

STUDY

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African Union: The African political integration process and its impact on EU-AU relations in the field of foreign and security policy



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African Union:

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ABSTRACT

The European Union (EU) has long paid significant diplomatic, financial and institutional attention to its relationship with the African Union (AU). Engagement between the two organisations has steadily risen in scope and complexity over recent years, reflecting the AU's increasing role in African foreign and security policy matters. This study analyses the dynamics that shape African political integration as well as foreign and security cooperation, identifying areas of convergence and divergence in the various cooperation formats that link both unions. The EU remains the AU's principal partner, notably in the domain of peace and security. However, the relationship has become more politicised, with differing perspectives on the war in Ukraine and the EU's pursuit of flexible security arrangements in Africa. This study recommends that the EU adapt its funding arrangements, cooperation formats and multilateral engagement in its relationship with the AU to remain in tune with the pace and direction of political integration in Africa. In this effort, the European Parliament can add specific value through parliamentary diplomacy.

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List of abbreviations

ACP	African, Caribbean, Pacific
AGA	African Governance Architecture
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
APF	African Peace Facility
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
ATMIS	African Union Transition in Somalia
ASF	African Standby Force
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
C2C	Commission-to-Commission
CAP	Common African Position
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EAC	East African Community
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EDF	European Development Fund
EEAS	European External Action Service
EP	European Parliament
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
EPF	European Peace Facility
ERM	Early Response Mechanism
EU	European Union
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
JAES	Joint Africa Europe Strategy
LCBC	Lake Chad Basin Commission
MEP	Member of the European Parliament

MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
OACPS	Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
PAP	Pan-African Parliament
PAPS	Political Affairs, Peace and Security
PRC	Permanent Representatives Committee
PSC	Peace and Security Council
PSO	Peace Support Operation
REC	Regional Economic Community
RM	Regional Mechanism
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADR	Sahrawi Arab Democratic
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USA	United States of America

1 Introduction

Regional integration is a central vector of political relations both within Europe and Africa. The integration of Europe through the European Union (EU) serves as a major reference point for European governments and citizens. Among all other world regions, Africa stands out for its dedicated efforts to integrate through numerous formal regional organisations and continental initiatives. The African Union (AU) has built up a **robust continental administration** with an approved staff structure of about 1 700 professional and administrative personnel¹. The AU pursues **comprehensive ambitions to create a federated continent**, with goals that include political unity, a common market and free movement of people². The EU and the AU have also emerged as security and foreign policy actors, albeit with distinct remits and capacities. Consequently, the EU and the AU maintain a complex and multifaceted set of interactions, including cooperation at different levels of governance and substantial financial contributions from the EU to the AU. However, a certain amount of confrontation also exists, not least due to post-colonial legacies.

EU institutions acknowledge the **crucial role African political integration plays in the EU's foreign relations**. The President of the European Commission Von der Leyen's first trip outside Europe in 2019 was to the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, returning a few months later with 22 Commissioners. In 2022, after a hiatus in diplomatic gatherings caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, President of the European Council Charles Michel and French President Emmanuel Macron, whose country held the presidency of the Council of the EU at the time, organised a high-level event for over 40 African Heads of State. The European Parliament (EP) has also been active in regularly fostering links with elected representatives from across Africa. An Inter Parliamentary Meeting between the EP and the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) in December 2022 reaffirmed commitment to the parliamentary dimension of EU-AU cooperation.

As well as this shared commitment to regional integration, the AU is not only an **important interlocutor in addressing security, trade and health matters on the African continent**, but is also becoming increasingly involved in **multilateralism and global governance**. Yet this growing assertiveness has created significant points of friction in the interregional relationship. Disagreements over the war in Ukraine have shown that **the two partners are still a long way from forging a comprehensive alliance**. Complications in vaccine delivery and distribution as well as travel bans during the pandemic have been additional sources of frustration. European military interventions in the Sahel have reached a stalemate, while migration issues remain a source of friction. Meanwhile, other partners, ranging from China to Russia, are effectively competing for influence.

Despite shared ideals of regional integration as well as the reality of the AU's financial dependency, **the EU cannot take its relations with the AU for granted**. The institutional dynamics that shape the AU's role as well as its relationship with Member States and affiliated regional organisations offer both opportunities and challenges for an improved strategic partnership with the EU. To provide a better understanding of these dynamics, this study provides an assessment of the AU's political

¹ J. Trondal, T. Tiekou and S. Gänzle, '[The Organisational Dimension of Executive Authority in the Global South: Insights from the AU and ECOWAS Commissions](#)', *Global Policy*, 2022, pp. 1-17.

² African Union, [Agenda 2063: the Africa we want](#), Popular Version, September 2015.

integration process and analyses how these developments affect foreign and security policy interactions with the EU.

The study is divided into three main chapters. The first focuses on **African political and security integration**. After providing context (Section 2.1), the main regional actors are analysed (Section 2.2): the AU, its affiliated Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and *ad hoc* coalitions. Based on this assessment three overarching elements are provided to capture the ambiguities towards the AU's political integration agenda: national sovereignty, subsidiarity with RECs and international partnerships (Section 2.3). Thematic areas of political integration are then discussed within which African Member States' positions converge or diverge (Section 2.4). The final part examines how the AU conducts external partnerships and focuses on the specificities of the main partners beyond the EU: the United Nations (UN), China and the United States of America (USA) (Section 2.5).

Chapter 3 analyses the **EU-AU relationship through the lens of foreign and security policies**. After re-establishing the context (Section 3.1), areas of divergence and convergence between the AU and the EU are examined (Section 3.2). This is followed by an assessment of various formats that are critical to the vitality of this relationship as well as the diversity of EU institutions and instruments (Section 3.3).

Complementing the main analysis and illustrating how divergence and convergence emerge between the EU and the AU, Chapter 4 contains two case studies to provide an in-depth analysis of regional and interregional dynamics in the field of foreign and security policy. The first case study concerns the **AU's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine**. From dealing with increased food and fertiliser prices to proactively engaging parties of an extra-African conflict, the war in Ukraine has introduced new diplomatic challenges to the EU-AU partnership. This case highlights how the AU is trying to become a foreign and security policy actor without being able to rely on a common African position, as the sharp divisions between AU Member States show. While a globally-minded AU is likely to disagree with the EU more often, at least symbolically, this case study illustrates how continued substantive cooperation could be achieved between the two unions.

The second case study examines the **regional and international security partnerships that have emerged in response to insecurity in the Sahel since 2012**. The EU's initial involvement focused on military intervention through an *ad hoc* coalition of five regional states, the G5 Sahel. This arrangement constrained the AU's ability to play a leading role in resolving the conflict. The coalition has now reached a stalemate due to a series of military coups in the region combined with an increased presence of foreign mercenaries, forcing both the EU and the AU to look elsewhere for new regional alliances. As renewed strategies for the Sahel shift away from military responses and towards addressing the root causes of insecurity, such as climate change and governance, new collaboration opportunities emerge between the EU and the AU. This case demonstrates the benefits of forming tailored sub-regional coalitions when swiftly responding to specific security challenges. However, their fluid and informal nature risks undermining the preeminent role of the AU in conflict resolution and hence EU-AU collaboration in this regard.

Based on the findings of the overarching analysis and the case studies the study formulates a set of actionable policy recommendations in Chapter 5 for the EU and its institutions, particularly the EP.

The study's methodology relies on **content analyses of qualitative data sources**, in particular: EU and AU decisions, EU-AU partnership documents, research studies and media documents. In addition, the authors conducted and analysed **30 semi-structured expert interviews**, which took place in January 2023 both in Addis Ababa and Brussels. Most interviewees were senior and mid-level staff from AU and EU institutions with responsibilities in foreign and security policy. The remainder included various representatives from key AU and EU Member States, representatives of AU partners from non-EU countries, UN staff, as well as expert observers from think tanks and universities. The authors are deeply indebted to all interlocutors for their time and the insights they provided.

2 Regional integration in Africa with a focus on the African Union

2.1 Historical trajectory

Pan-Africanism has been a central ideological pillar throughout the history of regional integration in Africa, albeit its scope and purpose have been subject to different interpretations³. This movement emerged in the early 20th century, initially as an intellectual quest by the descendants of enslaved people across the USA and the Caribbean, as well as France and the United Kingdom (UK), along the fault line of continuing racist exclusion and imperial rule. Following early emphasis on **cultural emancipation and political self-determination**, the movement was later galvanised into an **anticolonial struggle** towards the continent's cultural and political unity as well as a global notion of anti-imperialism that extended to Asia and parts of Latin America.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Pan-Africanism transformed from an ideal into a political reality with the **end of colonial rule** in most of Africa, coupled with a global commitment to the UN values of **self-determination and racial equality**. Although marking a major success for the movement, decolonisation also exacerbated fragmentation between the different streams of Pan-Africanism that remain relevant today.

Firstly, a group of African states under the leadership of Ghana and Guinea articulated a **radical vision of Pan-Africanism that proposed a United States of Africa** in which the newly independent states would remove old colonial boundaries in efforts to combine independence with a wide-ranging continental institutional framework⁴. Moderate states led by Tanzania and Liberia proposed **integration that respected sovereignty mainly through sub-regional arrangements**. This narrow vision of integration emphasised that African states needed to prioritise national institutions before surrendering their sovereign rights to continental or sub-regional institutions. In seeking to compromise between these two visions, continental integration institutions were established in the political, economic and security arenas that were built on sovereign principles. **Federal ambitions for the continent ultimately failed to materialise** and a nationalist interpretation of Pan-Africanism prevailed in the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), created in 1963, which broadly preserved colonial borders. Pan-Africanism also espoused socialist values, as capitalism was conceptually associated with imperialism. Consequently, regional integration warranted protectionism and import substitution *vis-à-vis* the global economy. Geographically, the OAU represented a continental interpretation of Pan-Africanism but underneath divisions between North and sub-Saharan Africa as well as between francophone and anglophone countries persisted. Institutionally, the OAU depended on consensus to reach decisions, which severely curbed the prospect of deepening African integration and overcoming national fragmentation. Paramount importance was given to non-interference and national sovereignty rather than continental unity⁵.

³ H. Adi, *Pan-Africanism: a history*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2018.

⁴ P-H. Bischoff, [The Politics of Regional Integration in Africa](#), Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies, 2021.

⁵ R. Abrahamsen, '[Internationalists, sovereigntists, nativists: Contending visions of world order in Pan-Africanism](#)', *Review of International Studies*, Vol 46, No 1, 2020, pp. 56-74.

At the same time, the OAU encouraged a **proliferation of sub-regional institutions** to better accommodate the unique specificities of different groups of countries. During the 1970s and 1980s, such sub-regional organisations arose in: West Africa, mainly the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Southern Africa, the Southern African Community (SADC); and Central Africa, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). These organisations were forerunners of the present eight RECs⁶. The colonial legacy of regional integration persisted in parallel, most notably **the CFA franc zone which precluded monetary sovereignty** and institutionalised the pegging of local currencies to the French franc and later the euro. The 1980s' debt crises in many African states brought yet another shift in the dominant notion of pan-Africanist integration towards economic liberalisation and democracy. In 1991, the Abuja Treaty introduced the economic objective of creating outward oriented common markets in Africa, following which various regional parliamentary assemblies and courts were founded⁷.

Today, the **consolidation of postcolonial nation-states** remains a central concern in most of Africa and curbs the prospects of federalist Pan-Africanism. AU countries remain deadlocked over the idea of a Union Government since it was discussed more seriously in 2009 when the then Senegalese President Wade, a leading proponent of the Union Government concept, advocated that the 15 AU Member States that endorsed it should proceed with its establishment. Among them were the Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Libya and Mali.

Others, such as South Africa and Nigeria, placed priority on strengthening subregional organisations, reflecting a gradualist approach. This reality lends itself to three main scenarios for Pan Africanism. The first is the maintenance of the status-quo, in which continental institutions for security and development integration based on respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity coexist alongside sub-regional economic institutions. The consensus on the African Continental Free Trade Area implies a deepening of economic integration without venturing into the political sphere. The second scenario is the AU's consolidation as an international organisation, accompanied by significant breakthroughs on the modalities of unification. Finally, a maximalist scenario of supranationalism is viable but questions about the envisioned process and end-state remain, given that many states adhere strictly to national sovereignty.

Across these scenarios, political and intellectual movements in Africa today continue to cultivate a **notion of Pan-Africanism that keeps the desire for regional integration alive** in public discourse⁸. A shared notion of Pan-Africanism is incarnated by the AU, which seeks to create a political, economic and social space for the continent as well as the African diaspora⁹. However, numerous delineations of Pan-Africanism based on identity, paradigms and connections continue to exist. Some of these delineations are expressed by the manifold and incongruent overlap of numerous regional organisations across the continent, which represent different political cultures, economic visions and integration ambitions.

⁶ Economic Commission for Africa, [Assessing Regional Integration in Africa](#), UNECA, Addis Ababa, 2004.

⁷ Organization of African Unity, [Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community](#), 3 June 1991.

⁸ S. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, '[Pan-Africanism and the international system](#)', in T. Murithi (ed), *Handbook of Africa's International Relations*, Routledge, London, 2013, pp. 21-29.

⁹ T. Murithi, *The African Union: Pan-Africanism, peacebuilding and development*, Routledge, London, 2017.

2.2 Overview of the main institutions in the field of foreign and security policy: AU, RECs and ad hoc mechanisms

2.2.1 The African Union

The AU was established in 2002, following a decision in September 1999 under its predecessor the OAU to create a new continental organisation that would accelerate the continent's development¹⁰. Essentially an intergovernmental organisation, the AU is built around the following key decision- and policy-making organs:

- an **Assembly of Heads of State and Government** which is its supreme policy and decision-making body, comprising Heads of State and Government of all Member States. The AU Assembly Chairperson is selected at the January Ordinary Session of the AU Summit for a renewable one-year term. They are assisted by the AU Bureau, which consists of three vice-chairpersons and one rapporteur, the latter being the outgoing AU Assembly Chairperson. The Assembly elects this Bureau based on rotation, agreed geographical representation and regional consultations;
- an **Executive Council** composed of foreign ministers or equivalents designated by the governments of AU Members, which coordinates and takes decisions on policies in areas of common interest to Member States. This body reports to the AU Assembly, considers issues referred to it and monitors the implementation of policies formulated by the Assembly;
- a **Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC)**, comprising Member States' permanent representatives appointed to the AU, which prepares the Executive Council's work and acts on its instructions;
- **Specialised Technical Committees**, which report to the Executive Council and comprise ministers or senior officials from AU Members States;
- the **Peace and Security Council (PSC)**, the AU's organ for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. It comprises 15 elected Member States selected on the basis of regional representation to serve 3-year terms;
- the **African Union Commission (AUC)**, which is the AU's Secretariat based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, comprising an elected chairperson, a deputy chairperson, 6 commissioners and an estimated 1 700 staff, half of whom hold administrative functions¹¹.

