

Interaction between the Peace and Security Council and the African Union Commission

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Tomorrow (16 September) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to hold an interaction with the AU Commission at 3pm. The Chairperson of the AU Commission, Commissioner for Peace and Security, the Commissioner for Political Affairs and the Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture are expected to participate in the interactive discussion.

The various departments of the Commission have reported and briefed the Council in their respective areas of expertise. Tomorrow's session aims at assessing the current methods of engagement and based on that to identify ways of enhancing and systematizing the relationship to ensure a more coordinated and regular collaboration between the PSC and AUC.

The issues expected to be discussed during tomorrow's session include the level of effective execution by the AUC of its roles vis-à-vis the peace and security agenda of the AU and review of existing methods of interaction between the PSC and the AUC. In discussing these different issues, consideration is given to the various roles of the AUC.

The AUC as the secretariat of the Union has the responsibility of providing operational support to the PSC. In this respect, the roles of the AUC include preparing reports, briefing notes, other working documents of the PSC and keeping summary records of the meetings of the PSC, to enable the PSC and its subsidiary bodies to perform their functions effectively.

Similarly, the PSC protocol recognizes the wide range of roles and responsibilities of the AUC under the leadership of the AUC Chairperson in terms of conflict prevention, agenda setting, and following up on the implementation of the PSC decisions.

In line with the roles and responsibilities identified in article 7 and 10 of the PSC protocol, it would be of interest for the PSC to hear the Chairperson in providing an assessment on how the Commission has discharged its responsibilities in these set standards and in providing operational support for the PSC's mandate. Consideration is also to be had on strengthening the level and quality as well as predictability of interaction in all phases of conflict from prevention, management and post-conflict reconstruction as appropriate through the AUC Chairperson, Commissioners, the AUC Departments or the special envoys or representatives of the AUC Chairperson.

Another area for discussion during tomorrow's session is the role of the various departments of the AUC. In its retreat held in Swakopmund in 2015 the PSC highlighted the need to work closely with a number of actors in order to maintain peace and security in line African Peace and Security Architecture. Towards enhancing conflict prevention, the PSC stressed the need for the department of Political Affairs to 'attend all PSC meetings and provide regular briefings including those focusing on early warning aspects to the PSC'. Similarly, the Council called on the AUC to 'intensify its efforts in the area of PCRD, including submission of a report as decided by the Council, on the status of the AU PCRD architecture'. The Council has also tasked the Commission to regularly report on the operationalization of both African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and African Governance Architecture (AGA).

Given the complementarity of the Departments of Peace and Security (PSD) and Political Affairs (DPA) and the decision within the framework of the reform of the AU to merge the two departments in 2021, tomorrow's session is also expected to discuss the measures being taken towards smooth process of consolidating the two departments and managing the PSC's interaction with both departments. The two departments may provide an update on the plans for the merger of the two departments and where the merger process stands.

Tomorrow's session may also delve into addressing technical and operational issues. Although the various departments provide reports and briefing upon the request of the PSC, the interaction may also be critical in ensuring that the engagements are not ad-hoc or reactive. In this regard, an issue for discussion is reviewing the working arrangements in terms of the relationship between the PSC and the AUC. These include the role of the AUC in terms of the drafting of the outcome documents of the PSC, in following up with the decisions of the PSC including timely delivery of briefings requested to be delivered within a set time frame, provision of updates on PSC decisions and the predictability in the timely submissions of the reports of the AUC Chairperson. Also significant is the availability of an effectively functioning process for sharing early warning analysis with the PSC and provision of updates on outcomes of PSC sessions requiring follow up.

In this context the PSC and the Commission may wish to agree on preparing calendar of activities on delivery of time specific briefings, updates on previous decisions and on submission of reports of the AUC Chairperson that could feature in the monthly work plan in addition to the other agenda items proposed by the rotating chairs. This will also be a critical step in ensuring the continuity

of proper follow up of decisions and to prevent interruption when monthly chairs rotate. This exercise may enable the monthly chairs of the PSC to build on decisions and deliberation from previous month and contribute to their implementation and predictable working practice of the PSC.

The interaction will also offer the Council to map the in-house capacity in the Commission and ways to adequately make use of the expertise and knowledge of staff in the Commission to ensure informed decision-making process. This will also be essential in addressing siloes and foster inter-departmental coordination, information sharing and complementarity. It will also enable the PSC and Commission to utilize existing capacity and resources.

In addition to the responsibilities of the departments, the role of AU offices located in various African member states may also be discussed. The PSC may also stress the critical role of its Secretariat. The PSC Secretariat has a wide role in not only following up on the decisions of the Council but also in arranging the meetings of the PSC, preparing the working documents, and keeping records of PSC meetings. By tapping into the vast expertise in the Commission and various offices of the AU, the Secretariat also helps in enabling the PSC to receive the technical inputs that boost the decision-making process. The Secretariat is in key position in bridging the information sharing and coordination mechanism between the Council with departments in the Commission including those participating in tomorrow's session.

In this regard and recognizing the expanding role and responsibilities of its Secretariat, the PSC may wish to propose ways of enhancing its capacity. The secretariat has been coordinating the activities of the Council and the operationalization of the ambitious

mandate of the Council with limited capacity.

The expected outcome is a communiqué. The PSC may commend the Commission for its efforts in supporting the mandate of the Council. It may call on the Commission to support continuous collaboration through reporting and regular briefing by departments. It may identify calendar of activities that will ensure predictable interaction, bring continuity in the work of the PSC and foster cooperative and more institutionalized interaction with the Commission. It may also highlight on the need to enhance the capacity of its secretariat. In the light of the impending merger of the PSD and DPA, the PSC could request the AUC to present to it a report on the plan and timelines for the merger. It is also expected to decide on having a regular interactive session with the Commission to follow up on tomorrow's session and institutionalize the assessment of the working relationship between the two.