

Informal consultation on countries in political transition

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Tomorrow (21 December), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will hold an informal consultation with the representatives of Member States currently undergoing political transitions, namely Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso.

This marks the second instance of the PSC deploying the format of informal consultation pursuant to article 8(11) of the PSC Protocol, Rule 16 of its Rules of Procedure, and article 25(3) of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG). The informal consultation affords the PSC the opportunity for direct engagement with Member States suspended from AU activities due to unconstitutional changes of government (UCG) for discussing the transition and the process towards restoration of constitutional order and civilian rule. The first such consultation was held on 26 April of this year, during which the PSC interacted with representatives of Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Sudan. It is noteworthy that this consultation did not result in a formal outcome document. Tomorrow's informal engagement is expected to take stock of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of key transition activities in the three countries, and exchange on how to enhance the progress in the transitional process.

On Guinea

PSC's last engagement on Guinea was during the informal consultation in April. Subsequently, PSC had planned to undertake a field mission to Guinea in August and receive an

updated briefing on the political transitions in Guinea and Mali in September, as outlined in its program of work. However, neither the field mission nor the updated briefing session occurred as originally planned.

In October 2022, ECOWAS and Guinea's transition authorities agreed on a two-year transition period after intense negotiations, with the election expected to take place at the end of next year. PSC, at its 1116th session, welcomed the agreement reached on the timeline, urging all stakeholders for its adoption and support to ensure a sustained and comprehensive return to constitutional order. The transition timeline covers ten priority areas, including the development of a new constitution, a referendum on the new constitution, establishment of an election management body, and organization of local, legislative, and presidential elections. In late April, the transition authorities appealed to the international community for assistance in mobilizing some 6 trillion Guinean francs (\$600 million) for the implementation of the transition plan.

One of the issues likely to receive attention during the consultation is progress towards the drafting of the constitution. The National Transitional Council initiated a series of constitutional consultations, inviting key stakeholders to engage in discussions on the guiding principles of the constitution and offer recommendations. Despite the participation of certain stakeholders who provided their inputs, the large opposition and civil society coalition known as *Forces Vives de Guinée* (FVG) boycotted the initiative. Sources indicate that the transitional legislature was expected to consider and adopt the draft constitution in June, with a subsequent referendum on the draft constitution scheduled for this December. The June deadline has already been missed, and it is also unlikely that the referendum will take place according to the original plan.

Guinea's transitional authorities are currently experiencing strained relations both internally with opposition parties and externally with the regional bloc ECOWAS, posing a significant challenge to the transition process. The fluid security situation also remains a cause for concern as the prison break staged in early November in the capital Conakry demonstrates. Top ex-military officials, who have been on trial for the 2009 massacre of civilians, were reportedly freed by armed men from a central prison in the capital. Three of them, including the former military leader Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, were recaptured, while former minister of Presidential Security Colonel Claude Pivi remains fugitive. The incident [reportedly](#) witnessed a fighting between Special Forces, formerly led by interim President Col. Mamady Doumbouya, and Autonomous Battalion of Airborne Troops, of which Colonel Pivi was once a member. This coupled with preceding events in April and May, during which Col. Doumbouya dismissed key figures, including the armed forces chief of staff and the head of military intelligence, signals internal discord within the transition authorities.

On Burkina Faso

The last time PSC discussed the situation in Burkina Faso was at its 1166th session on 3 August, while considering the report of the field mission to the country conducted from 22 to 27 July 2023. In the communiqué adopted during that session, PSC urged the 'transitional authority to practically demonstrate its commitment and ensure that elections are successfully organized within the stipulated timelines.' The interim President, Captain Ibrahim Traore, who assumed power following the military coup on September 30, 2022, agreed to adhere to the initially agreed-upon transition timeline of 24 months, with the election expected to take place in July 2024. While there have been encouraging developments—including the establishment of a Transition Roadmap, an electoral calendar, and the Independent National Electoral Commission—convening

the elections on the scheduled timeline of 24 July 2024 remains doubtful, mainly due to the prevailing security challenges. The PSC, during its recent field mission, observed that several stakeholders in Burkina Faso expressed uncertainties regarding the likelihood of the election taking place in July. Meanwhile, in September, interim President Traore explicitly [stated](#) on state TV that elections are 'not priority' compared to security. He went on to say that 'there won't be an election that is only concentrated in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso and other nearby towns', alluding to cities less impacted by terrorist attacks.