The six largest economies of Africa contribute half of the AU's membership contributions but most of its budget comes from sources outside Africa, largely the EU¹².

In order to provide operational, institutional and policy direction, the AU set up the **African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) as a mechanism for comprehensively addressing peace and security issues in a coordinated manner** between the AU, the RECs and Regional Mechanisms

¹⁰ The AU's objectives are listed under article 3 of the [Constitutive Act of the African Union](#) (2000) and the [Protocol on the Amendments to the Constitutive Act of the African Union](#) (2003).

¹¹ T. Kwasi Tiekou, S. Gänzle and J. Trondal, 'People who run African affairs: staffing and recruitment in the African Union Commission', *The journal of modern african studies*, Vol 58, No 3, 2020, pp. 461-481.

¹² U. Engel and F. Mattheis (eds), *The finances of regional organisations in the Global South: Follow the money*. Routledge, London, 2019.

(RMs) for conflict prevention, management and resolution¹³. The APSA is built around defined structures that include: the PSC, the standing decision-making organ for peace, security and stability in Africa; the AUC; the Panel of the Wise; a Continental Early Warning System; an ASF; and the Peace Fund. Additional components of APSA are: the Military Staff Committee, a subsidiary body of the PSC; the Common African Defence and Security Policy; the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa), a subsidiary mechanism of the Panel of the Wise; and the African Union Child Protection Architecture, established by the AU Assembly in 2019 as a subset of the APSA.

As an institutional mechanism, APSA has become the **foundation for interventions on peace and security in Africa**, regarding which collaboration between the RECs and RMs is guided by the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation in the Area of Peace and Security between the AU and RECs, signed in Addis Ababa on 28 January 2008. One aim of this MoU is to contribute to the full operationalisation and effective functioning of the EU APSA Support Programme, thereby enabling the AUC and RECs/RMs to develop joint programmes and activities in the area of peace, security and stability in Africa. APSA's implementation is guided by roadmaps in order to increase its impact. For instance, under the 2016–20 Roadmap the AU and RECs/RMs agreed to concentrate on five strategic priorities: conflict prevention, crisis and conflict management, post-conflict reconstruction and peace building, strategic security issues, as well as coordination and partnerships. One key aspect of this Roadmap was the need to mainstream and address cross-cutting issues such as youth, gender, children in situations of conflict, human rights and climate change. When the Political Affairs along with the Peace and Security departments of the AU Commission were merged into the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) in 2021, the process of aligning APSA with the African Governance Architecture (AGA) began with the establishment of a joint APSA–AGA Secretariat¹⁴.

2.2.2 The RECs

African RECs arose at various times, with varying mandates, roles and structures aimed at coordinating economic and political development among sub-continental regions in Africa. The AU considers RECs as the **cornerstones of African integration and the 'building blocks' of the APSA**, recognising eight such Communities that are closely linked to its work. These are: the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU); the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa; the Community of Sahel-Saharan States; the East African Community (EAC); the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD); the ECCAS; the ECOWAS; and the SADC. Although these organisations play an important role for economic integration, as their moniker suggests, they have over time become crucial security actors and now serve as the foundation of the APSA.

The degree of integration and effectiveness achieved by RECs as pillars of economic integration and the APSA varies greatly depending on security within particular neighbourhoods. It also depends on the socio economic development, policy preferences and coordination of those countries as well as the political commitment of their governments. Some organisations have made crucial contributions to security and governance, including ECOWAS, that has built up an early warning and peacebuilding

¹³ African Union, [African Union Handbook 2022 – A guide for those working with and within the African Union](#), Ninth edition, African Union Commission and New Zealand Crown, Addis Ababa, 2022, p. 77.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

architecture with strong ties to Member States' civil society and governments. ECOWAS also has a track record of successful intervention in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars and more recently in the 2016-17 Gambian crisis. Similarly, SADC has responded decisively to governance crises in Lesotho and Madagascar and is currently engaging in counter-terrorism measures in northern Mozambique. However, many other RECs have yet to demonstrate an aptitude for action in tackling governance and security crises.

Many African countries are members of different RECs, leading to what has been called a '**spaghetti bowl**' of overlapping memberships. IGAD is one of the most affected by membership overlaps, as countries in the East and Horn of Africa have joined other RECs for economic and strategic reasons. Similar trends are observable in North Africa where countries are members of different overlapping RECs and Regional Mechanisms (RMs), while there is no functioning REC that takes primary responsibility for ensuring peace and stability in North Africa. Initially, the AMU was tasked with establishing the North African Standby Brigade as the region's contribution to the ASF. However, it was unable to do so because Morocco was not an AU Member at the time. This resulted in the formation of North Africa Regional Capability, which is based in Egypt and is not affiliated with any REC. Although a functioning structure has been built up, it has never been deployed and furthermore it is unclear how the AU or any REC could regulate this body¹⁵. In general terms, overlaps in REC membership, mandates and priorities have resulted in competition for limited financial resources and political mandates.

2.2.3 Ad hoc security groupings

Shifts in Africa's security landscape, combined with the lack of immediate alternatives to pressing security concerns, have prompted African states and external actors to turn to *ad hoc* security groupings. While these **fill a genuine gap in the APSA toolbox by responding to fast-changing threats, they have posed structural challenges for the AU to monitor and ensure that they act in accordance with its doctrines**. *Ad hoc* security groupings are essentially regional mechanisms recognised by the AU as part of the APSA system under the PSC Protocol. This Protocol emphasises subsidiarity in engagement through *ad hoc* arrangements requiring RMs and the PSC to build collaboration and synergies through liaison offices and formally through MoUs. Each *ad hoc* mechanism has gained momentum through the active support and agreement of troop-contributing countries, endorsement by the relevant REC and support from international actors before authorisation of the PSC was sought¹⁶. For each *ad hoc* mechanism, the dynamics of AU authorisation or endorsement were unique. Amongst these organisations are:

- the **AU Regional Task Force**, which was a multinational operation to counter the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda in 2011. It was launched by the governments of the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda and South Sudan, initially supported by US Special Forces and the UN¹⁷.

¹⁵ Institute for Security Studies, [North Africa could benefit from a functioning regional organisation](#), Peace and Security Council Report, 2019.

¹⁶ O. Ismail and A. Ababu, [Ad hoc security arrangements and APSA. A case study of ACL-GLR, MNJTF, and G5 Sahel Force](#), Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Laboratory Of Analysis Of Societies And Powers – Africa / Diasporas, 2021, p. 15.

¹⁷ World Peace Foundation, [AU Regional Task Force Against the Lord's Resistance Army Mission](#), nd.

- The **G-5 Sahel Force**, established in 2014 by the presidents of Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Mali and Mauritania, with assistance from Benin. It was founded as a platform for joint security-development strategies and activities, with the primary goals of combating terrorism and transnational criminal networks. Activities were geared toward restoring state authority facilitating the return of refugees and internally displaced people, enabling humanitarian operations and contributing to Sahel development efforts¹⁸. But a series of unconstitutional changes in the government of Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso, dealt a blow to its operations, with Mali's military-led transitional government ultimately withdrawing from the G5 Sahel coalition in May 2022¹⁹. Mali's withdrawal was prompted by an increase in political tensions between the French and Malian governments following France's criticism of Mali's decision to cooperate with Russian paramilitaries. This led to the withdrawal of France's Barkhane and Takuba forces from Mali²⁰.
- Finally, the **Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)** against Boko Haram came into existence with a mandate formally authorised and approved by the AU PSC in January 2015, which has been renewed on an annual basis since then. The MNJTF evolved from the early 1990s, when countries in the Lake Chad Basin and Benin established it to combat cross-border criminality and insecurity. The transborder and transregional nature of Boko Haram's activities provoked a revision of its mandate that expanded to counter-terrorism. The MNJTF conducts military operations, prevents and disrupts cross-border movement of weapons, supplies fighters and logistical support to the group, searches for and frees abductees and disrupts terrorist infrastructure in the region²¹.

In general, the track record of *ad hoc* security arrangements is mixed. While they can be efficient as **quick and tailored responses to tackle specific problems, they are typically deployed as quick fixes to exceptional challenges and fail to provide long-term solutions that increasingly appear to be needed in African security**²². The ensuing fragmented vision of how to deal with security on the continent makes it difficult for the AU Commission to exercise control and ensure coherence with other institutional formats.

2.3 Ambiguities of African integration

This section discusses three fundamental ambiguities that characterise the AU's ambition to integrate the continent: frictions between national sovereignty and supranational ambitions; the question of subsidiarity between continental and regional levels; and the substantive role of external partners in implementing the pan-African agenda.

¹⁸ O. Ismail and A. Ababu, [Ad hoc security arrangements and APSA. A case study of ACL-GLR, MNJTF, and G5 Sahel Force](#) Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Laboratory Of Analysis Of Societies And Powers – Africa / Diasporas, 2021, p. 9.

¹⁹ F. Edu-Afful, et al., [Shifting from External Dependency: Remodeling the G5 Sahel Joint Force for the Future](#), Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network, *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*, 2022, p. 6.

²⁰ Le Monde with AFP, [France completes military pullout from Mali](#), *Le Monde*, 15 August 2022.

²¹ O. Ismail and A. Ababu, [Ad hoc security arrangements and APSA. A case study of ACL-GLR, MNJTF, and G5 Sahel Force](#) Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Laboratory Of Analysis Of Societies And Powers – Africa / Diasporas, 2021, p. 5.

²² Y-F. Reykers, J. Karlsrud, M. Brosig, S. Hofmann, C. Maglia and P. Rieker, [Ad Hoc Coalitions in Global Governance: Short-Notice, Task- and Time-Specific Cooperation](#), *International Affairs*, 30 January 2023.

2.3.1 National sovereignty and supranational ambitions

The EU's foreign policy towards Africa is predicated on the benefits of supporting regional integration, which makes the AU's decade-long efforts to achieve continental cooperation and integration a central reference point. The AU comprises an assembly of 55 Member States (all 54 African UN members plus the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic) and has built up a sophisticated institutional architecture. However, actual African regional integration exhibits **contradictory trends and is often decried as ineffective or inappropriate to the challenges it is supposed to meet**²³. The privilege of **national sovereignty** and efforts to guard it have led to the construction of an incohesive institutional structure lacking in supranational scope. African integration schemes must comply with the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, respect for boundaries, equality of Member States, non-intervention and non-interference in the internal affairs of Member States. This framework originally lent stability to African interstate relations for the OAU's first three decades of existence. However, when civil wars arose in West Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region from the 1960s to the 1990s, there were growing pressures for continental and sub-regional organisations to rethink some of the core foundations of integration²⁴. At a continental level, these pressures culminated in sufficient momentum to establish the AU, an institution that continues to respect sovereign equality but is more willing to intervene in the internal affairs of Member States when faced with violent conflicts. The AU's 2002 Constitutive Act thus changed the **'non-interference' principle to a 'non-indifference' doctrine**²⁵. The AU's peacekeeping missions in Darfur (UNAMID), Burundi (AMIB) and Somalia (AMISOM) have demonstrated the willingness and capacity of the AU to intervene in African crises. At sub-regional levels, ECOWAS under Nigerian leadership launched military interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone, signalling a new determination to alter the bounds of sovereignty. In Southern Africa, SADC also intervened in Lesotho to restore order and stability. Apart from military interventions, continental and sub-regional institutions have invoked the principle of non-indifference in building multiple institutions for conflict prevention, mediation and post-conflict reconstruction.

African institutions have faced tremendous obstacles as they seek to transcend sovereignty in efforts to strengthen supranational institutions of economic, political and security integration. African states remain **deeply divided on common values of governance, security and socio-economic development**. Moreover, sovereignty has become a hindrance as Africa's RECs move toward supranational institutions that would overcome some of the challenges of sovereignty-centred integration.

In addition to the limited delegation of power to supranational institutions, integration governance structures further **lack effective dispute settlement mechanisms**. The AU Assembly has decision-making, monitoring and enforcement powers, albeit in theory these can be delegated to other

²³ African Union, [African Integration Report 2021 – Putting Free Movement of Persons at the Centre of Continental Integration](#), 2021, p. 26; International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, [African Integration: Facing Up to the Emerging Challenge](#), Issue Paper, ICTSD, Geneva, 2016.

²⁴ These include the Nigerian-Biafran war (1967-1970), the Mau-Mau rebellion, Shifta and Garriza wars in Kenya (1952-1980), the Somali civil war (from 1972), the Ethiopian-Somali wars (1964 and 1977), civil wars in Uganda (1986-1994), Rwanda (1992-1993) and Burundi (1994-1995 & 1996-1999) and the First and Second Congo wars (1996 and 1998).

²⁵ T. Murithi, ['The African Union's Transition from Non-Intervention to Non-Indifference: An Ad Hoc Approach to the Responsibility to Protect?'](#), *International Politics and Society*, Vol 1, 2009, pp. 90-106, p. 92.

organs as stated in the Abuja Treaty. The AU Commission serves as the AU's technical secretariat in this regard but its mandate to serve as a technical resource rather than an implementing organ is one indication of its limitations. In practice, the **implementation of key decisions remains largely within the purview or control of AU Members**. Most strategic issues are still referred to the Executive Council made up of Foreign Ministers via the PRC, comprising African Ambassadors and Representatives of AU Member States. As a result, any binding obligations passed by the AU Assembly could be enforced by the AU Commission only if Member States, through the Executive Council, are willing to cede some aspects of sovereignty to the Secretariat in order to make it a fully functional Commission²⁶. The same principles apply to the PAP and the African Court of Justice, two other key organs. A weak PAP and Court of Justice precludes the establishment of binding rules or even the imposition of sanctions on Member States that fail to implement protocols and treaties at continental level. Even if there are plans to give these organs more power, federalist plans for a 'United States of Africa' still lack widespread consensus.

In different regions of Africa, forging new **prospects for sub-regional political integration** have also become increasingly difficult. Violent extremism in the Sahel has shaped a geographically distinct sub-region that undermines commitment to ECOWAS. Even where there are no widespread conflicts, RECs are not advancing in institutional terms to overcome the legacies of intergovernmentalism. In East Africa, the absence of common values in governance undermines the objective of a political union. Moreover, the succession of new Members, such as South Sudan, the DRC and potentially Somalia, burden the EAC with additional political complexity. In the SADC region, expectations that South Africa would propel the region to new heights of integration have remained stunted because South Africa is unprepared for regional arrangements that challenge its dominant position in the immediate neighbourhood, the Southern African Customs Union. In Central and North Africa, efforts towards political integration have faltered against the backdrop of intraregional feuds and lack of a recognised leader for integration.

