

6th Informal Joint Retreat of the AUPSC and EUPSC

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Tomorrow (02 May), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the European Union (EU) Political and Security Committee (EUPSC) will convene their 6th informal joint retreat, which will be followed by the 14th annual joint consultative meeting to be convened on 03 May. This year's joint retreat is expected take place in Brussels, Belgium.

The practice of convening an informal joint retreat ahead of the annual consultative meeting of the AUPSC and EUPSC was institutionalised starting from 2015. Since then, the two counterparts have regularly held these retreats which are meant to facilitate constructive dialogue by presenting the platform for consultative engagement based on identified thematic issue(s). The coming informal joint retreat is expected to feature two agenda items. The first one will be global peace and security concerns, with a focus on issues surrounding multilateralism. The second agenda item will focus on the financing of AU Peace Support Operations (PSOs), including through access to UN assessed contributions.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, the world today faces complex challenges that necessitate joint action and multilateral solutions. Arms proliferation, transnational organised crimes, spread of terrorism, climate change, global economic shocks and cybersecurity are some of the security threats that have clear transboundary effect and cannot be effectively addressed in the absence of a well organised global approach. Despite this, we witness growing scepticism about multilateralism with nationalist sentiments and

individualistic tendencies increasing globally. While this trend started a while ago, it became particularly acute during the COVID-19 pandemic during which some parts of the world such as Africa were left to fend for themselves despite the mantra 'we are all in this together'. The rise of protectionism and the failure of advanced countries to show solidarity by sharing essential medical supplies including therapeutics and vaccines and vaccines technology blew a major blow to people's faith in multilateralism. The situation was further aggravated by the lack of collective action that fairly responds to the socio-economic fallouts that the pandemic triggered. As if these were not enough, the war in Ukraine and the responses it triggered added a more dangerous dimension with economic shock waves and deepening big power confrontation threatening to plug the world into further division and even a nuclear catastrophe. All of these and the various other conflicts in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa highlight not only the failure of the prevailing multilateral system to deliver on some of its most basic roles and the need for its urgent transformative reform. Questions such as how to make the multilateral system more inclusive and representative (for example through the reform of the archaic and increasingly failing UN Security Council), how to ensure consistent and effective collective enforcement of international norms and how to achieve the call of Secretary General for a new Bretton Woods moment and the enhancement of the role of regional organizations are some of the issues that are of pressing concern for this first agenda item of the 6th informal joint retreat.

One of the key issues in this regard that may receive some attention at tomorrow's informal joint retreat is the use of sanctions and coercive measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. While the use of Chapter VII to impose sanctions has to an extent been an effective tool for maintaining international peace and security, both sanctions under Chapter VII and more so unilateral sanctions have also lately come

under criticism for having counterproductive impact on nations' ability to effectively defend themselves and pursue their development agendas. For the AU, as elaborated in the outcome of the 35th Ordinary Session of the Assembly [[Assembly/AU/Res. 1\(XXXV\)](#)], unilateral coercive measures and sanctions have proven not only to have 'disproportionate and indiscriminate human cost', but also impede on the right to development particularly by constraining trade and investment relations and negatively impacting post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts. Additionally, given the major reversals being experienced in the state of peace and security both in Africa and globally, it may interest for tomorrow's informal consultation that the AUPSC and the EUPSC explore ways of enhancing effective conflict prevention and peaceful resolution of disputes through diplomatic and other means within the framework of Chapters VI and VIII of the UN Charter (on 'Pacific Settlement of Disputes' and 'Regional Arrangements', respectively) as critical measure for restoring the effectiveness of the multilateral system to meet the promise of the UN Charter to 'save succeeding generations from the scourge of war'.

Aside from these issues, it is also possible that EUPSC members will make remarks regarding the war in Ukraine, within the framework of the agenda item on global peace and security concerns. It is to be recalled that the EU proposed to discuss the Ukraine war as one of the agenda items of the previous joint retreat. However, on the side of the AU, the topic was considered to be beyond the mandate of the PSC for discussion at the joint retreat. Eventually, the lack of agreement on the inclusion of a reference became a deal breaker as the annual consultative meeting ended without the adoption of a joint communique. Discomfort on the part of AU member states on the matter still persists and it would be interesting to see if the convening of the meeting in Brussels will lead to the inclusion of a language on the war in Ukraine.

