

Briefing on Early Warning and Continental Security Outlook

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Tomorrow (26 July) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1013th session to receive briefing on early warning and continental security outlook.

The session starts with the opening remarks of the Chairperson of the PSC for July, Victor Adekunle Adeleke. This is followed by a briefing that AU Commissioner for Political Affairs and Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye presents to the Council on the agenda of the session.

Since the adoption of its decision at its 360th meeting held in March 2013 to review (at least biannually) the state of peace and security on the continent, using horizon scanning briefing from the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the Council has dedicated some sessions on this theme, with the most recent being the 901st meeting held in December 2019. The discussion in tomorrow's session is likely to proceed in two segments.

The first segment of the discussion is expected to focus on the continental early warning system with particular emphasis on the role of the Committee of Intelligence and Security Service of Africa (CISSA) within the context of enhancing the conflict prevention capacity of the AU Commission and the PSC. It is to be recalled that the AU Assembly Decision 62 of June 2005 endorsed the establishment of CISSA and directed that the Committee collaborate with AU and all its organs notably the Commission and the PSC.

The major value of CISSA in early warning and understanding the security outlook of the continent is the fact that it brings intelligence-based data with the potential of

bolstering the information and analysis from the CEWS. However, the extent to which this potential of CISSA will enhance better understanding of threats and early response depends on intelligence sharing among CISSA members and availability of reliable way of relaying intelligence-based data for AU decision-making on peace and security. While it may not be feasible to rely on intelligence for country specific situations relating to governance related security challenges, CISSA's intelligence based assessment can be particularly useful with respect to transnational threats involving terrorism and organized crimes.

Apart from the role of CISSA, a broader discussion is expected on the role of the CEWS in providing systematic monitoring and analysis of peace and security threats in the continent. The tracking and analysis of relevant governance and peace and security trends by CEWS is used to regularly provide tailor made updates to concerned AU Commission structures. This helps to inform whether, how and what kind of early warning the AU Commission initiates.

Despite progress made in the institutional operationalisation of the CEWS, there remain various challenges limiting its effectiveness. At the operational and institutional level, one such challenge is the disconnect between early warning and early response. At the root of the creation of the early warning system is to enable decision-makers take early measures against a looming crisis before it evolves into a full-blown conflict. Practice over the years reveals the serious limitation in translating early warning information and policy recommendations into effective early action by AU. Two main challenges can be raised in this regard.

One of the main challenges comes from member states themselves. As member states often invoke their sovereignty or deny brewing crisis, the political space is shrinking for the Council to engage at the early stage of the crisis. During its 669th meeting held on 21 March 2017, the Council expressed its

'concern over the continued cases of denials to objective/credible early warning signals of looming crisis, thereby undermining the conflict prevention capacity of the Council'. If this challenge is left unattended, not only it compromises the mandate of the Council but also puts its credibility on the line.

The second challenge is lack of effective flow of information between the early warning mechanism and the PSC. CEWS produces variety of outputs to facilitate anticipation and prevention of conflicts and enable decision makers to develop appropriate strategies to prevent or contain conflicts. Yet, most of the outputs including the early warning report rarely reaches members of PSC. As a recent PSC document notes the Council 'has not always worked closely with PAPS department in getting up-to-date early warning data'. In light of this challenge, the AU master roadmap calls for regular early warning briefings 'strictly to the PSC members' as one modality to establish a clear channel of communication on early warning reports to the PSC. In this context, building both formal and informal communication channel between CEWS and the Council that would facilitate a direct and regular engagement remains extremely important. In addition, as emphasized by the Conclusions of the Cairo Retreat of the PSC, the call for regular meetings/briefings between the PSC and the Chairperson of the Commission and the Commissioner for PAPS deserves attention. Moreover, institutionalizing the breakfast briefings and luncheons for members of the Council could be another avenue to enhance rapport and close working relationship between the Commission and the Council, which is key for facilitating conflict prevention measures.

