

Guinea-Bissau: Building a Real Stability Pact

I. OVERVIEW

The November 2008 legislative elections were an important test for Guinea-Bissau, whose transition to democratic rule badly needed impetus. It was uncertain whether they would take place until the last minute, but they were praised by both citizens and international observers. Still, that is not enough to guarantee either stability or movement on badly needed institutional reform. The collapse of the political parties' stability pact before the elections and allegations of coup and assassination attempts afterwards illustrate the dangers. If he can be assured of continued donor support, the new prime minister has an opportunity to carry out the administrative and political measures needed to strengthen the state, stabilise the economy and fight drug trafficking. But he will need to ground his government's work on political dialogue with President Vieira, the army and rivals within his own party to achieve a genuine stability pact.

The African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde, PAIGC) and its leader, Carlos Gomes Junior (the new prime minister), won a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, but there are serious fissures within the party, and President Nino Vieira – though the big loser in the vote – remains influential. The permanent threat of military intervention in politics adds to the risks of government paralysis. The collapse of the stability pact and the government of Martinho Ndafo Cabi in March 2008 was the result of a one-off alliance between Vieira and Gomes Junior, but they are bitter foes, and shifts in alliances within PAIGC could all too easily bring down the prime minister before the presidential elections anticipated in 2010.

The precise circumstances surrounding the attempted coup d'état instigated, according to the authorities, by the head of the navy in July 2008 and the attempted assassination of Vieira one week after the elections are still unknown. At the least, the two events illustrate the country's fragility and how politicians use factions within the military to settle scores.

Ordinary citizens are paying a high price for the economic and institutional stagnation that is paralysing the

country while the political and military classes engage in their endless rows. They voted in large numbers and calmly, and the overwhelming support they gave Gomes Junior showed a desire to break with the malpractices that have characterised political life since independence. His profile contrasts markedly with those of the political heavyweights who traditionally have dominated affairs, and his effectiveness in an earlier stint as prime minister (2004-2005) is widely acknowledged.

As much as the country needs a competent prime minister to pursue the institutional reforms tentatively begun by the previous government, however, it also needs genuine consensus among political actors on objectives and priorities. Since 2007, it has benefited from heightened interest among donors, who had largely abandoned it after the disastrous mismanagement of the Kumba Yala presidency (1999-2003). But this interest will be short-lived if political instability continues to delay the implementation of the reform program drawn up with international partners.

Guinea-Bissau will be unstable and unable to cope with rampant corruption or change its status as a key drugs transiting country as long as its institutions remain structurally feeble. Firm commitment is needed from all political and military actors to engage in a dialogue directed at supporting reforms and to seize, while it is still there, the outstretched hand of donors. The following steps are required:

- The prime minister should initiate talks with the president and the various factions of the ruling party on his government's priorities, with a view to producing a program to which all stakeholders commit. A similar dialogue needs to be opened with the military leadership on speeding up security sector reform. Priorities should include a revised electoral law, public administration reform, anti-corruption measures, macroeconomic stabilisation and consultation with civil society about national reconciliation.
- Regional partners and donor countries should press all political actors to take part in the above dialogues and support their conclusions. Donors should release money promised for security sector reform as soon as possible and set up an effective mechanism to coordinate their efforts in that area.

- The UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) should help keep promised donor aid (both financial and technical) flowing, in particular for security sector and administrative reforms and the fight against drug trafficking. It should also actively support efforts for dialogue between the prime minister and the various factions of the ruling party and the military.

II. LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS: A FRAGILE SUCCESS¹

The elections of 16 November 2008 were described by both national and international observers as an example to West Africa.² Bissau-Guineans certainly deserve credit for the calm manner in which the vote took place. But this favourable outcome would not have been reached without a strong international presence – the result of a resurgence of donor interest in the country after it was put on the agenda of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) in December 2007.³ That the elections were conducted properly was more a cause for relief than the natural outcome of a well-established process. Guinea-Bissau's political parties and leaders still have much to do before the foundations of a healthy and stable political system are well established.

A. THE ELECTION PROCESS

Right up until the week before the elections, there was real uncertainty over whether they would be held on the planned date or whether they would be conducted in a manner that would confer legitimacy on the result. In an extremely volatile political context there was a risk that events would erupt at the last minute to prevent the vote taking place. The possibility of military intervention or large scale fraud could not be excluded. People have not forgotten the presidential elections of 2005 – whose results are still regarded by most Bissau-Guineans as questionable. In the event, the 2008 legislative elections took place on the scheduled date and without disruption; but the nervous mood in the run-up to the vote reflected the fragility and vulner-

ability of a country where the army has repeatedly intervened in political life.

1. A pre-electoral period full of uncertainty

The legislative elections, initially planned for March 2008, were eventually pushed back to the end of the year. This postponement illustrates the reluctance of the political class to face the test of the ballot box. President Vieira found himself in a difficult position because of his unpopularity and the military's overt hostility towards him. He had no interest in early elections and had even raised the possibility of delaying the vote until 2009, when it could be held at the same time as an early presidential election. This proposal was promptly rejected by the National Assembly. International partners pushed, in vain, for the elections to be held in March 2008 as originally scheduled. With preparations lagging and resources in short supply, a postponement became inevitable.

The president nevertheless ceded to pressure from the international community and from the army – particularly the powerful chief of staff, Tagme na Wai. On 23 March 2008, in a surprise address to members of the assembly and the government, he announced that polling would take place on 16 November.⁴ Even this commitment appeared difficult to meet because the funding promised by donors was slow in coming and the political climate remained unstable.

The campaign period was also overshadowed by fears that the military might become embroiled in politics or that Tagme na Wai would prove unable to keep the security forces under his control. Although he made reassuring statements and appeared determined to ensure the smooth conduct of the elections, some elements in the army had expressed reservations about security sector reforms that the government with the support of international partners had planned.⁵ These individuals could have tried to prevent the elections taking place in order to delay or thwart implementation of the reforms. These concerns appeared well justified when the head of the navy, Bubu na Tchuto, was arrested; the authorities claimed that he had attempted a coup d'état on 8 August 2008. He was detained and placed under house arrest, only to escape with surprising ease to Gambia two days later. Right up until the day of the elections, there was therefore no real guarantee that voting would take place undisturbed by military interference.

¹This briefing follows Crisis Group Africa Report N°142, *Guinea-Bissau: In Need of a State*, 2 July 2008. For more information on the historical background, please refer to this earlier publication.

²Crisis Group interviews, European Union (EU) Election Observation Mission, Senegalese embassy and members of civil society, Bissau, November 2008.

³United Nations General Assembly Communiqué PBC/26, 19 December 2007.

⁴For more details on the context of this announcement, see Crisis Group Report, *Guinea-Bissau*, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

⁵Ibid, p. 21, and Crisis Group interview, Bissau, November 2008.

