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EU Halts C. Africa Army Training Over Wagner Influence

By AFP

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EPA

The European Union has suspended a military training mission in the Central African Republic over Russian mercenary outfit Wagner's alleged "control" over the country's armed forces, a commander said Wednesday.

The United Nations and France say the private security force has provided backing to the CAR army in repelling rebels who tried to advance on the capital, allegations Moscow denies.

The suspension comes just days after European foreign ministers slapped sanctions on Wagner, and weeks after UN experts urged the Central African Republic to cut ties with the group, accusing it of violent harassment, intimidation and sexual abuse.

"Due to the control exerted by the mercenaries of the Wagner group over the CAR armed forces, the European Union, keen to respect international humanitarian law, has decided to

temporarily suspend training," General Jacques Langlade de Montgros, the commander of the EU training mission told AFP.

"These mercenaries train the CAR armed forces and use them in their operations," he said.

"The temporary suspension of our operations aims to avoid any overlapping with these mercenaries and ensure they do not use the Centrafrican soldiers we have trained."

Some 70 European instructors have returned to their home countries for the time being, he said, but training could resume "as soon as we have assurances that the Centrafrican soldiers will not be used by the Wagner mercenaries."

Moscow has said there are 1,135 "unarmed instructors" in the CAR, supporting the beleaguered government of President Faustin Archange Touadera.

France and the United Nations say some of them are from the Wagner group, but Russia has denied this.

The CAR — the second poorest country in the world, according to UN figures — has been ravaged by a civil war since 2013.

The level of fighting has fallen off since 2018, though many parts of the country still escape state control.

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