

Beyond business as usual

Igniting the AU-EU partnership on peace, security and governance

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This report is part of a special series on Africa-EU relations in the run-up and follow-up of the 2022 AU-EU Summit.

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author.

KEY MESSAGES

- Africa is working to reduce its dependence on donors and enhance its role in financing its own institutions, both generally and in particular in peace and security. There is an urgent need to speed up this process. Two thirds of the budget for peace support is still funded by external partners. This risks undermining African political leadership in peace support operations.
- More nuanced and frank political dialogue is critical. It is time to move beyond a reliance on political declarations without concrete supporting commitments and action.
- The AU should negotiate for an oversight role in the newly created European Peace Facility (EPF), which will contribute to the financing of military peace support operations in EU partner countries. Though the EPF is global in scope it is expected to focus on Africa. Moreover, it will replace the African Peace Facility (APF), bringing the risk of bypassing the AU Peace and Security Architecture. This would undermine AU ownership of conflict prevention, dialogue, negotiation and mediation efforts on the continent.
- Governance should be understood as more than just political governance and the pursuit of democratic ideals, to include factors affecting socio-economic well-being, such as effective management of public affairs and strengthening of the rule of law.
- Capable African institutions with peer pressure mechanisms in place and locally embedded civil society initiatives will be more effective in ensuring domestic accountability over externally driven donor accountability.



RATIONALE

This report is the outcome of a partnership initiative launched in 2021 by the European Think Tanks Group (ETTG) and the Africa-based Institute for Security Studies (ISS), with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Our initiative seeks to advance Africa-Europe relations in the run up to the 6th EU-AU Summit in Brussels (17-18 February 2022) and contribute to effective follow-up and implementation of the decisions taken there. Between November 2021 and January 2022 we jointly organised three virtual closed-door roundtables with leading African and European knowledge centres and independent experts focused on three key pillars of the AU-EU partnership:

- (i) green transformation and climate change;**
- (ii) economic development and trade agenda; and**
- (iii) participatory and accountable governance, peace and security.**

These roundtables identified areas of convergence and divergence of views between the continents on key priorities of the partnership. The three virtual roundtables were instrumental in producing three concise reports containing policy recommendations for African and European decision makers and for all stakeholders interested in strengthening the partnership. Each of the three reports has been made available before the Summit. Following the event, these will be revised into a single final ETTG-ISS publication that will be out in March 2022.

The ETTG and ISS thank UNDP for supporting the partnership, as well as all of the over 70 experts who dedicated their time to take part in the virtual roundtables and shape the content of the three reports.

INTRODUCTION

Peace, stability and good governance in Africa are key for both Africa and Europe, but require a stable and sustainable peace and security architecture. Across the African continent, armed conflicts and transnational crime remain major challenges. Violent extremism still poses a high risk in certain pockets, while the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to divide societies, aggravate structural political weaknesses, undermine socio-economic progress and weaken already fragile institutions.¹ From the western Sahel, across the Lake Chad Basin to the Horn of Africa and now in southern Africa, national, regional and international institutions struggle to effectively respond to these threats to peace and stability and to long-term security governance.

In Europe, too, countries face significant domestic and international challenges. The pandemic has exposed differences and created socio-economic cleavages, while increasing the number of people in need of economic and psychological assistance. The continent is also affected by instability and fear of war in the neighbourhood, from Libya to Ukraine.² In this context, EU institutions are struggling to define a joint EU foreign and security policy.

Against this backdrop, the AU and EU have invested in a durable and solid partnership, with peace and security as a central pillar. Cooperation on peace and security can be embedded in the AU's other partnerships as well, such as the AU-United Nations (UN) partnership, and in the AU's overall aspirations for African agency.

BACKGROUND: THE STATE OF EU-AFRICA PEACE AND SECURITY RELATIONS

Since its official launch in 2002, the AU has had a clear mandate to promote peace and security on the continent through the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). As part of the APSA, a central Peace and Security Council (PSC) and supporting structures were established, with the APSA additionally including eight regional economic communities (RECs), such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The AU Commission supports the work of the PSC and manages the AU's relationship with the RECs. To augment its approach to peace, security and governance, the AU merged its Department of Peace and Security with the Department of Political Affairs in 2020. This move was an important step forward, intended to ensure that the AU addresses the political and governance-related causes of conflicts in an integrated manner.³

The EU has been a major financial supporter of Africa's peace and security initiatives, second only to the UN. Between 2004 and 2019, the EU provided some €2.9 billion in financial assistance to various African peace and security efforts through the APSA via the African Peace Facility (APF).⁴ In addition, the EU has remained a close partner to the AU in identifying peace and security priorities.

