

Session on the 17 years journey of the PSC on the occasion of its 1000th session

Automatic Heading TextDate | 25 May, 2021

Tomorrow (25 May) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council will convene its 1000th session dedicated to an appraisal of the 17 years journey of the Council. While the Council came into operation in March 2004, it was during its 10th session held for first time at the level of Heads of State and Government that the PSC was officially launched on the occasion of the celebration of Africa Day on 25 May 2004.

In marking the 17th years anniversary of the launch of the PSC and its 1000th session during tomorrow's session, the PSC will conduct the session in a hybrid form combining a physical meeting with participation virtually. For the occasion, the PSC has invited all the former AU Commissioners for Peace and Security, Said Djinnit, Ramtane Lamamra & Smail Chergui and Directors of the Peace and Security Department, El-Ghassim wane and Kambudzi Ademore Mupoki.

Highlighting the level of institutionalization of the PSC and its working methods, the number of PSC meetings between 2004 and 2021 shows a fourfold increase from the 21 meetings that the PSC held during its first year of operation. Since 2015, the PSC meets on a monthly basis for an average not less than six times. While its Rules of Procedure came into operation when the PSC became operational and served, together with the PSC Protocol, as the framework for guiding the work of the PSC, the PSC elaborated the specifics of its working methods through the Conclusions of the Dakar Retreat of the PSC held

in August 2007. In 2019, the PSC consolidated the Conclusions of the Dakar Retreat and the conclusions of the subsequent 11 retreats on its working methods into the Manual on the Working Methods of the PSC. The PSC Secretariat has become not only the technical arm for the standardized conduct of the business of the PSC but also the custodian of its institutional memory. The two main subsidiary bodies of the PSC, the Committee of Experts and the Military Staff Committee, have achieved full operationalization, availing the PSC useful support despite capacity limitations.

As at the end of December 2020, 52 of the 55 member States of the AU are parties to the PSC Protocol. The three countries that are not yet parties to the Protocol are Cabo Verde, Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. Following the elections held in February 2020, out of the 52 States Parties to the PSC Protocol, the number of States that served as members of the PSC reached 40. The States Parties to the PSC Protocol that never served on the PSC include the Central African Republic, Comoros, Eritrea, Guinea Bissau, Madagascar, Mauritius, Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles and Somalia.

Disaggregating the 1000 sessions of the PSC offers useful insights about how the PSC deployed its very finite time and resources over the years. Of the total number of PSC sessions, about 70% have been on country/region specific situations. The PSC used the remaining 30% of its sessions for thematic issues, consultative meetings with other AU organs and institutions, the UN Security Council, the Peacebuilding Commission, the EU, LAS and the ICRC.

Although situations from all parts of the continent featured on the agenda of the PSC, the regional distribution of the sessions of the PSC shows notable variations in terms of PSC engagements across the five regions of the continent. 46% or nearly half of the sessions of the PSC dedicated to county/regional situations dealt with situations in the East

Africa region. Much of the focus of these sessions focusing on this region have been on Somalia and the two Sudans. Both Somalia and Sudan have been on the agenda of the PSC since its establishment in 2004. And regardless of progress achieved over the years in relation to the situations in both countries, they continue to face major political and security challenges and are therefore still in the agenda of the Council. South Sudan, which has been on Council's agenda since 2012 has also been considered at a relatively high frequency, although Mali and Sahel and Guinea Bissau featured more on the agenda of the PSC than other situations in this region.

After East Africa, West Africa featured most regularly on the agenda of the PSC, accounting for more than 25% of the sessions of the PSC. Compared to East Africa, where Somalia and the Sudans account for more than 2/3 of the activities of the PSC in the region, more countries in West Africa were on the agenda of the PSC more regularly. The political instability and ever-increasing terrorist threat in Mali and the Sahel region continue to be one of the major security concerns for the PSC. Central Africa, with 19% of sessions, comes next in place. Central African Republic (CAR), Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have all been on Council's agenda since the early days of its establishment. CAR and DRC, which make the highest number of PSC's sessions in the region respectively, are still part of Council's agenda.

In comparison to the three regions, there are fewer number of PSC sessions on the situations in Northern and Southern Africa. Of the two, northern Africa takes the lead with 9% of the total sessions. From the northern region, the situation that dominates the agenda of the PSC is that of Libya. Other situations that featured on the agenda of the PSC include those of Western Sahara, Egypt and Tunisia. Southern Africa is the region with the least number of situations on the agenda of the PSC making up only about 1 % of the total

country/region specific sessions. Mozambique, Lesotho and Zimbabwe have all at some point been considered by Council although none have continuously featured on its agenda. South Africa has also been addressed by the PSC in the context of the 2019 xenophobic attacks in the country.