There are also other sources of early warning and preventive action whose role stands to enhance effective early warning and response. Apart from the AU Commission Chairperson, those that the PSC Protocol contemplates to play role in this respect include the RECs/RMs, the African Commission on Human

and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), the Panel of the Wise and civil society organizations. It is imperative to strengthen cooperation and information sharing not only with these actors specified in the PSC Protocol but also with the CISSA and the African Peer Review Mechanism, whose roles in this regard the PSC has recognized over the years.

The other issue of interest to the Council is the implementation of the Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework (CSCPF) and its tools of the Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment (CSVRA) and Country Structural Vulnerability Mitigation Strategies (CSVMS). Endorsed by the Council in 2015, the framework and its tools aim to strengthen the capacity of member states to identify and address structural vulnerabilities at an early stage and design mitigation measures. As a voluntary mechanism, it is critical that political buy-in of member states is enhanced so that more member states undertake the assessment. In this respect, the close working relationship between the CEWS and the APRM, which is assigned in facilitating conflict early warning, would be useful.

The second segment of tomorrow's PSC session involves the reactivation of the horizon scanning briefing that presents updates on the continental security outlook. The idea behind the horizon-scanning briefing is to bridge the gap between early warning and early response by providing the Council with required periodic information and analysis for preventive measures. The horizon scanning briefing can present the overall trends in threats to peace and security on the continent and specific country situations exhibiting risks of eruption into major conflicts. The overall trends worth paying attention to include, among others, the spread of terrorism and violent extremism, deterioration in democratic governance involving election violence and unconstitutional changes of government, rising incidence of protests and riots and intercommunal violence particularly involving herders and

farmers. In terms of effective use of the horizon scanning briefing, it is critical that there is clarity on how it highlights specific country situations requiring conflict prevention intervention. Previous experiences of the Council indicate that the briefing focuses on thematic issues such as emerging security threats and root causes of conflicts, but rarely discusses emerging country specific situations.

Given persisting political sensitivity and reluctance for country specific focus, it will be of interest to members of the PSC to achieve common understanding on the methodology and criteria to be used, the threshold to be met and the imperative for consistency. As custodian of the AU norms including the PSC Protocol with a responsibility for ensuring their implementation, it is also critical that the AU Commission guides PSC members in the Council's consideration of country specific situations based on objective and verifiable analysis.

The expected outcome of the session is a communique. The Council is expected to commend the Commission for the positive steps taken towards strengthening the continental early warning system and its collaboration with RECs/RMs as well as the role of CISSA. In connection with RECs/RMs, the Council may further follow up on the AU Assembly decision during its 33rd Ordinary Session held in February 2020, which requested the PSC to take appropriate action and put in place a 'format of interaction' to address early warning and early response issues. On CISSA, the Council is likely to stress the importance of enhancing coordination and collaboration between CISSA and the Council, as well as between and among the national intelligence services of member states, with the view to facilitate well informed and intelligence-driven early action by the Council. In relation to early warning and early response in general, the Council may reiterate its call for the implementation of its previous decisions in bridging the huge gap between early warning and early response including

through the conduct of early warning and horizon-scanning briefing at least once every six months. In addition, the Council may request the Commission to institutionalise and/or strengthen communication channels between the Commission and the Council through in particular sharing of early warning reports, Breakfast and Luncheons briefings, and regularizing the meeting between the Chairperson of the Commission, Commissioner for PAPS, and the PSC in line with article 10 of the PSC protocol. On denialism and political will of member states, the Council is likely to echo its 901st meeting where it encouraged member states to 'guard against denialism to credible early warning signs of looming crisis' and cooperate with the PSC and RECs/RMs in their endeavor to discharge their mandate of conflict prevention and peace making. Apart from this, the Council is also likely to call up on the Commission to operationalize the different decisions including those relating to the role of the ACHPR and the APRM as highlighted in the communique of the 866th and 953rd sessions of the PSC. Following up on the Conclusions of the Cairo retreat, the Council may further request the Commission to 'elaborate the mechanism and indicators for consideration by the PSC' within the context of operationalization of the CEWS. The Council may encourage the engagement of CSOs on the basis of Article 20 of the PSC protocol and the Maseru Retreat of the PSC. The Council is likely to encourage member states to make use of the available tools of the CEWS most particularly the CSVRA and CSVMS and close coordination between CEWS and APRM in implementing CSVRA.