In this framework, the EU recently launched two important initiatives that could impact African peace and security. First, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 has inaugurated the new Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), also known as "Global Europe", which aims to provide a more integrated approach to conflicts and crises, while also emphasising the EU's domestic security interests and concerns. Second, the new European Peace Facility (EPF), with a budget of some

1. Fiedler, Charlotte, Karina Mross, Yonas Adaye Adeto (2021). "Implications of COVID-19 for conflict in Africa", DIE Briefing Paper 12/2021, <https://bit.ly/3spERIY>

2. Adler, K. (2022). "Russia-Ukraine crisis: Why Brussels fears Europe is 'closest to war' in decades", BBC News, 17 January, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60030615>

3. Ronceray, Martin, Lidet Tadesse Shiferaw and Ueli Staeger (2021). "Merging peace and politics: Drivers, dilemmas and options for the AU's new governance setup". ECDPM Discussion Paper 303, <https://bit.ly/3Jf9Yrv>

4. Hauck, Volker and Lidet Tadesse Shiferaw (2020). "How can we judge the AU-EU partnership on peace and security?" ECDPM Great Insights Magazine, Vol. 9, Issue 3, <https://bit.ly/3rxicVL>



€5 billion for the period 2021-2027, will have a global scope, though it is expected to maintain a strong focus on Africa. The EPF can be deployed bilaterally with individual partner countries or coalitions, without oversight by the continental AU institutions. This means that the new instrument risks negatively impacting the longstanding AU-EU partnership on peace and security, as the AU might see it as undermining its overarching role in coordinating peace and security action on the continent, in favour of bilateralism.

Until now, the EU and AU have worked closely towards increased convergence. The EU's 2020 Joint Communication "Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa" broadly aligned with the AU's "Silencing the Guns by 2020" initiative and the longer-term goals of the AU's "Agenda 2063". Yet, despite their convergence on broad policy agendas, serious obstacles remain at both the transcontinental level and between individual AU and EU member states. These expose African countries to the influence of external actors, while also hampering attempts at a collective European foreign policy strategy. Moreover, the two actors' security priorities are somewhat different. For instance, African leaders, particularly those in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, look to the Great Lakes region and the Gulf of Guinea with grave concern, whereas the EU's focus is more limited, restricted primarily to the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa.



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STRENGTHENING AU-EU COOPERATION ON PEACE AND SECURITY

Ensuring equal political engagement

A renewed AU-EU partnership on peace and security cannot be based predominantly on considering if and how to deploy military interventions. Instead, it should privilege political dialogue and cooperation from a broader perspective, with a stronger emphasis on prevention and stabilisation measures. In this sense, the establishment of the Regional Stabilisation Strategy for countries affected by the Lake Chad Basin and the subsequent deployment by the UNDP of the Regional Stabilisation Facility, are examples of how to create a bridge between security and development interventions in conflict situations.

However, current structures are often too rigid to respond to existing challenges. For instance, some AU-EU memoranda of understanding (MOU), such as the one on peace, security and governance signed in 2018,⁵ look useful at first, but lack agreed benchmarks to measure what effective delivery, progress, results and impact actually mean, making all positions and arguments debatable. In this sense, there is a need to get beyond "nice diplomatic language" and move forward with more frank political dialogue, including a dialogue addressing the geopolitical dimensions of the AU-EU partnership with a bearing on peace and security.

This revamping of diplomatic language can also leverage some different assumptions. For example, Africa cannot be presumed to be the beneficiary of peace and security measures, but rather a global contributor to them. Nor can the EU be considered an apolitical "donor". At the same time, it is important to recognise the perception among some African countries that the EU still struggles to speak with a collective voice and remains overly influenced by the interests of key member states like France.