The greatest concern that hung over the elections was probably the question of whether they would be seen as legitimate. “These elections could be rigged; no one would be any the wiser,” a member of civil society remarked to European Union election observers. He was recalling the 2005 presidential election won by Vieira which these same observers had declared transparent.⁶ The Bissau-Guinean political class, however, and above all public opinion had had serious doubts.⁷ In the 2005 poll, the PAIGC candidate, Malam Bacai Sagna, was seen as the firm favourite after securing 35.45 per cent of the votes in the first round, while Vieira only won 28.87 per cent.

Against all expectations, the former president Kumba Yala, who had finished third in the first round, with 25 per cent of the votes, called on his supporters to vote for Vieira in the second round. It is possible that this strategy worked and that his supporters followed his advice. But a number of Crisis Group sources insist that the chairman of the National Electoral Commission (CNE) had in fact declared Malam Bacai Sagna the victor, only to revise his verdict. Even today, Bissau-Guineans believe that Vieira stole his victory.⁸

⁶ Crisis Group interview, member of civil society, Bissau, 24 November 2008.

⁷ Numerous Crisis Group interviews, Bissau, March, October, November 2008.

⁸ In the 2005 elections Nino Vieira, after returning from exile, stood as an independent candidate because he had lost the backing of the PAIGC. Kumba Yala, who had been overthrown as president, stood in the name of the Party for Social Reform (Partido da Renovação Social, PRS). Results region by region show that in the second round Nino Vieira won a substantial number of votes in regions where the Balanta account for a hefty share of the voters – Cacheu, Oio and Tombali. However, it seemed hard to believe that these voters would back Nino Vieira, who had incurred their bitter antipathy by ordering the execution in 1998 of six Balanta officers and personalities. Indeed, Kumba Yala had made this particular issue the centrepiece of his campaign against the president – with a fair degree of success. Moreover, computer records held by international observers show that Malam Bacai Sagna won 52.39 per cent of the second round votes, compared with Nino Vieira’s 47.61 per cent. Contacted by Crisis Group, the European Union insisted that this was a mistake. However, the election documents of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) show the same results. It is plausible that this could be the result of a single mistake reproduced by several observer organisations. Even so, this mistake puts in doubt the transparency of the election results.

2. Preparations guaranteed by international partners

Despite this uncertainty, international partners did come together to provide the necessary resources for the organisation of the legislative elections – although there were some delays in the actual disbursement of promised funding. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for example, had to draw on its own funds to pay for preparations, before securing reimbursement once the donors finally sent the money they had promised. Still, the donors proved willing to be flexible, especially in dealing with salary arrears owed to electoral services personnel. The latter had still not been paid by the government for their work in the 2005 presidential election and they were threatening to withhold the results of the 2008 poll while their overdue salaries from 2005 remained unpaid. For a long time the donors refused to step in to pay what they considered a sovereign obligation. The bill was eventually settled thanks to funding released by Japan during the week before the legislative election.⁹

While the donors’ readiness to be flexible allowed the elections to proceed in good order, the inability of the Bissau-Guinean state to pay this national debt nevertheless illustrates the patent lack of political will to assume proper responsibility for the democratic process. Previously, at the time of the first multi-party elections in 1994, one analyst noted that the government took no responsibility for any costs related to the electoral process and seemed to believe that if the international community insisted on elections, it should cover all the costs.¹⁰

A key part of the electoral preparations was the identification of voters. Civil society and political parties expressed doubts about the transparency of this process. The PRS in particular accused the National Statistics Institute – the body responsible for preparing the electoral roll – of favouring the PAIGC. But the latter pointed out the updating of the electoral roll for the 2008 election had in fact been carried out while the PRS was in charge of the ministry of internal administration. The PAIGC spokesman accused the then minister of taking advantage of this situation to ensure that the electoral census favoured the PRS, and called for

⁹ Crisis Group interview, UNDP, Bissau, October 2008. See also “Le Brésil augmente son appui aux législatives en Guinée Bissau à travers le PNUD”, UNDP press release, 14 November 2008.

¹⁰ Johannes Augel, “Guinea-Bissau expects its first democratic elections”, Augel and Carlos Cardoso (eds.), *Transição democrática na Guiné-Bissau* (Lisbon, 1996), p. 45.

the whole process to be fully revised.¹¹ International partners managed to calm this dispute down. The European Union Election Observation Mission and the UNDP reassured the PAIGC that “there had been some purely material errors, which had not compromised the validity of the census, and the majority of these had been corrected”.¹² Ultimately, all the important political parties accepted the results of the census, which identified 593,557 registered voters.

Despite consensus over the updating of the electoral roll, the voter identification process still faced basic problems: “To have credible elections in this country, the entire process of identification needs to be redone”.¹³ A significant number of foreigners, Guineans in particular, were able to vote fraudulently in the legislative elections, thanks to the procedure allowing registration on the basis of a witness statement.¹⁴ In effect, this system allows an individual who has no identity papers – which is the case for more than 90 per cent of Guinea-Bissau’s population – to register on the basis of a declaration by a witness who does already have identity papers and who gives a solemn declaration as to the other individual’s Bissau-Guinean nationality. In practice, this process is often too lax. In any case, fake identity papers can be obtained with relative ease.¹⁵ Although no political party had any particular interest in raising this problem at the time of the legislative polls, the current registration procedures remain extremely vulnerable to fraud. In order to prevent problems arising in the presidential elections scheduled for 2010 this weakness needs to be acknowledged and tackled in the planned reform of the electoral law.

Another fundamental problem that requires action is the lack of professionalism among political parties. For example, during the run-up to the election, the president of the Bissau-Guinean Democratic Movement (Movimento Democrático Guinéense, MDG) admitted to European Union election observers that he himself had registered to vote using an identity card that had expired. “In Guinea-Bissau the political parties

are the first to demonstrate ignorance of the election law,” pointed out a member of the observation mission.¹⁶ Yet the parties represent the base of national political culture, and it is their leaders who constitute much of the National Assembly, government and executive.

The lack of professionalism on the part of the political parties has an impact on the entire Bissau-Guinean political system and it will only be remedied over the long term. But some immediate steps could be taken to stimulate progress. The Supreme Court could check whether the structure of the political parties satisfies the requirements of the law before it gives the green light for them to participate in elections. Equally, the government could support the efforts undertaken by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international partners to educate members of parliament. The PBC, which is now the coordinating structure for donors, should make support for such work a priority for international aid programs to Guinea-Bissau.

The local media also displayed a lack of professionalism. Although they showed no perceptible desire to disturb the electoral process or stir up violence, the poor quality of election coverage betrayed serious financial constraints.¹⁷ For example, 97 per cent of the 365 members of the journalists’ union have not received even basic training in journalism – a fact reflected in the quality of their work.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the national television service has only three cameras and one car to cover the entire country. It has no computer and suffers from the salary arrears problem that affects the rest of the public sector.¹⁹ Resources are limited right across the media: only four radio stations provide nationwide coverage, all based in Bissau. Others broadcast only locally and rely mainly on funding from NGOs.²⁰

Some of the village chiefs Crisis Group met also expressed concern that private radio stations might stir up ethnic tensions but, in the event, this did not occur

¹¹ Crisis Group interviews, PAIGC and PRS representatives, Bissau, October 2008.

