

Second Annual Consultative meeting between the PSC and the Peace and Security Organs of the Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms

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Tomorrow (26 August) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is set to convene the second annual consultative meeting between the PSC and the Peace and Security organs of the Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs).

The session on the consultative meeting is expected to start with the opening remark of the PSC Chairperson for August, Cameroon's Permanent Representative to the AU, Churchill Ewumbue-Monono. Thereafter, the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Bankole Adeoye, is expected to make a statement on the state of AU-RECs/RMs relationship. The representatives of the Policy Organs of the RECs/RMs and the RECs/RMs, namely the East African Community (EAC), East African Standby Force (EASF), Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD), North African Regional Capability (NARC), Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) are expected to make presentation on their respective relationship and engagement since the inaugural meeting with the PSC and

the AU.

This session is convened as a follow up to the decision taken at the inaugural consultative meeting of the PSC and the policy-making organs of the RECs/RMs in 2019 to hold the consultative meeting on annual basis. The consultative meeting is also in line with Article 16 of the PSC Protocol on close working relations and policy coordination with RECs/RMs, and the conclusions of the various retreats of the PSC which called for a mechanism to strengthen harmonization and coordination through a periodic engagement between the PSC and the policy bodies of RECs/RMs.

This year's consultative meeting affords the Council the opportunity to follow up on the decisions of the inaugural consultative meeting and the communiqué of 870th PSC session, particularly those relating to the modalities to harmonize decision-making processes and strengthen coordination as well as institutionalize their relationship. In this regard, it is worth recalling that paragraph 18 of the communiqué of the inaugural meeting stipulates that, the PSC and the RECs/RMs policy organs agree to institutionalize their relationship, in particular through the following:

- i. holding of annual joint consultative meetings, between the PSC and the RECs/RMs policy organs on peace and security issues, alternately in Addis Ababa and in the headquarters of the RECs/RMs, in rotation. In this context, the joint consultative meeting should be convened ahead of the mid-year coordination summit between the AU and RECs/RMs;
- ii. swiftly communicate decisions on peace and security issues to each other for enhancing subsidiarity and complementarity, while ensuring coherence in decision-making process;
- iii. regular interaction between the PSC and the RECs/RMs Chairpersons of the policy organs and/or equivalent relevant structures on peace and security matters, on issues of common

concern, including through the use of the video-teleconferencing;

iv. joint field missions to assess situations of common concern and identify further joint action as may be needed;

v. holding of joint retreats/brainstorming sessions to reflect on priorities on peace and security issues of the PSC and the RECs/RMs and develop appropriate common response strategies; and

vi. organizing staff exchange visits.

Among others, tomorrow's session helps in considering whether and how much progress has been made in implementing the foregoing modalities and the challenges faced in pursuing policy coordination and mobilizing a more synchronized collective action by the PSC and policy organs of RECs/RMs. Best practices, if any, and gaps in coordinated policy-making as well as emerging issues affecting coordination between the PSC and RECs/RMs are also expected to be highlighted in this meeting.

From the available evidence, little seems to have moved forward in terms of translating the commitments made in the joint communique into action. Notwithstanding the framework articulated in the joint communique, policy coordination between the PSC and the RECs/RMs depends on convenience and has as yet to be institutionalized. For example, the representation of PSC and its active participation in meetings of the policy organs of RECs/RMs where decisions on matters that concern its mandate leaves a lot to be desired. Though such engagement is extremely important to coordinate responses and harmonize decisions, there is the issue of whether RECs/RMs have recognized the importance of regularly inviting and ensuring the participation of the PSC, through its Chairperson as envisaged in the Conclusions of the Abuja retreat of the PSC. On the other hand, while the practice of

joint field missions and joint retreats is taking hold with other institutions, notably the European Union Political and Security Committee (EU PSC), the same kind of engagement between the PSC and RECs/RMs is yet to develop.

Tomorrow's session may also follow up on its previous decision to establish a team of focal points from all RECs/RMs and the PSC Secretariat, a mechanism devised to facilitate a 'well-coordinated network for regular meetings/consultations', particularly on issues that are in the agendas of both the PSC and RECs/RMs.

