1. Introduction
The objective of the fact-finding and study visit was to gather first-hand information to assist the JPA in its assessment of the security and political situation in Mali and of how it could support the political process underway, with a view to restoring normal constitutional life and re-establishing the Malian government’s sovereignty over the whole of its territory.

The visit took place from 5-7 March 2013. The delegation members held frank, in-depth discussions with Members of the National Assembly, representatives of the interim government at the highest level, political groups, associations representing the people of northern Mali, economic and social leaders, representatives of ECOWAS and the United Nations and diplomatic representations in Bamako.

2. Brief historical background to the current political crisis in Mali

Mali was once known for its exemplary democracy. Today many observers and some members of the Malian political class see it as a deeply weakened state having only the façade of a democracy.

The harsh conditions of life in the desert have brought all sections of society in northern Mali to a situation of potential intercommunal conflict. Armed clashes in 1963 and 1990 led to the signing of the Tamanrasset accords, which recognised the extreme deprivation of the northern regions and provided for a series of constitutional and administrative changes to take better account of the needs of the people living there. A lack of financial resources meant those changes were never able to be introduced, leading to a fresh Tuareg rebellion in 2006. A new peace agreement (the Algiers Accords) was signed, but its implementation has been delayed.

In January 2012, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (known by its French acronym MNLA), began attacking military barracks in Menaka, Tessalet and Aguelhoc. These attacks destabilised the Malian state and demonstrated the weakness of its disorganised army, which suffered major losses.

Frustration at this situation triggered a coup headed by Captain Sanogo on 22 March 2012, with three administrative regions in the north being occupied by various Islamist groups (Ansar Dine, MUJWA, AQIM). The coup was effectively brought under control by the international community, in particular by ECOWAS, which forced the coup leaders to establish a transitional government with the main task of restoring the constitutional order.

During the nine months of occupation, the armed groups committed numerous atrocities, often with the excuse that they were applying sharia law.

Following an abrupt resumption of hostilities and advances made by terrorist groups in the direction of Bamako, the Malian conflict entered a new phase with the French military intervention on 11 January 2013. Operation Serval allowed French and
Malian troops to halt the jihadists’ advance and to retake control of the main towns in the north, which had been in rebel hands since April 2012. The operation also sped up the deployment of the UN-sanctioned, African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA).

Many support bases and arms caches hidden in the mountains of the north-east still need to be dismantled, a difficult undertaking in what has become a guerrilla war.

3. Main subjects of discussion

a. The current situation in Mali
   
i) Political tensions

The coup in March 2012 had the effect of strongly polarising Mali’s political class between, on the one hand, coalitions of political parties and civil society organisations who supported the coup and, on the other hand, staunchly anti-coup political parties and groups. Other parties have taken a less trenchant position, seemingly wishing to remain above the fray.

Although the role of the former junta seems to be diminishing, this polarisation will no doubt have a strong impact on the upcoming election campaign.

There appears to be broad cross-party consensus on the need for elections to be held quickly, on the launching of a dialogue and reconciliation process, on the illegitimacy of the MNLA in that process and on the indivisibility of Malian territory.

Tensions have eased somewhat since the adoption of the roadmap for the transition, which is the key element on which the political parties and the government are focused as a way out of the crisis.

ii) Humanitarian crisis

The security crisis in the north and the deterioration in living conditions have driven many people to the south of Mali and into neighbouring countries, causing a major humanitarian crisis.

Mali is now home to more than 400,000 refugees and 300,000 internally displaced persons, who have urgent health and nutrition needs.

When the delegation visited a camp for displaced persons in Nyamana, on the outskirts of Bamako, the people from the north of the country who were at the camp, while grateful for the assistance given to them, expressed their desire to return home as soon as possible.
The delegation noted the measures being implemented by the Ministry of Territorial Administration to organise the repatriation of uprooted people as soon as the minimum requirements in the north are restored.

iii) Security considerations

- **International dimension of the crisis**

The security and institutional crisis in Mali has evolved and changed in nature. Whereas the 1990 conflict in the north was essentially a Malian conflict, the current crisis is the result of non-Malian movements, their initial allies, the MNLA, having been rapidly replaced by groups such as AQIM, MUJWO, Ansar Dine and MIA, which took advantage of the weakness of the central government to establish themselves in the north. The crisis then spilled out of Mali into the ‘sub-region’ and beyond.

