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BRIEFING NOTE
ON THE AFRICAN UNION EVALUATION MISSION OF THE
SITUATION IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC,
15 TO 18 NOVEMBER 2006

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. As part of African Union support to efforts made by the Central African authorities and countries of the region to consolidate peace and stability in the Central African Republic (CAR), the Chairperson of the Commission dispatched his Special Envoy, Sadok Fayala for CAR, to Bangui from 15 to 18 November 2006. The task of the Special Envoy was to assess developments on the ground and, together with Central African authorities and political stakeholders, as well as external partners, consider ways and means of fostering security, peace and stability in the country.

2. The Special Envoy was received by the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, and, in the absence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Justice, as well as by the Minister of the Interior. He also met with opposition parties belonging to the Union of Active Forces of the Nation (UFCV), parties of the presidential majority and the parties of the centre. Furthermore, he held working sessions with the representative of the United Nations Secretary-General, Head of the United Nations Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA), the French Ambassador, the Head of the European Union Delegation, the Commander of the CEMAC Multinational Force (FOMUC) and the Resident Representative of the World Bank.

3. The Special Envoy's mission was undertaken against the background of recent incidents that took place in the country, particularly the repeated attacks by armed elements in the East of the country (in the border region with the Sudan) and the occupation of the localities of Birao, Ouadda Djallé and Ouandja. The Chairperson of the Commission and the current Chairman of the African Union condemned these attacks. The Chairperson of the Commission further called for an immediate end to the confrontations and recalled the AU's attachment to respect for legal institutions and the rejection of any unconstitutional change of government.

4. This Briefing Note gives a summary of the Special Envoy's consultations in Bangui. The Note deals with the political, security and military situation, as well as the economy and finance (status of discussions with international financial institutions). The Note concludes with observations and recommendations.

II. SUMMARY OF VARIOUS CONSULTATIONS

5. The personalities met by the Special Envoy hailed the arrival of the AU mission and commended the AU's prompt reaction following the attacks on some Central African towns. President Bozizé conveyed his gratitude to the Chairperson of the Commission for the AU's efforts in support of the CAR.

6. At each working session, the Special Envoy stated the purpose of his mission, which fell within the context of monitoring the situation in CAR, as well as AU continuing support to the efforts deployed by Central African authorities and leaders of the region to consolidate peace and stability and also to revive economic activity. In this respect, he recalled the AU's firm rejection of any unconstitutional change of government, in accordance with the Constitutive Act and the Lome Declaration of July 2000, which the AU has always upheld since the incidents registered on 15 March 2003, and maintained up to the legislative and presidential elections of April and May 2005. This position still prevails within the context of the attacks and the occupation of the localities of Birao, Ouadda Djalle and Ouadja by armed units.

7. The African Union has constantly supported the process of restoring constitutional rule in CAR by maintaining contact with the new Central African authorities, through several missions undertaken by the Special Envoy to that country; by lifting the suspension imposed on CAR in March 2003; by supporting the activities of the CEMAC Multinational Force (FOMUC) under the Facility for Peace in Africa and by initiating a support strategy for economic revival, the first phase of which was marked by a multidisciplinary mission of experts to Bangui. The Special Envoy informed his interlocutors that a Peace and Security Council meeting devoted to CAR and the consideration of the report of the multidisciplinary mission of experts will soon be held.

III. POLITICAL SITUATION

8. At the time of the visit, the political situation in Bangui was generally calm despite the fact that, a few days earlier, there had been worrisome rumours about the occupation of the town of Bria by rebel forces. The attacks, followed by the occupation of Birao, Ouanda Djalle and Ouandja by the rebels since 29 October 2006, dominated the various discussions, almost relegating economic and financial issues to second place; yet they are a major concern for the people of the Central African Republic.

9. The mission was informed of the leadership crisis undermining the country's major political parties, particularly the "Mouvement de liberation du peuple centrafricain (MLPC)" - Central African People's Liberation Movement - which has broken up into two factions. One faction is inclined to former President Ange-Felix Patassé, and the other to Mr. Martin Ziguele, former Prime Minister under President Patassé and candidate for the April-May 2005 presidential election. Abel Goumba's "Front Patriotique pour le progrès (FFP) – Patriotic Front for Progress - and André Kolingba's « Rassemblement démocratique centrafricain (RDC) » - Central African Democratic Movement – were also said to be divided, giving rise to a new political group considered centrist in its political orientation.

IV. SECURITY AND MILITARY SITUATION

10. The security and military situation in CAR is characterized by attacks and the occupation of several localities in the Vakaga region. A group of rebels operating under the "Union des Forces démocratiques pour le changement (UFDR" – Union of

Democratic Forces for Change – claimed responsibility for the attacks. The little resistance made by the Central African Armed Forces (FACA), created a real political crisis in the country, and the FOMUC suddenly found itself in a demanding situation.

11. According to the Central African authorities, the rebels came from Sudan, with the material backing of the Sudanese authorities, for the simple reason that the Government of the Sudan is opposed to the deployment of United Nations Forces both in Sudan and at the border with the Central African Republic. Another reason given by the Government of the Central African Republic for Sudan's alleged involvement is the links existing between Chad and CAR, which are said not to be to the liking of the Sudan, whose relations with Chad have deteriorated of recent.