The consultative meeting may also reflect on trends affecting harmonization of decision-making and strong coordination between PSC and RECs/RMs. One such issue is the divergence of norms between RECs/RMs and the AU system that may lead to diverging policy approach. This has been more visible in relation to contestations on elections and events involving unconstitutional changes of government. The SADC and AU were not on the same page in terms of the policy responses they respectively adopted initially to the unconstitutional change of government in Madagascar in 2009. The recent military seizure of power in Mali and Chad not only illustrates the divergence of norms among RECs but also shows how this could lead to the PSC taking divergent policy approaches to military coups.

The other major issue is the lack of clarity about the principle of subsidiarity and its application vis-à-vis the envisaged primary role of the PSC in the maintenance of peace and security in the continent. First, there is the issue of how the PSC may discharge its mandate as provided for in the PSC Protocol when a conflict situation arises within a particular REC/RM. The expectation from the mandate entrusted to the PSC under the PSC Protocol is that at the very least the PSC plays the role of accompanying and contributing to the policy response of the concerned REC/RM while ensuring that the applicable AU norms are duly respected. Where the REC/RM

concerned is not seized with the issue despite the need for regional and continental engagement, the PSC faces the issue of discharging its mandate by being seized with the situation while coordinating with the concerned REC(s)/RM(s).

The trans-regional nature of some situations such as the security threat posed by Boko Haram and overlapping membership in regional mechanisms is another emerging challenge for policy coordination. On the trans-regional nature of some security situations, while this offers the opportunity for horizontal coordination among RECs/RMs, the experience towards such practice remains limited. It is to be recalled that the PSC underscored the importance of horizontal coordination in the Communiqué of its 870th session. Most recently, at its 1010th session held in July 2021, the PSC also stressed the importance of strengthening institutional collaboration between ECCAS and ECOWAS in the implementation of the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram affected areas of Lake Chad Basin. On conflict/crisis situation that erupts in a country with multiple membership to RECs and RMs, not only the issue of who takes the lead in resolving the situation remains controversial but also harmonizing and coordinating actions can become even more challenging.

The latest deployment of the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) along with Rwandan troops is another development of interest to the Council. It is to be recalled that the inaugural consultative meeting stressed the importance of 'prior consultations and coordination, particularly, during the planning and deployment phases of peace support operations' and further emphasized the importance of undertaking the deployment of African Standby Force within a 'partnership between the PSC and the RECs/RMs policy organs.' However, indications are that the deployment of SAMIM did not take place within this framework. Close coordination and consultation between the PSC and the policy

organ of the concerned REC was lacking.

The expected outcome of the annual consultative meeting is a joint communique. It is expected that the communique would welcome the convening of the joint consultative meeting and the presentations that the various RECs/RMs made. It may also reiterate the importance of the close working relationship between the PSC and the Policy organs of the RECs/RMs and the need for implementation of the modalities for policy coordination and close working relationship between the two outlined in the joint communique of the first consultative meeting. The PSC and the representatives of the Policy Organs of the RECs/RMs may follow up on its decision at its 870th session to convene a “meeting of the Technical Working Group of Experts to develop a matrix outlining concrete practical steps to be undertaken, assign responsibilities with specific timelines, as well as a roadmap with clearly defined modalities and timeframes for consideration by the Council”. They may also urge the need for close consultation and invitation for participation of each in decisions relating to conflict situations of which the other is interested. They may also underscore the importance of the need for applying the principle of subsidiarity without it inhibiting the need for active participation and engagement of the PSC within the framework of the mandate entrusted to it under the PSC Protocol for taking conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict resolution as well as post-conflict reconstruction and development measures guided by the demands of the situation concerned while coordinating with the concerned REC/RM. In this respect, the communiqué may reiterate the decision of the PSC from its 870th session for “convening of a joint retreat of the PSC and RECs/RMs to brainstorm and reflect on ‘Decision-making, Harmonisation and Coordination between the AUPSC and RECs/RMs on the promotion of peace and security’ and develop report on appropriate common response strategies”. They may also emphasise the need for horizontal coordination between RECs/RMs affected by

shared security issues including with the facilitation of the
PSC.