Given the above, not only does establishing effective supranational institutions remain a political challenge, but **delegating responsibilities and mandates to either continental or regional institutions also remains contentious. In the short to medium term, African integration is likely to remain anchored in the dominant logic of intergovernmentalism**. Supranational mechanisms are best accepted where they serve to enhance national sovereignty and regime stability by bolstering incumbents against internal threats and outside interventions.

2.3.2 Subsidiarity: continental integration and the role of RECs

The AU also recognises democratic governance, peace and security as the foundations of regional integration and sustainable development on the continent. Through the joint implementation of the APSA and the AGA, the AU Commission has focused on initiatives aimed at **conflict prevention, management and post-conflict reconstruction**. Although these frameworks have a continental dimension, the ability to act at a regional level is pivotal in implementing this agenda. An arrangement of subsidiarity was adopted in 2002 and governs the AU's relationship with RMs that include the eight RECs and other regional security measures. Against a backdrop of the growing and often competitive roles of these partly overlapping institutions in conflict prevention, management and resolution, it is crucial that there should be **coherence, collaboration and coordination**.

²⁶ African Union, [Governance of Integration in Africa: Challenges and Way Forward](#), 2013, p. 7.

Although subsidiarity fundamentally hinges on the unevenness of resources, resolve and ability between the AU and RECs, it also recognises that even though RECs have the comparative advantage to take the leadership in responding to local conflicts in their jurisdiction, they should consult the AU because it retains a mandate as the continent's premier peace and security institution.

In 2008, the AU signed a **MoU with RECs/RMs** that reiterated the AU's primacy in peace and security. This MoU called for 'adherence to the principles of subsidiarity, complementarity and comparative advantage'²⁷. However, despite this agreement, subsidiarity still faces legal ambiguities and contradictions, particularly when rifts occur between the mechanisms that exist at continental, regional and even subregional levels. In this configuration, locating subsidiarity is further complicated by states' multiple memberships in regional organisations. The AU recognised these challenges years ago but has yet to act on its conclusions of retreats (strategic meetings) in 2015 and 2016²⁸. Disagreements over both the interpretation and application of subsidiarity also stem from perceptions by regional actors that continental actors seek to encroach on their roles. For this reason, some RECs have used subsidiarity to assert their primacy in the management of crises, leaving the **AU with no choice but to endorse local decisions as *faits accomplis***. Apart from AU-RECs' disagreements, the multiplication of *ad hoc* security arrangements, such as the G5 Sahel and the Multinational Joint Task Force for the Sahel, has compromised the ability of both RECs and AU in their pursuit of subsidiarity²⁹.

Furthermore, while the sharing of competencies between different levels of authority is possible in a European context, such sharing does not occur within the AU. **The AU and the RECs both have very broad, general and similar competencies**³⁰. However, these similarities among African organisations appear to be reflected in the AU institutional reform, which refers more to the 'diversification of labour' between the AU and the RECs and less to competence sharing. Because of the inherent tensions in African conceptions of subsidiarity, the notion is **implemented in varying ways, depending on context and the priorities of individual Member States and foreign stakeholders**. Recent African crises have demonstrated the ambiguities in implementing subsidiarity. Since the early 2000s, SADC has routinely ignored the AU in various peace initiatives involving Lesotho and Zimbabwe. During the ongoing conflict in Mozambique that involves Islamist insurgents in Cabo Delgado, SADC deployed a military mission in July 2022 without authorisation from the AU's PSC, as the mission did not include a so-called 'enforcement' mandate³¹. The AU endorsed this

²⁷ African Union, Regional Economic Communities and Coordinating Mechanisms of the Regional Standby Brigades of Eastern Africa and Northern Africa, [Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the area of peace and security](#), 2008.

²⁸ African Union, [Press Statement](#), PSC/PR/BR.(DX) 510th Meeting Swakopmund, Peace and Security Council, Namibia, 22 May 2015; African Union, [Conclusions of the retreat of the Peace and Security Council on enhancement of cooperation between the African Union Peace And Security Council and the Regional Economic Communities And Regional Mechanisms For Conflict Prevention, Management And Resolution in the promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa](#), PSC/Retreat/8, Peace and Security Council, Abuja, Nigeria, 14-16 September 2015.

²⁹ C. de Coning, A. Yaw Tchie and A. Grand, '[Ad Hoc Security Initiatives, an African Response to Insecurity](#)', *African Security Review*, Vol 31, No 2, 2022, pp. 1-16.

³⁰ F. Djilo and P-S. Handy, [Unscrambling subsidiarity in the African Union: From competition to collaboration](#), Africa Report No 37, Institute for Security Studies, 2021, p. 5.

³¹ African Union, [Communique of the 1062nd meeting of the PSC held on 31 January 2022 on the Deployment of the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique \(SAMIM\)](#), 2022.

deployment months later, reportedly unhappy about not having been consulted formally³². Following a military coup in Mali during May 2021, ECOWAS imposed financial and economic sanctions against the military leaders to pre-empt any upsurge of coups against civilians in the region. Although the AU endorsed this decision in January 2022, certain PSC members opposed the endorsement because of growing opposition to ECOWAS in Mali. ECOWAS subsequently lifted the sanctions after the military Junta agreed to a firm timetable for the return to constitutional rule³³. These two examples illustrate how the AU cherishes its continental political leadership role and sometimes struggles to accept less subsidiary levels of intervention.

RECs and RMs often invoke subsidiarity in conflict resolution because of their **proximity to local conflicts and better knowledge of local contexts**. However, **proximity does not necessarily translate into effective solutions**. Furthermore, regional polarisation reduces the ability of RECs/RMs to manage conflicts. During the Burundi crisis in 2015-2016, the EAC's mediation attempts failed partly because of regional disagreements. By contrast, the current ongoing conflict in the eastern part of the DRC, the EAC has overcome some of the existing tensions among Member States but lingering suspicions between the core protagonists – the DRC and Rwanda – continue to hamper durable solutions³⁴. Rwanda's support of rebel groups active in eastern DRC and increased competition over access to and control of natural resources have rekindled these tensions³⁵. While regional actors including SADC, the EAC and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region have successfully negotiated agreements reducing escalation through ceasefires, the solutions have not endured due to deep regional divisions. This suggests that without external partners and guarantors, mediation in a regional conflict involving numerous state actors from that region may be difficult. The conflict also demonstrates that even where subsidiarity works, African actors are incapable of resolving conflicts beyond their abilities and resources. Member States have in practical terms not delegated competences to the continental level and continue to be the primary actors in all areas. As a result, in the pan-African context subsidiarity is more of a political tool for regulating activities between the regional and continental levels, where competencies or even autonomy are significantly limited. Indeed, the subsidiarity discourse can be viewed as a regional-level defence strategy against a continental peace and security architecture that is frequently viewed as intrusive³⁶.

A more practical and direct relationship between the AU's PSC and the security organs of the RECs is a relatively new phenomenon, which could potentially mainstream conventions around subsidiarity. Article 16 of the PSC Protocol formalises relations between the PSC and the AU Assembly, as well as the RECs/RMs, in promoting peace, security and stability on the continent. The PSC held its Second Annual Joint Consultative Meeting with the Peace and Security Organs of the

³² Authors' interview with AU officials

³³ A. Adetuyi, '[Military Coup and Its Effects on the Democratization Process in Mali and the Region](#)', Policy Brief, *Institute for Peace and Security Studies*, Addis Ababa, Vol 15, No 5, 2021.

³⁴ International Crisis Group, '[The African Union and the Burundi Crisis: Ambition versus Reality](#)', ICG Briefing Paper No 122, 28 September 2016; International Crisis Group, '[A Perilous Free-for-all in the eastern DRC?](#)', ICG Podcast, 13 May 2022.

³⁵ N. Florquin and C. Seymou, '[Down, but Not Out: The FDLR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo](#)', Small Arms Survey Research Note No 56, January 2016.

³⁶ F. Djilo and P-S. Handy, '[Unscrambling subsidiarity in the African Union: From competition to collaboration](#)', Africa Report No 37, Institute for Security Studies, 2021, p. 4.

RECs/RMs only in August 2021³⁷, which means that these practices are very much a 'work in progress'. Ultimately, subsidiarity needs to complement, not supplant, local initiatives of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

2.3.3 The contested role of external partners: ownership and partnerships

External actors play vital roles in African security matters. Their involvement can help to overcome a lack of resources and provide political momentum in instances of low commitment and will. However, this involvement usually takes place in the **context of heavily loaded historical relations and often struggles to deliver the promised results**. Traditional Western partners such as the EU, the USA and the UK have developed a mix of support portfolios to the AU and African countries, seeking to depict this new phase of engagement with Africa as one of 'equal partnerships'. The EU African Peace Facility (APF) best captures the spirit of these. It was created in 2004 to support 'African solutions to African problems' and in order to lessen the frequency, severity and length of violent conflicts in Africa aimed to intervene on three fronts simultaneously:

- (i) Capacity-building on conflict prevention, management and resolution structures together with various mechanisms, essentially aimed at implementing the African Peace and Security Architecture through strengthening the institutional capacities of the AUC, RECs and RMs;
- (ii) Collaboration between RECs/RMs and the AU Commission to prevent and provide swift responses to conflicts. The Early Response Mechanism (ERM) operational from 2009 supplied the AU with a fast-track procedure for reacting and deploying urgent assistance measures when responding to crises. These included deploying preventive diplomacy, mediation, fact-finding and observations missions and initiating Peace Support Operations (PSOs);
- (iii) Conflict management through deployment of PSOs by the AUC and RECs. Between 2004 and 2019, the APF contributed approximately EUR 2.7 billion to AU PSOs, including EUR 2.1 billion to AMISOM³⁸.

Under the APF, this funding has largely been **directed toward supporting 16 AU-led PSOs deployed in 19 countries**³⁹. Despite AU enthusiasm about the APF, the EU merged this facility into a new **European Peace Facility** (EPF) in 2021, potentially undermining the solidity of the EU's commitment to African peace and security⁴⁰. The EPF is an off-budget financing instrument formally established by the EU's Foreign Affairs Council in March 2021, with an estimated EUR 5.6 billion to be spent globally on conflict management and international security support, over a 7-year period⁴¹. The EPF includes provisions for peacekeeping, recovery, rapid conflict response and security, thereby replacing the APF in providing funding to African peacekeeping operations. The **APSA Support Programme** is another EU flagship initiative. The fourth phase of this capacity building programme

³⁷ African Union, [2nd Annual Consultative Meeting between the Peace and Security Council and the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management And Resolutions \(RECs/RMs\), Joint Communiqué](#), Peace and Security Council, 26 August 2021.

³⁸ European Commission, Mapping of APF Interventions, NDICI, Evaluation report (Unpublished), 2021.

³⁹ European Commission, Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development, [African peace facility: annual report 2019](#), Publications Office of the European Union, 2020.

⁴⁰ The Institute of Security Studies, [Africa-Europe Peace and Security Partnership at a Crossroads](#), Peace and Security Council Report, 2022.

⁴¹ Council of the European Union, ['European Peace Facility'](#) webpage, 2023.

(APSA IV) is budgeted at EUR 40.5 million from 2020 to 2024. The programme's overarching goal is to reduce the occurrence, duration and intensity of violent conflicts in Africa. The specific goals are to: (i) improve conflict cycle management under APSA, with a focus on effective early warning systems and the ASF; (ii) increase the effectiveness of cooperation within and around the APSA framework (including civil society organisations); and (iii) implement the APSA in a way that is inclusive of youth and children. This programme implements recommendations made by the EU Court of Auditors in its Special Report on EU support to the APSA in the following ways: the programme has a limited number of priorities centred on three specific objectives and 11 expected outputs; results are well-defined and structured in a clear, logical framework with SMART indicators; support for operational costs and salaries has been limited to essentials; and a robust third-party monitoring, evaluation and reporting system is in place⁴².

Given the EU's dominance as a funder of the APSA alongside discomfort over the implications of a donor-driven African security and integration agenda, there are **on-going debates on alternative financing mechanisms**. The pursuit of such alternatives is complicated by the fact that there are no short-term viable partners available to fill the gap, were the EU to reduce its contributions to the AU drastically. As one solution, AU Members created the African Peace Fund to improve domestic resource mobilisation and project ownership. It consists of regular AU budget appropriations, voluntary contributions from Member States, international partners and other sources such as the private sector, civil society and individuals, as well as fundraising activities⁴³. However, AU Members have not reached consensus on the scale of assessment for the Fund's initial endowment, resulting in significant operationalisation delays⁴⁴. The AUC Chairperson is further tasked with soliciting and accepting voluntary contributions from sources outside Africa and hence implicitly from non-traditional partners. This endeavour has not been fruitful, as even major countries such as China provide minute contributions to the AU budget whilst other non-traditional funders such as the Gulf states do not fund the AU at all. Generally, these alternatives have yet to gravitate around a funding model that breaks the cycle of dependence on external partners.

2.4 Analysis of converging and diverging security interests amongst African regional actors, with a focus on the AU and key Member States

The AU's **progress and contributions to African security** are subject to diverging perspectives. Some observers point to the AU Member States' steadfast opposition to a supranational legal order and more robust AU Commission competences. Others emphasise the AU's relatively short history; it has been in existence for only two decades and the challenges some individual Member States face means that the AU's progression should be viewed in relative terms. As in Europe, foreign and security policy is one of the last bastions of national sovereignty, hence whilst diverging interests remain a challenge, they must also be considered as part and parcel of institutional development.

⁴² European Court of Auditors, [The African Peace and Security Architecture; need to refocus EU Support](#), Special report No 20/2018, 2018.

⁴³ African Union, [African Union Handbook 2022 – A guide for those working with and within the African Union](#), Ninth edition, African Union Commission and New Zealand Crown, Addis Ababa, 2022, p. 81.

⁴⁴ African Union, [Financing the African Union. Towards the financial autonomy of the Union](#), 2020, p. 12.

