

14th Annual Consultative Meeting of the AUPSC and EUPSC

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Tomorrow (03 May), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the European Union (EU) Political and Security Committee (EUPSC) will convene their 14th annual joint consultative meeting, preceded by the 6th joint retreat taking place today. The EU will be hosting this year's round of meetings, which will be taking place in Brussels, Belgium.

The joint consultative meeting between the AUPSC and EUPSC has been taking place since the inaugural meeting held in 2008. Convened within the framework of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy, the annually convened joint consultative meeting of the two organs mainly serves to discuss thematic and conflict related agendas of common interest.

Chairperson of the AUPSC and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Uganda to the AU, Ambassador Rebecca Amuge Otengo and the Permanent Chair of the EUPSC, Ambassador Delphine Pronk are expected to make opening remarks to start off the 14th consultative meeting. This year's meeting is expected to address three region specific situations of concern in Africa. These will be situations in the Great Lakes Region (GLR), the Horn of Africa and the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin (LCB).

Sahel and LCB

The situation in the Sahel and LCB was one of the agenda items that featured in the previous joint annual consultative meeting. On this specific item, it is expected that Senegal

will take the lead speaking on behalf of the AUPSC while Morocco, Nigeria, Cameroon and Tunisia will be supporting speakers.

The Sahel region continues to experience complex security and humanitarian crises. Terrorist groups have continued to stage string of attacks in Burkina Faso, including the most recent attacks that claimed the lives of 44 civilians in north-eastern part of the country, near the Niger border. The attacks against civilians by various armed groups has intensified in the country. On 20 April, the UN has reported the killing of 150 civilians by armed men in uniform. Similarly, in Mali, civilians continue to be targets of terrorist attacks. The UN Secretary-General's latest report ([S/2023/236](#)), which was presented to the Security Council on 12 April, characterized the security situation in Mali as 'volatile' with surging clashes between non-state armed groups, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin, mainly in the Gao and Menaka regions.

The protracted and deadly conflicts involving terrorist groups and the compounded effects of climate change, socio-economic and governance challenges have unleashed a dire humanitarian crisis. According to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, over 24 million people in the Sahel needed assistance in 2022, which is estimated to be six million more than in 2021. While the humanitarian needs are high, a concerning trend is the limited humanitarian access and the dwindling resources for assistance that hinders the delivery of assistance to vulnerable populations and exposes humanitarian personnel to high risks.

In terms of the threat of expansion of conflicts involving terrorist groups, one of the most worrying trends is the geographic spread of the insecurity from the Sahel to the littoral states of West Africa. This has triggered the establishment of the Accra Initiative. In December 2022, the

62nd Ordinary session of ECOWAS Summit, highlighting the urgent need for 'more effective coordination and structured harmonization of the different counter-terrorism initiatives in the region', agreed to establish a regional force to combat terrorism and deter unconstitutional changes of government. The envisaged regional force will be an additional arrangement to the already existing plethora of multilateral security frameworks, including the G5 Sahel Joint Force and UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

The two sides are also expected to discuss the transitional processes towards restoration of constitutional order in Mali and Burkina Faso. It is to be recalled that the PSC for the first time held an informal consultation with countries affected by coups and held exchanges with representatives of these countries, including Burkina Faso and Mali on 26 April. This is the first encounter for the PSC to have direct engagement with these countries and may inform PSC's approach to the discussion on the transitions in these two Sahelian countries.

The complex security situation in the Sahel is further compounded by the deepening geostrategic tension playing itself out in this region. While there are various factors for the major diplomatic breakdown between Mali and France, the emergence of the Wagner Group as the preferred security partner of Mali as Mali kicks out France and cancels longstanding security agreement with France and the Group's involvement in Burkina Faso have transformed the Sahel into a major theatre of geostrategic rivalry. This geostrategic tension has come to increasingly affect regional and international diplomatic efforts for stemming the tide of increasing insecurity in the region. It has eroded trust between these countries and countries in the region and is one of the factors that soured relations in G5 Sahel leading to Mali's withdrawal from it.

