

## **Speech of Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Venizelos in the European Parliament Plenary on Europe's role in the Central African Republic**

Mr. President, Honorable Members,

On behalf of High-representative/Vice-President Cathy Ashton, I would like to reiterate my deep concern at the crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) and underline the need to protect the population there. The country continues to experience a major crisis: insecurity is widespread, as are human rights violations, and the humanitarian situation is alarming. The social fabric has been disrupted, further fuelling inter-communitarian tensions which are being politically exploited and which lead to "tit-for-tat" killings between the Christian and Muslim population.

Public institutions that were already weak and overstretched have ceased functioning. We are now facing not a failed state, but a vacuum where one can hardly say there is a state.

While restoring security is key to protecting the civilian population and stabilizing the situation in support of the political process, there is no military solution to this conflict. The current crisis stems from decades of lack of political consensus, daunting governance challenges, and an imbalanced socio-economic development.

The European Union has been actively engaged since the outset of the current crisis, in late December 2012, to contribute to preventing the outbreak of a full-fledged conflict.

After the violent seizure of power by Seleka rebel groups in March 2013, the EU supported regional and international efforts to find a political resolution to the crisis and help to stabilize the country.

The EU has responded swiftly and comprehensively to address the current crisis, in full support of the French intervention. Its response, which combines stabilization and development support, is a testimonial to the EU ability to quickly and adequately respond to the severe crisis with all of the instruments at its disposal. It comes in addition to the scaled-up humanitarian engagement

of the European Commission and the EU Member States (€76 m in 2013 compared to €20 m in 2012).

I would like to highlight three key elements which we consider essential for a way out of the crisis in CAR:

First, security must be re-established, starting from the capital and then gradually reaching out to the region. The EU fully supports the African force MISCA and welcomes the support provided by the French operation Sangaris to restore law and order, both in line with a UNSCR. We also appreciate the bilateral assistance provided by EU Member states.

Given the urgent priority of reestablishing a secure environment, the EU Foreign Affairs Council took a political decision on 20 January to begin preparations for an EU military operation in the Central African Republic.

The decision was taken in the context of the continued state of lawlessness and physical insecurity throughout much of the country, and the common desire to reinforce the security situation so that urgently needed humanitarian support can be delivered to those that need it. The EU operation intends to complement the ongoing efforts of MISCA and French forces. It underlines the willingness of the EU to respond in a comprehensive way.

I am glad that the UN Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2134(2014) on 28 Jan. which authorizes the EU operation in CAR. The AU has also welcomed an EU CSDP operation.

I am delighted as Greek Foreign Minister that the headquarters of this operation is in Larissa, where we have very close cooperation with the French forces that constitute the core of the operation.

Second, the recreation of a political process is essential. In this context, the appointment of new transitional authorities, after transparent consultations, and the balanced nature of the new government between different communities are positive signs. Furthermore, with the specific background of the Head of State of Transition in human rights work and mediation, she has a unique opportunity to advance the political transition process, bring all the parties together to end the violence, and move her country toward elections not later than February 2015.

The EU stands ready, in close coordination with its partners, to assist the new government in bringing the transition process forward. While elections are essential to restore legitimate authorities and constitutional order, the international response and mobilisation should go beyond, to ensure a sustainable resolution of the recurrent instability in CAR.

Third, these initiatives have to be combined with the humanitarian efforts to assist those in need. On 20 January, the UN and the EU chaired a High-level International Meeting which raised nearly US \$500 million for the humanitarian and development effort.

This is a positive development, but I must strongly underline that improving humanitarian coverage and re-launching development assistance are directly linked to positive developments in the security situation.

We believe speed is of the essence to support the new transitional authorities, to re-impose order and to put the political process back on track. We will continue to support the humanitarian, stabilization and political processes and contribute to paving the way to more sustainable development.

An essential medium- to long-term objective is the rebuilding of state institutions and to support longer-term socio-economic recovery, in the framework of a comprehensive state- and peacebuilding agenda.

With its long-standing relationship with the CAR and the instruments at its disposal used within a comprehensive approach, the EU has a real added-value in international efforts to stabilize the country and to support a lasting recovery.

## Reply

Thank you, Mr. President.

I want to express my warm thanks to all the honorable Members of the European Parliament who took the floor. Once again, the European Parliament expresses European sensitivities; belief in principles and values. In recent months, the European Parliament has dealt a number of times with the situation in the Central African Republic, contributing substantially to raising awareness in Europe and in global public opinion, as well, I would say, as to activating the mechanisms of the Council.

Ladies and gentlemen MEPs, the Central African Republic was for a very long time a forgotten crisis. The complexity of the problems the country is facing is obvious. It is important for the international community to continue to participate actively and in the long term, so that all of these problems can be dealt with; problems that are without question religious, tribal, ethnic, developmental, institutional; problems of a state that does not exist, of a society of citizens that must be consolidated. We are fully aware of these major contradictions that have to be settled in a peaceful manner, in a political manner.

It is of extreme significance that the Foreign Affairs Council decided to move and to organize a European operation within the framework of Common Security and Defence Policy. This is an important political decision; an important decision for the political entity of the European Union.

Many references were made to the fact that the EU battle groups mechanism was not used. There was extensive debate in the Foreign Affairs Council on this issue, because we are in fact aware that the battle groups are a capability that must be activated at some point. But the EU Military Committee itself assessed the situation and recommended that the Council not have recourse to the battle groups mechanism, because the characteristics of the battle groups are not compatible with the special conditions – military, political, social conditions – that exist in the Central African Republic. So the Council took the experts' opinion into very serious consideration; the opinion of the experts who could make an in-the-field assessment, based on professional military criteria.

On the other hand, it is also very important – and you will allow me to stress this for a second time – that we are hosting the operation for this team in a Greek city, Larissa, and it is there that the military personnel will be trained by a French commander. This is a move that symbolizes and expresses the joint action of the member states, and I think that it gives added value to this operation within the framework of Common Security and Defence Policy.

I would like to implore you to continue to express, on behalf of the citizens of Europe, our sensitivity to and interest in what is happening in this country, and not to let this crisis again become a forgotten crisis.

Thank you very much.