2.4.1 Institutional set-up

In founding the AU and particularly in agreeing to the PSC Protocol, AU Member States recognised a **need for collective security on the African continent**. Member States continue to uphold these initial decisions and the institutions created by them. Recent AU reforms have addressed its working methods but not the legitimacy or existence of any AU institution and a policy framework. In general terms, Member States agree on the need for an **effective and efficient AU Commission**. Its leadership has taken a role in early warning and preventive diplomacy, issuing regular statements condemning coups, terrorist attacks and insurgencies. In recent years, AU Member States have also granted the **Chairperson of the AU and the AU Bureau** increased responsibilities, the former being subject to a one-year rotating position between the five African regions and assigned to one sitting head of government from the respective region. The support for these institutional elements is widespread, with backing for mediating in the war in Ethiopia and the conflict over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

Conversely, **consensus on the balance of power between AU institutions is thin**, with Members being divided into three main camps. Countries representing Africa's largest economies and populations, often summarised as the **Big Six** (Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria and South Africa) collectively account for 45.1 % of all assessed contributions from Member States and therefore comprise a major block in AU politics⁴⁵. The Big Six have an intergovernmental vision of the AU's foreign and security policy, in which the AU Commission takes a secretarial role. By contrast, a second group of **medium-sized AU Member States** aspires to create a stronger Commission with more autonomy. In the first few years of AU reforms since 2015, Rwanda has trailblazed this position of an 'AU fit for purpose', which enjoys 'decision-making, engagement, and impact' in peace and security⁴⁶. Finally, numerous **sovereignty-oriented AU Member States** face considerable domestic economic and governance challenges, depriving them of diplomatic resources to engage with AU institutions beyond a keen insistence on national sovereignty. Many small states fall into this category but also some larger sovereignty-oriented countries, including the DRC, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, oppose a more proactive AU.

These divergent preferences **directly impact AU reform in the areas of peace and security**. Consensual decision-making implies that in the face of differing views and pressure to produce results, AU institutions only produce 'thin' agreement or even fail to produce tangible outcomes. The PSC has also become the focus of tensions around such reforms. The Kagame reform proposals suggested 'reviewing the PSC's membership, in accordance with Article 5(4) of the PSC Protocol, strengthening the PSC's working methods, and strengthening the PSC's role in prevention and crisis management'⁴⁷. Ideas such as a more precise 'trigger mechanism' for early action would represent institutional progress. Yet momentum has dwindled since 2018, when discussions were more

⁴⁵ African Union, [Decision On The Scale Of Assessment For The Regular Budget And The Peace Fund](#), Thirty Second Ordinary Session, Assembly/AU/Dec.734(XXXII), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 10 – 11 February 2019.

⁴⁶ P. Kagame, '[The Imperative To Strengthen Our Union. Report on the Proposed Recommendations for the Institutional Reform of the African Union](#)', African Union, 2017.

⁴⁷ P. Kagame, '[The Imperative To Strengthen Our Union. Report on the Proposed Recommendations for the Institutional Reform of the African Union](#)', African Union, 2017, p. 9.

enthusiastic⁴⁸. Current discussions regarding the PSC's composition and organisational culture now reveal deeply entrenched views.

2.4.2 Unconstitutional changes of government

Many issues have divided AU Member States over the past decades. Arguably the most ambitious yet most challenging mandate concerns **preventing unconstitutional changes of government**⁴⁹. The AU's normative framework against military and civilian coups is clearly defined and boasts an overall positive track record at implementing measures against different instances of unconstitutional changes of government⁵⁰. However, recent years have seen numerous attempts and a growing number of successful coups⁵¹. Constitutional coups, the extension of presidential term limits and other constitutional revisions are particularly challenging. Repeatedly, long-term Heads of State prioritise stability over constitutionality. The international community, including the EU and its Member States, also contribute to this challenging trade-off by failing to prevent and respond to all coups consistently and uniformly.

Preventing coups is a serious problem for the AU, as the offenders are also among the governments deciding whether to sanction (attempted) coups. The shadow of future suspension has led the PSC to avoid strong action against unconstitutional activity, by avoiding the formal designation of sanctionable acts as constituting coups. The double standards resulting from this case-by-case consideration of unconstitutionality drive wedges between more democratically minded Member States and those which are more sovereignty-oriented. There is momentum to double down on this core AU mandate among certain Member States, but there are pockets of resistance, which challenge an ambitious normative framework on a continent sharply divided over issues of constitutionality.

2.4.3 Western Sahara and Palestine/Israel

Western Sahara is another deeply divisive issue in the AU's foreign and security policy. Since Spain relinquished control in 1975, the Sahrawi people and Morocco have fought over legitimate authority in this vast territory. Morocco re-joined the AU in 2017, ending a hiatus in OAU/AU membership which had existed since 1984, when the OAU accepted the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as a Member State⁵². Differences among North African countries, particularly between Morocco and Algeria, continue to complicate the AU's political processes and partnership architecture. This can be seen, for example, with the SADR's participation in partnership summits with non-African countries who have yet to recognise SADR as a country. The Western Sahara case straddles legal, political and economic considerations, including the AU's Constitutive Act and the African Charter on Human and

⁴⁸ African Union, '[Communiqué Adopted by the Peace and Security Council \(PSC\) of the African Union \(AU\) at Its 1073rd Meeting Held on 6 April 2022 on the Continental Early Warning and Security Outlook in Africa](#)', PSC/PR/COMM. 1073 (2022), Peace and Security Council, 2022; Amani Africa, '[The Reform of the AU: Towards the Peace and Security Council "We Want"](#)', Report No 3, 6 August 2018.

⁴⁹ U. Engel, '[The African Union and mediation in cases of Unconstitutional Changes of Government, 2008-2011](#)', *New mediation practices in African conflicts*, 2012, pp. 55-82.

⁵⁰ I. K. Souaré, '[The African Union as a Norm Entrepreneur on Military Coups d'état in Africa \(1952-2012\): An Empirical Assessment](#)', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol 52, No 1, March 2014, pp. 69-94.

⁵¹ N. Amoateng, '[Military Coups in Africa: A Continuation of Politics by Other Means?](#)', *Conflict & Resilience Monitor* 2022/1, ACCORD, 2022.

⁵² F. Mattheis, '[Why Western Sahara remains one of Africa's most divisive political issues](#)', *The Conversation*, 27 March 2019.

Peoples' Rights⁵³. It not only deeply divides AU Member States but also affects EU-AU relations, for instance causing the Court of Justice of the EU to annul the EU's Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement with Morocco for lacking consent from the SADR⁵⁴.

Beyond the continent, AU Member States are also profoundly divided over the AU's **position on Palestine and Israel's status with the AU**. The AU historically aligned with Northern African states' decolonial, pro-Palestinian position. Mahmoud Abbas regularly holds an address at the AU February Assembly meetings. However, in recent years and alongside stronger bilateral ties between Israel and AU Member States, the AU membership has become increasingly divided on Palestine. In July 2021, the AU Chairperson accepted a request from Israel's government for the AU to take up observer status, in doing so presumably overstepping his executive competencies, given not only the politicised nature of the matter, but also the 'known views and concerns of Member States'⁵⁵. With this decision being referred to the Assembly and then postponed until summer of 2023, it is unlikely that AU Member States will reach a consensus.

Along these converging and diverging interests in the field of foreign and security policies, informal coalitions have formed. This includes the so-called G4 of Algeria, Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Africa, a group of heavyweights that broadly agree on *not* granting Israel observer status to the AU and support Western Sahara's independence from Morocco. They converge on broader questions regarding their alignment in geopolitical rivalry⁵⁶.

2.5 Foreign and security policy of the AU

The AU's foreign and security policy reflects the ambiguities of African integration, the nature of AU institutions, as well as the interests of Member States, outlined in the first part of this chapter. Section 2.5 provides an overview of key concepts, policies and mechanisms, highlighting both the advances and limitations of their practical implementation.

2.5.1 Key mechanisms and policies

The AU foreign and security policy must be understood in light of the **weak delegation to AU organs, particularly the AU Commission**. Unlike in other areas of African integration, the Commission has been granted limited powers only in specific instances. The PSC Protocol puts Member States in the driving seat of initiating AU action, which means that the AUC cannot take foreign and security policy action beyond statements issued by the AUC Chairperson. Of course, this **arrangement does not preclude the AUC from taking a leading role on specific issues when so**

⁵³ African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights, '[The Matter of Bernard Anbataayela Mornah Applicant V. Respondent States Republic of Benin, Burkina Faso, Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, Republic of Ghana, Republic of Mali, Republic of Malawi, United Republic of Tanzania, Republic of Tunisia, and Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic Republic of Mauritius, Interveners](#)', Application N° 028/2018, Judgment, 22 September 2022.

⁵⁴ International Institute for Sustainable Development, '[EU Court Annuls EU Fisheries Deal With Morocco, Backing Polisario](#)', *IISD*, 20 October 2021.

⁵⁵ African Union, '[Decision on the Criteria for Granting Observer Status and a System of Accreditation to the AU Doc](#)', EX.CL/Dec.168 (VI), Executive Council, 2005; African Union, '[Draft Criteria For Granting Observer Status And For A System Of Accreditation Within The AU](#)', EX.CL/195 (VII), Annex IV, Executive Council, 2005; African Union, '[Remarks of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on the granting of observer state to the State of Israel](#)', Press Release, 6 February 2022.

⁵⁶ Middle East Monitor, '[Algeria, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa form G4 nations](#)', 24 February 2022.

delegated. Running the world's largest peacekeeping operation in Somalia as well as implementing the Cessation of Hostilities agreement in Ethiopia are two examples of the AUC being able to deliver when Member States provide a clear mandate.

Despite a challenging decision-making process, the AU has agreed on key **frameworks and roadmaps in the area of security policy**. Ranking among the AU's flagship projects in its main strategic document, Agenda 2063, one of the AU's major projects is concerned with 'ending all wars, civil conflicts, gender-based violence, and violent conflicts', which is usually referred to as the '**Silencing the Guns' agenda**⁵⁷. The Lusaka Master Roadmap, agreed upon by the PSC in 2016, provides a detailed overview of the range of sectors through which the AU aims to effectively silence the guns. These include: operationalisation of the ASF, a planned regionalised framework for rapid military deployment; better inclusion of civil society in PSC meetings and other AU meetings through the Livingstone Formula; preventing illicit inflow and proliferation of arms; promoting disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes; and security sector reform⁵⁸.

While some of the goals in the AU's Roadmap have been subject to considerable dynamic action, **the majority of objectives remain aspirational**. Better monitoring and evaluation of the framework are now foreseen. However, the AU's patchy record in ratifying and implementing its own decisions risks raising expectations among African citizens and international partners that the AU cannot possibly deliver by 2030, the extended deadline to 'Silence the Guns'⁵⁹. For example, the Roadmap's goal to '[p]ut measures, including imposition of sanctions on those Member States that sign and ratify, but fail to comply with AU instruments' refers to Article 23 of the AU Constitutive Act. It is not yet operationalised due to a lack of political will. The Article stipulates that any Member State which 'fails to comply with the decisions and policies of the Union may be subjected to other sanctions, such as the denial of transport and communications links with other Member States, and other measures of a political and economic nature to be determined by the Assembly'⁶⁰.

Implementing, monitoring and enforcing decisions are patchy and depend on political will among Member States, which is stronger on **issues for security concerns where interests align and sovereignty remains intact, such as the effects of climate change**. Africa is strongly affected by desertification, droughts and other extreme weather events, which have become a major risk multiplier for conflict, notably through their impact on agriculture. The AU has developed impressive leadership on issues such as climate and food security, as demonstrated in the wake of food insecurity caused by the war in Ukraine⁶¹. On the same day that the UN Security Council (UNSC) failed to reach consensus on a climate security resolution in 2021, the PSC issued a communiqué highlighting the importance of early warning mechanisms, speaking with one voice in global forums and strengthening capacity at national level to 'to advance a holistic African perspective on the climate, security and development nexus'⁶². The AUC has demonstrated an ability to integrate these

⁵⁷ African Union, [Agenda 2063: the Africa we want](#), Popular Version, September 2015.

⁵⁸ African Union, '[African Union Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020](#)', 2016.

⁵⁹ L. Louw-Vaudran, '[Can Africa Stay on Target to Silence the Guns by 2030?](#)', *Institute for Security Studies Africa*, 28 June 2022.

⁶⁰ African Union, [Constitutive Act of the African Union](#), 2000.

⁶¹ African Union, '[High Level Food Security and Nutrition Conference](#)', Press Release, 10 October 2022.

⁶² African Union, '[Communique of the 1051th Meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council \(PSC\) Held on 26 November 2021 on the Theme: Climate Change and Peace and Security: The Need for an Informed Climate-Security-Development Nexus for African](#)', PSC/PR/COMM.1051 (2021), Peace and Security Council, 26 November 2021.

policy areas across its departments, while recognising the need for collaboration to facilitate adaptation and mitigation in response to climate change.

2.5.2 Common African positions

When interests align, African states can **demonstrate remarkable unity through Common African Positions (CAPs)**. Particularly important CAPs in the realm of foreign and security policy include: the CAP on the post-2015 Agenda that tangibly influenced the UN Sustainable Development Goals; the CAP on the UN Review of Peace Operations in 2015 and on the 2020 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture; the CAP on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration from 2017; and the CAP on Proposed Reform of the UN dubbed the 'Ezulwini Consensus' from 2005. An assessment by Ambassador Bankole Adeoye prior to his appointment as AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, concludes that CAPs on UN matters are generally 'fairly' or 'highly' impactful⁶³. However, Adeoye also cautions that **the AU lacks the necessary resources to structure balanced negotiations which result in well-respected positions**. Respect for agreed text is particularly crucial at the UN, where African members are regularly pressured to deviate or choose to deviate from CAPs. A controversial example is the 2011 Libya crisis, when under significant pressure from UNSC permanent members, the three African members of the UNSC voted in favour of resolution 1973, thereby actively deviating from the AU PSC's position⁶⁴. Hence, the AU's foreign and security policy has attained impressive consensus in various areas, although its Member States still struggle to uphold such views in practice when the stakes are high.

2.5.3 International partnerships

An additional challenge in the AU's foreign policy is managing goals as well as the delivery and monitoring of partnerships. The AU's partnership strategy has been delayed for some years, owing in part to concerns about AU Member States' representation at summits and the classification of various partnerships⁶⁵. The Partnership Framework's latest version weighs and classifies existing and potential international partners into primary and secondary clusters, based on their direct relevance to the AU's Agenda 2063⁶⁶. However, there are **interlinked procedural and substantive challenges in the AU's partnership management**. As the AUC Chairperson stated in January 2023, 'beyond the material organisation of these meetings, the problems of evaluating their content, defining our strategic vision and participation must be rethought in the light of international dynamics, and above all in light of the place and of the role that our Union must play'⁶⁷. In this speech, Chairperson Faki's emphasis of 'international dynamics' alludes not only to an increased demand from outside Africa for the AU to take positions on issues such as the war in Ukraine, but also a need to develop partnerships that deliver substantive collaboration beyond summit meetings. Besides the EU, other

⁶³ B. Adeoye, '[Common African Positions on Global Issues](#)', Africa Report No 30, *Institute for Security Studies*, 2020.

