

# Briefing on the situation in Central African Republic and Operation of MOUACA

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Tomorrow (25 July) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene its 1093<sup>rd</sup> session to consider the situation in Central African Republic (CAR), with a focus on the operation of AU Military Observers Mission to CAR (MOUACA).

Following opening remarks by Abdi Mahamoud Eybe, Permanent Representative of Djibouti to the AU and Chairperson of the Council for the month of July, Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security is expected to deliver a statement. Ambassador Bertino Matias Matondo, Special Representative of the AU Chairperson (SRCC) for CAR and representative of the Economic Community of the Central African States (ECCAS) are also expected to deliver statements. The representative of CAR is also expected to make a statement as a concerned country. Representatives of the Multidimensional Integrated Mission for the Stabilization of CAR (MINUSCA) and the European Union (EU) are also expected to make statements.

It has been a year since the Council convened a dedicated session on CAR despite the request made at its 936<sup>th</sup> session, for the AU Commission to provide regular reports, at least every three months, on the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in CAR (PAPR-CAR). It is to be recalled that the last time the PSC met to discuss CAR was at its 1011<sup>th</sup> meeting held on 21 July 2021, where the

Council considered the report of its field mission to CAR conducted from 27 June to 01 July. The field mission took place after the holding of the presidential and legislative elections that were marred by violence and contention.

Tomorrow's session will address two broad issues. The first of this is the state of the situation in the CAR. Indeed, considering the fact that the PSC did not consider the situation for a year, tomorrow's session affords the opportunity to review developments in the situation in the CAR since its last engagement in the context of its field mission. The second issue that tomorrow's session will address concerns AU's role in supporting peace and security in the CAR, including the status and operation of the MOUACA.

In terms of the situation in the CAR, it is to be recalled that one of the major challenges that the PAPR -CAR has faced has been the return of some of the armed groups to fighting and the emergence of new armed groups in the context of and after the elections of December 2020 that were marred by violence. After the establishment of the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) in December 2020, an umbrella body of six armed groups (also signatories of the peace agreement) with strong backing from former President François Bozizé, the CAR has plunged into violent conflicts, as the CPS launched attacks capturing territories in parts of the country. In the course of 2021, three trends emerged in terms of the response of the government established after the December 2020 elections. The first trend involves the launching by national defense forces of a military offensive, with support from foreign troops deployed on bilateral arrangements, against the various armed rebel groups. Although not successful in substantially reversing and containing the armed rebel groups, the offensive became one of the factors in weakening of the armed rebel groups including the CPC.

However, the military operation and the fighting involving armed rebel groups have led to reports of violations against

civilians, further exacerbating the suffering of ordinary people. According to the latest report of the United Nations Secretary-General on CAR, as of June 2022, 374 security violations have been recorded. The majority of the 374 violations were targeted at civilians (284), followed by violations related to restrictions of movement (41), illegal military activities (31) and obstruction of State institutions, humanitarian organizations or the United Nations (18). Anti-personnel mines and other explosive weapons against civilians is another challenge in the country. For the PSC, one of the issues of particular importance is the need for military operations to comply with AU norms on the protection of civilians and respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.

The second trend involves the mobilization of regional engagement and support for the peace process in the CAR. This involved the adoption by the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) of a road map at a meeting of the ICGLR held in September 2021. The joint road map the ICGLR leaders adopted to revitalize the peace process, among others, called for the declaration of a ceasefire by the Government and reaffirmed the continued consultations of the Heads of State and Government of ICGLR with leaders of the armed groups for a total renunciation of violence. This led to the announcement by CAR President in October 2021 of a unilateral ceasefire. Considering the contribution of the Luanda Roadmap for peace in CAR and the need for ensuring complementary implementation with the PAPR -CAR, a strategic review was launched by the President with a view to combine the implementation of the PAPR-CAR with the Luanda Roadmap. Subsequently, on 15 July the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Strategic Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation/Security Sector Reform and National Reconciliation adopted a decision for the establishment of a coordination mechanism chaired by the Prime Minister and Head of Government.

The third trend relates to efforts for peace and reconciliation in the country. Parallel to the military offensive, President Faustin Archange Touadera launched the Republican Dialogue in an attempt to breathe some life into the peace process. Following the establishment of the organizing committee for a republican dialogue in June 2021, the dialogue was inaugurated on 1 September 2021. While the CPC affiliated armed groups were excluded, the dialogue brought together various political and security actors. Yet, progress in undertaking the republican dialogue has been slow and marred by contentions over inclusivity and withdrawals of key stakeholders from the process. Thus, despite the convening of the dialogue from 21 to 27 March 2022, several opposition groups and parties announced their withdrawal from the dialogue. Notwithstanding the resultant fragmentation and contentions surrounding the dialogue including the attempt of the members of the President's party to have a proposal removing the two-term limit of the president removed from the Constitution included as part of the recommendations of the dialogue, the final report of the republican dialogue, which included 217 recommendations, was submitted to the President on 19 April. Subsequently, a presidential decree on the establishment of the committee for implementation and monitoring of the recommendations of the dialogue has been published. For members of the PSC, a major issue of importance is the need for achieving consensus among the major political and social forces in the country on the recommendations if the dialogue is to achieve the objectives of national reconciliation and consolidating peace.