Everyone the delegation spoke to expressed gratitude for the French military action, although they felt it had not received sufficient support from the international community. On the other hand, they failed to understand France’s attitude in the Kidal region, where its forces were collaborating with the MNLA. Everyone, including the associations in the north, viewed the MNLA as a terrorist group which should be dealt with accordingly.

The military operations need to be pursued to completion. The closure of the borders with Algeria and Mauritania is a great help, but an international military presence with a strong offensive component must remain until the Malian army’s capability is sufficiently built up across the entire country.

France announced that it would scale back its troop presence from April 2013, but that it would remain for as long as needed. The clean-up operations which it is conducting together with troops from Chad in the Ifoghas mountains have not yet finished.

As a first step, AFISMA troops should be deployed to maintain control in the country, in close cooperation with Malian, French and other troops. The mission already has close to 4200 men on the ground. At a donors’ conference on 29 January 2013 organised by the African Union, USD 455 million was pledged for AFISMA, but actual payment is still awaited.

- **Transforming AFISMA into a UN mission**

For purposes of coordination, funding and sustainability of operations, AFISMA should be rapidly transformed into a UN mission.

Most Malians the delegation spoke to were opposed to this idea, believing the mission had neither an appropriate mandate nor the capacities to complete the offensive operations which France was conducting. They feared that inserting a force between the Malian army and the rebel areas would consolidate the partitioning of the country.
The transitional government favours a UN mission, on condition that it is given a strong mandate and substantial resources.

- **Reform of the Malian army**

The Malian army is divided, decimated, poorly trained and politicised. The only operational units are at the front with the French forces. A new army capable of meeting the country’s needs must be created.

On 17 January 2013, the EU Foreign Affairs Council agreed to speed up the deployment of the EU Training Mission in Mali. That mission will have 450 staff and a 15-month mandate. In addition to training Malian troops and strengthening their military capabilities, the mission also aims to consolidate civilian authority over the military.

**b. Dialogue and reconciliation commission**

On 28 February 2013, the Malian National Assembly unanimously adopted a roadmap for the transitional period, which provides for the organisation of a national dialogue and reconciliation between all the political and economic stakeholders.

Mali’s highest authorities remained steadfast and unanimous on the conditions necessary for a productive dialogue: the laying down of arms, recognition of secularism and of Mali’s territorial integrity and the application of justice. This position is broadly shared by all non-state actors, who are agreed on the need for the dialogue to be as broad as possible. There have been calls for the dialogue also to address the issue of decentralisation, as provided for in the national constitution, while retaining a strong central power. The framework for the dialogue should include a timetable, indicators and procedures for implementing the results. The ECOWAS representative pointed out that the dialogue should be seen as a long-term process which would go beyond the elections to allow a democratic state to be re-established.

The Minister for Territorial Administration, Colonel Moussa Sinko Coulibaly, also stressed the importance of inter-community dialogue, given the deep trauma that the violence in the north had engendered among the population. The judiciary must seek the truth and be involved in this process to ensure that the dialogue is not used to justify impunity.

**c. Elections**

The National Assembly also approved the government’s proposal to hold the elections before 31 July 2013. That proposal is an integral part of the roadmap.

Certain actors have expressed doubts about the feasibility of organising elections so quickly. Nevertheless, all the political parties which the delegation met said that they were ready and willing to take part in the elections.
The interim President, Dioncounda Traoré, gave a firm indication to the delegation that he would not be standing in the presidential election.

As far as the head of the electoral commission, General Siaka Sangaré, was concerned, the holding of credible elections would help to restore the authority of central government.

And in order to be credible, the elections had to be organised in such a way that all voters had the opportunity to take part. Many of the people who the delegation spoke to pointed out that the Kidal region had still not been liberated.

The Minister for Territorial Administration told the delegation that a project to introduce a biometric voter registration system had been underway since 2009, with the aim of issuing photo voter cards with a unique identification number.

