2010

EU mission for the reform of the security sector in Guinea-Bissau

The EU mission for the reform of the security sector in Guinea-Bissau (UERSS), created in June 2008 with a mandate up to 31 May 2010, has been authorised to continue its activities for another four months with a significantly reduced staffing level, in the wake of the instability generated by the military intervention which led to the arrest of the commander-in-chief of the armed forces on 1 April 2010.

Speaking to the Lusa press agency on 7 May 2010, the head of the mission, the Spanish general Juan Esteban Verastegui, said: 'Fortunately, the door is not closed. Even without an implementation mission, authorisation has been given to extend the mission by four months so as to give the Brussels authorities time to take a pressure-free decision [on its possible prolongation] while at the same time hoping for a political solution to the problems arising from 1 April'.

Given the risk of escalating problems in Guinea-Bissau as regards security and the functioning of the state, notably thanks to the increasing influence of drug trafficking with the grave consequences that entails for regional and global security, can the Council explain what conditions are required for a decision to be taken to prolong this mission beyond September 2010 while reinforcing its mandate and allocating it more staff so that it can effectively aid the reform of the security sector in the country? Should it be decided not to prolong the mission, what alternative measures will the Council take in order to minimise the above risks?

20 September 2010

Reply by the Council

The EU mission in support of the reform of the security sector in Guinea-Bissau (EUSSR) was extended, with reduced staff, until 30 September 2010. This decision was taken by the Political and Security Committee at the end of April, taking into account the political and military fragility of the country. The aim of this decision was to give the civilian authorities additional time in which to demonstrate, through concrete action, their commitment to democratic values and the rule of law.

The events that occurred on 1 April 2010 in Bissau and the appointment on June 25 of Major General Antonio Indjai – the person largely responsible for these events – to the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces showed again that the pre-eminence of civilian authority over the military, and adherence to democratically legitimate procedures, are far from established.

Following the events of April 1, the EU decided to conduct a strategic review and to reinforce political dialogue at the level of EU Heads of Mission in situ, as well as through a mission of senior officials from the General Secretariat of the Council and from the Commission which visited Bissau from 20 to 21 May 2010. During the various demarches carried out, a number of key EU messages were conveyed to the national authorities.

The EU requested, in particular, that the former Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and other persons illegally detained be released, that the responsibility of those behind the incidents of 1 April 2010 be legally established and that a framework conducive to the continuation of the reform process be put in place. This process would require appointing persons to head the Armed Forces who did not participate in the mutiny on 1 April and who would strongly support the government reform programme. The EU also reiterated the importance of the adoption and promulgation by the relevant national bodies of the legislative package for security sector reform, as a prerequisite for implementation of the reform process.

Against the background of recent developments, the Political and Security Committee has followed closely the situation in Guinea-Bissau and reviewed EU involvement in the country. In the light of these discussions, it was considered that the political conditions for deploying a new mission in Guinea-Bissau under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) were not in place, despite enhanced political contacts with the civilian authorities in Guinea Bissau. The Committee decided to task competent EU bodies for advice on the other recommendations of the strategic review.

The EU is convinced that its support to Guinea Bissau must be matched by an unequivocal commitment on the part of the authorities to respect fully democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law. The EU will maintain a presence in the country with an appropriate range of instruments and follow the situation attentively, in close cooperation with its international partners, in particular the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas), the African Union and the United Nations.

The EU remains concerned at the risk of a deterioration of the security situation in Guinea-Bissau and the possible effects on the effective functioning of the state, not least as a result of the increasing impact of drug trafficking. Against this background, the Council is currently considering what further action the EU might take in response.