The other agenda tabled for the AUPSC-EUPSC informal retreat is the perennial issue of financing of AU PSOs, which is not actually totally separate from the first agenda. AU PSOs serve and contribute to the global public good of maintaining international peace and security. It is this recognition of the role of AU PSOs that led to the establishment by the EU of its most celebrated financial instrument – the Africa Peace Facility. This facility more than any other served as the fuel critical to both the establishment and effective take off of the African Peace and Security Architecture and the launch of over a dozen peace support operations that tremendously contributed to the maintenance of international peace and security, albeit at heavy loss of the lives of PSO personnel which only African troop contributors are willing to bear. The lack of effective, predictable and sustainable funding has severely undermined the use of AU PSOs. The resultant vacuum that this situation has left has led to not only the proliferation of poorly functioning, military heavy, ad hoc and politically expedient self-defence based operations but also the increasing resort of countries seeking robust security cooperation to private military companies. These are developments that not only take place with little regard to multilateral frameworks but also in the case of the Wagner Group in a manner that undermines various tenets of multilateralism.

The discussion on the agenda is coming on the heels of the adoption of the African Consensus Paper on predictable, adequate, and sustainable financing for the AU peace and security activities by the AU Assembly at its 36th ordinary session held in February of this year. On 28 April, the UN Secretary-General also released the much-anticipated report on progress made towards the fulfilment of commitments set out in UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions 2320(2016) and 2378(2017), which were adopted to advance the issue of sustainable and predictable funding for AU PSOs using UN assessed contributions.

Members of the EUPSC are likely to be interested to get clarity on what AU's 25 percent commitment to the PSOs means as envisaged in the Consensus Paper. It is to be recalled that the AU Assembly agreed to cover 25 percent of its PSOs budget in January 2015 as part of the effort to take charge of its own budget. According to the Concept Note, it appears that the commitment is not to cover 25 percent of the total budget of PSOs but to dedicate the same percent of AU's annual budget to cover the 'preparation stage' of AU PSOs while expenses required for the 'employment and post-employment stages' of the PSOs are expected to be covered by the UN through its assessed contribution.

The Consensus Paper further explains activities that fall within the category of 'preparation stage' stating that the 25 percent of the Union's annual budget will cover costs related to strategic planning, mission specific pre-deployment training, mission-specific technical assessments and fact-finding missions, recruitment and selection process of mission personnel, pre-deployment verification of personnel and equipment, negotiations and signing processes for the MoU between the AU and Police/Troop Contributing Countries (P/TCC), negotiations and signing processes for AU-Host Country Status of Forces/Mission Agreements, negotiations and signing processes for Letters of Assists between the AU and Countries Contributing capabilities for AU-Led PSOs.'

In terms of the operationalization of the AU Peace Fund, the PSC members may also highlight the commitment the AU Assembly displayed at its 36th ordinary session in February of this year, where it decided to the immediate use of the Peace Fund and its Crisis Reserve Facility to support the deployment and operations of East African Community regional force in eastern DRC, as well as to contribute towards filling the financial gap in ATMIS.

The informal retreat is also an opportunity to assess the

status of the implementation of the tripartite AU-EU-UN project on AU Compliance and Accountability Framework (AUCF). Launched in November 2022, the project aims to enhance AU's capacity to ensure that its PSOs are continuously planned and conducted in compliance with international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as well as applicable standards of conduct and discipline. Given that the compliance issue was one of the sticking points during the negotiation to adopt UNSC resolution on financing AU PSOs in 2018 and 2019, the work undertaken under this project is expected to strengthen AU's position in the negotiation expected to resume this year. The informal meeting serves as an occasion to build and renew the consensus for access to UN assessed contributions for AU PSOs authorized by the UNSC.