

Briefing on the situation in CAR

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Tomorrow (13 June) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1157th session to consider the current situation in Central Africa Republic (CAR).

Following opening remarks by Sophia Nyamudeza, Permanent Representative of Zimbabwe and Chairperson of the PSC for the month of June, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye is expected to make a statement. Representative of CAR, as the concerned country and representatives of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the United Nations (UN) are also expected to make statements.

The last time the PSC met to discuss the situation in CAR and the operations of the AU Military Observer Mission to the Central African Republic (MOUACA) was at its 1116th session held on 31 October 2022. PSC members welcomed the progress made towards the implementation of the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the CAR and the roadmap adopted by ICGLR in support of this Agreement. With respect to MOUACA whose full operationalisation could not be realised, the PSC decided at the 1116th meeting for the initiation of gradual drawdown and closure of the mission as its mandate becomes integrated within the AU Mission in the Central African Republic (MISAC).

The PSC meeting tomorrow, among other things, is expected to follow up on the progress made since its previous session in terms of the implementation of the 2019 Political Agreement

and the ICGLR roadmap. On 4 June 2022, a strategic review meeting took place in Bangui in the presence of the Angolan and Rwandan foreign ministers, as well as other international and regional partners, to take stock of the progress and challenges in this regard. This was followed by a series of coordination meetings that took place under the chairmanship of CAR Prime Minister Félix Moloua with the objective of accelerating the implementation of the roadmap.

On 14 September 2022, the government and the representatives of armed groups that are signatories to the political agreement discussed the possible dissolution of these armed groups. Subsequently, CAR President Faustin-Archange Touadéra presided over a ceremony held on 6 December 2022 to mark the dissolution of four armed groups that are signatories to the Political Agreement. However, there has not been much progress in engagement between the government and other armed groups, particularly the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC), the main coalition of armed groups in the CAR.

There are indeed growing concerns about the increasing military activities of armed groups with the onset of the dry season and the tensions along the border particularly with Chad and Sudan. On 9 February 2023, Angolan President João Lourenço who is the current chair of ICGLR, hosted President Touadéra and Transitional Chadian President Mahamat Idriss Déby in Luanda where the two leaders agreed to work together to address security issues between their countries. The PSC had underscored the need to address the situation of the leaders of the CPC present in Chad in order to find a rapid solution and, following the Luanda meeting between Touadéra and Déby, former CAR president François Bozizé, who leads the CPC left N'Djamena for Guinea-Bissau.

In January 2023, Sudan announced that it was closing its borders with CAR because of concerns over unnamed actors operating on the Sudanese side of the border to plot regime change in the CAR. The situation is now much more complicated

with the ongoing fighting in Sudan and the influx of refugees and returnees to the CAR. According to OCHA, 13,824 people, including 3,456 Central African returnees have crossed the border into CAR because of the fighting, and this number is expected to rise. The northeast part of CAR depends on Sudan for supplies, but border traffic is reportedly disrupted due to insecurity and this has significantly increased the price of basic commodities, according to OCHA. With CAR's western partners having suspended financial aid over the regime's involvement with Russia, the economic and humanitarian situation is made worse as CAR is unable to mobilize funds for filling in the resultant financial shortfall.

The other issue expected to receive attention during tomorrow's session is the electoral preparations that are underway. CAR is expected to hold local elections for the first time since 1988. The first round of local elections is set to take place on 16 July and the second round on 15 October. However, the CAR government is facing a budget shortfall in organizing these elections and the PSC had directed the AU Commission to continue to provide the necessary support for the success of this electoral process, including the possibility of allocation of resources from the Peace Fund. Other partners appear to be reluctant to provide funding because of concerns that the money might be used to organize a constitutional referendum that is being planned by the CAR government. The prime minister is said to have assured the UN that local elections will not be combined with any eventual referendum on the Constitution.

The issue of the constitutional referendum was raised at the republican dialogue that was convened by the CAR government from 22 to 27 March 2022. The proposal was for a revision of the constitution to lift the two-term limit of the president but this was rejected by the opposition and civil society representatives. Although the proposal was excluded from the final report of the republican dialogue, the CAR government

established a committee in August 2022 to draft a new constitution. The current constitution, adopted in 2016 following popular consultations, does not allow the president to run for a third term and the CAR Constitutional Court declared the review process unconstitutional and invalidated the decree establishing the drafting committee and the government's decision in September 2022. Subsequently, President Touadéra removed the president of the Constitutional Court, Danièle Darlan, in October 2022.

Regarding MOUACA whose operation has been terminated in line with the communiqué of PSC's 1116th meeting, it may interest the PSC to follow-up on the progress made in the integration of its key mandates within the framework of activities undertaken by MISAC. At the 1116th session, the PSC decided to dispatch a 'Multidisciplinary Mission comprising technical experts, including members of the Military Staff Committee (MSC) and human rights specialists' to liquidate MOUACA and strengthen MISAC to implement MOUACA's mandate. In addition to its core purpose of monitoring, evaluating and supporting the overall implementation of the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in CAR, MOUACA was also tasked with assessing progress of the activities of the Joint Special Security Units (USMS) and contributing towards efforts in the areas of protection of civilians and protection of resources necessary for CAR's economic recovery. MISAC has been facing challenges related to shortage of resources and the requisite technical capacity over the past many years. Tomorrow's briefing presents the PSC the opportunity to receive updates in respect to addressing challenges facing MISAC.

The UN Security Council is expected to extend the 2127 CAR sanctions regime in July. In connection with the sanction on CAR, the PSC already expressed its support for the lifting of the arms embargo imposed on CAR. Last year, the Security Council further eased the arms embargo by providing some exemptions but five members (China, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, and

Russia) abstained on the vote. Next month, the CAR government supported by the three African members and other like-minded members such as Russia and China are likely to push for the lifting of the notification requirement similar to what the Security Council did in December 2022 regarding the 1533 Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) sanctions regime. The Chair of the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Harold Agyeman (Ghana) has visited the country last week to engage in discussion with the CAR authorities and other relevant stakeholders in relation to the implementation of the sanctions regime.

The expected outcome of the session is a Communiqué. The PSC may welcome steps taken towards implementing the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in CAR and call on all CAR stakeholders to be part of the agreement and advance its full realisation. The PSC may in this regard note the need for enhanced support to MISAC for its effective role in carrying out the mandates of the former MOUACA, specifically in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Political Agreement. It may also welcome preparations being made to organise local elections for the first time in decades and call on the AU Commission to support the CAR for the successful conduct of the election in a credible and transparent manner and in CAR's efforts to mobilize the requisite funds for conducting the elections. The PSC may express concern over increasing tensions and military activities, particularly in border areas, threatening the relative stability the country has experienced in recent years. It may further note the destructive potential of a constitutional referendum that does not have the full support of all relevant actors and is contrary to democratic principles and in light of that, it may encourage the CAR government to refrain from making moves that may destabilise and lead the country backward. The PSC may also express grave concern over the worsening humanitarian and economic crises in CAR and appeal to the international community to extend

assistance. The PSC may welcome the visit that the Chair of the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Harold Agyeman (Ghana), undertook to the CAR. Reiterating its earlier call for lifting of sanctions on the CAR, the PSC may call on the UNSC to lift the notification requirement.