

12th Annual Joint Consultative Meeting Between the AUPSC and EUPSC

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Tomorrow (26 October), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to hold its 12th annual joint consultative meeting with the European Union (EU) Political and Security Committee (PSC). The session is expected to take place through VTC.

The respective chairpersons of the two bodies, namely the Chairperson of the PSC Ambassador Osama Abdelkhalek and the Permanent Chair of the EUPSC Ambassador Sofie From-Emmesberger, are set to deliver the opening remarks. The Commissioner for Peace and Security Smail Chergui and EU representative are scheduled to address the joint consultative meeting.

The PSC and EU PSC joint consultative meeting is convened on a yearly basis, aimed at facilitating dialogue between the organs on topical thematic and conflict specific agendas of common interest. The AUPSC and EUPSC have held annual joint consultative meetings in the context of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy, since their inaugural meeting in 2008. Starting from 2015, the joint consultative meetings are preceded by joint informal retreats aimed at creating the opportunity for an informal engagement to facilitate more constructive dialogue and convergence of approaches.

Given that the two bodies were unable to hold the annual joint consultative meeting in 2019, the convening of this year's meeting carries its own significance. It signifies continuing interest on both sides to maintain the regularity of the consultative meeting.

Throughout their meetings over the years, the AU PSC and EU PSC have addressed various thematic and country specific peace and security concerns in Africa. Some of the thematic topics that featured on the agenda of previous consultative meetings include unconstitutional change of governments, election management, migration, and the spread of terrorism and violent extremism in Africa. Conflict specific agendas of previous meetings addressed conflicts in countries such as Libya, Sudan, South Sudan, CAR, Somalia and the Sahel region. In addition, key collaborative issues are also discussed at these meetings such as the importance of sustainable financing of AU-led peace operations and the need for enhanced AU–EU partnership in maintaining peace and security and boosting development in Africa, particularly by supporting conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

Over the 12 years of their joint collaborations, the AUPSC and EUPSC have also introduced the conduct of joint field missions to particular conflict settings. In 2015, the AUPSC and EUPSC also undertook a joint field mission to Mali. The mission focused on consultations and discussion on finding lasting solutions to the political and socio-economic crisis in Mali. Subsequently, in March 2018, they undertook a joint field visit to CAR, in the context of the AU-EU common agenda for sustainable stabilisation of the situation in CAR.

The 11th Annual Joint Consultative Meeting took place in October 2018, in Brussels, Belgium. At their last meeting in 2018, the AU PSC and EU PSC were able to address multiple issues with a particular focus on the situations in Mali/Sahel, South Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, CAR and DRC.

This year the agenda is expected to focus only on three country/region specific issues: Mali/Sahel, Somalia and Sudan. In preparation for this year's meeting, three preparatory meetings and consultations have been held in the course of this month, two at the ambassadorial level and one at the level of the PSC Committee of Experts. These preparatory

meetings reflected on the issues of interest on the agenda items to be considered during the consultative meeting and identified the speakers from members of the AUPSC designated to speak on the three agenda items.

On the situation in Mali/Sahel Ambassador of Ghana Amma Twum-Amoah and Ambassador of Algeria Salah Francis Elhamdi will make presentations on behalf of the PSC. With regards to Mali and the Sahel, some of the key points raised in the 2018 AU PSC- EU PSC consultative meeting were the continued spread of terrorist attack in the Sahel region with a concerning spill-over effect from northern Mali to the central parts of the country as well as neighbouring States, mainly Burkina Faso. They also discussed the importance of supporting G5 Sahel Joint Force and ECOWAS led efforts, through mobilising political support from regional and international actors to follow up on the pledges and through ensuring greater ownership of initiatives by countries of the region.

As the following years demonstrated, the terrorism situation in Mali and the Sahel region in general have deteriorated further. The heightened increase in terrorist attacks in the region in 2019 has rendered the border area between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger into major crisis hotspot. A discussion on the situation in Mali at the 12th consultative meeting of the AUPSC and EUPSC is expected to highlight the efforts deployed towards the establishment of a civilian led transitional government in Mali after the 18 August military coup that ousted Ibrahim Keita and the state of the transition since the establishment of the transitional government. Apart from supporting the transition, the meeting is also sure to reflect on the need for adhering to the Malian Transitional Charter, the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement of and the key ECOWAS decisions and the terms of the last AUPSC communique on Mali.

On Somalia three presentations are expected from the PSC side: Ambassador of Djibouti, Ambassador Mohamed Idriss Farah,

Ambassador of Lesotho Mafa Mosothoane Sejanamane and Ambassador of Ethiopia Tesfaye Yilma.

In relation to Somalia, the main points noted during the 11th consultative meeting were the continued Al-Shabaab threats to the security situation; the adoption of the Somali Transitional Plan (STP); the need for a reconfigured AMISOM to move towards the gradual handover of security responsibility to the country's security institutions as well as the need for enhanced support to the Somalia National Army as to prepare it to take over security responsibilities from AMISOM; and the importance of collaboration between FGS and FMS for the success of Somalia's security sector reform.

While Al-Shabaab continues to pose serious threat as its various attacks have shown, new threats in the form of desert locust invasion and flooding (threats impacting most of the horn region currently) have compounded the security crisis in Somalia and the horn of Africa during 2020. Together with the COVID-19 pandemic, these conditions have worsened the humanitarian situation. On the other hand, despite some progress registered in terms of the process of AMISOM's handover of responsibilities and in the political situation in Somalia, the level of preparedness of Somali Security Forces and the relationship between FGS and FMS remain at best work in progress. A major recent positive development was the agreement among Somali political actors on the modalities for the election.

A country situation which was not a topic of discussion at the 2018 AUPSC-EUPSC joint consultative meeting but that will feature in tomorrow's meeting is Sudan. Three PSC members are expected to deliver presentations: Ambassador of Kenya Catherine Mwangi, Charge D'Affair of Nigeria Richards Adejola and Ambassador of Egypt Osama Abdelkhalek.

The situation in Sudan has been among the most dominating topics in the agenda of the AUPSC throughout 2019 and to some

extent in 2020. Major points of discussion expected to feature during the consultative session include the peace process notably, the peace agreement signed between the transitional government and major rebel groups, the socio-economic reconstruction of Sudan and the humanitarian situation resulting from heavy flooding. Of major concern for the Sudan transition has been the country's continued designation by the US as a state sponsor of terrorism. In this respect, the announcement by the US Government for delisting Sudan from the list of states sponsors of terrorism offers the unique opportunity for supporting the transitional process more robustly.

The expected outcome is a joint communiqué. On Mali/Sahel the two organs may commend the work of ECOWAS in mediating and facilitating political dialogue. It may welcome the recent developments in the formation of a transitional government in Mali and the importance of maintaining the civilian nature of the transition and respect the provisions of the Malian Transitional Charter. They may underline that the fight against terrorism should be accompanied with addressing the root causes of conflict and instability and improving governance in Mali and the Sahel region. On Somalia the communiqué may welcome the progress made towards the preparation of the upcoming election and the dialogue between the FGS and FMS. It may express concern over the continued security challenges in the country and underline the importance that the drawdown of AMISOM should be based on the security realities of the country. On Sudan AUPSC and EUPSC may welcome the positive developments in the signing of the peace agreement and they may call on the remaining non-signatories to join the peace process. Welcoming the decision of the US to delist Sudan from the list of sponsors of terrorism, they may also urge for enhanced economic support to address the severe economic challenges facing Sudan.