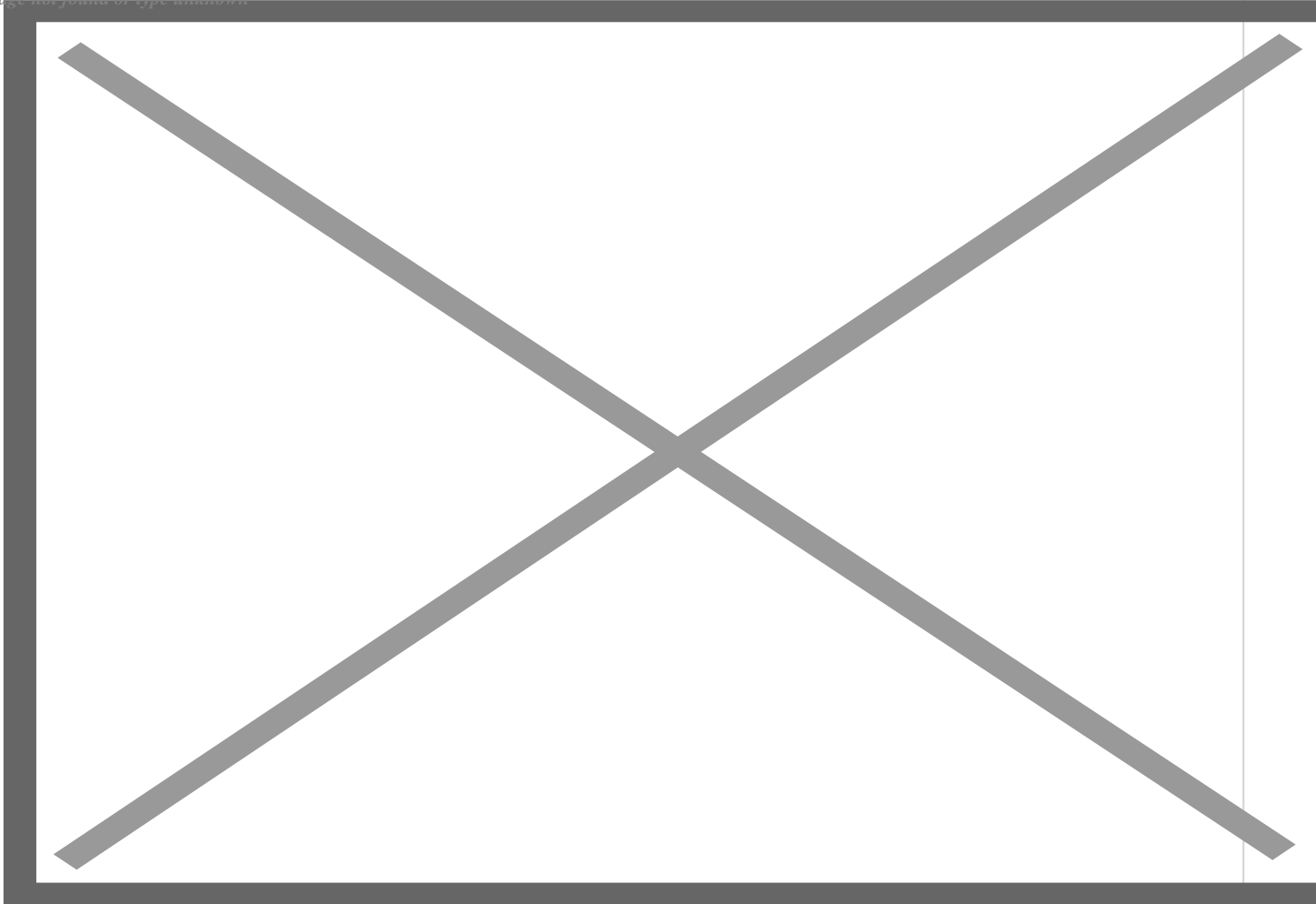


West African leaders lift economic sanctions on Mali

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Leaders from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) gathered to assess efforts to secure timetables for restoring civilian rule in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso.

Accra, July 4 (RHC)-- Leaders of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have lifted economic and financial sanctions imposed on Mali, after its military rulers proposed a 24-month transition to democracy and published a new electoral law.

The bloc had imposed stiff sanctions on Mali in January after the military government said it would not organise democratic elections the following month as initially planned.

ECOWAS Commission President Jean Claude Kassi Brou told a news conference on Sunday that the sanctions will be lifted immediately. Borders with Mali will reopen and regional diplomats will return to Bamako.

“However, the heads of state decided to maintain individual sanctions, and the suspension of Mali from ECOWAS, until the return to constitutional rule,” Kassi Brou said.

The individual sanctions targeted members of the ruling military government and the transitional council. Sanctions have crippled Mali’s economy, raising humanitarian concerns amid widespread suffering. The country has defaulted on more than \$300m of its debt due to the sanctions, which cut it off from the regional financial market and the regional central bank.

The ECOWAS mediator in Mali, former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan, visited the country last week. A member of his entourage told AFP news agency that Mali had made “enormous progress.”

Mali’s top diplomat Abdoulaye Diop on Friday said the recent political developments were moving the country towards a lifting of the sanctions.

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