Though the peace and security framework of the AU anchored on the PSC is still relatively young, the foregoing shows that it has come a long way both in terms of its institutionalization and in initiating efforts for maintaining peace and security on the continent. Its 17 years of journey make the PSC well positioned to become the leading platform for peace and security decision-making on the continent. As its engagement witnessed huge expansion and acquired increasing, though sometimes challenged, authority, the PSC has come to significantly affect the politics of AU member States, the relations between them and ultimately Africa's relations with the wider international community and the latter's engagement on peace and security issues on the continent.

Perhaps more than the successes registered, tomorrow's session is of particular importance for reflecting on the challenges facing the PSC and the gap between the ambitions of the PSC protocol and the practice of the PSC. Indeed, as the PSC marks its 1000th session, increasing number of questions are emerging on the effectiveness of the work of the PSC and the way it conducts its business and the adequacy of some of its tools. The relapse of countries in transition back to conflict, the persistence of existing conflicts and the eruption of new conflicts and crises as well as the violence and insecurity from the spread of terrorism have put a spotlight on the effectiveness of the PSC conflict prevention, peacebuilding and conflict management and resolution activities.

Despite the decline witnessed in the number and scale of conflicts during 2000s, there has been notable increase in the number and nature of conflicts in the conflict from around

2011. The changes in the nature of conflicts and the challenges arising from emerging security threats call for response mechanisms that are prompt, agile and robust. These raise major questions on a) the security instruments that best fit for responding to changing security challenges, b) the adequacy of the political and institutional frameworks of the AU and c) the provision of the required level of leadership and resources by member States.

Addressing both the persistence of violent conflicts & crises and the enormous gap between the ambitions of the PSC Protocol and the actual practice of the PSC requires that the PSC addresses the various issues undermining its effectiveness.

The first set of challenges relate to the uneven implementation of the mandate of the PSC. This has two dimensions. The first relates to the fact that the level of implementation of the conflict prevention, management, resolution and peacebuilding functions of the PSC. The PSC has predominantly operated like a 'fire-brigade'. Hence, fire-fighting – dealing with conflicts after they have erupted – has become the dominant feature of the work of the PSC. As a result, other dimensions of the mandate of the PSC, notably conflict prevention, have been poorly implemented. Second, the PSC has not been consistent in its approach of putting conflict situations on its agenda. The PSC faces a charge of applying a double standard by intervening in some conflicts and failing to do so in other conflicts of similar, or even more serious, gravity.

The second set of challenges relate to capacity issues. In terms of diplomatic resources and technical expertise, despite the requirements of the PSC Protocol for member States to be in good standing and to have the capacity to shoulder the responsibilities of membership, a number of states still lack the required staff complement and technical expertise at the AU headquarters and the material capacity to effectively support the implementation of the decisions of the PSC. A

number of member States also lack the required technical expertise that provide dedicated analysis for and follow up on the activities of the PSC. Similarly, the size and technical capacity of the AU Commission (AUC) is inadequate to support the PSC in all aspects of its mandate. Additionally, there are several subsidiary bodies of the PSC that are not operationalized. There is also the perennial issue of the mismatch between the diplomatic, logistic, technical and financial resources that the AU and its member States are willing to commit and what the implementation of the decisions of the PSC requires.

The PSC also faces political challenges. Despite the fact that member States of the AU made commitments under various AU instruments including the AU Constitutive Act and the Protocol Establishing the PSC, on various occasions the pursuit of national policy interests in member States engagement on peace and security issues without due regard to AU policy and normative requirements undermined PSC's efforts and frustrated the emergence of timely and robust response. Recently, this has led to major retrogression when the PSC failed to uphold its zero tolerance policy for military seizure of power, severely denting its credibility as far as the application of AU's norm banning unconstitutional changes of government is concerned. Additionally, there is a trend of States invoking sovereignty for blocking or resisting the role of the PSC as witnessed during the previous few years and in the course of this year.

The other set of challenges lie in the realm of policy and operational coordination between the PSC and regional economic communities and/or mechanisms (RECs/RMs). The AU and RECs/RMs have experienced increasing interaction punctuated by tension over the leadership of, and division of responsibility in, the management of various crises.

As it did during the 10th anniversary of the PSC, it is anticipated that the PSC will issue a communique. The

communique is expected to acknowledge the progress registered in the execution of the mandate of the PSC. It is also expected to set out proposals for addressing the challenges that the PSC faces in dealing with the peace and security challenges of the continent, including those outlined above.