

missions. The *Inclusive Alliance Platform PAI-Terra Ranka*, led by the main opposition party, won an absolute majority. Assembly speaker Domingos Simões Pereira took office on 28 July 2023 and appointed a new government in August 2023. Throughout the Fall of 2023, the ANP and its standing committees sharpened the exercise of their oversight functions—empowered also by its twinning with the Portuguese Assembly—but without involving civil society. On 4 December 2023, after what was labelled a coup attempt, the President once again dissolved the ANP, which entailed the dismissal of the Government. In turn, the Assembly speaker accused the President of carrying out a "constitutional coup d'etat", since the Constitution bars dissolution of the ANP during the first year of its term.⁵ On 13 December 2023, police prevented members of the ANP from accessing the ANP premises, using tear gas to disperse the crowd gathering near the building. In January 2024, the President appointed a new government. A demonstration by the *Inclusive Alliance Platform - Terra Ranka* was planned for 8 January 2024, but security forces blocked off strategic areas of the capital, and dispersed citizens attempting to join the march, while the Interior Ministry has issued a press release banning all demonstrations in Guinea-Bissau.

The current President's 5-year-term lapses in February of 2025, but dates for the presidential election and for parliamentary snap elections, remain unknown in June 2024, including to the National Election Commission (CNE). However, the current government is updating the electoral roll and in January 2024 the President announced to the press that he would start consultations with the CNE – whose mandate however expired in April 2022 - to set the date for another ANP snap election. The judicial system is headed by the Supreme Court, appointed by the President, but the head of the Supreme Court resigned in November 2023 so that the court lacks a quorum in May 2024. Previous Supreme Court decisions to clarify separation and balance of powers in RGB's semi-presidential dispensation have not settled the recurrent clinch between the directly elected head-of-state and the legislature. The President is therefore now ruling by decree.

Local council elections (*autarquias*), mandated by the Constitution since at least 1996, never took place. Lack of elected local authorities means that citizens (and CSOs) do not have democratically legitimised and accessible channels to demand service delivery and budget allocations from central government, and no venues to influence political processes. This paradigm is compounded by limited CSO advocacy and public relations skills. Instead, CSOs have taken direct charge of the delivery of social services, in the fostering of social cohesion at local level and in influencing policy setting in several sectors (i.e. environment, gender, child rights, education, health, etc.). But CSOs still lack weight and assertiveness to influence national political processes, to open interfaces between citizens and the State, or to mediate among opposing actors involved in the political conflicts.

In terms of policy functions, however, donor-funded CSOs currently support development planning processes at local level. Strengthening CSOs means in this framework also strengthening the linkages between the State and political institutions and society at large, as strengthened CSOs can improve the relevance and effectiveness of public advocacy, strengthen the protection and the exercise of citizen rights and entitlements through advocacy and judicial review in the administrative court system and support the development of democratic policies by fostering capacity of the grassroots and of elected officials by facilitating access to information. CSOs strengthening is also critical to improve access to newly elected leaders and convey societal dynamics in the political arena, and foster the mediation of political conflicts by creating or managing spaces for political dialogue.

2.2 Problem Analysis

Guinea-Bissau has suffered recurrent political instability, short-lived elected government, internal armed conflicts and violation of human rights. Since the late 1980s, state capacity to provide services to citizens and to uphold good governance have gradually deteriorated to the extent that CSOs deliver most essential services, particularly in the rural areas. The situation has been improving in recent years but remains hampered by a weak public administration. The President, whose term lapses in February 2025, has dissolved the -, dismissed government, and appointed a new cabinet by decree. Lack of accessible venues, mechanisms and forums for CSOs monitoring of and inputting into governance processes hinders productive interaction between CSOs and state institutions.

Civil society:

In Guinea-Bissau, CSOs have been a key EU partner in a wide range of actions. A wide array of CSOs operate across the country, ranging from community-based organisations to local and thematic platforms, to about 100 active NGOs mainly working at regional level, and another large group operating at national level. CSOs have

⁵ Article 94.1 of the Constitution