⁶⁴ African Union, '[Communiqué of the 265th Meeting of the Peace and Security Council](#)', PSC/PR/COMM.2(CCLXV), Peace and Security Council, 10 March 2011.

⁶⁵ P. Apiko, '[Getting Partnerships Right: The Case for an AU Strategy](#)', Paper, *ECDPM*, 29 November 2021.

⁶⁶ African Union, *The African Union Partnership Strategy and Policy Framework*, 20 June 2022 (unpublished).

⁶⁷ African Union, '[45th Session of the Permanent Representatives Committee Speech of H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat Chairperson of The African Union Commission](#)', 16 January 2023.

AU partners, including the USA, China, Turkey and Japan, have follow-up mechanisms to summits with the AU but are generally dissatisfied with the impact developed by these instruments⁶⁸.

Despite these hurdles, significant progress has been made in developing a distinct strategy for the AU's relations with the EU, given the latter's substantive support to the APSA and the AU's desire to strengthen its position in joint programming and joint funding. The AU strategy for the EU was finalised in 2022, through a process led by the PRC, AU ambassadors and the Sub-Committee on Multilateral Cooperation⁶⁹. The strategy emphasises Africa's objectives and priorities in the partnership and covers traditional areas of cooperation such as trade, aid, migration, governance and peace and security. On this last area, it is emphasised that any EU assistance must be channelled through the APSA. An appendix to this strategy also describes key consequences of the European Green Deal for African countries.

The AU has also built up a notable **network of diplomatic representation outside the African continent**. It has multilateral representations at the UN in New York (since 1968) and Geneva, the League of Arab States in Cairo, as well as the EU and Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) in Brussels. These representations taken from various AU Member States usually comprise half a dozen diplomats, complemented with additional secondments. Furthermore, the AU has bilateral delegations in Washington, D.C. and Beijing. Plans to upgrade the latter to a permanent mission have been postponed amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Unlike past arrangements when the EU financed most of the AU's costs related to diplomatic representation, AU Member States have budgeted to cover roughly half of these costs, which indicates a shift to more political orientation in its foreign policy representations.

The following section focuses on the three most important AU partnerships next to the EU, namely those with the UN, China and the USA. Other **partnerships, such as those with Japan, India, South Korea, Turkey, the League of Arab States and the AU-South America Partnership provide less substantive cooperation and financial support to the AU**, but focus significantly on summit-level diplomacy between countries. Importantly, while several African countries in crisis have used closer relations with Russia to distance themselves from the EU and its Member States, Russia is not one of the AU's strategic partners and does not cooperate directly with it in the area of security. Russia-Africa summits are dubbed Business Summits and organised without a leading AU role.

2.5.4 AU-UN relations

Africa is the largest UN General Assembly (UNGA) bloc with 28 % of the votes⁷⁰. It also holds more than 25 % of votes in all UN governing bodies and is additionally the largest bloc in other agencies such as the World Trade Organisation, the Group of 77 and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Strategic engagement with the UN is a long-standing foreign and security policy element of the OAU/AU, ever since observer status was achieved in 1965. It has become **increasingly sophisticated with various consultative mechanisms on peace and security, including early warning, conflict prevention and mediation**⁷¹. These include the annual joint consultative meeting between UNSC members and the AU PSC, held since 2007. However, the absence of institutionalised working

⁶⁸ Interviews with diplomats, June 2022, October 2022 and January 2023.

⁶⁹ The Office of the AUC has not made the strategy public and it remains an internal document.

⁷⁰ P. Nantulya, '[Africa's role in China's multilateralism strategy](#)', *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, 24 January 2023.

⁷¹ See UN-AU partnership on United Nations, [African Union](#) webpage.

methods undermines any potential for more effective collaboration. Whilst increased informal dialogue, including monthly meetings between the UNSC President and the PSC Chairperson, helps to realise common strategies, a more comprehensive dialogue of AU and UN representatives remains underdeveloped.

Similarly, senior-level AU-UN Joint Task Force meetings have been held since 2008. They involve the Departments of Political Affairs, Peace Operations and Operational Support, which form a bi-annual Joint Task Force on Peace and Security with the AU Commission and Directors to assess and discuss political developments in the region, while seeking responses to looming and current conflicts. These meetings bring together UN and AU officials to share information, coordinate and strengthen their cooperation. Since various crises in Africa constitute a big part of the UNSC's agenda, this partnership remains essential. However, Africa's engagement with the UN depends largely on the priorities and good will of the UNSC permanent members.

An uneasy relationship therefore exists between the UN and the AU, stemming from the fact that **the AU views itself as the primary security decision-maker in Africa**. All African states, by virtue of their membership in the UN, recognise the UNSC's primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. However, the AU does not see itself as merely carrying out UNSC decisions under Article VIII of the UN Charter, but also refers to the PSC Protocol's mandate of 'primary responsibility for promoting peace, security and stability in Africa'. It expects the UNSC to defer to PSC positions when making decisions on African issues and that in some cases UNSC approval for its decision to intervene or use force will be 'granted after the fact' in situations requiring immediate action⁷².

2.5.5 China

China's prioritisation of relations with African countries aligns with its development model and desire to reshape multilateral institutions. Its bilateral and regional agreements in Africa include two standard foreign policy elements: **the 'One China Principle' and mutual support on global governance issues**. As Eswatini is the only remaining African country to recognise Taiwan, the former objective has almost been met, whereas the latter depends on garnering support from the Global South for its global initiatives. Consequently, not only are African votes in the UN system critical to Chinese efforts in redesigning global institutions but the idea of partnership with its associated perceptions are also very significant. Thus, despite criticism of China's relations with African countries as resource diplomacy, **China has invested heavily in maintaining positive relations with the AU**, its main selling point being that it did not colonise Africa but was instead a key ally to African countries during the liberation movements and decolonisation periods. Trade flows, infrastructure investments and natural resources extraction, though, dominate the current collaboration with African countries. This is flanked by the strategic donation of highly visible public buildings across the continent, including the main AU building and conference centre. In 2015, China became the third major partner, after the USA and the EU, to open a diplomatic mission to the AU. China also

⁷² L. Tadesse Shiferaw, '[The AU-UN peace and security partnerships, power and politics](#)', Discussion paper No 305, ECPDM, 2021.

provided funds to open the AU's counterpart mission in Beijing⁷³. This was part of its effort to move beyond bilateral mechanisms characteristic of traditional Sino-African relations.

China's current engagement with the AU is based on the **China-Africa Cooperation Forum**, which China established in 2000 to promote consultation and pragmatic cooperation, as well as political dialogue and economic cooperation with African countries. The Forum, originally established at Ministerial level, pivoted in 2006 towards Heads of State and Government level, resulting in collaboration on hard security. Although the relationship remains dominated by economic links, four key areas of engagement in China-Africa peace and security cooperation have emerged, namely: **military cooperation; conflict resolution and peacekeeping missions; judicial and police cooperation; and non-traditional security cooperation**. Expanded Chinese engagement in Africa to include support for peacekeeping operations signalled a radical shift from an initial 'non-interference' policy.

While China conducts the bulk of its foreign policy in Africa at a bilateral level, it has also established an important continental level framework with the AU. This cooperation revolves around **support to the APSA, regional PSOs and financing AU peacekeeping missions in African countries**, over a dozen of which have seen the arrival of Chinese personnel over the last two decades. Financial aid packages to the AU have included a multi-year contribution of USD 100 million to support the establishment and operation of the ASF and the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises. In addition to direct financial assistance, **China provides various RECs with technical assistance, capacity-building training and various technologies to combat piracy, terrorism and instability**. A more recent version of commitments to the AU and RECs in the Forum of China-Africa Cooperation Dakar Action Plan (2022-2024) seeks to consolidate China's cooperation through peace and security support and capacity building⁷⁴. China, has for instance, supplied equipment to ECOWAS for the establishment of a logistics base and provided bilateral military assistance to countries that contribute troops to regional peacekeeping operations, including Burundi, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda⁷⁵. While China's support to the AU peace and security activities is generally viewed as modest, *ad hoc* and bilateral in comparison to the APF, the cooperation formats that have been built up over time indicate that China is eager to be strategically present, with a long-term engagement.

2.5.6 The USA

Compared to other world regions, Africa traditionally occupies a secondary role in US foreign and security policy. Less than 10 % of its global military aid goes to the continent and only 2 500 out of 200 000 soldiers abroad are stationed in Africa⁷⁶. However, more attention has been given to Africa in terms of security policy since 2001 and the 'war on terror'. Consequently, **national security concerns constitute a key driver in the USA's relationship with Africa**. Other important foreign

⁷³ African Union, '[Communiqué on the Visit of the African Union Commission Chairperson to the People's Republic of China](#)', 9 February 2018; Rédaction AfricaNews, '[African Union launches China-funded office in Beijing](#)', 5 September 2018; Interview with an AU official, November 2018.

⁷⁴ See, Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, '[Dakar Action Plan \(2022-2024\)](#)', 22 December 2021.

⁷⁵ S. Van Hoeymissen, '[Regional Organizations in China's Security Strategy for Africa: The Sense of Supporting "African Solutions to African Problems"](#)', *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, Vol 40, No 4, 2011, pp. 91-118, p. 100.

⁷⁶ F. Mattheis, 'Die Afrikapolitik der USA im Wandel', in: C. Lammert, M. B. Siewert and B. Vormann (eds.), *Handbuch Politik USA*, Springer VS, Cham, 2022, pp. 701-716.

policy fields include global health initiatives, including a flagship project on HIV/AIDS (President's Emergency Plan on AIDS, PEPFAR⁷⁷) and commercial activities under the African Growth and Opportunity Act⁷⁸.

US security interests in Africa have repeatedly been stressed in key guidelines under different governments, such as the 2012 Africa Strategy, the 2018 speech of National Security Advisor Bolton, the 2022 National Security Strategy and the 2022 Africa Strategy. The current strategy reflects a shift in tone rather than substance, recognising Africa as an important geopolitical player, while the four main objectives capture the continuity of policies articulated by past administrations. These include: fostering openness and open societies; delivering democratic and security dividends; advancing pandemic recovery and economic opportunity; coupled with supporting conservation, climate adaptation and just energy transition⁷⁹. Additional emphasis is placed on supporting the AU's Agenda 2063⁸⁰. This strategy reframes the region's importance to US national security interests⁸¹. Accordingly, the Pentagon and its Office for African Affairs have promoted the securitisation of its Africa policy. Central to this shift is US Africa Command with 6 000 soldiers, special forces and substantial budget allocations.

At the same time, **the USA is guided by a 'light footprint' approach** that is concerned with limiting its involvement through troops on the ground, ever since its failed 1993 intervention in Somalia. To address its main concern – jihadist and anti-American violence such as the attacks on the US representation in 2012 in Benghazi, killing one ambassador – there is a focus on drones for intelligence and attacks. Military support for African national armies and paramilitaries plays an important role. US security policy in Africa is also firmly embedded in the **overarching global strategic concern of great power rivalry**. An impactful US military presence and cooperation with other Western states, such as France, are regarded as tools to contain the expanding military presence of China and Russia.

The US security policy in Africa has traditionally limited itself to sub-Saharan Africa around a few **key partners, such as South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and Ethiopia**. Cross-border dynamics of violent jihadist groups have generated more attention for transnational approaches, with the US Africa Command covering the entire continent except Egypt. The AU's potential to become a relevant security actor led the USA to open a diplomatic representation to the AU in 2006 and since 2010 regular USA-AU High Level Dialogues have been taking place. However, a dedicated continental approach has not yet superseded the US policy towards Africa. The geographic delineation of Africa follows a dynamic security perception held by the USA rather than membership in African regional organisations. Accordingly, the spatiality of armed jihadist groups, such as Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Ansar al-Sharia, play a more central role in guiding the location of US military presence and support. Regional cooperation with the USA is designed to regain control over spaces that are transnational but do not correspond to the delineation of African regional organisations, for instance: the Pan-Sahel Initiative (2003); the East Africa Counter-Terrorism Initiative

⁷⁷ US Department of State, '[The United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief](#)', webpage, nd.

⁷⁸ Office of the US Trade Representative, '[African Growth and Opportunity Act \(AGOA\)](#)', webpage, nd.

⁷⁹ The White House, '[US Strategy towards Sub-Saharan Africa](#)', 2022.

⁸⁰ The White House, '[Remarks by President Biden at the U.S.-Africa Summit Leaders Session on Partnering on the African Union's Agenda 2063](#)', Walter E. Washington Convention Center, Washington, D.C., 15 December 2022.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 4.

(2004); the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (2004); and the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative (2005). African and multilateral missions are supported in a flexible manner when they correspond to US interests. In line with the 'light footprint' approach, this occurs through training, financing, equipment and advice, for instance via Operation Flintlock, Operation Enduring Freedom or AMISOM. In addition, the USA supports *ad hoc* regional security initiatives tailored to specific conflicts, such as the G5 Sahel, even during a period of neglect for multilateral structures under President Trump.

The USA thus constitutes **an important and active security actor in Africa and reaffirmed this ambition along with other political commitments on multilateral cooperation** at the last high-level USA-Africa Summit in 2022⁸². The Summit confirmed new financial commitments, including USD 100 million for the 21st Partnership for African Security. Under President Biden, security cooperation is more explicitly linked to questions of democracy and governance. The cartography of US engagement continues to be guided by perceived threats to national security, such as: weak governments; jihadist groups; as well as illicit trade of arms and drugs. Accordingly, the USA concentrates efforts on territories, where these three threats overlap. The AU remains a relevant partner for the USA, albeit in a pragmatic fashion that requires their security concerns to coincide. The AU would still be circumvented if other bilateral or regional *ad hoc* mechanisms are more likely to serve the USA.

⁸² US Department of State, '[U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit](#)', webpage, nd.

3 EU-AU relations, with a focus on political and security cooperation

3.1 Overview of the long-term trends in EU-AU relations

3.1.1 The notion of partnership and the persistence of asymmetries

The term 'partnership' has been used since the 1970s to describe the relationship between Africa and European institutions⁸³. However, given significant disparities between the two sides and the persistent donor-client pattern, this term has come to be considered less as a description of the *status quo* and more as encapsulating a **commitment by both sides to privilege this specific relationship over others**. Although this asymmetry has been a steady marker in characterising the partnership, there have been important power shifts over time.

