

Update on some countries in political transitions (Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, and Mali)

Update on some countries in political transitions (Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, and Mali) Date | 19 September 2022

Tomorrow (19 September), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council will convene its 1106th session to receive updates on the political transitions in Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, and Mali.

The session starts with opening remarks from Amma Twum-Amoah, Permanent Representative of Ghana to the AU and PSC Chairperson for the month of September 2022, followed by a statement from Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security. Maman Sidikou, High Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission and Head of the AU Mission for the Sahel (MISAHEL) and Basile Ikouebe, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission and Head of the AU Office in Ndjamen are expected to deliver statements. The representatives of Chad, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) are also expected to make statements as relevant country and regional mechanisms, in addition to the representative of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

It will be for the second time that Council considers the situation in countries undergoing political transitions due to unconstitutional changes of government as one agenda item. The first was held on 14 April 2022 at its 1076th session where Council discussed the political transitions in Burkina Faso,

Chad, Guinea, Mali, and Sudan. It is not clear why Council has not included Sudan in the agenda item this time. It has been now more than five months since the PSC considered the political transition in Sudan despite its decision, at its 1041st session, to receive monthly update on the evolution of the situation in Sudan.

Tomorrow's session is expected to review the political developments in the four countries since its last meeting in April. It also presents Council the opportunity to follow up on the implementation of some of its key decisions taken at its 1076th session, including the establishment of a monitoring dashboard of the situations in Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, Chad, and Sudan; the organization of a Needs Assessment Mission to Guinea; the operationalization of the Monitoring Mechanism on the Transition in Guinea; and the establishment of a Transition Support Group in Burkina Faso (TSG-BF).

On Burkina Faso, a major development since the last session is the decision of Burkinabe authorities to set a shorter transition period than its initial 36 months timetable. Duration of the transition was a source of disagreement between Burkinabe authorities and ECOWAS as the latter found the 36 months proposal in early March unacceptable. As part of the effort to support the transition in Burkina Faso and resolve the disagreement over the duration of the transition, it is to be recalled that ECOWAS appointed former President of Niger Mahamadou ISSOUFOU as its mediator. Subsequent engagement between ECOWAS and Burkinabe authorities through the mediator bridged differences between the two sides. While the communique of the 61st ordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority stated that the progress made led to lifting of economic and financial sanctions, there was no specified list of economic & financial sanctions imposed on Burkina Faso. What is lifted could only be the threat of immediate application of unspecified economic and financial sanctions to

which reference was made in the March 2022 ECOWAS Authority meeting. Despite various policy measures including the reshuffling of the army command & the understanding reached on the duration of the transition, the security situation in the country did not show any improvement. If anything, the dire security situation has continued to deteriorate since the coup. According to ACLED data, more than 530 violent incidents occurred between February and May 2022, showing a 115 percent year-on-year increase. The humanitarian situation also continues to worsen. According to the [latest data](#) provided by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) published on 5 September, 'violent attacks has driven more people to flee between January and July 2022 than during the entire year of 2021' in Burkina Faso, making the country one of the three fastest growing displacement crises in the world. Close to 2 million (nearly one in 10 persons) have been displaced in the country. The same source indicates that the 'rate of severe food insecurity has nearly doubled compared to last year, with over 600,000 people in emergency hunger levels during this lean season'. The deteriorating security and humanitarian situation underscore the need for ending the political and constitutional crisis and implementing the necessary political and institutional reforms.

On Mali, like in the case of Burkina Faso, diplomatic engagements between ECOWAS and the transition authorities in Mali culminated in acceptable transition timeline of 24 months from 29 March 2022. With Malian transitional authorities submitting a new timetable of 24 months and taking other positive steps notably the promulgation of a new electoral law on 24 June and establishment of the single election management body, Agence Indépendante de Gestion des Elections (AIGE), the 61st ordinary session of ECOWAS authority decided to lift the economic and financial sanctions it imposed on 9 January while maintaining the suspension and targeted sanctions against individuals and groups.

The convening of the 3rd meeting of the Monitoring and Support Group for the Transition in Mali (GST-Mali) took place on 6 September in Togo pursuant to 1027th and 1076th sessions of the Council. Co-convened by the AU, ECOWAS, and UN under the auspices of the Togolese government, the 3rd meeting of the GST-Mali presented an opportunity for Malian authorities to present steps being taken for implementing the transitional roadmap and mobilize support from regional and international actors for the reform process. The Transitional Authority of Mali, during the 3rd meeting of the GST-Mali, also requested the lifting of remaining sanctions. It remains to be seen how Council will respond to the call for lifting also of suspension, which under current circumstances could realistically happen only with agreement with ECOWAS. Mali's request of the lifting of sanction also brings the gap in AU's normative framework of sanctions into the spotlight as there is still unclarity on the issue of how and when sanctions are lifted.

