

Ministerial Session on the Operationalization of APSA in the Sahel

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Today (27 June) the PSC will hold a ministerial session on the role of Africa in the Harmonization of Initiatives and Operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) in the Sahel'. It is expected that the ministerial meeting will receive a briefing report of the AU Commission Chairperson. Apart from its transnational character, the crisis in the Sahel presents particular challenges to the region and the continent for a number of factors. First, the crisis has multiple dimensions including terrorism, trafficking, porous borders, identity based conflicts and weak state institutions. Second, rather than being confined to a particular region, the Sahel crisis transcends regional boundaries covering parts of North Africa and of West Africa. Third and related to this is the fact that there is no one regional mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution on which the response to the crisis can be anchored. Fourth, the crisis intersects with the conflict in Libya and the conflict involving Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. Fifth, the final factor relate to multiplicity of initiatives and divergence of roles and concerns over both preponderance of external influence and significantly risks of fragmentation or weakening of the implementation of the APSA in addressing the crisis.

The session is expected to take stock of the political, security and regional developments shaping the crisis in the Sahel. In the political front, apart from the presidential and legislative elections in Mali scheduled for July and November

respectively, the session will review the status of implementation of the 2015 Algiers Accord For peace and Reconciliation in Mali. The degree of success in the convening of the elections is seen to be critical. It presents an opportunity for renewed active pursuit of the peace process in the country, key to addressing the crisis in the country. From the perspective of the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement, issues of concern for PSC members include the lack of trust between the parties, slow pace of its implementation and the impact of heavy attention on security measures associated with the G5 Sahel Joint Force on the peace process.

Perhaps of major interest for the ministerial session of the PSC is the security dimension of the situation in the Sahel. Indeed, as pointed out in the briefing report, the session would zero on 'the efforts of Africa to take ownership of the Sahel initiatives and to see how well the overall Regional ad-hoc initiatives fall within the framework of the African Standby Force (FAA), within the APSA, in conformity with the Communiqué of the PSC of 13 November 2017, in which Council, in the face of emerging threats in the Sahel in particular, stressed the need for a better articulation of Regional and interregional initiatives within the context of APSA.' This particular focus of the session accordingly has two dimensions. The first of these relate to the question of enhancing the ownership of African actors, particularly countries of the region, on the Sahel initiatives. This seems to particularly concern the G5 Sahel Joint Force. This is a force of 5000 military personnel, police officers, gendarmerie and border patrol officers only of five states in the Sahel: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. The PSC mandated the deployment of the Joint Force for an initial period of one year in the communiqué of its 679th meeting of April 2017. In terms of the operationalization of the Force, the Force headquarters was set up in Sévaré, Mali at the end of 2017. On 31 October 2017, the Force undertook its first cross border operation, 'Hawbi', in the central sector

involving Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. It has since undertaken its second operation in the same sector.

Two areas would in particular be of interest to the PSC in the operationalization of the G5 Sahel Joint Force. First is the establishment of the command and organizational structures of the Force. Related to this is also the issue of coordination between the operations of the force and the implementation of the various Sahel strategies. Second is the provision and coordination of support including funding for the Joint Mission.

With respect to the command and organizational set up of the Joint Force, the operationalization of the Central Command Post and its coordination with and setting up of sectors' command is of interest to the PSC. It is reported that France provides organizational structure to the Force and takes part in the six monthly meeting of the military command. Another area of interest is the mechanism required for ensuring coordination between the Joint Force and the various other regional and international operations in the Sahel and significantly with other Sahel countries outside of the G5. As noted in the AU Commission Chairperson's briefing report, 'there is an imperative need for cooperation but especially for coordination in order to avoid any competitive approach that would only be counterproductive to the resolution of the problems identified in the Region.'

The issue for the PSC here is how the G5 Sahel can accentuate regional ownership, reinforce the peace process in Mali and facilitate international support while operating within the framework of the APSA, allaying fears of weakening of the application of APSA processes and standards. It is to be recalled that the 13 April 2017 communiqué of the PSC envisaged close cooperation with Sahel countries that are not members of the G5 Sahel within the framework of the implementation plan of the concept of operations of the G5 Sahel Joint Force. Undoubtedly, international support

including notably that of France seems key for the effective operationalization of the G5 Sahel Joint Force. Perhaps, one way of addressing concerns around the application of the APSA in the Sahel is the integration of APSA processes and standards in the operationalization of the G5 Force. This can be done through enabling the AU to provide the civilian capacity that the PSC communiqué authorizing the Force stipulated, including those necessary for enhancing compliance with international human rights and international humanitarian law by the Force. The other aspect relate to the operationalization of the MoU that the G5 Sahel Secretariat and the AU Commission signed on 23 March 2018 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

While there is heavy focus on the G5 Sahel Joint Force, other initiatives such as the Nouakchott Process, which seeks to facilitate horizontal security coordination and intelligence sharing and cooperation among all countries of the Sahel, did not fare well. The forces attracted support from the European Union (€100 million), Saudi Arabia (€100 million), the United Arab Emirates (€30 million), and Rwanda and Turkey. As the Chairperson's briefing report rightly pointed out, 'Rwanda remains to date the only African country to have made a financial contribution to the operationalisation of the G5 Force. Surely, the AU Member States should show greater solidarity with the Sahel and Lake Chad countries.' In terms of the preferred option for addressing the challenges of predictable funding, the briefing note states that 'the best option for an initiative such as the G5 Joint Force would be to establish it as an autonomous brigade within MINUSMA, modeled on the MONUSCO Intervention Brigade.' Another issue that has increasingly become a concern for AU as reflected in PSC meetings is the issue around the presence of international forces in the Sahel involving what the report called 'a gradual militarization of the foreign intervention in the Sahel, which only partially addresses the challenges in the region.'

The expected outcome of the ministerial session is a communiqué. It is anticipated that the communiqué will welcome the progress being witnessed towards the organization of the elections in Mali, notably the presidential election expected to take place next month. It is also expected to underscore the importance of the full and timely implementation of the 2015 peace agreement for consolidating peace, while expressing concern about new conflict trends intersecting ethnicity and terrorism. In terms of coordination, it is expected to reiterate the previous decision of the PSC on close cooperation with Sahel countries including those not members of the G5 Sahel within the framework of the implementation plan of the concept of operations of the G5 Sahel Joint Force. Beyond emphasizing the importance of the Nouakchott Process the communiqué expected to provide for the establishment of a high level ad hoc committee for coordination and mobilization of support for Sahel within the framework of the APSA. It is also expected to urge international partners to support the operationalization of the APSA in the Sahel in the implementation of the G5 Sahel Force both for mobilizing wider regional support and consolidating the gains registered in establishing and activating the APSA for which partner support played key part. As part of this, the communiqué is expected to provide for the provision of civilian capacity including experts in human rights and international humanitarian law by the AU within the G5 Sahel Force and the operationalization of the MoU that the AU Commission and the G5 Sahel Secretariat signed in March this year. Other issues the communiqué is anticipated to address include the need for addressing the Libyan crisis, the concern over the gradual militarization of international intervention in the Sahel and the imperative for prioritizing political solutions and the economic development and post-conflict reconstruction programmes, within the priorities determined by the Sahel states themselves.