¹² Crisis Group interview, EU Election Observation Mission, November 2008. See also “Preliminary report on the legislative elections in Guinea-Bissau”, EU Election Observation Mission, page 6, at http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_ass_observ/guinea_bissau_2008/.

¹³ Crisis Group interview, EU Election Observation Mission, Bissau, October 2008.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Bissau, October 2008.

¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, EU Election Observation Mission and a foreigner fraudulently registered in a constituency outside Bissau, Bissau and Gabù, October 2008.

¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, EU Election Observation Mission, Bissau, October 2008. This parliamentarian also complained that the registration process presented electors with too many obstacles.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Bissau, October 2008.

¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, EU Election Observation Mission, Bissau, October 2008.

¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, EU Election Observation Mission, including a Bissau-Guinean member of the personnel, Bissau, October 2008; see also the preliminary report of the EU Election Observation Mission, *op. cit.*

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, EU Election Observation Mission, Bissau, October 2008.

on a large scale.²¹ Even if some newspapers gave space to defamatory polemic towards the end of the campaign period, international observers reported an acceptable level of media impartiality.

Overall, the PAIGC seems to have benefited from a slight advantage over other parties in terms of media coverage on radio and national television. The directors of the national television and radio stations and the national newspaper are members of the PAIGC and their sympathies were evident in the election coverage.²² But the European Union observer mission concluded that their performance was acceptable, given the limited resources available. However, international partners should encourage efforts to raise professional standards in the media to improve the situation over the long term, particularly with the 2010 presidential elections on the horizon. Here too the PBC will have an important role to play in supporting the training of journalists, equipping community and private radio stations and the production of civic education broadcasts.

3. The exemplary conduct of the election

The vote took place on 16 November in a calm atmosphere undisturbed by any major incidents. The international election observers on the ground agreed that there had not been any significant fraud. Public opinion was of the same view and the announcement of the provisional results on 21 November sparked a joyous mood on the streets of Bissau, particularly among young people. Voters had gone to the polls in large numbers, producing a 72 per cent turnout – particularly high for legislative elections in Guinea-Bissau.²³ The sort of doubts felt about the legitimacy of the 2005 election were not felt with regard to the 2008 legislative polls. According to a civil society figure, “While the presidential vote of 2005 was the least transparent election in the country’s history, the legislative polls of 2008 were the most transparent”.²⁴

The whole political class, except Kumba Yala of the PRS, accepted the results. Yala told the media that he rejected the provisional results and remained the true president of the country. But fortunately, thanks to the crushing scale of the PAIGC victory, his words found no echo

in the population, and he did not repeat them when the definitive results were announced a week later. Yala’s statement could well have sparked violence: he draws the bulk of his support from the Balanta community who account for 30 per cent of the population. Some 80 per cent of the armed forces are Balanta and, in the past, Yala has been able to play on their frustrations and political ambitions.²⁵

Even though Tagme na Wai does not command the loyalty of the whole army, his appeals for calm and military discipline throughout the election period were largely heeded. There were no reports of election day incidents linked to military pressure or intervention of any kind. This also helped in controlling the notoriously unpredictable behaviour of Kumba Yala who needs the backing of the army’s Balanta to give weight to his political strategies.

The elections passed off smoothly thanks to the exemplary behaviour of the voters. During the run-up to the campaign period, Crisis Group met a number of village chiefs who expressed serious worries about the tensions that had emerged among villagers after the political parties had made speeches that were sometimes provocative in tone. In particular they mentioned fights that had broken out between members of the PRS and the PAIGC. They feared that these tensions would escalate as polling day approached. However, no serious fights broke out during the vote or the subsequent count. These legislative elections expressed Bissau-Guineans’ great desire for change,²⁶ even if the big victor was the PAIGC, historic architect of the independence struggle and subsequent ruling party under the one-party system.

B. THE PAIGC’S EMPHATIC COMEBACK

The legislative elections thus confirmed an emphatic comeback by the PAIGC, which won 67 of the 100 parliamentary seats. The scale of this victory came as a surprise. Like the PAIGC itself, the PRS and the United Social Democrat Party (Partido Unido Social Democrático, PUSD) also appeared to enjoy relatively strong support among the electorate.²⁷ The PAIGC’s crushing

²¹ Statements made to Crisis Group at a meeting with village chiefs from the five regions of Guinea-Bissau, organised by the NGO Voz di Paz and held at Bulà on 26 October 2008.

²² Crisis Group interviews, EU Election Observation Mission, Bissau, October and November 2008.

²³ Report by the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General in Guinea-Bissau, 2 December 2008.

²⁴ Crisis Group interview, member of civil society, Bissau, 24 November 2008.

²⁵ See Crisis Group Report, *Guinea-Bissau*, op. cit., p. 15.

²⁶ Crisis Group interviews, several election observers, Bissau and Dakar, October and November 2008.

²⁷ In the previous legislature (2004-2008), the PAIGC held 45 seats, the PRS had 35 and the PUSD had seventeen. But Francisco Fadul, chairman of the PUSD, left his party after an internal dispute and created a new party, the Party for Democracy, Development and Citizenship (Partido para Democracia, Desenvolvimento e Cidadania, PADEC). Once Fadul left, voters drifted away from the PUSD – yet PADEC

victory in terms of not only seats but also votes – with a sixteen per cent rise in its share of the vote in these elections – is therefore particularly significant. This can be attributed to the popularity of the party's chairman, Carlos Gomes Junior, and general dissatisfaction with the head of state, Nino Vieira.

For the first time since Guinea-Bissau adopted a multi-party system in 1994, one party will hold an unchallengeable majority in the National Assembly with more than two-thirds of the seats. The PAIGC had come close to achieving this position in 1994 when, as the former single party, it had obtained 62 seats and an overall majority. Under the Bissau-Guinean political system, changes to the constitution only take effect if they secure the support of two thirds of the votes in the assembly.²⁸ The PAIGC will therefore now be able to revise the constitution and it will have plenty of room for manoeuvre as it brings forward legislation.²⁹ So the people of Guinea-Bissau have given their leaders the chance to establish a strong national assembly – which would correspond to the spirit of the semi-presidential constitution adopted in 1994.

1. A personal victory for “Cadogo”

The popularity of Carlos Gomes Junior really gathered momentum during the legislative election campaign itself. Many electors interviewed by Crisis Group said they were voting, above all, for Carlos Gomes Junior himself, rather than the PAIGC. They felt that while the party had too often failed to move the country forward during its years in power, Carlos Gomes Junior represents a new generation of politicians with the capacity to provide effective leadership. This way of looking at things does indeed reflect the campaign message of the PAIGC, which repeatedly stressed the governing qualities that Carlos Gomes Junior had shown during his seventeen months as prime minister before the presidential elections of 2005. He had, notably, managed to ensure the regular payment of public servants'

did not succeed in winning the loyalty of this segment of the electorate.

