

Ministerial session on the situation in Mali

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Tomorrow (24 May) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene its 999th session at the Ministerial level to consider the situation in Mali.

Algeria's Foreign Minister, Sabri BouKadoum, chairperson of the ministerial PSC session, is scheduled to make the opening remark. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali, Zeyni Moulaye, representing Mali as the country concerned, and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of Ghana, as Chair of ECOWAS, will deliver statements. Others scheduled to address the PSC include Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Bankole Adeoye, the new Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission (SRCC) for Mali and Head of the AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL), Maman Sidikou and the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Mali and Head of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), El Ghassim Wane.

The last time the PSC considered the situation in Mali was during its 954th session convened on 9 October 2020, following the issuance of a Transitional Charter and the establishment of a transitional government involving civilian leadership in October last year, as prescribed by ECOWAS and the PSC. The Prime Minister announced his 25-member cabinet in October. High-ranking military officials including those who took part in the August coup, members of the Movement of June 5-Rally of Patriotic Forces (M5-RFP) who led the protest against Keita's regime, representatives of civil society, as well as four representatives of the signatory movements to the 2015 peace agreement formed the interim government. Against the

background of these developments, during that session the PSC lifted the suspension of Mali from participation in AU activities.

For purposes of tomorrow's session, it would be of interest for PSC members to follow up on the Council's call for the interim government to expedite the implementation of the outstanding provisions of the Transitional Charter including the establishment of the National Transitional Council and to work towards the conclusion of the transitional process for holding national elections at the end of the 18-month transitional period. The PSC also recognized the importance of the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement in order to comprehensively address political, security and socio-economic challenges facing the Republic of Mali. In this context, tomorrow's session presents the Council with the opportunity to receive updates on the progress made in respect of all these various areas.

Those providing update to the PSC, including the representative of Mali, are expected to highlight a number of developments. The first of this is the establishment of the Transitional National Council (TNC), as requested in the communique of the 954th session of the PSC. Established on the basis of a decree that the interim President, Bah N'Daw, issued last November, the 121 seats of the TNC were allocated to Defense and Security Forces, representatives of M5-RFP, signatory movements of the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, political parties and other groups. Major political actors including the M5-RFP strongly criticized the arrangement over the perceived unfair representation of the military in the Council who were able to secure 22 seats. The inaugural session of the transitional council elected one of the leaders of the Coup, Malick Diaw, as the President of the Council with overwhelming majority early in December. Second, in February, the Transitional Council considered and approved the action plan of the interim government, setting out six

priority areas and 275 specific actions. Of particular interest for the PSC is ensuring the implementation of the action plan within the transitional period focusing on the major milestones for convening national elections.

Despite these positive developments, the recent resignation of interim Prime Minister Moctar Ouane on 14 May and his immediate reinstatement to pave the way for 'new broad-based' government illustrates not only the fragility of the transition but also the simmering tension between the military and civilian elements of the transitional government, due to the dominant role taken by the military leadership in the transition. The report of the ECOWAS mediator and special envoy to Mali, former President of Nigeria Goodluck Jonathan, also flagged the concerns of stakeholders stating that 'the mission encourages the government to ensure greater inclusivity of the main socio-political actors...' This was further echoed by the authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS during its fifty-eighth ordinary session held on 23 January 2021, which underscored the 'need for the timely implementation of the various decisions relating to the Transition, in a more consultative and inclusive approach with all stakeholders'.

With respect to the preparations for national elections, on 15 April 2021, the Minister of Territorial Administration announced an electoral calendar. Accordingly, a constitutional referendum is slated for October 2021. The parliamentary election and the first round of presidential voting will take place on 27 February 2022, with the runoff presidential election envisaged to take place in March 2022. Local and regional elections are also set to take place in December this year. As UN Secretary-General noted in his last quarterly report, the government is taking positive steps in engaging political parties, civil society organizations and signatories of the 2015 peace agreement to map out agreeable legal and institutional framework for the upcoming elections.

