

Open session on international and regional initiatives in the Sahel Region

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Tomorrow (17 December) the Peace and Security Council (PSC) is scheduled to convene the only open session of the month. The session is to be held under the theme 'International and Regional Initiatives in the Sahel Region: Promotion of Coordination and African Ownership for Peace, Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development.'

The AU High Representative for Mali and the Sahel and Head of the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL), Pierre Buyoya is expected to brief the Council. The UN Special Advisor for the Sahel, Ibrahim Thiaw, is also expected to brief the session. Representatives of the G5 Sahel including member countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger), other regional organizations notably Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African states and the European Union (EU) and individual countries with Sahel strategy are also expected to participate in the session.

As pointed out in the background note for the session, the complex crises in the Sahel have engaged the attention and interest of large number of actors. The regional and international engagement is thus characterized by the multiplicity of actors involved and proliferation of initiatives and strategies.

In the security realm, the initiatives include the UN Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the G5 Sahel Force, the AU's political mission MISAHEL, three missions of the EU and the French regional operation Barkhane. The questions raised in the

background note in respect of these initiatives include: 'To what extent do international security initiatives, which include MINUSMA, the French Barkhane Force, as well as the different forms of support from the EU and its individual Member States, take into account the ongoing regional initiatives in the area of security? Do the coordination and consultation mechanisms put in place produce the expected results? What is the level of articulation between the efforts in the field of security in the Sahel, in general and those made for the implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, signed in 2015, knowing that the Mali is the epicentre of the current crisis and the implementation of the Agreement is the best way to isolate armed terrorist groups?'

These questions clearly manifest concerns about duplication and tendencies of competing approaches in terms of focus and target groups and importantly about how priorities are set and by whom. There are also questions about how these various initiatives affect not only local and regional processes, notably the 2015 peace agreement of Mali and G5 Sahel, but also the operationalization of the APSA in the Sahel region. It is also to be recalled that concerns over the militarization of the Sahel region have been raised in various PSC session in the course of 2018. The briefings from Buyoya and statements from representatives of the G5 Sahel are expected to highlight these issues from the experiences in the implementation of these various security initiatives and the lessons from existing arrangements for coordination including the Ministerial Coordination Platform (MCP) for the Sahel Strategies of the countries of the region.

In the context of the discussion about the impact of diverse initiatives, an issue that deserves attention during tomorrow's session is the state of operationalization of the G5 Sahel joint Task Force. Despite the initial plan to be fully operational in March 2018, and the second deadline of

May 2018, the force still faces serious logistical, staffing, training, financial and constraints. The first two of the three military operations undertaken by the regional task force so were conducted with the support of the 4,000 French counterterrorism forces. The 29 June 2018 attack on the headquarters of the force triggering exchange of gunfire that lasted for hours raised serious questions on its autonomy, operational capacity and effectiveness.

The issues afflicting the G5 Task Force are associated with the funding of the Force. The Task Force is dependent on pledges and donations from individual countries. There are uncertainties on the long-term funding for the force, and it only received less than one fourth of the 420 million euros pledged by the international community at the fundraising event held at the start of 2018. In an attempt to address these challenges of predictability and sustainability of funding, the G5 countries and the AU have been seeking to secure a UN Chapter VII mandate and a support package akin to that offered to the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) based on UN assessed contributions.

The chairman of the G5 Sahel Group of Countries, President Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger, previously announced that the group would pursue direct funding from the United Nations under Chapter 7 of the U.N. Charter. This is another issue expected to feature in tomorrow's session. It is thus noted in the background note that the AU 'continues to plead for the G5 Sahel Joint Force to operate under Chapter VII of the Charter and to receive funding from the assessed contributions of the United Nations budget.'

In the meantime, it is anticipated that, apart from updating the Council on the current political and security issues in the region and how MUNISMA's efforts to address this issues, Thiaw would inform the PSC how MUNISMA is coordinating with and supporting the G5 Sahel Force.