²⁸ Crisis Group telephone interview, Bissau-Guinean constitutional specialist, 17 December 2008.

²⁹ There is already a constitutional reform proposal which was approved by an alliance of assembly members under the presidency of Kumba Yala but which the latter never promulgated. The main feature of this proposed reform would be the creation of a procedure for the impeachment of the president should the latter commit a serious fault. The reform package does not include any proposal to change the rules governing the number of presidential mandates, currently limited by the constitution to two consecutive terms.

salaries.³⁰ He also managed to revive relationships with international donors, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which had broken down during Kumba Yala's presidency.³¹

Within the PAIGC Carlos Gomes Junior is criticised for his failure to participate in the liberation war. Known by the sobriquet “Cadogo”, he is of mixed Biafada, Papel and Portuguese origin. While the PAIGC's fighters were engaged in the liberation struggle, he was working in the colonial administration – a path that, in the Bissau-Guinean context, has been detrimental to his national image. Since independence, and with the establishment of the one-party state, PAIGC leaders drew their legitimacy and their popular support – particularly in the countryside – from their participation in the liberation struggle.³² This was the basis of their monopoly over political life, power and the resources of the state over two decades. Even after the liberalisation of politics this historical legitimacy continued to weigh heavily on political life.³³

The huge popularity garnered by Carlos Gomes Junior during the 2008 legislative elections appears to show that these traditional indicators of political legitimacy are now evolving: the electorate is more interested in a political leader's potential to be a good manager than in his past role in the liberation war.³⁴ The electorate now includes an entire generation who did not experience the liberation war, even if they still see this past struggle as one of historical importance. But the changed political outlook is not confined to young

³⁰ Crisis Group interviews, PAIGC spokesman, senior civil servant, members of civil society and diplomats, Bissau, October 2008.

³¹ See Crisis Group Report, *Guinea-Bissau*, op. cit., p. 16.

³² This is explained by the fact that the liberation war was fought in the countryside where the PAIGC recruited its fighters. These were also the territories that became liberated zones administered by the party during the long years of the struggle. Bissau remained under the control of the Portuguese right up until independence in 1974 – which limited the influence of the PAIGC over the population of the capital. See *ibid*; Patrick Chabal, “National liberation in Portuguese Guinea, 1956-1974”, *African Affairs*, vol. 80, no. 318 (1981); and Joshua Forrest, *Lineages of State Fragility, Rural Civil Society in Guinea-Bissau* (Oxford, 2003).

³³ Augel, “Guinea-Bissau expects its first democratic elections”, op. cit., p. 50.

³⁴ Certainly, there could be other reasons for this popularity. Several of those interviewed by Crisis Group pointed to a more cynical explanation for the voters' support: “They said to themselves that as he was already rich, he probably would not feel the need to steal money from the state coffers to the extent that other politicians have done”. Crisis Group interviews, members of civil society and diplomats, Bissau, October 2008.

people: only 38 per cent of the electors were aged between eighteen and 28. This shows that older voters have also now developed criteria other than historical legitimacy as factors in choosing their leaders.³⁵

Even if his image differs markedly from that of the other heavyweights of Bissau-Guinean political life, Carlos Gomes Junior is not a new face. After service in the government's finance department he moved to the central bank, before developing a business career during the 1980s, when he became very rich. He came to prominence as director of the national fuel and lubricants distribution company (Sociedade de Distribuição de Combustível e Lubrificante da Guiné-Bissau, DICOL). He subsequently became close to President Vieira, who brought him into the PAIGC, initially as a delegate member, then as a member of the central committee and finally the political bureau.³⁶

The two men became very close, but it was after the 1999 legislative elections that "Cadogo" really made his breakthrough as a player in the PAIGC. At this point the party sought his assistance to rebuild its finances. Consequently, with the support of Malam Bacai Sagna, one of the leading figures in the PAIGC, he was elected chairman of the party. This career path as a PAIGC apparatchik, combined with the need to reward the party base, may well now be a constraint upon "Cadogo"'s will and capacity to effectively combat corruption, notwithstanding the effectiveness with which he performed in government during his previous stint as prime minister.

After that earlier time in office, relations between Carlos Gomes Junior and Nino Vieira developed into bitter rivalry. Nino Vieira had been a legendary figure in the PAIGC. He was heavily involved in the liberation struggle and came to symbolise the party's domination over Bissau-Guinean political life during his eighteen years in power. His formal links with the party were broken at the moment of his departure into exile after the war of 1998-1999. Upon his return, for the presidential elections of 2005, Nino Vieira put forward his candidacy in the face of opposition from Carlos Gomes Junior, by now chairman of the PAIGC, and against the will of the majority within the party. When Vieira returned to Bissau, the army, led by General Tagme na Wai, had to provide him with an official escort for his own protection.³⁷ Unable to secure the support of the

PAIGC, Nino Vieira eventually opted to put himself forward as an independent candidate.

Relations between Carlos Gomes Junior and Nino Vieira had also been poisoned by personal factors. "Cadogo" is said to have refused to hand over to Nino Vieira various properties that he had acquired – under his own name – on Vieira's behalf, before the latter's departure.³⁸ Nevertheless, in July 2008 the two men negotiated a marriage of convenience to bring down the stability pact and block the path of the other big figure in the PAIGC, the defeated 2005 presidential candidate, Malam Bacai Sagna.³⁹

The PAIGC's legislative election success is also explained by the fact that the population largely responded to its appeal for a comfortable majority in the National Assembly that would allow it to provide strong government for the next four years. The party argued that at the end of this time it could be judged on its performance in office.⁴⁰ The electors thus opted for a pragmatic vote for the PAIGC, in spite of its disastrous governing record and the numerous abuses committed during the one-party era.

2. The total failure of the PRID and the retreat of the PRS

The only other party to achieve a significant vote in the legislative elections was the PRS – which ended up with 26 seats, nine fewer than in the previous legislature.⁴¹ The Republican Party for Independence and Development (Partido Republicano para Independência e Desenvolvimento, PRID), which was aiming to establish itself as the third force in national politics, suffered a disastrous result and only scraped into the assembly with three seats. One of the reasons for this was probably the voters' desire to punish President Vieira. Officially, of course, he was not involved in the legislative elections, but in reality his popular standing was tested through the performance of the PRID. Working behind the front provided by key allies, he had in fact been the unofficial creator of the party. The party's public face is Aristides Gomes, whom Nino Vieira had refused to remove from the premiership in March 2007, despite parliament passing a vote of no confidence against him. The PRID's first secretary is Sandje Fati, one of the generals who had defended

³⁵ Crisis Group interview, EU Election Observation Mission, Bissau, November 2008.

³⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Oscar "KanKan" Barbosa, PAIGC spokesman, Bissau, October and November 2008.

³⁷ For more details on the circumstances of his return, see Crisis Group Report, *Guinea-Bissau*, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

³⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Bissau, March and October 2008.

³⁹ See below, III.A.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, PAIGC spokesman, October 2008.

⁴¹ Of the other parties, the New Democracy Party (Partido da Nova Democracia, PND) secured one seat, with 2.35 per cent of the vote. The PUSD (1.69 per cent) and the PADEC (1.55 per cent) did not win any seats.

President Vieira's camp during the 1998-1999 war. Moreover, Nino Vieira's wife, Isabella, gave strong public support to the PRID, assuming the role of official sponsor to the party during the campaign.

These connections enabled the PRID, founded just seven months earlier, to draw on considerable financial resources. A number of witness accounts speak of the "hundreds" of heavy duty twin-cabin 4×4 vehicles deployed during the campaign, and the lavish distribution of gifts to voters around the country. The scale of this disbursement of wealth stirred suspicion. Both the PAIGC and the PRS accused the PRID of using money earned from drug trafficking to fund its campaign.⁴² This seems to have caused irreparable damage to the image of the PRID in the eyes of the public and its campaign investment did not pay off. The PRID was the big loser in the election, confirming in the process the great unpopularity of President Vieira.

The PRS, meanwhile, saw its tally of assembly seats fall from 35 to 28. This party, which originally had a multi-ethnic base, rooted itself increasingly in the Balanta electorate during the presidency of Kumba Yala, who has led the party for sixteen years. This strategy enabled him to achieve a considerable lead in the elections of 2000.⁴³ But by the time of the 2008 elections the party had become a prisoner of this ethnic identification.

Kumba Yala had bargained on securing the much sought after vote of the Muslim Fula community.⁴⁴ He even converted to Islam during a long stay in Morocco – during which he claimed to have learnt Arabic and studied the Koran – and he adopted the name Mohamed Yala Embaló. Moreover, during the campaign he insisted that the PRS was a national party and not one limited to the Balanta. But the tactic seems to have failed: the PRS lost ground in regions where it had been particularly popular at the previous election. The pattern of its retreat confirms that the party still has a solid core electorate based on the support of the Balanta for Kumba Yala. It lost seats in the multi-ethnic region of Cacheu, retreated to a small extent in the largely Balanta

districts Oio and Tombali, and lost no ground at all in the core Balanta areas, Quinara and Biombo.⁴⁵

The PRS probably also suffered from mounting a poorly organised campaign disrupted by humiliating internal disputes. In contrast to the PAIGC, which smoothed over its internal divisions during the election period, the PRS proved unable to maintain even a measure of unity. Several PRS members, ministers in the caretaker government in the run-up to the election, left the party to join the PRID. Even if these defections can be explained by the fact that the dissidents probably had links to President Nino Vieira, this damaged the party's image and limited its chances of winning votes outside its core Balanta supporters. The absence of Kumba Yala during the pre-election period and his authoritarian management of the PRS also worked against the party's prospects.⁴⁶ The PRS never announced who would become prime minister if it won the legislative elections, because this person would only have been chosen by Kumba Yala at the last minute, to prevent anyone developing a political base within the party to rival his own.⁴⁷

The success of these legislative elections represents a reinforcement of democratic institutions and a first step in the right direction for Guinea-Bissau. Even so, the risk of renewed destabilisation for the newly elected government has not been eliminated.

III. RISKS OF DESTABILISATION FOR THE NEW MAJORITY

The chronic political instability that has affected Guinea-Bissau since the early years of independence has structural causes, namely the weakness of civil institutions and the tendency of the army to intervene in political life. Today, once again, the relations of power and authority between leading figures – civil or military, almost all of whom were involved in the independence struggle under the banner of the PAIGC – have a

⁴² Crisis Group interviews with a member of civil society, Bissau, November 2008. See also "GBissau politicians trade allegations of helping drug traffickers", Agence France-Presse, 6 November 2008.

⁴³ Crisis Group Report, *Guinea-Bissau*, op. cit., p. 15.

⁴⁴ Many sources now believe that the Fula account for 30 per cent of Guinea-Bissau's population and have thus come to outnumber the Balanta. Although these estimates are widely repeated in political and diplomatic circles in Bissau, they have not so far been confirmed by any official population census.

⁴⁵ See the regional constituency results of the legislative elections, "Dossier dos Resultados das Eleições Legislativas de 16 de Novembro de 2008", National Electoral Commission, November 2008.

⁴⁶ In particular, decisions about the order in which candidates were placed on the electoral lists were taken in a seemingly arbitrary fashion by Kumba Yala. Some important members of the PRS, such as Artur Sagna, were thus excluded from positions at the top of the lists. Crisis Group interview, PRS dissident, Bissau, October 2008.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interviews, PRS representatives, Bissau, October 2008.

preponderant influence over national politics, regardless of the nominal partisan majorities.

C. INTERNAL DIVISIONS AND POSITIONING FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

The national stability pact signed on 13 March 2007 by the three main parties in the assembly, the PAIGC, the PRS and the PUSD, had raised hopes for greater stability in the conduct of government and for a serious chance of moving forward with the institutional reforms necessary for the consolidation of civil power and its role in the democratic governance of the country. But unfortunately the pact survived for only fifteen months. Its premature collapse showed that even a strong parliamentary majority was unable to provide a secure base for the advance of a reformist government program in Guinea-Bissau.

The fluctuating pattern of alliances and manoeuvres within and across parties, linked to the personal relationships between leaders and assembly members, the influence of historic liberation war leaders, and generalised corruption among the political class, have tended to undermine the government's capacity to act. Even if Carlos Gomes Junior has so far declared no ambition to stand for the presidency in 2010, there is a high risk that, behind the institutional facade, a struggle for position will develop between President Vieira, the prime minister and other potential candidates such as the PAIGC's Malam Bacai Sagna.

The PAIGC chairman is supposed to convene the party congress every four years. But the congress that should have taken place in November 2007 was repeatedly postponed by Carlos Gomes Junior. The official reason for these delays was a lack of funding; but in reality he was playing for time to put in place his own political alliances. Much was at stake. The PAIGC's internal statutes specify the chairman as the party's nominee for prime minister, should it win a majority in the National Assembly. Yet when the congress was finally held, from 26 June to 2 July 2008, the clear favourite was Malam Bacai Sagna, a prominent party figure and former candidate narrowly defeated in the 2005 presidential race.

At the congress Carlos Gomes Junior managed to win the endorsement of the PAIGC thanks to the support of influential party figures still loyal to Nino Vieira. For, despite their differences, from Vieira's point of view, Carlos Gomes Junior was a less dangerous rival than Malam Bacai Sagna would have been had he secured the party leadership. There was therefore a temporary alliance between the two men at the time of the con-

gress. Nino Vieira needed to prevent Malam Bacai Sagna winning, while Carlos Gomes Junior needed Nino Vieira's support in his bid for the party chairmanship. On the same day that it voted Carlos Gomes Junior into the chairmanship, the PAIGC ceremonially invited Nino Vieira to become its honorary president.

