

Report of the Commission on the Peace Process in the Central African Republic

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Tomorrow (9 May) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will receive a briefing by the Commissioner of Peace and Security Smail Chergui on the peace process in the Central African Republic (CAR) and the implementation of the peace agreement. The UN is expected to participate in providing a briefing. Ambassador Hope Tumukunde Gasatura is also expected to make a statement as the Chair of the month.

It is expected that the PSC will receive the Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the peace process in the Central African Republic. The focus of the report and the session is expected to be the peace process in particular the Global Peace Agreement in the Central African Republic, signed by the CAR government and 14 armed groups in Bangui on 6 February and the follow up to the agreement as well as AU's role in this respect.

The 826th PSC session that was held at a ministerial level on the margins of the 32nd AU Summit made a decision 'to carry out a quarterly review of the situation in the CAR and the implementation of the Political Agreement and requests the Commission to report to Council on the progress made'. In line with this decision Chergui is expected to provide an update on the contents of the agreement and its implementation.

Although CAR did not feature regularly on the agenda of the PSC in 2018, tomorrow's session will be the fourth briefing on CAR which the PSC will be receiving since the beginning of 2019. At the AU Commission level as well there has been a vast engagement and leadership in brokering the peace process . It

is to be recalled that the peace deal was the outcome of the Direct Dialogue facilitated by the AU together with the UN and held in Khartoum, from 24 January to 5 February 2019.

When Chergui briefed the UN Security Council on 21 February, he indicated that the peace agreement was successful in bringing the government and armed groups to meet face to face for the first time and in tackling the root cause of the conflict including access to justice, fair distribution of national wealth and inclusivity in all state institutions. Moreover an important element of the agreement was the decision to establish a follow-up process to ensure the implementation of commitments by actors party to the agreement.

Indeed the establishment of this monitoring mechanism will play a critical role in the success and sustainability of the peace agreement and the Chergui may provide update in this regard.

Other provisions include contentious issues such as justice. The parties have agreed to set up a commission endowed with the mandate of reviewing all issues pertaining to conflict-related issues of justice. The commission is expected to submit its recommendations to the Commission on Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation, the National Assembly and the follow-up mechanism. The parties also agreed on the creation of mixed brigades, comprising former armed group members and national defense forces, with the responsibility to protect the borders of the country, among other tasks. Chergui may also provide update on the progress made particularly in the security arrangements under the agreement. It would also be of interest for member states to hear Chergui's assessment of the challenges that the peace agreement faces.

After the Khartoum agreement, Fermin Ngrebada, the chief government negotiator, was appointed the new prime minister. Despite the welcome, this revealed the subsequent appointment

of members of the cabinet ensued in a disagreement. All the ministries considered strategic including the prime minister office were kept by the incumbent government representatives. Despite the inclusion of ten of the 14 armed opposition groups signatories of the peace agreement, the perception of lack of inclusivity in the cabinet led to the rejection by two signatories of the agreement.

In an attempt to resolve this disagreement, the AU Commission brought to Addis Ababa for talks the government of CAR and the 14 armed groups from 18-20 March. At the end of the talks, the parties agreed on the inclusion of three representatives of armed groups in the government.

On 24 March a precedential decree officially appointed the armed groups leaders

Ali Darassa, leader of the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic, Mahamat Al Khatim, leader of the Central African Patriotic Movement, and Sidiki Abass, commander of the group Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation, as special military advisers to the prime minister's office.

The implications of such appointments and arrangement on the sustainability of the peace agreement are yet to be seen and it is expected to be one of the key components of the progress update that Chergui is expected to provide to PSC members. From the perspective of PSC members, it would also be of interest to learn about the arrangements under the peace agreement for mechanism for the resolution of disputes that arise over the peace agreement and the implications of the role of the AU as a guarantor of the peace agreement.

The other aspect that may be raised in the Chairperson's report is the outcome of the joint mission that was undertaken by AU, UN and EU and the second meeting of the International Support Group for CAR that was held in April. The aim of the mission was to support the initial phase of implementation of political agreement. The delegation held extensive

consultations with the government, armed groups and other stakeholders. PSC members may in this regard wish to receive the assessment of Chergui about the commitment of the parties.

Another area of interest for PSC members relate to the role of the joint engagement of the leadership of the AU and the UN in facilitating and supporting the peace agreement. The recent appointment of AU and UN representatives in CAR offers an opportunity to enhance joint support for the political dialogue. The AU has appointed Matias Bertino Matondo, as the new Special Representative and Head of Office for the AU Office in CAR and the UN has appointed Mankeur Ndiaye, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). The collaboration of the two new heads of mission of the two organizations is expected to complement the political processes that are led jointly from Addis Ababa and New York. It is to be recalled that Chergui in his briefing at the UNSC has also underlined the importance of aligning the mandate of MINUSCA with the security provisions in the peace agreement. These steps require a coordinated and harmonized approach among the various offices to ensure and support the successful implementation of the commitments.

The cooperation between the AU and the UN is also essential in light of the recent developments at the UNSC on the process towards the suspension or the progressive lifting of the arms embargo on the government of CAR. The UNSC has established key benchmarks with regards to the reform of the security sector (SSR) and disarmament demobilization, reintegration and repatriation (DDRR) in CAR. The criteria include the implementation of the National Program for DDRR, establishment of arm registration and protocol for the management of illicit weapons. The performance of the government against the set benchmarks and the assessment that will be undertaken by the UN will inform the review of the arms embargo by 30 September 2019.

The expected outcome of the session is a press statement. It is expected that member states would express their support for the peace agreement and the role that the AU in collaboration with the UN plays in supporting the agreement. The Council may urge parties to comply with the commitments they made under the peace agreement and it may request the Commission to provide further updates on the peace process within the framework of the terms set in the communiqué of the 826th session of the PSC.