On Guinea, the country has witnessed deteriorating political situation as tension erupted between the National Front for the Defense of the Constitution (FNDC) (an alliance of political parties, trade unions and civil society groups and a leading opposition group that spearheaded protests against former president Alpha Conde), and the military authority that took over-power unconstitutionally on 5 September 2021. The opposition group staged protests in late July and on 17 August over concerns of military authority's 'unilateral management' of the transition towards a civilian rule. On 8 August, the transition authorities dissolved the FNDC, a further blow to the country's transition towards democracy. Following the same pattern in Mali and Burkina Faso, the National Transition Council of Guinea set a 36-month transition to civilian rule on 11 May, which ECOWAS rejected. ECOWAS at its 61st ordinary session requested the transition authorities either to propose

an acceptable transition timeline until 1 August 2022 or face economic and financial sanctions as well as targeted sanctions. The authorities did not comply with the provided deadline, and it is accordingly susceptible for ECOWAS sanctions. ECOWAS mediator, former Beninese President Boni Yayi, was reportedly in Conakry in August trying to convince the transition authorities to agree for a shorter duration of transition period, but no indication that such diplomatic engagements bore fruit so far.

On Chad, the situation in Chad is marked by two significant developments since Council's last session in April. The first is the signing of peace agreement between Chad's transition government and about 40 politico-military groups on 8 August in Doha, Qatar, after more than five months of peace talks. Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), main rebel group which was behind the April attack that cost the life of former President Idriss Déby Into, remains a holdout group, denting the success of the Doha peace talk. The second key development is the launch of the 21-day 'Inclusive National Dialogue' on 20 August following the signing of the Doha agreement. The dialogue gathered some 1,400 delegates from various stakeholders. After the launch, the dialogue ran into procedural challenges, its scheduled end has been pushed back by ten days, to 30 September. Apart from FACT, the dialogue was also boycotted by Wakit Tamma, a large coalition of opposition groups and civil society groups. Last week, Chadian forces fired tear gas on supporters of the leader of Transformers, one of the parties of the coalition that boycotted the dialogue, after he was summoned for questioning by authorities. The authorities have been cracking down on members of Transformers, with about 200 having been arrested and held for several days before their release for planning to stage a rally.

In apparent departure to its own norms and established practices, PSC did not sanctioned Chad for the military

seizure of power in April 2021 but outlined list of conditions that Chad's transition authorities should meet. During its 996th session held on 14 May 2021, Council requested the Transitional Military Council (TMC), among others, to complete the transition within 18 months from 20 April 2021, further stating that 'no form of extension of the transition period prolonging the restoration of constitutional order, would be acceptable to the AU'. It also urged the Chairman and members of the TMC not to run for the upcoming elections. PSC's 18-months deadline will lapse this October and it is unlikely that the deadline will be met. The question therefore remains: will the PSC proceed with sanction or extend the transition timeline? The PSC is seen as having dealt with the military seizure of power & the suspension of constitution leniently. For it to be seen to be applying AU norms fairly, at a minimum it needs to uphold its own decisions on Chad by reaffirming the timeline and conditions of the transition as set out in the communique of its 996th session.

The expected outcome is a communique. Council is expected to welcome the agreement reached between ECOWAS and Burkina Faso as well as Mali on the new timetable of the transition and the resultant lifting of the economic and financial sanctions on these countries by ECOWAS. It may also note the convening of the 3rd meeting of the GST-Mali, the promulgation of a new electoral law and the establishment of the single election management body in relation to Mali and the need for enhancing closer working relationship and support for the transitional process in Mali; and the signing of Doha peace agreement between Chadian Transitional Authorities and politico-military groups, the launch of the 'inclusive national dialogue' in relation to Chad as steps in the right direction towards the restoration of constitutional order and ensure lasting peace in these countries. While commending the signing of the peace agreement, it may call upon the holdout groups to join the peace process. It may also reiterate the demands it set in its

996th session and call on the transitional authorities to respect the freedom of assembly and protest of opposition groups and ensure full inclusion of all political and social forces in the national dialogue by addressing concerns of various stakeholders. On Guinea, Council may express its dissatisfaction over the Transitional authorities' proposal of 36 months transition, and thus, it may urge the authorities to engage with ECOWAS in good faith with the view to reaching agreement on acceptable timetable for a rapid return to constitutional order and call for the operationalization of the Monitoring Mechanism on the Transition in Guinea for working with ECOWAS to get a transitional roadmap agreeable to all. It may also express concern over the deteriorating socio-political situation in Guinea due to the political disagreement with opposition groups over the transition. In this regard, Council may urge transition authorities to respect political rights as enshrined in the relevant instruments of the AU and hold inclusive national dialogue to resolve underlying issues. Council may also express its grave concern over the worsening security and humanitarian situation particularly in the context of Burkina Faso and Mali, which Council may call upon international partners to step up efforts to address these situations.