The new EPF: Risks and perspectives

The EPF is one of the major novelties introduced by the EU MFF. However, there are several challenges to be tackled to avoid negative spillovers for the AU.

First and foremost, it is crucial to address the issue of how to finance the AU's peace and security architecture with predictable and sustainable funds that reduce conditionality

5. Council of the European Union (2018). Memorandum of understanding between the African Union and the European Union on peace, security and governance 9250/18 <https://bit.ly/3Liuauu>



and dependence on the EU. Africa is increasingly working to lessen its donor dependence and enhance its financial ownership vis-à-vis its peace and security and AU institutional funding needs. The AU introduced a 0.2% levy on eligible imports to raise funds from member states for financing itself. But more and faster action needs to be taken by the AU Heads of State to increase the AU institutions' self-financing ability and the AU budget for peace support, which is still two thirds funded by external partners. While the AU is also pursuing engagement with the UN to secure funding from UN assessed contributions, substantially more funds will be needed, for instance, to establish an AU rapid response mechanism. The EU can work closely with Africa to spearhead the discussion on sustainable financing.

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Second, there is a risk that the distribution of EU funds directly to ad hoc coalitions might undermine AU political leadership. This has already occurred in the past, for instance, in the case of the G5 Sahel where the AU had no legal mandate to influence decision-making processes.

of these negative spillovers. In a world where multilateralism on the global peace agenda is increasingly under pressure, the EU should exercise caution not to undermine the continental platform and the AU's political role.

Third, a weakening of the AU in this new EPF landscape could undermine conflict prevention, dialogue, negotiation and mediation efforts on the continent. Though the AU has traditionally supported these civilian instruments, rising requests from African governments for more direct, bilateral funding and military arrangements with the EU could lead to the bypassing and sidelining of the AU. In this sense, the fact that the EPF would enable the EU to operate on peace and security in Africa without the approval of the AU or RECs could destabilise the partnership and the AU's role in coordinating peace and security measures on the continent. If the EU comes to play a stronger role in Africa at the bilateral level, the AU's position could be weakened in the coming years. Such a prospect of increased bilateral support from the EU to AU member states risks undermining a founding principle of the AU.

Finally, the AU-EU cooperation risks losing contact with the national level due to a "building from the roof" approach. For instance, the APF has not been fully understood at the local level, a difficulty which is likely to also affect the EPF.

Fourth, the fact that the EPF can finance security means – including lethal arms – can lead to a militarisation of measures, weakening the existing AU architecture for peace and security. In fact, the direct transfer of lethal weapons could be more in the interest of individual African states than of the collective AU system. Therefore, the underlying principles guiding the operationalisation of the EPF need to be made clearer, and safeguards put in place to avoid the occurrence

For all these reasons, it is essential that the next EPF focuses more broadly on human security and be transparent, accountable and politically informed. At the same time, the AU can claim a role in oversight. A focus only on state security might achieve stability from the EU's perspective but have negative impacts locally. For instance, it could lead to less democratic space for local populations, or empower some political actors over others, inevitably making the EU an actor in the internal political complexities of its partners. This can be avoided by combining the EPF with significant consultation and work with local populations and civil society organisations (CSOs). In this sense, the essential question remains who will monitor the implementation of "train and equip" to prevent human rights abuses by governments against protesting people (sometimes under the guise of "fighting terrorism"). In some countries, self-organised civil society or non-governmental organisations are important to compensate for weak governance and the absence of effective political leadership, and civil society generally is



important for accountability and an open political space.⁶ These organisations can play a vital role in assessment, monitoring and decisions that guarantee respect for national sovereignty and protection of the population against unintended consequences of external support to build states' military and defence capabilities.

IMPROVING THE POLITICAL DIALOGUE ON THE GOVERNANCE AGENDA

Governance is a paramount issue in the dialogue between Europe and Africa. However, governance cannot be approached as one party policing the other. It is better seen as constructive dialogue, as part of the partnership. There is a need to think beyond immediate and short-term solutions, and work on institution building and a broader understanding of governance that does not solely insist on political governance and democratic rituals but also includes socio-economic well-being.