The minister highlighted the experience of the electoral commission (CENI) in organising elections, and felt that the challenges would be more to do with security than logistics. The minister and the CENI had agreed a timetable for the elections with the political parties. Once a final date for the elections was announced, the CENI could begin the process of inviting local and international election observers. The minister stressed that the minimum requirement for holding the elections was that they take place in all regions of the country. Displaced persons would be registered where they were and refugee populations abroad would also be able to vote. He said that the process had begun to restore the administration in the regions of Gao and Timbuktu, although progress was slow.

d. Economic development

The discussions highlighted the close link between economic development and security, on which point all the stakeholders agreed that poverty was a source of conflict, as had been shown by various events in northern Mali since independence, and conversely that sustainable economic development can only take place in a context of peace and security.

The development gap between the north and south of the country has been further accentuated by the current conflict, which has seen the total destruction of the existing economic and social infrastructure in the north. The return of uprooted people and their participation in the forthcoming elections are crucial for the credibility of the various votes.

However, that return is conditional on securing the liberated areas, re-establishing administrative structures and, in particular, restoring basic social services, as well as the resumption of development projects.

In general terms, the various parties appealed to Mali’s financial and technical partners to fully resume their development assistance, in which greater emphasis should be placed on the private sector.
e. Involvement of neighbouring countries – the regional dimension

The delegation and the stakeholders they met all took the view that even after Mali’s territorial integrity had been restored, a lasting peace would be hard to imagine without the active and coordinated involvement of the countries in the sub-region.

Given the porous borders, greater cooperation is needed not only among Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, but also with other countries of the Sahel-Saharan region (Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Libya, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, Chad and Tunisia) in order to wage an effective fight against terrorism and transnational crime.

To that end, in addition to a strengthening and more effective operationalisation of the Joint Military Staff Committee (CEMOC), other joint mechanisms for combating terrorism and crime could be developed.

Beyond the strictly security aspect, sub-regional cooperation should also include an economic component in order to support the recovery of productive and social sectors and help in the fight against poverty, which provides fertile ground for recruiting all kinds of extremist and criminal elements.

Cooperation could be implemented through regional organisations such as ECOWAS and CEN-SAD, or bilaterally between the countries concerned.

4. Observations and recommendations

It is clear that the elections will only take place if the Malian authorities, with the help of the international community, are in control throughout the country. To achieve that, the UN needs to get involved rapidly and with a strong mandate.

Strong political parties and a strong civil society are as important for the process of dialogue and national reconciliation as they are for the holding of transparent elections. They will be vital to the process of establishing a strong and responsible government. Security and logistical aspects are essential to ensuring that the elections are credible. To ensure that they run smoothly and that internationally recognised standards are adhered to, the participation of local and international observers and verifiers is to be strongly encouraged.

It is important that the national dialogue extends beyond the elections, that the new government is involved and, above all, that the process is far-reaching and decentralised. While stressing that the dialogue must be inclusive, the delegation recommends that the question of the MNLA be dealt with very carefully by the international community. The process of dialogue should also help to identify shortcomings in previous administrations and to pave the way for the future. Particular attention should be given to meeting the specific needs of the people in the north, not only in terms of infrastructure but also from the point of view of promoting and establishing a culture of democracy in these areas.
International assistance should be mobilised to help in the country’s recovery. In the first stage, it should comprise emergency aid for the immediate construction or reconstruction of infrastructure and the restoration of the administration in all parts of the country, and, in the second stage, support for economic development to facilitate the return of uprooted people and their participation in a revitalised economy.