On the implementation of the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement resulting from the Algiers process, one notable development was the holding of the fifth ministerial session of the Agreement Monitoring Committee on 11 February in Kidal, for the first time since 2015. Six Malian ministers and the leadership of the signatory armed groups and international mediators took part in that session, with Algeria's Foreign Minister, the Chairperson of tomorrow's PSC session, as Chair of the Monitoring Committee. Apart from allocation of seats for signatory armed groups in the transitional institutions, progress is also being made with respect to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process, which forms key part of the peace agreement. A worrying development worth highlighting is the killing of the President of one of the signatory armed groups (Coordination of Azawad Movements), Ould Sidati, in Bamako last month.

Despite the positive political atmosphere from the transitional process and the 2015 agreement, the security situation remains dire. A terrorist attacks in Kidal on 2 April 2020 led to the death of 10 peacekeepers and one UN contractor. In a deadliest attack since August 2020 on a security post in the norther region of Gao in March 2020, 33 Malian soldiers were killed and 14 were injured.

On the humanitarian and socioeconomic front, the situation remains dire causing frustrations on the part of the population. A nationwide strike was called by the prominent National Workers' Union of Mali (UNTM), starting on 17 May to demand a better living and working conditions to their members. It is to be recalled that the PSC, during its last session on Mali, requested the Chairperson of the Commission, through the Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Centre, to 'engage the Transitional Government of Mali with the view to identifying priority areas that should contribute towards the restoration of national socio-economic development to more effectively prevent relapse to conflict'. In this

respect, the Council is likely to follow up on this decision during tomorrow's session.

In tomorrow's session, the PSC may also follow up on the tools it agreed to put in place with the view to support the transition in Mali. One of such mechanisms is the 'follow-up and support committee', which the PSC requested the Chairperson of the Commission to 'urgently activate' at its 954th session to ensure the appropriate participation and contribution of AU to the transitional government. Accordingly, the inaugural meeting of the committee- co-chaired by the AU, ECOWAS, and the UN- was held on 30 November 2020 in Bamako, followed by its second meeting convened on 8 March 2021 in Lome, Togo.

The expected outcome is a communique. The PSC is expected to welcome the progress made in the implementation of the Transitional Charter since its last session on Mali held on 9 October 2020. The Council is however expected to share the concerns of different stakeholders in the lack of proper consultation and inclusivity in the transition process, and in this respect, it may echo the fifty-eighth ordinary session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS in stressing 'the need for the timely implementation of the various decisions relating to the Transition, in a more consultative and inclusive approach with stakeholders'. On the election, the Council is expected to welcome the announcement of the electoral calendar by the Government and urge Malian authorities to work on the outstanding legal and institutional frameworks in consultation with all stakeholders and create a conducive environment that would enable the conduct of the constitutional referendum and a free, fair and credible elections. In this regard, the Council may request the Chairperson of the Commission to initiate electoral support to Malian authorities. The Council may welcome the adoption of the Interim Government's action plan by the National Council that outlined six priority areas, and may, in this respect,

request the Chairperson of the Commission to continue its engagement with Malian authorities with the view to support them in translating this action plan into a reality.

In relation to the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, the PSC is likely to welcome the progress registered and call on the parties to expedite the redeployment of reconstituted forces to the regions that continue to experience armed violence. In relation to the security situation, the Council is expected to condemn the continued terrorist attacks and intercommunal violence pervasive in central and northern part of the country, including the attacks on MINUSMA. On the socioeconomic condition, the Council is also likely to express its concern over the continued disagreement between Malian authorities and labor unions in light of the recent nationwide strike called by UNTM. In this respect, it may call on all parties to resolve their differences through dialogue to avoid a further damage to the struggling economy. In relation to the 'follow-up and support committee', the Council is expected to welcome the activation of the Committee and the meetings it held, and the plan for the convening of its third meeting next month in Bamako. The Council is also expected to pay tribute to the late former President of Burundi, Paul Buyoya for his service and to welcome the appointment of Sidikou as SRCC and Head MISAH.