The stability pact did not survive this deal between Vieira and Gomes Junior. Nominally, the PAIGC pulled out of the arrangement because the then prime minister, Martinho Ndafo Cabi, had appointed members of the PRS as the general directors of the treasury and the customs service.⁴⁸ Carlos Gomes Junior accused Cabi, a Balanta, of "possessing a PRS heart in his PAIGC body".⁴⁹ He was perhaps hoping to exert some influence over the caretaker government charged with preparing the elections.

This also left Gomes Junior in debt to Nino Vieira for the latter's support for his bid for the PAIGC chairmanship. Anxious to see the collapse of the Cabi government – which had been imposed upon him – Vieira secured Gomes Junior's assent to the scrapping of the stability pact. Vieira was thus able to dissolve the National Assembly and appoint a new caretaker government, tasked with organising the elections and paying public sector salaries. He installed his close allies in this administration and for four months the salaries went unpaid. This provoked a resurgence of the repeated public service strikes which had cooled off during the Martinho Ndafo Cabi premiership.

The collapse of the stability pact illustrates one of the challenges facing the new majority. Without the negotiation of an internal consensus inside the PAIGC and without securing President Vieira's assent to the government program for the next two years, any attempt to advance reform risks being sabotaged by political manoeuvres in the run-up to the 2010 presidential election.

D. ATTEMPTED COUPS D'ETAT?

The consequences of the pact's collapse were also felt in the army. The country has subsequently suffered two outbreaks of violence whose circumstances remain largely unexplained. First, in July 2008, the authorities announced that they had uncovered a coup attempt that was being planned by the head of the navy, Bubu na Tchuto. He was detained and placed under house arrest the very next day. However, the evidence cited

⁴⁸ Report of the United Nations Bureau for the Consolidation of Peace in Guinea Bissau (UNOGBIS), 29 September 2008.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Bissau, October 2008.

by the official communiqué was meagre.⁵⁰ He was accused of making several telephone calls to army officers while Tagme na Wai was abroad seeking their support in launching a coup d'état.⁵¹

The authorities provided no details of how they had obtained this information. They did not mention which phone calls had been tapped or cite credible witness reports that might have confirmed the official version of events. Hardly had Bubu na Tchuto been arrested than he fled with surprising ease to Gambia. The authorities claimed that he was placed under house arrest there. Yet numerous witnesses report that he is moving around freely in Gambia and telephoning his officers in Bissau, while there are no discussions about his possible extradition officially under way with the Gambian authorities.

At present, amidst such confusion, the claimed history of the incident is widely doubted by the public: "We Bissau-Guineans do not believe that there really was an attempted coup d'état".⁵² Several possible explanations for the affair are circulating: it might, for example, be a manoeuvre by Tagme na Wai to get rid of a navy chief whose power had grown in tandem with the development of drug trafficking.⁵³ Members of Bubu's coterie were subsequently dispersed to various different barracks, in an apparent effort to weaken this faction.

One week after the legislative elections, the authorities announced that there had been an attempt to assassinate President Nino Vieira during the night of Saturday 22-Sunday 23 November. The official version, set out in a statement to the media, and then, blow by blow, to diplomats in Bissau, claims that about ten naval personnel led by Alexandre Ntchmi Yala – one of Bubu na Tchuto's officers and a nephew of Kumba Yala – had attacked President Vieira's residence at 1.10 in the morning. Supposedly, a battle broke out between the presidential guard and the attackers, until the latter eventually fled. The attack thus failed, although one member of the presidential guard was killed. The minister of the interior subsequently announced that the presidency had been forewarned of the attack before it took place. At first glance, the evident damage to the presidential residence would appear to confirm that an

assassination attempt did take place, but the official explanations appear unconvincing.⁵⁴

A number of military sources have noted flaws in the official account of events, notably the absence of bullet marks other than on the main wall of the presidential residence, suggesting that nobody returned fire against the attackers. One military source said that the shots that he heard on the evening of the incident sounded like shots fired into the air rather than against a target on the ground. "Either the attackers were particularly incompetent or lacking in motivation, or it was a piece of theatre", he said.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, several witnesses have pointed out that no security cordon was put in place in the hours after the attack, and that several members of the presidential guard fled the scene after the explosion, suggesting that they were not expecting to be attacked.

In truth, Guinea-Bissau is well used to rumours of coups – a regular feature of political life since independence. Even if some inhabitants of Bissau were scared during the night of the attack, daily life returned to normal the following morning. There was no sign of people taking flight and no one seemed worried about safety. The military were quick to remind everyone that they had no grievance against the population. General Tagme na Wai appeared on television on 27 November, swearing that he would never betray the people of Guinea-Bissau and promising his full commitment to the safeguarding of peace in the country.⁵⁶

Even today, the true course of events is shrouded in total confusion. The authorities announced that six of the attackers were arrested on the evening of the attack. Their leader was reportedly arrested in Senegal two weeks later.⁵⁷ Some weeks after these events, the most widely supported hypothesis among the local population and the diplomatic community is that of a fabrication.⁵⁸ A commission of inquiry has been set up, but its findings are still awaited. The government should have brought together a competent team to examine the site of the attack and collect evidence. But that was not done and it has consequently proved impossible to clarify what happened. On 6 January 2009, General Tagme na Wai ordered that several members of the presidential guard should be deprived of their arms; he accuses them of trying to assassinate him by shooting at his

⁵⁰ "Guinée-Bissau: un coup d'état déjoué, le chef de la marine arrêté", Agence France-Presse, 9 August 2008.

⁵¹ Tagme na Wai was in Senegal at the time for a medical check-up, en route to Nigeria for a meeting of chiefs of staff from across the region.

⁵² Crisis Group interview, member of a civil society organisation, Bissau, October 2008.

⁵³ Crisis Group interviews, members of civil society and political players, Bissau, October and November 2008.

⁵⁴ The damage was concentrated in the parts of the house where the president is in the habit of passing the evening hours.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, Bissau, November 2008.

⁵⁶ Television news bulletin, RTGB, 27 November 2008.

⁵⁷ "Le présumé cerveau du coup d'Etat interrogé à Dakar", APAnews, 17 December 2008.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Bissau and Dakar, November 2008.

car as he drove past the presidential residence on the way back to his own home at 1 a.m.⁵⁹

The confusion that surrounds these two events has serious consequences. Although the public was not directly affected, this latest incident has undermined the hopes for change fostered by the success of the elections and has clouded the prospects for a revival of the national economy. An IMF mission that was visiting Bissau to assess progress made with the budget and the country's prospects for agreeing a poverty reduction programme quickly left the country the day after the assassination attempt against President Vieira. Meanwhile Ecobank, which was supposed to lend the government the money to pay salaries, reviewed its stance at the last minute and cancelled the loan offer. The bank has also shut its offices in Bissau and Gabù.

