

Consideration of report on the political transition in Chad

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Tomorrow (03 August) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1016th session. PSC will consider the report on the progress on the implementation of the political transition in Chad on the African Union Support Mechanism (AUSM).

This first session of the month will have two segments. During the first and partially open segment, it is envisaged that following opening remark of the PSC Chairperson for August, Cameroon's Permanent Representative to the AU, Churchill Ewumbue-Monono, and a statement by the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Bankole Adeoye, the AU High Representative for Chad and Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission, Basile Ekouebe; Representative of Chad as the country concerned; Congo as the Chair of Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); ECCAS Secretariat; Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), Mamman Nuhu; Representative of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD); Representative of the G5 Sahel Force; and Head of the European Union (EU) Delegation to the AU, Birgitte Markussen will make statements reflecting their respective perspectives on the agenda of the session. Following deliberation among PSC member States and consideration of key elements for the outcome document during the second and closed segment of the session, August's Chairperson, Churchill Ewumbue-Monono will deliver closing remarks.

This session is a follow up to the PSC's request of the

Chairperson of the Commission (at its 996th meeting held on 14 May this year) to report to it by the end of June 2021 on developments in Chad in general, and in particular, the work of the AUSM. The AUSM has been established in line with the PSC's request of the Chairperson to set up the same with the aim to facilitate and coordinate the efforts of the AU High Representative and development partners towards providing 'comprehensive and sustained support to the transition process in Chad'.

During its last meeting on Chad (996th session), the Council requested, among others, the completion of the transition to democratic rule within 18 months, effective from 20 April 2021; assurances that the Chairman of Transitional Military Council (TMC) and its members do not run in the upcoming national elections; and the urgent revision of the Transition Charter. The Council also requested Chadian authorities to 'urgently establish the National Transition Council' to serve as interim legislative body with a clear mandate to draft a new 'people-centred constitution'. It further requested that 'inclusive' and 'transparent' national dialogues and reconciliations are conducted and investigations in to the killing of the late President Idriss Deby expedited. The report on the AUSM is expected to highlight developments towards the implementation of these measures, and the work undertaken by the AUSM to support Chadian authorities in this respect.

On several occasions, the leadership of TMC has vowed to comply with the 18-month timeline to organize national elections and hand over power to the democratically elected government. However, in his rare interview with a Jeune Afrique magazine in June, the leader of TMC, Mahamat Deby, 'did not rule out' the possibility of extension of the 18 months deadline attaching the elections on two conditions. The first is that 'Chadians are able to agree to move forward at the planned pace' and the second is that partners help Chad to

‘finance the dialogue and the elections.’ To allay concerns about their future plans, in a statement made on 20 May, the TMC members and its leader affirmed that they are not taking part in the upcoming elections in adherence to the PSC’s direction. There is the issue of whether members of the civilian members of the interim government are eligible to the presidential and legislative elections in late 2022. Unless the issue is clarified as part of its amendment, the transitional charter in its original terms does not seem to envisage such restriction, thereby leaving the option open for Prime Minister Albert Pahimi Padacke and his cabinet comprising 40 Ministers and deputy Ministers to run for the 2022 elections.

The National Transition Council, the legislative body of the transition, is not yet in place. However, the TMC has formed a committee of TMC leadership and representatives of main political parties with the task of appointing members of the future transitional council. Another issue that would be of interest for PSC members is to ensure that the national council is inclusive with its members drawn from a wide spectrum of the society representing the various political and social sectors of the public.

The 93-member transitional council is responsible for drafting a ‘new people-centred constitution’ and overseeing the revision of the transition charter, together with the interim government. The delay in its establishment also stalls the process of drafting a new constitution and revision of the existing transitional Charter, as required by the PSC at its 996th session. In accompanying the transition, AUSM prioritizes the revision of the Charter to ensure that there is a clear separation of role between TMC and interim government as outlined in the 996th session; the eligibility/non-eligibility of members of interim government and TMC are clarified; and the duration of the transition period is clearly provided with no possibility of extension.