Finally, a dialogue between the new government, the countries of the region and the regional organisations will need to be launched at the same time, to ensure that these countries provide support and cooperation as the process of reconciliation and reconstruction is carried out.
Mission d'information et d'étude du Bureau de l'Assemblée parlementaire paritaire ACP-UE à Bamako (Mali)
Programme

09.03.2013

Lundi 4 mars 2013

20.30 : Accueil de la délégation à l'aéroport par le Président de l'Assemblée Nationale, accompagné des Membres du Bureau et du Secrétaire Général, ainsi que du Cabinet du Président

Mardi 5 mars 2013

08.30-09.30 Réunion avec M. Richard ZINK, Chef de la délégation de l’UE, et les Ambassadeurs UE et ACP (Lieu : Hôtel Salam)

09.45-11.00 Audience avec M. Younoussi TOURE, Président de l’Assemblée Nationale, entouré de ses collaborateurs (Lieu : Assemblée nationale)

12.30-13.30 Audience avec M. Dioncounda TRAORE, Président de la République (Lieu : Base)

13.30-14.30 Déjeuner offert par M. Diango CISSOKO, Premier Ministre, Chef du Gouvernement (Lieu : Hôtel Salam)

15.15-16.55 Echange de vues avec les députés du Nord, COREN et autres associations du Nord (Lieu : Hôtel Salam)

17.10-18.00 Audience avec M. Tiéman Hubert COULIBALY, Ministre des Affaires étrangères et de la Coopération internationale (Lieu : Ministère des Affaires étrangères)
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<th>Mercredi 6 mars 2013</th>
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<tr>
<td>08.45-09.55</td>
<td>Réunion avec le représentant de la CEDEAO, Aboudou Touré Cheaka (Lieu : Hôtel Salam)</td>
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<td>10.00-11.00</td>
<td>Réunion avec les Ambassadeurs des Etats-Unis et du Canada (Lieu : Hôtel Salam)</td>
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<td>11.00-11.30</td>
<td>Réunion avec l’Ambassadeur de la Chine (Lieu : Hôtel Salam)</td>
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<td>11.45-12.00</td>
<td>Réunion avec le Chargé d’affaires de la Mauritanie (Lieu : Hôtel Salam)</td>
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<td>12.15-12.45</td>
<td>Réunion avec l’Ambassadeur de l’Algérie (Lieu : Hôtel Salam)</td>
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<td>13.00-14.30</td>
<td>Déjeuner offert par M. Younoussi TOURE, Président de l’Assemblée Nationale (Lieu: Hôtel Salam)</td>
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<td>15.00 - 16.15</td>
<td>Visite aux déplacés du Nord organisée par le Ministère de l’Action Humanitaire, de la Solidarité et des Personnes Agées</td>
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<td>16.45-18.30</td>
<td>Echanges avec les regroupements politiques (FDR, CSM, ADPS, MP22-COPAM, IBK Mali 2012 etc.) (Lieu: Hôtel Salam)</td>
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<th>Jeudi 7 mars 2013</th>
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<td>09.30-11.00</td>
<td>Echange de vues avec Aurélien Agbenonci, coordinateur résident des agences des Nations unies et Steven Siqueira, Chef de cabinet du bureau des Nations unies au Mali (Lieu: Hôtel Salam)</td>
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<td>11.00-12.20</td>
<td>Réunion avec la Coordination des Associations et ONG féminines du Mali (CAFO), le Conseil national de la société civile, le Conseil national des Jeunes du Mali, l’UNTM et la CSTM (Lieu: Hôtel Salam)</td>
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<td>12.20-13.00</td>
<td>Réunion avec l’Eglise catholique de Bamako (le Haut Conseil islamique du Mali et l’Association des groupements d’Eglises et Missions protestantes évangéliques au Mali étaient également invités) (Lieu: Hôtel Salam)</td>
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<td>13.00-13.45</td>
<td>Réunion avec la Chambre de commerce et d’industrie du Mali (Lieu: Hôtel Salam)</td>
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<td>14.30-15.30</td>
<td><strong>Rencontre avec le Ministre de l’Administration Territoriale et le Bureau de la CENI</strong> (Lieu : Ministère de l’Administration)</td>
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<td>15.30 -16.00</td>
<td><strong>Débriefing entre les membres de la mission</strong> (Lieu : Hôtel Salam)</td>
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<td>16.30 -17.15</td>
<td><strong>Entretien avec le Président de l’Assemblée Nationale</strong> (Lieu: Hôtel Salam)</td>
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<td>17.15-18.15</td>
<td><strong>Conférence de presse</strong> (Lieu: Hôtel Salam)</td>
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