The challenges facing the Sahel region are multiple and go beyond the realm of security. They cover state weakness involving poor capacity and level of control of its territory, ecological degradation, underdevelopment, and bad governance. In an attempt to address these plethora of political, climatic, developmental and security challenges, the various actors engaged in the Sahel region have adopted their own respective strategies. It is pointed out in the background note that 'there are no less than fifteen Regional and International strategies and initiatives in support of the Sahel Region.'

One study undertaken in 2015 identified 14 major multilateral strategies and several other regional and individual country strategies and initiatives. Clearly, the Sahelian strategic landscape has become crowded. While the strategies converge in terms of the issues they seek to address and their objectives, they also differ in terms of geographical scope of application, focus areas and financing regimes. Thiaw is expected to update the PSC on the implementation of the UN strategy and how it interfaces with the regional strategies and efforts.

These numerous strategies by various actors with differing expertise and mandate raise questions similar to those relating to the security sphere noted above. One platform tracking strategies in the Sahel region pointed out the large number of strategies raise 'questions about their relevance, their consideration for each other and their usefulness'. It is also noted in the background note for tomorrow's session that the 'concern about coordination also led some development partners such as Germany, France, the World Bank, the European Union, and others to establish the "Sahel Alliance" to support, particularly, the G5 Sahel, with a view to promoting coherence and pooling of resources.'

After several years of implementation, the fundamental question is whether the large number of strategies is making a

difference in the conditions in the Sahel. The socio-economic, governance, security and humanitarian conditions of the region remain dire. These conditions are characterized by the presence of armed terrorist groups and allied networks of increasingly militarized transnational organised crime involving traffickers and smugglers, covering the Central part of Mali, Northern and the North East of Burkina Faso and the border between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. It is to be recalled that on 2 July 2018 on the sidelines of the AU summit in Nouakchott, Mauritania, the Presidents of the member states of the G5 Sahel and the President of France held a meeting. It was agreed that the G5 Sahel would seek Chapter VII authorization for the G5 Sahel military operation from the UN Security Council. As a follow up to that meeting earlier this month on 6 December, a coordination conference of G5 Sahel partners and funders for the financing of the Priority Investment Program (PIP) of the Sahel region was held in Nouakchott. Developed as part of the G5 Sahel development and security strategy adopted by the leaders of the member states in 2016, the PIP is a three- year (2019-2021) program with a reported portfolio of 40 projects and with a budget of Euro 1.9 billion.

The background note indicates that the session has two objectives. These are a) to identify and evaluate the initiatives taken so far to ensure effective coordination of peace and Post-conflict Reconstruction Strategies in the Sahel Region and b) to explore, on the basis of this assessment, ways and means of improving the articulation of initiatives and strategies for the Sahel, founded on a division of labour, based on the comparative advantages of the actors. The expected outcome is a communiqué.

In the light of the issues highlighted above, various approaches may be taken for meeting the objectives of the open session. In terms of coordination, one approach could be to focus on reinvigorating the Ministerial Coordination Platform

(MCP) for the Sahel Strategies with appropriately structured mechanism and measures, and working in concert with the 'Sahel Alliance', for ensuring a coordinated delivery on the priorities that the countries of the region, in collaboration with partners, have set.

Given the governance and development focus of the PIP, an approach related to the above could be to align the focus and resources of the various strategies around the PIP, with different actors taking responsibility for the areas on which they have comparative advantages.

In terms of addressing pressing concerns particularly in the security realm, one approach to realize the objectives of the session is to focus on how effectively the various actors and strategies can be mobilized a) for achieving the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement of Mali and b) for addressing the challenges facing the full operationalization of the G5 Sahel Task Force and its alignment with governance and development imperatives.

Another outcome area of the session is to contribute to the decision of the PSC's 782nd meeting at ministerial level held in Nouakchott. That meeting requested the AU Commission to take the necessary measures to facilitate the review of the AU Sahel Strategy with a view to not only adapting it to the new political, institutional and security context of the Region, but also strengthening the coordination and cooperation between the various actors in the Sahel.