

Consultations under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement between the Government of Bissau and the European Union

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ACP Press Release 30 March 2011: Consultations under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement took on Tuesday March 29th between the Government of Bissau and the European Union.

The Cotonou Agreement provides for such consultations when issues of human rights and good governance arise in a signatory country to such an extent as might warrant the cessation of aid and development cooperation.

The Bissauan delegation was led by the country's Prime Minister H. E. Mr. Carlos Gomes Junior, included several ministers and senior officials. The EU side was led by Mr János Hovari, Deputy State Secretary responsible for Development Cooperation and Africa. He represented the Hungarian Presidency. Mr Hovari was joined by Development Commissioner Andris Piebalgs, Managing Director for Africa of the External Action Service, Ambassador Nicholas Westcott and other high officials. The Guinea-Bissau delegation were accompanied to the consultation by the ACP Group, in the form of the Troika, led by the Chairman of the Committee of Ambassadors and Ambassador of Nigeria, H.E Mr. Mr. Usman Alhaji Baraya, Secretary-General Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas and a group of countries known as "the Friends of Guinea-Bissau".

Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, which is a partnership agreement between the ACP and the EU, lays out consultation procedures and appropriate measures as regards human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law. In this case, the consultation was requested by the European Union following the military unrest in Guinea-Bissau in April 2010. The Europeans were particularly concerned about the security situation in the country, the lack of subordination of the military under the civil authority and the use of some of the Bissauan islands by drug smugglers. In his detailed responses, Prime Minister Carlos Junior explained the rather difficult political, economic and social situation in his country and outlined the strategies they have taken so far and those they intend to undertake to address the challenges.

The "Friends of Guinea-Bissau", which included Jamaica, Angola, Cape Verde, Senegal, Guyana and South Africa, spoke in support of the positive efforts taken by the West African nation and underscored the importance of continued support from the international community so as not to jeopardise an already delicate situation. Similar sentiments were also re-iterated by the Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, H.E Mr. Ramtane Lamamra, who was also in attendance. The proposals of the Guinea-Bissau side include measures for progressively ensuring the primacy of civilian authority, improving democratic governance, guaranteeing the safeguarding of constitutional order and the rule of law, and tackling impunity and organised crime.

Following the consultation, the EU said that it will continue to monitor respect of these undertakings, step-up political dialogue with authorities and regularly review the progress made, including through monitoring missions. They said that the implementation of these undertakings will re-open the way for EU to support the process of political and economic reforms in Guinea Bissau.

Prime Minister Carlos Junior reiterated his Government's commitment to the undertakings made to the EU and pledged to do his utmost to normalise the situation and return the country to the path of democratic governance and stability.

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