With respect to the convening of national dialogues and reconciliation as directed by the PSC, a new Ministry of Reconciliation and Dialogue, a portfolio handed to a political and military figure Acheick Ibn Oumar, was established in May. Other encouraging developments observed include the release of high-profile detainees such as Timam Erdimi (son of former rebel leader) and Baradine Berdei (human rights activist detained since January 2020) and the legalization of the opposition party Les Transformateurs (The Transformers). However, the process has not yet begun. In this respect, the AU can play a big role in supporting Chadians to convene genuine and inclusive national dialogue and reconciliation to address issues of national concern.

Another issue the Council is likely to follow up during tomorrow's session is its request for the appointment of a High Representative. In June, the AU Commission Chairperson appointed Ibrahima Fall of Senegal as High Representative. The TMC leadership declined to accept the appointment, hence Fall was unable to take up his assignment. Such rejection happened for the second time in less than two months. It is to be recalled that Somalia rejected former Ghanaian President John Mahama as AU's High Representative back in May. There are media reports that Chad's rejection has to do with issues of consultation. Unlike the High Representative, Chairperson's appointment of Basile Ikouébé of Congo as the Special Representative and Head of the AU Liaison Office in Chad—who previously served in the same position for the Great Lakes Region—seem to have gone smoothly.

The report is also likely to give an overview of the situation in Chad. There are two main developments of interest to the Council in this respect. The first is the internal situation including the intrastate conflict between Chadian authorities and rebel groups, which significantly subsided in recent months. Reports indicate that rebels' capability is degraded after Chadian army military engagement. Meanwhile, Togolese

authorities managed to convene series of meetings between the TMC and four rebel groups including the Front for Change and Concord in Chad, otherwise known in its French acronym as FACT, in an attempt to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. The efforts have so far failed, as the position of rebel groups seem 'irreconcilable' with Chadian authorities for the time being. It is also worth noting that one of the opposition parties, the Transformers, and CSOs held rallies in late July against 'usurpation of power' by TCM. There were similar protests in April and May.

The second is the inter-state deadly skirmish between Chad and Central African Republic (CAR) in late May. The incident reportedly happened when CAR armed forces were pursuing rebels into the Chadian territory, resulting in the death of Chadian soldiers. Tension escalated quickly, but eventually the two countries agreed to establish an 'independent and impartial international commission of inquiry' composed of representatives from AU, ECCAS and the UN to clarify the circumstances surrounding the 30 May incident. The two neighbouring countries have experienced recurring tension for quite some time, and as such, the establishment of the commission of inquiry can serve as an opportunity to resolve the tension between the two countries beyond the incident.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a communique. On the transitional process, the PSC is likely to welcome the progress made thus far such as the formation of a committee for constituting the membership of the national transitional council. Given that many of the important actions are still pending, the Council is expected to urge Chadian authorities to make tangible progress in this regard. Apart from calling for speedy appointment of members of national transitional council, the PSC may in this regard underscore the need to fast track the revision of the transitional charter and the drafting of the constitution as well as the convening of an inclusive and genuine national dialogue. The Council is also

likely to reemphasize the need to comply strictly with the 18-month timeframe for the transition and for members of the TMC to abide by their commitment not to run in the upcoming elections. On the security front, the Council may echo the 4 June Declaration of the summit of ECCAS on the political situation in Chad, which expressed concern over the threat of mercenaries in the region and calls for an international mechanism to manage the withdrawal of mercenaries and foreign fighters engaged in Libyan conflict to avoid destabilization of Chad and the broader region. The Council is expected to commend Togo for the diplomatic efforts to bring Chadian authorities and rebel groups to the negotiating table, and may encourage Togolese authorities to step up the effort. Regarding Chad-CAR relations, the Council may welcome the agreement to establish an international commission of inquiry to investigate the late May incident and further encourage both parties to strengthen security cooperation around border areas. The Council may express its expectation that the AU Commission working with Chad proceeds with the implementation of its decision on the appointment of the AU High Representative for Chad.