For instance, burgeoning commodity prices in the 1970s briefly gave exporters of primary resources a strategic advantage during negotiation of the foundational trade agreement linking the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group with the European Community⁸⁴. However, the **predominant dynamic clearly remained one of unequal negotiating partners**. The European Community's dominance created a sense of bitterness on the African side, when confronted with a partner that unilaterally promotes contractually binding mechanisms or paternalistically takes decisions outside of the partnership. Although the degree of asymmetry oscillates, the gap in power and capacity also persists to date in EU-AU relations. Hence, the partnership's prevailing tone has effectively prevented the addressing of challenges facing the AU and its Member States' financial, institutional and human capacities. Whilst high-level summits, joint dialogues and notions of ownership promote a sense of equality, very different expectations continue to be placed on each side. This is most visible not only in the relationship's funding and conditionalities, but also in the fact that any areas of cooperation are predominantly geared towards interventions in Africa, with little room for reciprocity.

3.1.2 Political conditionalities and political dialogue

Political conditionalities, - a European say in the internal affairs of African countries, have always been controversial. This topic first appeared as part of a **proposal for policy dialogue with the ACP group in the 1980s**, entailing greater European involvement in the selection of development project proposals and closer monitoring of their execution. The ACP resisted this proposal citing undue interference in African business⁸⁵. By the 1990s, the EU had adopted a more holistic approach to development which also included good governance as a requirement. To date, the EU still maintains the application of political conditionalities in its relationship with ACP countries with aid being contingent on national governments, for instance, not violating human rights standards. However,

⁸³ M. Lister, *The European Union's relations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries*, Routledge, London, 1999.

⁸⁴ S. R. Hurt, 'Co-Operation and Coercion? The Cotonou Agreement between the European Union and ACP States and the End of the Lomé Convention', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol 24, No 1, 2003, pp. 161–176.

⁸⁵ F. Dieter, 'La dimension politique de Lomé', *Le Courrier*, Vol 166, November-December 1997, p. 79.

from an African perspective, political conditionalities, especially if applied unilaterally, represent a form of coercion⁸⁶.

The politicisation of EU-Africa relations acquired a new meaning with the introduction of regular EU-Africa Summits, starting in 2000 with the Cairo gathering, followed by a signing of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) in 2007. **The JAES substantially extended the scope of cooperation from trade and development, to new areas such as climate change, peacebuilding as well as science and technology.** However, the JAES has heightened tensions between AU structures and African Member States, together with various sub-regional organisations, given various trade-offs between the EU's commitment to African institutions on national, regional and continental levels. So far, the AU has received only a fraction of its expected development aid, but increased attention from the EU has created competition, which in turn requires more politicisation.

3.2 Analysis of converging and diverging political and security interests and main drivers in the EU-AU relationship

Acknowledging that many crises transcend continental boundaries, the EU and the AU agree on the **need to tackle a largely congruent list of societal, security, economic and developmental challenges.** Divergences in the partnership regularly arise because **the two sides may agree on the diagnosis but not necessarily on the cure.** Section 3.2 examines areas of convergence in the partnership, some actual but others merely superficial. This includes a discussion on the long-standing shared commitment to regional integration together with an assessment of EU-AU collaboration for effective multilateralism.

3.2.1 Shared responsibility and interest in countering security challenges

Although disagreements tend to receive more public attention, there are significant and long-standing convergences of interest, as **the EU and AU are of one mind on a whole host of issues and challenges.** In the area of security policy, both espouse an understanding of conflict that covers the entire conflict cycle, with an emphasis on early warning, conflict prevention and mediation. Both organisations consider inequality, underdevelopment and poor governance as the cause of contemporary terrorism, rather than stemming from ideational or religious motives. Consequently, the EU and AU see eye-to-eye on the need for good governance on the African continent, through programmes aimed at strengthening institutions, promoting human rights and supporting democratic processes. They also agree on the need to protect state integrity in both regions and have an extensive shared interest in countering maritime piracy, drug trafficking and violent extremism. There are also **contemporary human and state security challenges** on which the two organisations fully agree, including: mitigating climate change effects to prevent conflict; and anticipating the effects of demographic changes in Europe and Africa to curb human and drug trafficking. Others are cybersecurity and cybercrime, illicit financial flows including crypto-currencies and the integrity of critical infrastructures. In these areas, the EU and AU agree that capacity-building is needed to address Africa's digital divide in the security realm.

⁸⁶ S. R. Hurt, '[Co-Operation and Coercion? The Cotonou Agreement between the European Union and ACP States and the End of the Lomé Convention](#)', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol 24, No 1, 2003, pp. 161–176.

3.2.2 The ambiguous consensus on regional integration

Alongside concurrence on many thematic priorities, the EU and AU also agree in principle that there is a **fair division of labour in EU-AU peace and security efforts, consisting of European funding and African implementation**. There is a shared understanding that both sides gain from routing EU support to African security through regional cooperation and integration formats. The organisations have also become reasonably comfortable with the EU-AU security partnership being characterised by an unequal resource base and **redistribution from the EU to the AU being needed to redress the balance**. Hence, substantive resource allocations to the AU form the basis of sectoral cooperation in security and foreign policy (see Section 3.3). Such security partnership arrangements are also recognised in the UN's concept of 'partnership peacekeeping', where different security actors build on their respective comparative advantage⁸⁷. This convergence of interests also extends to a shared prioritising of the AU's external diplomacy, including long-standing support for AU Liaison Offices and REC/RM liaison offices at the AU.

The topic of EU-AU **convergence on regional integration is vast in rhetoric but modest in substance**. African integration oscillates between supranationalism and national sovereignty, often tending towards the latter (see Section 2.3). Despite overall improving governance conditions, there are more than 30 AU Member States whose security, rule of law and participatory governance have deteriorated in the last decade⁸⁸. These and other AU Member States tend to have a much more transactional approach to regional integration, where the processes need to provide support and legitimacy to ruling elites, especially when under domestic pressure⁸⁹. The EU, by contrast, has gradually backed down from initial expectations about the AU following an 'EU model' of regional integration⁹⁰. Nonetheless, there are regular deceptions on the EU's side, such as a similarly looking organisation does not necessarily act similarly. The significantly different normative and functional drivers of the two integration projects are, therefore, not yet fully accommodated pragmatically within the partnership⁹¹.

3.2.3 Shared challenges, different responses

While the EU and AU agree on the need for individual and joint action on many issues, they still disagree about the substance of such policy action. In these areas, the partnership experiences **significant tension between underscoring the importance of addressing challenges, while trying to manage disagreement and find common ground**. In other words, there are significant areas within the EU-AU partnership where the challenge is not only of a technocratic nature in finding the right resources and approaches for development, but also about **interregional political deliberation to find the right solutions**. The topics often include shared challenges having impacts beyond the African continent, such as energy, climate and migration. Differences of appreciation

⁸⁷ United Nations, '[Report of the Secretary-General on Partnering for Peace: Moving towards Partnership Peacekeeping](#)', S/2015/229., 1 April 2015.

⁸⁸ Mo Ibrahim Foundation, '[2022 Ibrahim Index of African Governance – Index Governance](#)', 2022, p. 14.

⁸⁹ F. Söderbaum, '[Modes of Regional Governance in Africa: Neoliberalism, Sovereignty Boosting, and Shadow Networks](#)', *Global Governancel*, Vol 10, No 4, 2004, pp. 419–36.

⁹⁰ L. Fioramonti and F. Mattheis, '[Is Africa really following Europe? An integrated framework for comparative regionalism](#)', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol 54, No 3, 2016, pp. 674–690.

⁹¹ U. Staeger, '[Africa-EU Relations and Normative Power Europe: A Decolonial Pan-African Critique](#)', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol 54, No 4, 2016, pp. 981–998.

between the AU and EU often concern the orientation of appropriate policy action, the temporal urgency of action and the degree of supranationalism required in implementing collective solutions.

The issue of **human rights promotion** illustrates very well how superficial convergence plays out. Echoing the aspirations of AU frameworks including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, the EU promotes a liberal understanding of democracy and individual rights. Many AU Member States, by contrast, prioritise regional stability and development over liberal individual rights. This divergence of interests has led to disagreements on how to handle issues such as freedom of speech, political repression, as well as sexual and reproductive rights. Challenges also appear in so-called fourth-generation human rights promotion in the digital space, where many AU Member States espouse a conception of cybercrime that prioritises national security over human rights. In supporting the AU's human rights mechanisms, the EU faces a dilemma between normative ambition and breadth of participation: human rights challenges in many African countries are enormous, yet stronger AU frameworks and implementation mechanisms risk failing to garner consensus among AU Member States.

3.2.4 Divergences in a geopolitical and multipolar world

The Ukraine war has clearly demonstrated the EU-AU partnership's political limits. The AU has not moved so far as its interpretation of non-alignment is concerned, while the EU's previous trend towards 'principled pragmatism' and more geopolitical clout has been superseded by support to Ukraine as a matter of fundamental principle. Because the partnership has largely been focused on African issues, it **failed to explore sufficiently whether the partnership could also handle contentious geopolitics**. Political divergence has, therefore, not resulted from a recently developed rift between the Unions, but rather represents a dimension of partnership that is now claiming more space.

Given attempts for more political cooperation on a global scale, **the partnership suffers from a divergence on whether and how to find a shared voice on global issues**. The EU has a strategic interest in being a global security actor, whereas the AU prioritises regional stability and conflict resolution in Africa. Case Study 1 aptly illustrates how the AU can take a position on global issues, but does so very selectively. The AU has already taken positions on international issues such as the Palestinian situation, climate change and the 2003 Iraq War but has not achieved intergovernmental consensus on the war in Ukraine.

The AU and EU are more in tune regarding the principle of collaboration for **effective multilateralism and reforms of the multilateral system**. The current 'thin' convergence of actual positions, however, cannot be concealed by rhetorical zeal. The AU's position on UNSC reform has not changed since the 2005 Ezulwini Consensus which calls for two permanent and five non-permanent African seats on a reformed UNSC⁹². While being committed to making the UNSC more effective, transparent, democratic, representative and accountable⁹³, the EU has no fixed position on

⁹² African Union, 'The Common African Position on the Proposed Reform of the United Nations: "The Ezulwini Consensus"', Addis Ababa, 7 March 2005.

⁹³ Delegation of the European Union to the UN in New-York, '[EU Statement: UN Security Council Open Debate on Maintenance of International Peace and Security: New Orientation for Reformed Multilateralism \(NORM\)](#)', European External Action Service, 14 December 2022.

the composition of a reformed UNSC. However, the Foreign Ministers of France and Germany expressed support for the AU's CAP on UNSC reform and two permanent African seats in early 2023⁹⁴. Germany's membership in the Group of G4 Nations⁹⁵, France's permanent seat and the lack of a formal position from the Council of the EU will make delivering on this promise politically cumbersome.

More momentum exists around the **AU's request for an AU seat at the G20**. Following South Africa's initiative, the only African G20 member, the annually rotating AU Chair has been a 'permanently invited guest' at the G20 since its 2013 Summit in Saint Petersburg⁹⁶. AU partners from around the globe have come out in support of the AU Chair 2022's proposal, including the EU⁹⁷. Informally, however, many Western G20 members, including some in the EU, have reservations about the AU's capacity to agree on common positions that would allow for a meaningful AU membership at the G20. G20 countries have dedicated teams serving the various thematic configurations, which the already strained AU Commission would struggle to match. AU Chairperson Sall's suggestion that the AU's G20 mandate 'would be guided by African heads of states' annual meetings' requires that positions be taken months before the G20 Leaders Summits, which usually happen in the second half of the calendar year⁹⁸. The AU's potential membership at the G20 is thus another **issue where the EU and AU have vastly different motivations**. The AU position is above all about being duly recognised in the multilateral system, whereas the EU focuses on the substantive challenges arising from potential AU membership. To successfully cooperate as partners in the G20, the two organisations will need to reconcile their divergent expectations.

A transversal disagreement also persists regarding the **AU's diversification of partnerships**. The EU supports the AU in broadening its resource base through new partnerships and frequently reiterates this point when it comes to unfunded budget lines in the AU Commission programme, or the AU's larger PSOs like the AMISOM/African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). In practice, the EU is wary of the AU giving considerable visibility to non-Western partners who make smaller financial contributions to the AU, but whose geopolitical clout plays more into the AU's non-aligned foreign policy orientation. At a time of geopolitical rivalry, **the EU has yet to adopt a more relaxed and self-assured approach in the 'market of ideas' where AU partners compete**. The AU will not settle for an either/or approach to partnership and insists on creating leverage by maintaining co-existing multiple partnerships⁹⁹. The EU has struggled to find the right balance between cooperation and hopes for greater alignment, particularly following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Most stakeholders on both sides of the partnership agree that imposing geopolitical conditionalities in the

⁹⁴ E. Drieskens, '[Curb Your Enthusiasm: Why an EU Perspective on UN Security Council Reform Does Not Imply an EU Seat](#)', *Global Affairs*, Vol 1, No 1, 2015, pp. 59–66; Rédaction AfricaNews. '[German and French FMs Support "two Permanent Seats in the Security Council" for Africa](#)', *Africanews*, 13 January 2023.

⁹⁵ Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan comprise the G4, a group of four countries formed in 2005, that want to be permanent members of the UNSC.

⁹⁶ President of Russia, '[Press Statements Following Talks with President of South Africa Jacob Zuma](#)', Kremlin, 21 May 2013.

⁹⁷ See EU Statement: Delegation of the European Union to the UN in New-York, '[EU Statement: UN Security Council Open Debate on Maintenance of International Peace and Security: New Orientation for Reformed Multilateralism \(NORM\)](#)', European External Action Service, 14 December 2022.

⁹⁸ M. Sal, '[Macky Sall: "The Inclusion of the African Union in the G20 Would Benefit the Entire World"](#)', *Le Monde*, 21 July 2022.

⁹⁹ F. Soulé, '["Africa+1" Summit Diplomacy and the "New Scramble" Narrative: Recentring African Agency](#)'. *African Affairs*, Vol 119, No 477, 2020, pp. 633-646.

partnership would have strongly detrimental effects, implying that the EU must revise how it defines and manages its expectations towards the AU.

3.3 Overview of key cooperation formats between the EU and the AU

3.3.1 EU-AU summits

The EU-AU summit (formerly EU-Africa summit) has become a routine event and rotates between the two continents. It is scheduled as a triennial two-day event, but there have been various postponements. *Ad hoc* summits can also be convened, as was the case for the Valletta summit on migration in 2015. The summit's main purpose is to provide a **regular venue for the political leadership from the EU, the AU and their Members to define the relationship framework**. It attracts numerous side events, including gatherings of parliamentarians, business representatives, trade unions, civil society organisations and subnational administrations. In addition, conferences on specific policy areas as well as cultural events take place.