IV. A NEW PACT TO TAKE REFORMS FORWARD

A. GUARANTEEING THE STABILITY OF GOVERNMENT

While the PAIGC's two-thirds majority in the National Assembly should facilitate the passage of legislation and limit the risk of a censure motion against the prime minister, it does not provide a guarantee of stability for the government or success for its actions. The assembly members will still be at risk of being drawn into internal struggles between the principal contenders for the presidency in 2010, in the hope of earning themselves ministerial posts.

Carlos Gomes Junior, the new prime minister, needs to create an environment that at least favours dialogue, if not consensus, both between the different political parties and the various factions of the PAIGC. During his seventeen-month stint in the premiership in 2004-2005, he was accused of failing to consult the PAIGC and the other parties over key decisions. But in future he will be expected to show that he is ready to seek a

broad consensus over the implementation of a government program firmly focused on reform.

In particular, he will need to outmanoeuvre potential attempts at destabilisation on the part of President Vieira, so that he can remain in the premiership for long enough to put reform in place. To do this, he will have to consolidate his alliances within the PAIGC and, more widely, across the political class because the president may well try to win over some assembly members and thus undermine the prime minister. Gomes Junior will have to work closely with Malam Bacai Sagna if he is to achieve results. The international community, and in particular, those partners actually present in Bissau, such as Senegal, Angola, France, the European Union and the United Nations, need to maintain pressure on the president and his entourage, so that they support the government's capacity to act rather than trying to paralyse or weaken it.⁶⁰

Carlos Gomes Junior needs to take advantage of good relations with international partners to improve his image in the countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Diplomats from these countries tend to think that he prefers to cultivate his already close connections with Portugal and Cape Verde and that he "takes no account of their opinion".⁶¹ He needs to give particular attention to the relationship with Senegal which, besides its military intervention during the 1998-1999 conflict, periodically tries to play a mediating role during Bissau-Guinean political crises.

Finally, the new premier will need to reach an understanding with the army, to ensure progress in the implementation of reforms before the presidential elections of 2010. That will not be easy. Carlos Gomes Junior is very unpopular with the military, both because of his mixed race non-Balanta origins and his career in the colonial administration. One particular dispute is also a contributing factor to this unpopularity. During his first stint as prime minister Carlos Gomes Junior suppressed a PRS protest march against the government during the second round of the presidential election. Four Balanta were killed by the security forces and Artur

⁵⁹ "Guinea-Bissau: le chef d'état-major échappe à une tentative d'assassinat", Agence France-Presse, 6 January 2009. These members of the presidential guard form part of a group known as the "Aguntas", a militia formed during the 1998-1999 war to protect Nino Vieira. The president is said to have appointed them to the presidential guard without informing General Tagme na Wai beforehand. This incident confirms the continuing fraught tensions between the president and General Tagme na Wai and underlines the extreme fragility of stability in Guinea-Bissau.

⁶⁰ Nino Vieira has repeatedly demonstrated his ability to manipulate national institutions to favour his own agenda. One of the most recent examples was his dismissal of Carlos Gomes Junior from the premiership for personal reasons in October 2006. See Crisis Group Report, *Guinea-Bissau*, op. cit., p. 17.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, diplomat from the sub-region, Bissau, November 2008.

Sagna, a leading figure in the PRS at the time, was beaten up by police officers.⁶²

The Balanta, who account for the majority of the armed forces, have not forgotten this incident. Moreover, during the legislative election campaign General Tagme na Wai reacted bluntly to Carlos Gomes Junior's promise of a cut in army manpower in the event of a PAIGC victory in the legislative polls. He declared that the country would face grave consequences if Carlos Gomes Junior lived up to his words, which he viewed as a threat.⁶³

One of the main obstacles to an agreement between politicians on a program for government is the still unresolved question of national reconciliation. In power for twenty years, the one-party regime oversaw a series of individual and mass executions of traditional chiefs and political opponents, some in public and some in secret.⁶⁴ There were also numerous cases of arbitrary abduction or detention. The law instigating an amnesty for past crimes passed by the National Assembly in early 2008 commands little support among the public, who see it as an exercise in mutual self-forgiveness on the part of the political class. Most people are not demanding judicial proceedings against those who committed the crimes. They simply want to see the subject opened up to public debate and to see the historical truth about the abuses that were committed.⁶⁵ Today, there are many families who have still not received an official explanation of how one of their relatives disappeared.

Many people active in politics and the military have personally suffered imprisonment, torture or humiliation in the past. They have emerged from these experiences and once more taken up their places on the political chessboard, without seeing any recognition of the suffering they endured or the injustices that were committed against them. In such a context, some of their dealings with each other are necessarily fuelled by a desire for vengeance. This creates a tense and embittered political atmosphere that hinders the chances of the national interest taking precedence over personal considerations.

There seems little prospect of a classic truth and reconciliation process taking place, especially with the presi-

dential elections looming in 2010. Certain potential candidates for the presidency – President Vieira, above all – may feel they are at particular risk of being targeted by such an initiative and would therefore oppose it. Even so, the new government cannot afford to ignore an issue that will, sooner or later, have to be dealt with. It could start by launching a national consultation about the subject of reconciliation and how, in practice, it might be achieved.

B. PRESSING ON WITH ARMY REFORM

The apparent 23 November assassination attempt against President Vieira is a reminder of the urgent need for security sector reform in a country with a history of politicisation of the army.⁶⁶ The majority of soldiers probably understand what reform would mean and the benefits that it could give them if it is implemented well: "I am absolutely convinced that the great majority of soldiers want reform. The one thing we lack is money," says the head of the European Union mission for security sector reform in Bissau.⁶⁷ Living conditions for the soldiers are poor in barracks that are often dilapidated. Moreover, they suffer from the same salary arrears problems that affect the public service and there are limited prospects for promotion in an army with low professional standards and a disproportionately large number of officers. Retirement or offers of alternative remunerated employment could be attractive to many current soldiers.

Unfortunately, the efforts already made to familiarise them with the reform issues and to win them round to its objectives are at risk of being wasted unless there is tangible progress soon. Although the reform was officially launched in January 2008, work has not started on implementing any of its key elements except the census of army manpower.⁶⁸ This lack of progress fosters uncertainty and the likelihood of discontent. For although the idea of reform has gained increasing acceptance across the ranks of the military, "There is still a deep mistrust of how the reform will be put into effect in concrete terms".⁶⁹ To move forward, it is essential that the money promised by the donors should actually be made available and that the technical work – notably the census of veterans and the verification of

⁶² Crisis Group interviews, PRS and UNOGBIS, Bissau, October and November 2008.

⁶³ UNOGBIS report, 2 December 2008, paragraph 7.

