

Cooperation, coordination and collaboration of the AU PSC and RECs/RMs

Automatic Heading TextDate | 19 August, 2019

Tomorrow (20 August) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to hold a session on cooperation, coordination and collaboration of the AU PSC and Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms on peace and security related matters on the continent.

It is to be recalled that in May 2019 the PSC held its inaugural meeting with RECs/RMs on the promotion of peace and security focusing on harmonization and coordination of decision-making processes and division of labor. Although the PSC protocol has no explicit language around the principle of subsidiarity when addressing the relationship between the PSC and RECs/RMs, its retreat with RECs/RMs in Abuja, Nigeria in 2015 addressed the principles of subsidiarity, complementarity and comparative advantages. Similarly the joint communiqué established that the synergy would be based on these principles. It is expected that the two mechanisms will identify a set of criteria in defining the scope and application of such principles.

Tomorrow's meeting will not only be a follow up to the PSC and RECs/RMs inaugural meeting but also a forum to reflect on the decisions that came out from the first mid-year coordination meeting between the AU and RECs/RMs held in July in Niamey, Niger. The Niger Declaration, which welcomed the efforts of the PSC and policy organs of RECs/RMs, it also called for the rapid establishment of 'practical modalities to facilitate timely and coordinated responses to continental crises'. Moreover the meeting tasked the Commission, Member States and

RECs/RM to prepare a detailed framework of division of labour to be adopted by the Assembly in February 2020. The upcoming Summit also offers an opportunity for the PSC to work closely with RECs/RMs in preparing its annual report to the Assembly.

In this regard, the joint PSC and RECs/RMs communiqué outlines concrete steps that are expected to solidify the working relations between the two mechanisms, which may inform and contribute to the broader efforts of establishing clearer division of labour and coordination between AU and RECs/RMs. PSC and RECs/RMs have agreed to establish a team of focal points comprising representatives from both institutions to foster coordination on peace and security issues. An agreement was also reached to hold joint field missions and joint retreats/brainstorming sessions for coordinated and strategic response. Hence tomorrow's session will be particularly essential to link the PSC level coordination to the broader Commission and AU level one. It may also reflect on the operationalization and the actual implementation of these initiatives by also agreeing on a timeframe and by developing a clear roadmap that governs its institutional working relations with RECs/RMs.

The other key instrument, which may also be of interest to the PSC, is the Report of the AUC Chairperson on the Status of Integration in Africa and the complementary regional perspectives presented by the Chairs of the RECs. The first Report was presented at the mid-year coordination meeting. It may be a key priority area for the Council to ensure that its joint and harmonized efforts with RECs/RMs feature in the comprehensive report that is expected to be regularly produced.

The enhanced coordination between PSC and the RECs/RMs policy organs is one of the key factors in realizing the full operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture. The various pillars of the architecture including the PSC itself will require the continued

coordination and synergy with RECs in discharging their mandate. The joint communiqué makes particular reference to early warning and response mechanisms and deployment of the African Standby Force.

The coordination efforts have also practical implications, which will require the immediate action by the PSC and RECs. Both sides are expected to generate of strengthen their capacities in order to facilitate the regular exchange and communication and alignment of decision making process. In this context it is worth noting that level of capacity among RECs vary, hence the level of engagement in the decision making process may also be affected. The other issue that will require a clear direction is related to the overlapping membership of states in different RECs.

When examining the implications of the Niamey first coordination meeting on its working relations with RECs/RMs, the PSC may also take in consideration the on-going efforts towards revising the 2008 Protocol on Relations Between the AU and RECs. The revised protocol is expected to take in consideration the new coordination structures that were officially kicked off in Niamey. Prior to the Assembly's adoption of the revised protocol in 2020, the PSC in close consultation with policy organs of RECs/RM may wish to engage in the revision of the protocol to ensure that it is in line with the agreed upon principles governing its working relations with RECs/RMs. The PSC may also work toward the formalization and recognition of its coordination mechanism with RECs/RMs by the revised Protocol. This effort may also look into further expanding article 30 of the Protocol that outlines the harmonization of mechanisms for promotion of peace, security and stability.

In the joint communiqué PSC and RECs/RMs agreed to hold 'annual joint consultative meetings, between the PSC and the RECs/RMs policy organs on peace and security issues, alternately in Addis Ababa and in the headquarters of the

RECs/RMs, in rotation' and to be 'convened ahead of the mid-year coordination summit between the AU and RECs/RMs'. Although the joint consultative meeting is a step forward in institutionalizing the partnership, it is also necessary to ensure that the coordination work takes place throughout the year in a systematic manner. It may also be essential to actively assess the implementation status of various decisions that emanate from the various consultative sessions.

During the production of this 'Insight' the form of the outcome was unknown. However the PSC may provide clear actions in implementing the decisions made during the inaugural meeting, particularly towards the development of a joint framework/roadmap with monitoring and follow up mechanisms. Following the Niamey declaration the PSC may request RECs/RMs to jointly kick-start the establishment of a mechanism for coordinated responses to crises. Moreover based on the decisions articulated in the Niamey declaration it may highlight for the need to ensure that its renewed working relation with RECs/RMs is informed by the Commission wide commitments and that they also contribute to the continental integration agenda.