Indeed, the worsening security situation in Burkina Faso will remain a significant challenge to the organization of elections. Despite government claims of significant security gains, with purported control over 65% to 70% of the territory, Burkina Faso has witnessed a concerning surge in terrorist attacks throughout the period from January to September 2023, according to the report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on counter-terrorism and related issues. Currently, Burkina Faso ranks second only to Afghanistan in bearing the brunt of terrorism globally, making the country 'the epicenter of terrorism and violent extremism' in the continent. On the other hand, the ban on the public demonstrations and political activities, which has been in place since the issuance of communiqué No. 3 of 30 September 2022, remains intact. Political parties are voicing their concerns over the ongoing restriction and limited space for their participation in the management of the transition process. Against this backdrop, PSC's 1166th session urged *Burkinabé* transitional authorities to lift such ban, an important request worth following-up in tomorrow's consultation.

The other key issue likely to receive attention in tomorrow's consultation is the operationalization of the monitoring mechanism of the transition, which remains an important aspect

of accompanying the transitional process. A year ago, ECOWAS and Burkina Faso signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of a Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism for the 24 months transition—a development welcomed during the 62nd Ordinary Session of ECOWAS on 04 December 2022. Nevertheless, PSC's field mission report highlights the challenges to operationalize the mechanism, including difficulties faced by the ECOWAS Mediator in conducting visits to the country. The announcement of the formation of a regional alliance between Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali is not received favorably in the region. In the [communiqué](#) adopted during its latest summit on 10 December, ECOWAS expressed its rejection of 'all forms of alliances that seek to divide the region and promote foreign interest in the region.' It is also recalled that the PSC, at its 1076th session, decided to establish a Transition Support Group in Burkina Faso (TSG-BF), in collaboration with ECOWAS and the UN, with the aim to mobilize the necessary resources to address security, development and human challenges.

On Mali

Mali was last discussed by the PSC during the first informal consultation it held with countries undergoing political transition in April this year. One key development since this informal consultation has been the successful conduct of Mali's national referendum in June which approved amendment of the constitution with, according to the national electoral authority, 97% votes in favor. While the referendum in itself has by and large been regarded as a test to the transition authorities' commitment to a democratic process, it has not been free of contentions. Although proponents of the newly amended constitution are hopeful it would strengthen fragile political institutions, opponents criticize the document for bestowing excessive power to the president.

While welcoming the conduct of the referendum and commending the transition authorities for deploying the necessary efforts

towards its successful completion, ECOWAS, at its 64th Ordinary Session held on 10 December, expressed concern over the reluctance of Malian transition authorities to cooperate with ECOWAS.

In late September, Mali's transition authorities announced that the presidential elections that were set to take place in February 2024 will be slightly delayed due to technical reason including the pending review of electoral lists. Further to the absence of any indication of a projected date for the postponed presidential elections to be conducted, the authorities have also decided not to hold legislative elections which were scheduled for end of 2023, opting instead to exclusively have presidential elections. This partial implementation of the transitional processes may not be without consequences for full return to constitutional and civilian rule.

On the security track, Mali continues to confront intense insurgencies with increasing tensions having been noted in the northern region over the past few months. Reports have indicated that in recent months, Al Qaeda's Sahelian affiliate has increased its attacks in northern Mali, to exploit the security vacuum already being created due to the ongoing withdrawal of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). As a result of such insecurity, humanitarian access to several parts of Mali's northern region is now limited, frustrating the already dire humanitarian situation. The heightened tensions and armed presence in the region is also impeding the timely and orderly departure of withdrawing MINUSMA troops and personnel. While reaffirming its plans to stick to the deadline of 31 December 2023 to complete withdrawal of MINUSMA as per Mali's request, the UN has expressed concern in mid-October, over the challenges being faced in the movement of logistics convoys.

No formal outcome document is expected from tomorrow's

consultation. The consultation may highlight the importance of institutionalizing the practice of informal consultation with countries undergoing political transitions, aiming to expedite their return to constitutional order. In addition to the informal consultation, it may also emphasize the need to operationalize monitoring and evaluation mechanism to effectively track the implementation of transition plans in countries under political transition. In this context, PSC may follow-up on its previous decisions, including the decision to establish a Monitoring Mechanism on Transition in Guinea (MMTG) during its 1064th session. While recognizing the complex and multi-dimensional challenges facing these countries, the consultation may emphasize the significance of adhering to the agreed transition timelines and fostering close collaboration for the effective implementation of key transition activities. Also of significance in respect to Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger is how to support their efforts in the fight against terrorism and consolidating security in these countries. It may also welcome the recent decision of ECOWAS, during its 64th ordinary session held on 10 December 2023, which directed its Member States to 'exempt the Transition Presidents, Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of the Member States in Transition from the travel ban and other targeted individual sanctions imposed on the three Member States' as important step for mending very strained relations with these countries.