This long-term approach to governance should also inform the themes on the political agenda. The EU is still perceived to dominate the agenda around topics such as migration, human rights, security and climate change. These asymmetries in the partnership create tensions and undermine trust between the parties. In this sense, the space for political dialogue should move to a shared understanding of threats and possible responses. To help overcome the asymmetry, the AU should more proactively define its agenda and priorities vis-à-vis the EU. Overall, the AU-EU dialogue has not been robust enough in political terms and in common actions. Furthermore, African and European leaders alike need to tackle the issue of governance fatigue, and move governance again to the top of the Africa-Europe agenda.

A possible evolution in the space for political dialogue provided by the partnership could be towards more attention to an inclusive approach to leadership. Much can be learned from the European Nordic countries and how their leaders connect with the grassroots level. One idea is to invite CSO representatives to the UN Security Council and to EU



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institutions. This connective approach to leadership can help meet people's expectations for a stronger role of civil societies, in particular, youth and women. The approach should include diasporas in dialogue, as they can be instrumental in bridging issues and promoting mutual understanding. It should involve the youth in initiatives around peace, security and governance and other themes, in an "intergenerational co-leadership approach". Concrete actions could include institutionalised initiatives and targeted youth recovery after conflicts, as reaffirmed in 2020 by UN Security Council Resolution 2535.⁷

Finally, the EU and AU should at all costs avoid the emergence of double standards. For example, the current responses to recent military coups risk being arbitrary and applying double standards. For this reason, the AU should consider revisiting its approach to governance, pushing its member states to adopt or respect a limitation in the number of mandates for heads of state and government as already instituted for the AU Commissioners. Although not applied in a consistent manner, it should not be forgotten that the AU Constitutive Act makes it possible for the AU to intervene in cases of unconstitutional change of government.

6. For instance, the People's Coalition for the Sahel is an alliance of CSOs based in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, as well as in other Sahel countries, supported by regional and international organisations. In March 2021 the Coalition launched the report "The Sahel: What Needs to Change" and in January 2022 it briefed the UN Security Council on human security in the region.

7. UN Security Council Resolution (2020), Resolution 2535, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2535>. The resolution underscores the critical role of youth in the prevention and resolution of conflict, with five pillars of action: participation, prevention, protection, partnership, and disengagement and reintegration. About two thirds of Africa's total exports to the EU are in primary goods (<https://bit.ly/3tgNbXj>).ly/3qdWK7p).

KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis presented suggests a number of policy recommendations for strengthening the AU-EU partnership on peace, security and governance in the run up to the EU-AU Summit:

RECOMMENDATION 1

The EU should align its support to the AU, not sideline the AU. This means ensuring a systematic alignment of EU support mechanisms and ensuring that new instruments are not to the detriment of existing regional political AU structures. For its part, the AU needs to bridge the gap between centre and periphery, between Addis Ababa and the RECs as well as the national level. Actions and policies need to be informed by dynamics on the ground, avoiding a “building from the roof” approach through regular conflict analysis and consultation with diverse stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The AU should negotiate for and claim an oversight role in the EPF, such as a seat on the oversight and monitoring structure of the EPF, like the EU used to have a seat on the Board of the AU Peace Fund.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The EU should conduct regular monitoring and analysis of possible negative effects of the new EPF in terms of militarisation of conflict response, indirect participation in political systems and conflicts of partners, and sidelining of the APSA in favour of ad hoc coalitions. Clear EPF principles and mechanisms need to be defined, as well as oversight and reporting mechanisms to establish accountability. Finally, transparency is needed in divisions of labour and communications on the whole process and decisions.

RECOMMENDATION 4

AU member states should speed up their efforts to increase their financing of AU institutions. Predictable and sustainable funds for the AU will reduce conditionality and dependence on the EU and other donors.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Despite an apparent “governance fatigue” in the AU-EU relationship, long-term governance agendas and strategies should remain central in the partnership. To be effective, unilateral conditionalities and double standards have to be avoided, and more reciprocity and mutual approaches instituted to tackle common challenges. To promote effective reforms, African peer pressure mechanisms can be strengthened, as well as locally embedded initiatives like the People’s Coalition for the Sahel. Such initiatives strengthen domestic accountability instead of externally driven donor accountability. More resources should be invested to understand and promote the role played by civil societies, including youth, diaspora, women and private sectors.



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