In 2000, the first EU-Africa summit in Cairo marked a milestone in the partnership's evolution. It entailed a **geographical shift for the EU to deal with Africa as an organised continent, rather than within the ACP group**. It also accelerated the expansion of policy areas, beyond the established focus on trade and development.

Convening high-level summits entails an **increase in political dialogue but also provides the opportunity for open contestation**. The second summit was scheduled for 2003, but was cancelled after disputes over the attendance of Robert Mugabe, President of Zimbabwe, who at the time was under a travel ban by the EU. AU Member States used the second summit in 2007, which eventually took place with Mugabe in Lisbon, to express their misgivings about European policies on migration and restitution of stolen cultural artefacts. The third summit which took place in Tripoli during 2010 was instrumentalised by the host, Moammar al-Qadhafi, who insisted that the EU pay him to limit migration to Europe. The fourth summit in 2014 convened in Brussels was again overshadowed by Robert Mugabe who boycotted the summit and was joined by certain other African states.

After Morocco joined the AU, the **summit was renamed the EU-AU summit** for its fifth gathering in 2017, this time located in Abidjan. The name change also underlines the EU's recognition of the AU as a privileged international actor. Following the name change, in 2018, the AU Assembly proposed a new approach to Africa's relations with the EU for the post-2020 period, coinciding with the expiration of the Cotonou agreement. It emphasised that the new agreement with the EU should be distinct from the ACP framework and built on a robust and sustainable continent-to-continent alliance, based on AU priorities¹⁰⁰. Consolidating this version of the partnership remains in permanent negotiation. The sixth summit gathering in 2022 in Brussels, which had been postponed during the pandemic, managed to avoid being contaminated by thorny political issues such as those surrounding post-Cotonou negotiations, but also the non-attendance of presidents who came to power as a result of recent *coups d'état*. Instead, emphasis was placed on the EU's material support for Africa under the EUR 150 billion Global Gateway envelope which, for instance, covered vaccine production in Africa.

¹⁰⁰ African Union and European Union, [Overview of the AU-EU partnership](#), 2nd AU-EU ministerial meeting, Kigali, 25-26 October 2021.

The EU-AU summit is also **an occasion for EU Member States to promote their national priorities in Africa**, especially if they do not have a dedicated format to engage at high-level with African countries, such as the *Sommet France-Afrique*, which has been held regularly since 1973. Many EU Members have developed their own Africa strategy. Beyond the former colonial powers, this also includes smaller countries such as Estonia and Malta. The main interests of Member States differ widely with respect to geographic and thematic focus, but also regarding the means allocated in terms of development aid and diplomatic presence¹⁰¹. The field of peace and security is high on the agenda of most national strategies, but only a handful are significantly engaged with military presence and bilateral defence agreements. EU-AU summits are thus an occasion for EU Members to garner support for their security engagement in Africa, thereby increasing legitimacy.

After six gatherings, the EU-AU summits have now become an **established formalised meeting at executive level**. They can galvanise debate on various spheres within the relationship and constitute an important element of mutual diplomatic recognition and appreciation. However, **summits can also easily be misappropriated politically, to the point of boycott**. The 2022 summit would certainly have been a much more controversial event had it taken place after rather than just before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The 7th EU-AU summit, which would normally take place in 2025 in Africa, will not only need to take stock of advances made in the bi-continental partnership generally, but also follow up to the launch of a 'renewed partnership' at the February 2022 summit, specifically committing both parts to work together in international fora – an ambition that considerably suffered from the important divides that emerged in the UNGA votes on the invasion of Ukraine.

3.3.2 Meetings between sibling institutions: Commission-to-Commission and PSC-to-PSC

Despite the presence of substantive differences in competencies and scope, there are significant institutional similarities between the EU and AU. **The partnership certainly draws a certain vibrancy from regular meetings between institutions that can speak eye-to-eye below the level of Heads of States and Governments**. These meetings occur not only between the executive organs of the two Commissions but also the EU's PSC and the AU's PSC. Between Commissions, 11 so-called 'C2C meetings' have so far taken place usually following an annual rhythm, focusing on taking stock of sectoral cooperation between the Unions and assessing progress of EU-AU summits. These gatherings were in the past often referred to as College-to-College meetings.

Over time, the **AU has criticised a lack of participation from the now 27 EU Commissioners**, though participation has consistently included at least two thirds of the European Commission, with an upward trend¹⁰². On the AU Commission side, **early and substantive involvement of different departments has been a challenge**, which has complicated the organisation of productive C2C meetings. But they have nevertheless served to underline and adapt thematic priorities in the partnership. The C2C meetings can also set up high-level dialogues and maintain existing dialogues, which include economic integration as well as Science, Technology and Innovation. As sibling

¹⁰¹ G. Carbone, '[Europe: Team Play in Africa? The Africa Policies of EU Member States](#)', *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, Brussels, 2020.

¹⁰² Authors' interviews in Addis Ababa, January 2023.

institutions, the two Commissions share considerable common ground in facing the challenges of spearheading regional integration against political and material obstacles.

The **Annual Joint Consultative Meeting between the AU PSC and EU PSC operates under a more intergovernmental logic**. This meeting is chaired by the respective rotating monthly chairs of the two PSCs and organised with support from: the EU Delegation to the AU; the European External Action Service (EEAS); and the AU PAPS department. Rather than following a whole-of-partnership approach as with the C2C format, the PSC-to-PSC format usually focuses on a handful of specific security crises. Past meetings have discussed the Sahel, Sudan, Somalia, South Sudan, the DRC, Central African Republic, Guinea Bissau, Lake Chad Basin and Libya. In addition, occasional Joint Retreats of the AU PSC and the EU PSC offer the opportunity for in-depth exchanges on the two Councils' thematic, doctrinal and political priorities. A recurring theme is a proposal by the AU PSC for the UNSC to consider financing AU-led PSO through UN peacekeeping assessed contributions. As discussed in Case Study 1 on Ukraine, the 2022 iteration of the PSC-to-PSC meeting failed to reach agreement on the usual Joint Communiqué, which is indicative of the considerable differences in appreciation between the two Councils. However, stakeholders on both sides of the partnership stress that exchanges of views between Member States continue to be extremely important. As the AU seemingly gravitates to a more intergovernmental dynamic, involving Member States in shaping the partnership is crucial. In this vein, the EU-AU Ministerial Meeting introduced in 2019 and a planned EU-AU Ministerial Follow-up Committee add further government-based dynamism, demonstrating the increasing complexity of formats in the partnership's institutional architecture.

These different dialogue and meeting formats are generally appreciated among AU stakeholders. However, among European and African partnership stakeholders, there are calls to **rationalise and improve the sequencing of different formats**. The AU Commission and AU PSC are facing considerable administrative resource scarcity and hence preparations for every additional meeting present a significant challenge. Hence, sequencing has been a welcome innovation, for instance by combining C2C meetings with hitherto separate Senior Officials meetings. In the medium term, both sides must find a balance between the depth and frequency of different dialogue formats.

3.3.3 Permanent EU representations

The 51 EU Delegations in Africa are quasi-embassies without consular functions, which exist as hybrid entities, bringing together staff from various backgrounds and organisational affiliations. They comprise EEAS employees, European Commission officials from various Directorates-General, locally employed staff and, in the case of Addis Ababa, also seconded officials from the EP. Apart from other diplomatic functions, they assist the EU in coordinating joint EU positions in African countries. They exist separately from the various EU special regional representatives as well as the security-focused missions and operations.

The Delegations can take up two distinct roles. The first is a **bilateral mandate**, whose roles differ slightly between each Delegation's local context and setting. However, in general they seek to deepen political dialogue on issues of mutual interest and strengthen the bilateral partnership, whilst at the same time pursuing a value-based foreign policy in areas of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The second type of mandate is a dedicated **region-to-region interaction with the RECs**. This is an additional portfolio held by the bilateral Delegation to the country that hosts the respective REC: the Federal Republic of Nigeria and ECOWAS; Djibouti and IGAD; the United Republic of

Tanzania and the EAC; Gabon, São Tome-and-Principe and ECCAS; Zambia and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa; as well as Botswana and SADC. Regional representations for the Community of Sahel-Saharan States and the AMU are managed through a focal representative located in EU Delegation offices in Tunisia and Rabat, Morocco, respectively. The **Delegation to the AU** has a different status, being physically and organisationally separated from the EU Delegation to Ethiopia. It also has a dedicated Ambassador. The interregional portfolio is generally concerned with the programming of regional aid as well as management of programmes and projects within the European Development Funds (EDFs) and Regional Indicative Programmes formats. The diplomats also coordinate assessments of EU assistance to the respective REC, which can be a politically charged exercise. The overlap of responsibilities between bilateral and regional goals can negatively impact how African countries perceive them. It relates to striking a balance between pursuing EU interests bilaterally alongside supporting regional processes and positions. The experience of Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations is frequently used. For instance, when the EU was pushing for bilateral contracts with individual African countries, efforts to consolidate regional positions on the agreement were ongoing. RECs then feel trapped in key agreement negotiations, where Delegations promote bilateral EU policies and positions at the expense of regional interests.

3.3.4 European Parliament

The EP plays a significant role in EU-AU partnerships, via its political positions, in its budgetary powers and through parliamentary diplomacy. While Africa has traditionally been primarily the focus of development and trade considerations, which continue to be a central element¹⁰³, the EP increasingly considers the continent and the AU through a lens of foreign and security policies. Relevant in this direction was the EP resolution of 6 July 2022 on the EU and the defence of multilateralism¹⁰⁴, which underlines the ‘intrinsic value’ of EU-AU relations, particularly in the context of global challenges. An ambition to interact with the AU in security matters has been further stressed in the EP resolution of 18 January 2023 on the implementation of the common security and defence policy (CSDP) – annual report 2022¹⁰⁵, which reiterates this ambition to move beyond development issues. This has also been reflected in the thematic focus of recent Members of the EP (MEP) visits, such as the last Committee on Foreign Affairs’ mission to Ethiopia in September 2022, which engaged with the AU on the security situation in the Horn of Africa.

The EP’s budgetary role in EU-AU relations also matters greatly. By co-shaping allocative decisions between different EU priorities, the EP significantly shapes the overall course and framework of EU spending in Africa. Establishing EDF budgets and introducing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) have given the EP a clearer focal point to oversee EU development funds and provide non-lethal security assistance to non-military recipients. In humanitarian aid, the EP shapes spending decisions on food security, health crises and disaster relief. In trade, the EP contributes to EU support for African economic integration. As the EU and AU might

¹⁰³ European Parliament, [Resolution on the future of EU-Africa trade relations \(2021/2178\(INI\)\)](#), P9_TA(2022)0267, 23 June 2022; European Parliament, [Resolution on a new EU-Africa Strategy – a partnership for sustainable and inclusive development \(2020/2041\(INI\)\)](#), P9_TA(2021)0108, 25 March 2021.

¹⁰⁴ European Parliament, [Resolution on the EU and the defence of multilateralism \(2020/2114\(INI\)\)v](#), P9_TA(2022)0286, 6 July 2022.

¹⁰⁵ European Parliament, [Resolution on the implementation of the common security and defence policy – annual report 2022 \(2022/2050\(INI\)\)](#), P9_TA(2023)0010, 18 January 2023.

seek to develop their relationship away from a funding basis towards a more political relationship, the EP is a crucial actor in innovating partnership instruments in line with this endeavour.

Furthermore, Africa occupies a central position in the EP's diplomatic efforts, specifically its Inter-Parliamentary Partnerships. The EU-ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly dates back to 1963 and constitutes a very much institutionalised venue for regular meetings, particularly with regard to trade and development relations between the EU and OACPS. Links between the EP and the PAP are more recent but cover a wide range of policy issues, including peace and security. These relationships are conducted via the Delegation for Relations with the PAP, created in 2009. This formalisation allows for a **long-term and regular dialogue between MEPs and their African peers**. The EP is the most important external partner for the PAP, with a formalised agreement and regular meetings, both in Brussels and at the PAP's seat in Midrand, South Africa, as well as at the side-lines of EU-AU summits. The EP's financial and technical support has been crucial for both the PAP's functioning and the inter-parliamentary meetings.

The PAP brings together 275 members of African national parliaments that meet twice a year. Despite being part of the AU architecture, **the PAP has played a marginal role in the continental integration process**, due in part to its geographical distance from the AU's headquarters in Addis Ababa, which has limited its capacity to interact with other AU bodies. **Most African states have presidential regimes where power is concentrated in the executive**. This is exacerbated at AU level, where the institutional set-up and procedures provide national governments with key decision-making powers. National parliaments have limited influence in regional integration matters and the PAP is thus limited to mere advisory functions without full legislative powers. In addition, PAP members are not directly elected, but are primarily members of national parliaments, thus limiting the prospects for transnational cooperation, given that national interests and national audiences remain central. Internal misgivings, including corruption and leadership issues, have also plagued the PAP. This has created additional hurdles for the EP-PAP relationship, hence no interparliamentary meeting could be convened during the 2022 EU-AU summit, albeit they did resume in December 2022¹⁰⁶.

EP-PAP **interparliamentary cooperation is a tedious process with less tangible outcomes compared to those emerging from other EU-AU channels of cooperation**. Questions of financial autonomy and legislative powers have seen some progress but are still to be resolved by the PAP. Thus, there are limited prospects of impacting the African or the European integration process significantly in the short to medium term. Nevertheless, due to its long-term aspirations, the PAP remains a natural partner for the EP in Africa in order to balance the executive dominance within the AU and at EU-AU summits.

In 2022, the EP opened a permanent antenna in Addis Ababa, which is embedded within the EU Delegation to the AU. Three EP officials are expected to be seconded to the EEAS. The main tasks of the antenna are to strengthen interactions with national and regional parliaments in Africa and to create a network of civil society organisations that can be mobilised for missions of the MEPs. This arrangement also constitutes a new mode of inter-institutional cooperation between the EEAS and the EP, as **the EP antenna underlines the ambition to integrate a stronger parliamentary pillar**

¹⁰⁶ European Parliament-Pan-African Parliament, [Declaration](#), Inter-parliamentary meeting (EP-PAP IPM), Brussels, 8-9 December 2022.

into EU-AU relations. This could result not only in agenda-setting that reflects human rights and democracy more prominently, but also closer budgetary oversight of the financial support to the AU. As the antenna is still in process of being set-up, it is not yet clear whether this would entail more direct relations between the EP and the AU (beyond PAP), as the geographical implantation suggests.

