



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 28.4.2003
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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

**concerning the opening of consultations with the Central African Republic under
Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement**

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On 15 March 2003 President Ange-Félix Patassé's democratically elected government was overthrown by rebel forces headed by François Bozizé, former chief of staff of the Central African Republic's armed forces.

Speaking on 16 March, the self-proclaimed President François Bozizé suspended the constitution and dissolved the National Assembly and the government. Announcing a temporary interruption in the democratic process, he pledged to set up a national transitional council, to draw up an agreed transition programme with the country's political parties and other interest groups and to hold transparent elections.

In addition to preparing for the elections, the stated priorities are the continuation of talks with the Bretton Woods Institutions, the reform of the army, disarmament, administrative reform, reform of revenue-collection departments and the campaign against HIV/AIDS.

Following the suspension of the constitution, the President wields extended powers and legislates by decree. He has appointed Abel Goumba, a widely respected and long-standing member of the opposition, to be prime minister. No details have been provided of the composition of the national transitional council, the electoral timetable or the functioning of the institutions during the interim period.

In a statement of 21 March the European Union firmly condemned this military coup and reiterated its attachment to respect for democratic principles, which was a condition for its cooperation with the CAR. The coup was also condemned by CEMAC, CENSAD and the African Union, whose Central Organ recommended suspending the CAR's membership. The weakness of the State and the proper management of the country's resources are also a source of concern.

In view of the above, and pursuant to Articles 9 and 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, the Commission proposes that the Council invite the ACP party to consultations to examine the situation in depth and, if necessary, to remedy it, in accordance with the annexed letter.

The purpose of these consultations is to underline the importance attached by the European Union to the Central African Republic's compliance with the essential elements of Article 9 of the Cotonou Agreement to which it is a signatory and to find out how the Central African Republic intends to achieve this.

Of particular interest will be the measures adopted and applied to restore constitutional rule, including the election timetable, with due respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including respect for fundamental social rights and transparent and accountable governance.

Pending the completion of consultations and the decision on "appropriate measures", new commitments with the CAR will be confined to possible humanitarian projects or direct aid to the population.

The Chief Authorising Officer is preparing to take over the duties of the National Authorising Officer until further notice.

ANNEX

Draft letter

to the Prime Minister, Head of the Interim Government of the Central African Republic

Sir,

In its statement of 21 March 2003 the European Union firmly condemned the military coup of 15 March. It also reiterated its attachment to the observance of democratic principles and the rule of law, which Article 9 of the Cotonou Agreement defines as the basis of the ACP-EU Partnership.

Pursuant to Article 96 of the Agreement, we have the honour of inviting the government of the Central African Republic to consultations to study in depth the situation in the country since the coup and to examine the measures to be taken to restore constitutional rule as soon as possible.

We suggest that these consultations take place within a fortnight, on a date to be agreed, at the premises of the Council of the European Union in Brussels.

I have the honour to be, Sir, yours faithfully,

For the Council, For the Commission

Copies:

The Chairman of the ACP Committee of Ambassadors

The Secretary-General of the ACP Group