12. Although the Government of Sudan refuted these accusations and sent a mission to Bangui, President Bozizé has maintained them, citing shuttles of an Antonov aircraft registered in Sudan (following an investigation with HCR) between the locality of Tiringoulu and Sudan, as evidence of Sudanese involvement. The plane was reported to have landed down troops and equipment. The Central African authorities further asserted that the Sudanese Government had cancelled a proposed trip by President Bozizé and the Chief of Staff of the Central African Armed Forces to Khartoum to discuss common border issues.

13. Attacks and the occupation of towns in the eastern part of the Central African Republic showed the limits of the country's army. Problems relating to the regular payment of allowances for food, training, understaffing and equipment were compounded by that of the soldiers' loyalty. According to President Bozizé, this situation was supposedly due to the nature of the composition of the army, which is made up of former fighters, who had supported President Bozizé in his campaign to seize power, and the former loyalists and members of President Patassé's former presidential security unit. But, as noted by other observers, the army is still beset by problems of tribalism that negatively affect troops' combativeness and motivation. Exactions by soldiers on the civilian populations and violations of human rights of which the soldiers of the regular army were accused, and impunity were brought to the delegation's attention.

14. Whatever be the case, it is necessary to work for a negotiated settlement of the crisis in the country. The Central African authorities should be encouraged to work in this direction, in spite of their different approaches on the issue. In fact, as regards the Government and parties of the presidential majority, it cannot presently be a question of dialogue, because nothing can justify the rebellion. The authorities insist that, before any dialogue, the rebels should, first and foremost, lay down their arms. Moreover, the previous national dialogue of September and October 2003 had adopted a set of recommendations, including the ban on the use of arms to come into power. Lastly, the institutions for dialogue and discussion, which are the National Assembly and the Grand Mediator, could have been used rather than the use of arms to manifest their grievances.

15. For their part, the opposition political parties consider that the CAR cannot be allowed to engage in a new war and that there is no other way out of the crisis except through dialogue. They denounce the decision of the Chadian authorities to send reinforcements to the Central African troops to deal with the situation in the affected areas. Moreover, the military front has been reinforced by several detachments of soldiers of FACA and FOMUC. France has deployed a detachment of 220 men in Bangui (Boali detachment), and has agreed to provide logistical and communication support to the CAR.

16. In line with these military initiatives, the Committee of the Wise set up after the Libreville negotiations in January 2005 held consultations with the political parties, civil society organizations, trade unions and the diplomatic corps with a view to mapping out a strategy to emerge from the crisis.

V. ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL SITUATION

17. The last mission of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank appreciated the reform efforts made by the Central African Government. However, two issues remain to be dealt with:

- a more transparent management of the mining sector, for which the World Bank requested some clarifications; and
- a difference of about \$3 million for the settlement of debts contracted from the ADB.

18. External partners underscored the many challenges faced by the Government whose capacities (human and financial resources) are limited. In relation to these constraints, the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the Commission urged the Central African authorities to devise a strategy for agricultural recovery that is less expensive and whose beneficial effect on the population is immediate.

VI. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

19. The appearance of an armed movement in the CAR is a new phenomenon that the Central African authorities, countries in the region (CEMAC and ECCAS), and the entire international community should henceforth decisively deal with that country. The persistence of rebel activities on Central African territory could derail efforts that have been made to date to improve the situation in the country, which include the following among others :

- the recommitment of the international financial institutions in CAR and its beneficial effect for the economic recovery of the country;
- support from the EU and AU to FOMUC through the Facility for Peace in Africa that has enabled relative stability to be maintained on the whole territory;

- the process that enabled constitutional order to be restored and the democratic process to be consolidated.

20. Moreover, rebel activities in CAR contribute to the destabilization of the whole region and raise suspicion between CAR and its neighbours.

21. The measures taken by FOMUC and FACA, with the support of France and Chad, give the impression that the rebellion has little chance to succeed in CAR. However, a lasting solution should be found to the crisis. In this respect, the consultations of the Committee of the Wise should inform the elaboration of a strategy for emerging from the crisis. It must be indicated that the possible deployment of UN troops at the border between the CAR and the Sudan is anxiously expected by the Central African authorities and part of the political class.

22. Considering the various consultations held in Bangui, and in addition to the implementation of the recommendations of the multidisciplinary mission that went to CAR, the mission of the Special Envoy proposes the following:

- in order to face the new situation created by the presence of rebels, the AU should encourage the Central African authorities and all the Central African political players to favour as much as possible avenues for a peaceful settlement within the framework of the institutions established after the last elections;
- assist CAR, through cooperation with other AU Member States, to build a strong national army, imbued with republican and civic values, capable of effectively ensuring the defence and integrity of the country;
- encourage the authorities of the country to promote good governance and respect for human rights and fight against impunity, particularly in the defence and security forces;
- urge the Central African authorities to maintain a peaceful and serene political atmosphere with all the players concerned. The opposition leaders could then be recognized, particularly through an opposition status. In this regard, the Central African authorities should see to it that measures adopted during the national dialogue of September-October 2003 are effectively implemented;
- provide assistance in administration and public financing to the CAR;
- mobilize external partners and financial institutions and encourage them to adopt a policy of developing infrastructure and undertaking construction works, particularly as regards roads, bridges, electricity and water sectors.