Against the background of the foregoing, the consultative meeting is expected to discuss not only the current state of the security situation but also how best the two Councils work together to address the challenges facing regional and international peace and security diplomacy in the region including the issues that have put the future of the UN Mission in Mali on the balance and how to lesson, through the provision of effective multilateral security partnership, the dependence of Sahel countries on the Wagner Group that is having its heavy toll on civilians and may further undermine regional security in the long term. In the medium to long-term, it is expected that the two sides would indicate their expectation to get useful strategic guidance from Joint Strategic Assessment being undertaken by the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel led by former President of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou and which was formally launched by AU, UN, ECOWAS, and the G5 Sahel in September 2022.

The second aspect of the agenda is the situation in the Lake Chad. While the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) plays a critical role in the fight against terrorism in the region, violence against civilians has increased steadily over the past year. As of January 2023, the crisis in the region has affected 11 million people depending the humanitarian crisis including four million facing severe food insecurity and more than 2.5 million displaced population. Despite the dire needs, humanitarian action continues to face challenges not only in relation to access but also due to decreasing humanitarian funding, which may in part be due to the large-scale commitment of resources to the crisis in Ukraine including resources that would otherwise have been used for meeting humanitarian needs in other settings. In 2022, in the Lake Chad, only 55% of the required funds were received to provide humanitarian assistance to affected population.

Beyond the military response to the threat of terrorism,

responding to the broader challenges requires development and humanitarian interventions. Towards providing a more sustained response and in terms of addressing the immediate and long-term needs, the implementation of the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region (RSS) remains critical.

Similarly, the third high level conference on the Lake Chad held in Niamey in January 2023 further reinforced the importance of complementarity of various actions and interventions and called for a harmonized response supported by humanitarian, stabilisation and development actors.

Horn of Africa

With respect to the Horn of Africa, Uganda will be taking the lead in delivering PSC's intervention while Djibouti, Namibia and Zimbabwe will assume supportive role representing the AUPSC. As the consultative meeting is happening at the time when the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) marked the first anniversary of its operation in April, the PSC and EUPSC may take the opportunity to evaluate the progress and challenges of the mission over the last one year.

The 'Somalia-led and owned offensive' against Al Shabaab since August 2022 has registered notable military and political gains. While Somali local militias or community defence forces along with Somali Security Force (SSF) take the lead in the offensives, the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) not only provided critical logistical support but also carried out successful joint kinetic operations with the SSF as part of the execution of its mandate pursuant to PSC communique 1068 (2022) and the UN Security Council Resolutions 2628 (2022). Al Shabaab has come under enormous pressure and suffered military defeats, particularly in Hirshabelle and Galmudug states, with its operational capability degraded and control of several towns and villages lost to the SSFs. This

also paved the way for the handover of Forward Operating Basis (FOBs) as part of the security transition in line with the ATMIS Concept of Operations (CONOPs) and the Somalia Transition Plan (STP). The first of FOBs handover took place in January when ATMIS transferred Maslah FOB to the federal government.

EU being the main financial contributor to ATMIS, the consultative meeting is likely to focus on the funding shortfall that the mission has continued to face as well as the financial implication of the delay of the 2000 troops drawdown until 30 June 2023. The funding shortfall of ATMIS for 2022 was around €25.8 million (US\$32 million). The shortfall has considerably increased for 2023, standing at US\$89 million. In March of this year, Bankole reportedly [appealed](#) to bilateral and international partners to help fill the indicated shortfall, further warning that if ATMIS does not have the funds to operate effectively in the coming months before the scheduled handover of security responsibility to SSF in December 2024, 'it may mean that al-Shabaab will eventually take over the responsibilities of a state in Somalia.' It is worth underscoring that much of the success that AMISOM /ATMIS registered in Somalia owes its main resource base to the funding that the EU provided under the now defunct Africa Peace Facility. This has developed, by any standard, to be one of, if not the most successful, peace and security partnership with AU and EU complementing each other harnessing their comparative advantages. There is growing concern in EU about heavy dependence on its resources and the lack of similar commitment and contribution from others. The EU has also been encouraging the AU to make at the very least symbolic financial contribution towards PSOs. While the AU has initiated processes highlighting its commitment to make financial contributions through the revitalization of its Peace Fund, this has as yet to be translated into committing symbolic financial contribution demonstrating burden sharing in the financial sphere. Of course, beyond funds, one thing

that is not adequately highlighted but worth mentioning in terms of AU's contribution to international peace and security is its enormous burden sharing through its peace support operations, which pay through lives and limbs as well as the various social and other costs resulting from loss of such lives and limbs.