⁶⁴ Augel, "Guinea-Bissau expects its first democratic elections", *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁶⁵ Remarks made to Crisis Group at the meeting of village chiefs, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, Bissau-Guinean researcher, Bissau, October 2008.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interviews, General Juan Esteban Verastegui, head of the EU mission for security sector reform, and Baciuro Dia, director of the mission for the coordination of security sector reform, October and November 2008.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, General Verastegui, October 2008.

the registers of enrolled troops – should be carried out. It is currently planned that the first batch of soldiers should undergo the reform process in June 2009.⁷⁰ This target date is late in the day, especially if political instability continues to exacerbate tensions.

There have been a number of reasons for the delay, including a lack of coordination between the various donors who are supposed to support the reform. The European Union, the United Nations and the bilateral donors have sent a number of evaluation missions to study reform needs but they have failed to coordinate their efforts. International partners have organised meetings to keep each other briefed on their respective projects, but these do not amount to a well-functioning coordination mechanism – and some donors are more involved than others. The European Union's security sector reform mission was set up without its role being clearly defined in relation to that of the United Nations Bureau for the Consolidation of Peace in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS), which took charge of the first multilateral initiatives. There is still no official coordinator of the international partners involved with the reform of the army.

Matters were not facilitated by the absence of a National Assembly in session or by the pre-electoral conditions of recent months. The members of the coordination committee, responsible for delivering national input into the reform strategy and with providing a bridge between the international partners and the military, were more preoccupied with the elections than with the work of the committee. Even though the reform projects were not officially halted during the caretaker government, their implementation was in practice suspended.

It remains to be seen whether the strategy for the Guinea-Bissau security sector is sufficient to redefine the fundamental role of the army in society and in national political life. In practice, the revolutionary armed forces (FAR) need to be transformed into a professional and depoliticised army, in order to deal with its tendency to intervene in politics and its lack of ethnic diversity. This will be a major task, because these problems have their origins in the history of the liberation struggle – which necessarily placed the army on a par with the political structure of the PAIGC – and the post-independence decades. During this period the army and the single ruling party were integrated into national institutions, as tools of the political leadership.⁷¹

One way of achieving greater professionalism in the army would be to put into practice the scheme for six months military service, for which legislative provision has already been made but not implemented. Meanwhile, the retirement of soldiers who are too old could be accelerated. This approach would have to be implemented gradually, to retain soldiers' confidence. With their particular status derived from the historical legitimacy of the FAR, soldiers should be treated with the respect that they consider to be their due and the dignity that they merit.

The slow pace of army reform has also contributed to the emergence of drug trafficking. Guinea-Bissau has become one of the world's most important transit hubs for cocaine, thanks to the role played by some members of the military. This cannot be properly tackled while reform of the armed forces remains stuck.⁷² The soldiers involved in drug trafficking are organised and armed; at the moment, for Guinea-Bissau's extremely weak judicial system, they remain untouchable.

The restructuring of the police force envisaged within the framework of security sector reform, and the programs to combat drug trafficking planned in partnership with United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the European Union could, eventually, slow down the development of drug trafficking or even reverse it. In June 2008, following an agreement between the Bissau-Guinean criminal police and UNODC, the European Union agreed to create a €2 million fund, principally to support the creation of an elite unit specialising in the investigation, detection and suppression of drug trafficking and organised crime in the country's ports and airports, and to modernise the administrative and legislative frameworks relating to drug trafficking. These programs are in the process of being implemented, but will only make a real impact if military participation in drug trafficking is tackled directly, through the reform of the army.

C. OTHER NECESSARY REFORMS

Other reforms also need to be put on the agenda before the presidential elections of 2010. One of the most important is the reform of the civil service. The initial strategy for this was drawn up by the government in November 2006, alongside the strategy for security reform. But there has been no further progress since then.

Another issue is the plan for reform of electoral law drawn up by national players, with the assistance of UNDP and the European Union, to reduce the "uncer-

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ See Crisis Group Report, *Guinea-Bissau*, op. cit., pp. 5-6, 10-11 and 21-22.

⁷² See the ONUDC annual report, 2008.

tainities” of the current law.⁷³ The National Assembly even established an ad hoc committee to work on the reform, but the issue has never been discussed by parliamentarians.⁷⁴ The reform project envisages that the National Electoral Commission (CNE) would be made independent, notably through the allocation of a budget of its own. At present, its budget is drawn from that of the Assembly itself. Moreover, because the members of the commission are elected by a two-thirds vote of the assembly, they are, in practice, representatives of the political parties.

The reform of the electoral law therefore also needs to change the arrangements for choosing the members of the CNE. One of the reform recommendations is the introduction of civil society observers to monitor the electoral process. Currently, the only national observers authorised by the electoral law are the representatives of political parties. Equally, permanent regional offices should be created, to avoid the need for their hasty establishment just a few months before the vote, as happened during the previous elections.

The new government, working in partnership with donors on these reforms – which have already secured the strong backing of political players and the public – needs to quickly achieve visible progress, before the run-up to the 2010 elections. The remaining challenge is implementation. A roadmap for reform, with a fixed timetable, could be established as soon as the new assembly has taken office – expected before the end of the year. The plan should command wide support to ensure that it has the full cooperation of government and parliament.

Guinea-Bissau is in an extremely fragile economic and budgetary situation. Public servants and the military have not been paid during the final four months of 2008. The country does not have the capacity to ensure the regular payment of salaries or contribute to financing the implementation of reforms that are crucial for its development. International partners must make sure that the aid promised for reform of the security sector, public administration and the electoral system is provided as soon as possible, in order to avoid pointless delays. Furthermore, they should show flexibility in providing the budgetary aid that will cover the payment of salaries at least temporarily. This can be made conditional on the new government under Carlos Gomes Junior showing its determination to overhaul state finances and to respect both national institutions and the vital goal of political stability.

V. CONCLUSION

Although the legislative elections of 2008 were a success, they did not remove the uncertainty that continues to hang over the political process in Guinea-Bissau. They also exposed fundamental problems that will have to be taken into account by the government and its international partners, to avoid a build-up of tension around the 2010 presidential elections. Between now and then, the country must face up to the urgent need for institutional reforms. The chronic instability, fuelled by the political and personal calculations of the country’s civil and military leaders, has to be brought under control. The reforms necessary for the achievement of this goal can only be carried out effectively if political stability is assured, at least in the medium term.

The new government must therefore do everything it can to encourage political dialogue and create an environment that favours the development of understanding between the major players. Supported by the international community, the prime minister and other leading political figures must make a supreme effort to respect the letter and the spirit of the constitution. The current renewal of international concern for Guinea-Bissau will not last for ever. To seize the opportunity that is presented to them, Bissau-Guinean leaders should provide early proof of their willingness to progress towards stability. Meanwhile, international partners should maintain pressure on the authorities and push them to implement the reforms already approved by the National Assembly.

Dakar/Brussels, 29 January 2009

⁷³ Crisis Group interview, EU Election Observation Mission, October 2008.

⁷⁴ Ibid.