Overall, these various developments removed attention for much of 2021 and early 2022 away from the PAPER-CAR. The UN in its various reports highlighted that implementation of the Political Agreement registered marginal progress. Some progress has been registered during 2021 particularly in the areas of disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation and continuing efforts to operationalize the

special mixed security units. Progress was also observed in the area of the socioeconomic provisions of the Agreement, with the development of a toolbox with support from World Bank for monitoring the implementation of projects related to the National Plan for Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan, including the delivery of peace dividends. In August 2021, the 11<sup>th</sup> session of the PAPR-CAR Executive Monitoring Committee (EMC) was held and resolved to hold the meeting every three months, to set up a coordination unit of the PAPR-CAR. Subsequently, the EMC held its 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> sessions on 14 February and 25 May 2022 respectively, which among others, highlighted the need for establishment of consultation mechanism for the implementation of the PAPR-CAR and Luanda Roadmap.

It is worth noting that global geopolitical tensions have found expression in the CAR. This is particularly associated with the presence of Russian forces. In this context, CAR has come to suffer some consequences of the mobilization of sanctions and other diplomatic measures against Russia after its invasion of Ukraine, notably in terms of suspension or delay in delivery of aids and support to the country.

The second aspect of tomorrow's session will focus on the role of the AU on the ground. This relates to both the AU Liaison Office in CAR and MOUACA. Despite its continued efforts to ensure effective engagement of the AU on the ground, the AU Liaison Office in Bangui faces serious financial and human resource constraints which continue to hamper its functioning, a point well emphasized by the PSC at its 1011<sup>th</sup> session. It is also to be recalled that the AU, the main guarantor of the PAPR-CAR, deployed MOUACA, to support and monitor the implementation of the PAPR-CAR. It is to be recalled that, the PSC at its 936<sup>th</sup> session held in July 2020, authorized MOUACA and endorsed the operation for the period from 1 September 2020 to 31 October 2022. Despite the fact that the challenges in the theatre of operation led to the reduction of the

initial force size of 49 military officers of MOUACA to 34, realizing the operationalization of the mission proved difficult. It was reported that this was on account of challenges relating to modalities in how finances are released, COVID-19, the dependence of MOUACA on receiving protection from CAR forces and logistical and security issues affecting the construction and servicing of sites for housing MOUACA as well as lack of support from MONUSCO.

MOUACA's deployment was based on funds from the European Peace Facility (EPF) and the current funding for MOUACA is envisaged to run until 31 July 2022. The lack of progress in the effective operationalization of MOUACA and the limited amount of funds absorbed by the mission have raised major question mark on the chances of extension of the EPF funding to MOUACA. It would thus be of particular importance for members of the PSC to know the measures that can be implemented for ensuring both the effective operationalization of MOUACA and the extension by the EU of the EPF funding beyond 31 July.

The other issue expected to receive attention during tomorrow's session is the lifting of the arms embargo imposed on CAR by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The embargo has since 2013 been extended regularly and is currently in force until 31 July 2022. In this regard, the PSC underscored in the Communiqué of its 1011<sup>th</sup> session, the need for the lifting of the arms embargo to enable the country to build the required capacity of the CAR defence and security forces, in order to enable them to more effectively discharge their constitutional mandate of defending the country. Similarly, at the UNSC meeting held on 22 June 2022 on CAR, Gabon on the behalf of the A3 echoed the need to lift arm embargo and call for international support for CAR Government efforts to strengthen its management system for weapons and munitions.

The PSC in tomorrow's meeting might also be keen to receive an

update on the state of the preparations for local elections, initially expected to be held in September 2022 for the first time in more than 30 years. On 16 March, the National Electoral Authority announced the postponement of the first round of local elections, scheduled for September 2022 owing to a lack of resources and the delay in the adoption of the law on the delimitation of administrative districts. Similarly, the humanitarian situation in the CAR, exacerbated by the volatile security situation and incidents of violations and fighting, will also received attention during tomorrow's session.

The expected outcome of the session is a Communiqué. The PSC may pay tribute to ECCAS, ICGLR, MINUSCA and other international stakeholders for their steadfast efforts to promote peace and reconciliation in CAR. The PSC may welcome the Luanda Roadmap and reaffirm the PAPR-CAR as the only peace framework and the Joint Roadmap being the vehicle for revitalizing its implementation on the basis of the coordination mechanism chaired by the Prime Minister. The PSC may express its concern over the recent flare-up of security tension and express its concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation. The PSC may also condemn the CPC's action on targeted attacks against civilians and MINUSCA which amount to deliberate violations of human rights, war crimes and crimes against humanity and complete violation of commitments made by CPC while signing of the PAPR-CAR. It may urge all security forces to fully observe and comply with standards and measures for protection of civilians and ensuring respect for human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL) and call on CAR to put in place an independent mechanism for monitoring and investigating reports of violations of human rights and IHL by security forces operating in its territory. The PSC may urge the armed rebel groups to abide faithfully by the commitments made in the PAPR- CAR and ensure its full implementation to contribute to lasting peace and stability in the country. It may welcome the

conduct of the republican dialogue, appeal to the government and opposition groups and parties to achieve consensus on the implementation of the recommendations of the dialogue. The PSC may also reiterate its request for the AU Commission to provide regular reports on the implementation of PAPR-CAR as necessary means for it to discharge its mandate in supporting the CAR and in supporting the AU Commission in implementing its measures. The PSC may once again express the need to lift the arms embargo imposed on CAR by the UNSC. The PSC may underscore the importance of local elections and encourage CAR to create the necessary conditions to undertake the local elections and in this regard may request the Commission to provide all the required support. On MOUACA, the PSC may request that the AU Commission requests extension of the financial support to the mission for a further period based on implementable plan that address the challenges impeding effective operationalization of MOUACA. With regards to the AU Liaison Office in CAR, Council may reiterate the call made at its 1011<sup>th</sup> session, for the Chairperson of the AU Commission to “urgently take necessary measures to ensure that the Office is availed with all necessary capacity, in order to enable it to more effectively discharge its mandate, including supporting the implementation of the 2019 Political Agreement”.