The peace process in Ethiopia, particularly the implementation of the Pretoria Agreement, is also expected to feature in the consultative meeting. Apart from the encouraging progress made in silencing the guns, reports from recent engagements from various international actors with and media reports of the interim administration of Tigray major remaining issues include addressing the enormous needs of people affected by the war for humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation support and the remaining challenges of the departure of forces other than the Ethiopian army from Tigray.

The conflict in Sudan is expected to be the other item expected to dominate the consultative meeting. The ongoing fighting that broke out on 15 April in Khartoum between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is claiming the lives of hundreds of people, destroying civilian infrastructure, and leaving millions of people stranded without adequate access to amenities and necessities. Wide range of actors are putting diplomatic pressure on the two conflicting parties to commit to a ceasefire and immediately resume dialogue, but fighting has continued to escalate, risking a full-blown civil war. In a conversation with Mo Ibrahim on 29 April, the former Prime Minister of Sudan warned that the conflict in the country could become worse than the civil wars in Syria and Libya. The concern about this grave risk is very legitimate given existing faultlines, fragility of state institutions and the huge risk of the conflict becoming a site of regional and global geostrategic confrontation as different foreign parties take sides as the war becomes protracted.

Considering the enormous humanitarian consequences of this fighting and the frightening implications of its continuation, the most urgent imperative the consultative meeting is sure to focus on is how to secure effective ceasefire and launch peace talks for a permanent cessation of hostilities. While the phone calls and statements to the two sides continue to be made by regional and international actors, the AUPSC and EUPSC are expected to take stock of the state of the diplomatic efforts and how best to bolster and sustain these efforts further and to seek ways and means of creating conditions for delivery of humanitarian assistance in Sudan.

Great Lakes Region (GLR)

Burundi will be taking the lead in relation to the GLR on behalf the AUPSC while Tanzania and South Africa will play supportive role on the file. With the full revival of the March 23 Movement (M23) in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the GLR has been experiencing heightened insecurity and increasing humanitarian crisis. The tension between DRC and Rwanda which ignited over Rwanda's alleged support to the M23 rebel group has been escalating throughout the last few months of 2022 and early 2023, with little to no progress attained in restoring diplomatic relations between the two countries. Despite fortified regional efforts to respond to M23 insurgency and activities of other armed groups in eastern DRC including the deployment of the East African Community (EAC) regional force, conflict between M23 and the Armed Forces of DRC (FARDC) remains unresolved. However, the intensity of fighting seems to have faded and some territories have been handed by the M23 to the EAC force. There is however increasing hostility against the EAC force from DRC. This has recently led to the resignation of the Force Commander of the EAC Force who accused Kinshasa of undermining the mission. Welcoming advances made through the military intervention deployed by the EAC and expressing support to the Nairobi and Luanda processes, the AUPSC and EUPSC may emphasise the need

for fortifying efforts geared towards political solution of the crisis in eastern DRC and stress the importance of strengthening mediation to restore diplomatic relations between DRC and Rwanda.

Another pertinent issue that requires attention is also the coming general election in the DRC which is scheduled to take place in December 2023. Months from the commencement of the elections, DRC President Tshisekedi has conducted reshuffling of government, appointing his former Chief of Staff as minister of economy and former vice president Jean-Pierre Bemba as defence minister. Tshisekedi's suggestions in early March of possible delays to the elections in eastern provinces due to insecurity has already provoked criticism from the prominent opposition leader, Martin Fayulu. Voter registration was also extended by the Electoral Commission on 15 March. Noting these developments, the two counterparts may emphasise at the coming consultative meeting, the need to ensure political tensions over the timely conduct of the general elections do not further compound the already complex security situation in the country.