3.3.5 Political and strategic commitments

The JAES is regarded as the EU-Africa relationship's backbone because it was this strategy which first established a long-term framework for institutional cooperation in jointly identified priority areas. The EU envisioned it as a **new chapter in EU-Africa relations that would put the AU and RECs at the centre of its engagement with Africa**, which was not the case with previous frameworks¹⁰⁷. The JAES seeks to strengthen cooperation in eight areas: (i) peace and security; (ii) democratic governance and human rights; (iii) trade, regional integration, and infrastructure; (iv) Millennium Development Goals; (v) energy; (vi) climate change; (vii) migration, mobility and employment; as well as (viii) science, information society and space¹⁰⁸. It aims to deliver on: improved political dialogue and joint positions on shared inter-continental and global concerns; closer involvement of non-state actors; and stronger European support for continental integration in Africa¹⁰⁹.

As highlighted earlier, the highest level of dialogue convened under the JAES is the EU-Africa summit, renamed the EU-AU summit in 2017. By adopting declarations, action plans and roadmaps, summits **not only determine the partnership's political orientation and priorities, but also set its future agenda**. Between summits, six-monthly ministerial meetings advance the political dialogue, review implementation of the Joint Strategy and related Action Plans and provide political guidance as needed. Foreign Ministers' dialogues have recently begun to be supplemented by sector-specific ministerial or senior officials' meetings, with input from Joint Expert Groups and the Joint Task Force.

Unofficial accounts of progress since the first Action Plan's adoption reflect general dissatisfaction with the JAES. Firstly, **coordination modalities are complex and African officials have expressed concerns that too much energy is expended on coordinating meetings instead of implementing concrete projects**. Coordination in Addis Ababa entails synergy between the AU-PRC and its relevant sub-Committees on the one hand alongside African capitals and the African Group of Ambassadors in Brussels on the other. Conversely, EU Delegations to the AU and in RECs capitals promote coordination and ownership. However, this is challenging since RECs frequently lack clarity on their implementing roles within the framework. The Africa-EU Joint Task Force, established to promote better coordination between the two Commissions, the EEAS, the two Parliaments, RECs, private sector and civil society representatives (for the African side via AU-Economic, Social and Cultural Council), has been difficult to sustain. It has failed to meet every six months as planned and has not maintained the level of momentum established by the annual College-to-College meeting.

¹⁰⁷ Council of the European Union, [The Africa-EU Strategic Partnership. A Joint Africa-EU Strategy](#), 16344/07 (Presse 291), Lisbon, 9 December 2007.

¹⁰⁸ African Union and European Union, [Joint Africa EU Strategy - Action Plan 2011-2013](#), 3rd Africa-EU Summit, 17593/10, 14 December 2010.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Secondly, **political cooperation between the two continents has made insufficient progress toward the ideal of an equal partnership.** Although the JAES has fundamentally changed the tone and scope of the EU-AU relationship beyond a conventional donor-recipient pattern, there is still frustration among AU and REC officials regarding an inability to set the terms of engagement and agendas for cooperation. This reflects their experiences negotiating programming and financial agreements with the EU. Within the JAES, the AU follows the EU's lead, thereby undermining its own agency. **The AU has more recently drafted a framework for its partnership with the EU that could help in reflecting its own expectations and concrete strategic priorities.** While it has continental goals and ambitions, such as those outlined in Agenda 2063, it has not always been clear how these relate to its international partnerships. In the absence of an actionable AU strategy for its engagement with the EU, pressure exerted by the collaboration framework to deliver results for the next Summit means that the partnership's structural asymmetry takes over. Effectively, this translates into the EU imposing its approach. Attempts by the European Commission to forge a common strategy with Africa since 2020¹¹⁰ and declarations from the last EU-AU summit in February 2022 must be understood in this context as proposals that the EU considers to be a basis for joint action. In the EU's view this probably speaks to AU objectives, rather than any result from jointly formulated priorities for reciprocal engagement.

At the 2022 summit, certain key agreements were highlighted in a statement of joint commitments:

- (i) a **renewed partnership**, 'founded on acknowledgement of history, respect for sovereignty, mutual respect and accountability, shared values, equality between partners and reciprocal commitments'¹¹¹;
- (ii) an **Africa-Europe Investment Package** of at least EUR 150 billion to the AU Agenda 2063, with a focus on energy, transportation, digital infrastructure, health and education;
- (iii) a **renewed and strengthened cooperation for peace and security** in line with the EU-AU MoU on Peace, Security and Governance signed in 2018;
- (iv) a **strengthened and reciprocal partnership for migration and mobility** through the joint EU-AU-UN Tripartite Task Force;
- (v) a **commitment to multilateralism**, specifically World Trade Organisation reforms and UN system reform efforts, including the UNSC.

Apart from some flagship projects, such as the creation of vaccine production sites in Africa, the **scope of deliverables has been scarce in the first 12 months since the summit**, partly due to disagreements between the AU and the EU on these joint commitments. Included are fundamental issues such as international justice (one of the most contentious being the International Criminal Court), UNSC reforms and migration. Essentially, there is a widening gap between official discourse and the strategic partnership's reality. This is exacerbated by uncertainty about whether the announced EUR 150 billion will effectively materialise, which largely depends on private sector involvement.

¹¹⁰ E. Pichon, '[Understanding the EU's approach to a new partnership with Africa](#)', Briefing EU Policies – Insight, European Parliamentary Research Service, PE 698.905, 2022.

¹¹¹ African Union, '[6th European Union - African Union Summit: A Joint Vision for 2030](#)', Press Release 16/2022, Addis Ababa, 18 February 2022.

Decisions concerning the EU-Africa relationship must also consider the evolution of another major partnership encompassing most AU Member States. The institutional vehicle for this cooperation is an agreement between the EU and the OACPS, formerly known as the ACP Group of States. This was codified in the 2000 Cotonou Agreement that expired in 2021. Negotiations for a successor partnership agreement between the OACPS and the EU started in 2017 and were concluded in 2020. Lead negotiators from the EU and OACPS initialled a new Post-Cotonou Agreement on 15 April 2021, but it has yet to be signed and ratified by Member States¹¹². The Agreement's objectives span a range of thematic issues from democracy promotion, climate change, trade and investment to preventing and addressing irregular migration¹¹³. **To avoid being side-lined, the AU adopted the African Common Position for Negotiations of a New Cooperation Agreement with the EU** in 2018, emphasising that dealing with Africa should be built on a continent-to-continent basis¹¹⁴. This approach appreciated that the new arrangement needed to be part of a broader EU-AU partnership strategy, given that sub-Saharan Africa constitutes the bulk of the ACP states. The AU Chairperson also appointed a High Representative for EU-AU relations to support Member States in negotiating a new post-2020 agreement¹¹⁵.

However, **the terms of this Post-Cotonou Agreement were ultimately not negotiated on a continental level** and deviations from the CAP were apparent. Member States struggled to balance between national interests and continental visions. Divisions between SADC – which led the Africa group of negotiators – and West African countries over the EPAs relate to the nature of economic and political relations of the respective countries with the EU. In this regard, the negotiations lacked a transversal architecture, bridging policy-makers from different RECs towards a shared approach on economic development. This agreement's provisions for peace and security were less contentious. They cover issues where there is more convergence such as human rights, good governance, human and environmental security, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, as outlined in Sections III and VII of the agreement. Implementing provisions for punishing violations and abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law, such as war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, will necessitate alignment with continental approaches, an issue highlighted by African negotiators in their various deliberations. The future of this agreement remains uncertain due to ongoing opposition from one EU Member State as well as a stalemate over the agreement's legal language and other substantive issues.

3.3.6 Sectoral cooperation and partnership instruments in security policy

The EU's financial assistance to the AU in the form of salaries, troop stipends, logistics, command and control equipment, along with the operationalisation of APSA are essential to its survival. **Without EU funding, the AU's current state would be radically different.** Indeed, the brunt of the EU's impact on African integration is experienced outside formal high-level meetings. The EU's financial instruments with substantive budgets require close inter-bureaucracy cooperation between

¹¹² See European Commission International Partnerships, '[ACP-EU Partnership](#)', webpage, nd.

¹¹³ European Union and Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, '[Negotiated Partnership Agreement](#)', 15 April 2021.

¹¹⁴ African Union, '[The African Union Executive Council adopts the African Common Position for Negotiations of a new cooperation agreement with the European Union](#)', Press Release, 27 March 2018.

¹¹⁵ See African Union, '[Appointment of AU High Representative](#)', webpage, 13 July 2018.

the EU and AU. For instance, in the AU's PAPS department, a dedicated Project Management Team handles the technical execution of support channels, whilst a Peacekeeping Finances team is responsible for the EU's support to AU PSOs. Overall, the effects of the EU's resource provision on the AU are considerable. Once approved, the modalities through which the EU provides resources enable the AU to take ownership, as they do not provide the EU with many formal veto points or other means of coercive influence¹¹⁶. But, as much as both sides strive towards a partnership of equals, there is a **postcolonial paradox in the EU-AU security partnership**, given that EU officials and Member State representatives often lament that the EU's status as the largest funder does not translate into a commensurate political role. The EU operates on an assumption that long-term sustainable funding of the AU will result in a form of reciprocity in the long run. However, in the short term both sides continue with occasional struggles in squaring significant funding volumes with a historically driven aversion to overly forceful EU positions.

The current generation of funding instruments in peace and security builds on more than two decades of experience from the EU-AU partnership. The importance of the APF as a dedicated resourcing facility to the African continent and the EU's support for APSA implementation are widely appreciated for providing robust and long-term assistance to the AU. However, a **new generation of instruments introduced with the 2021-2027 Multi-Annual Financial Framework has led to some friction in cooperation between the two Unions**. The EU Framework is administered through a new instrument, the NDICI – Global Europe, and incorporates most of the pre-existing instruments. Exceptional financial instruments that operate outside the NDICI include: humanitarian aid, overseas countries and territories; pre-accession assistance; and the Common Foreign and Security Policy budget.

The EPF has a larger geographic scope than the APF. It complements NDICI – Global Europe with the (not yet used) ability to provide the AU and other African security actors with weapons or platforms enabling lethal force. While **the division into two separate instruments expanded the EU's financing toolset, it also created opportunity costs for the AU's financial management**, even if APF commitments can be disbursed gradually until 2024, allowing for a more seamless transition.

¹¹⁶ U. Staeger, '[Resource Mobilization in Security Partnerships: Explaining Cooperation and Coercion in the EU's Partnership with the African Union](#)', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 2023.

Table 1: EU instruments for EU-AU security cooperation

Purpose	Pre-2021	2021-2027
Financial and logistical support to AU PSOs	APF (non-military and military non-lethal)	NDICI-Global Europe (non-military)
Military support to AU PSOs	APF (non-military and military non-lethal)	EPF, Assistance Measures (military: lethal and non-lethal)
Support to APSA implementation	APF, APSA Pillar	NDICI-Global Europe
Urgent support	APF, ERM (non-military and military non-lethal)	EPF, Assistance Measures, urgent measure (military non-lethal); NDICI-Global Europe, Rapid Response Component and a future ERM (non-military)

Source: Authors' own compilation.

However well-managed, the transition from the APF to the new instruments did not quell apprehensions of diminished EU commitment to AU security efforts. **The EU's multiple disbursements of assistance to the Ukrainian Armed Forces have sparked specific concerns that Africa would be neglected in future funding.** Although the EU's decision to cut contributions to ATMIS, whose UNSC mandate requests a gradual drawdown, was taken months before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, many AU stakeholders consider it an effect of the war. Decisions from the EU to replenish the instrument and a 3-year EUR 600 million assistance measure in the form of an EPF General Programme with the AU has reassured AU stakeholders but did not receive the same attention.

The EU's ability to fund RECs and RMs without a formal AU role (see also Section 3.3.7) is an additional concern. Under the APF, this arrangement was purely financial, although the AU Commission leadership had sometimes politicised their sign-off on APF assistance to RECs and RMs. **The EPF's decision-making is now more flexible, and the EU continues to consult the AU informally on these arrangements.** A final challenge relates to the complexity new instruments introduce to the partnership. While the APF offered EU support through a single instrument, **assistance through the EPF and NDICI-Global Europe is subject to central management in Brussels, led by separate EU Commission and Council units.** EU assistance to a single AU PSO that contains military and civilian components is provided through two separate contracts, adding to the already substantial administrative constraints of the AU Commission.

The AU's considerable administrative and financial challenges in implementing EU funds **have affected shared ownership of the instruments and the quality of political dialogue.** Despite passing the EU Pillar Assessment for delegated financial management of EU funds, the AU Commission often missed deadlines for financial reports. AU Member States have also insisted on

greater budgetary control over instruments like as the ERM. This greater control has, however, removed some of the instrument's agility and consequently both Commissions struggled to achieve quick approval for ERM funds from AU Member States. Regardless, the **EU-AU relationship is still predicated on a much less transactional relationship than the AU's newer partnerships with non-Western countries**. Mutual acknowledgement of the administrative and institutional context remains essential for the two organisations to move towards less frictional relations and joint approaches.

3.3.7 EU security cooperation with RECs

Similar to EU-AU relations, the EU's cooperation with RECs is frequently marked by an **asymmetry of power and resources**, with significant investment to RECs on the one hand and political and security cooperation under constant negotiation on the other. Traditionally, the EU's security cooperation with RECs has taken the form of **institutional capacity building and programme support**. Despite varying degrees of engagement with each REC, EU support for their respective regional institutional capacities to promote peace and security has been crucial. Until 2021, it was disbursed through successive EDF envelopes for security and activities as part of an approach to improve governance and socioeconomic conditions, while also contributing to stability. Among the REC support programmes channelled through the EDF were the EU Support to ECOWAS Regional Peace, Security, and Stability Mandate, the SADC Peace and Security Support Programme and IGAD's Promoting Peace and Stability in the Horn of Africa Region. Funding has been allocated to **mediation, electoral observation, transnational security and improving the capacity of respective Secretariats and Commissions to carry out their peace and security mandates**. RECs have also benefitted from facilities like the Instrument for Stability and Peace, particularly in the fight against terrorism. Further assistance has been provided to RECs via the AUC under a delegated management agreement between the EU and the AUC channelled by the AUC to the various RECs/RMs. Occasionally, funding arrangements have had to be renegotiated in cases where African countries raised concerns about sovereignty or restrictive conditions.

The **scale of structural funding remains substantive despite ambitions by RECs to reduce dependence on external funding**, which generally accounts for more than 60 % of their operational budgets. As with the AU's experience in generating its own resources, projects to improve the financial autonomy of RECs are slow to mature, creating a paradox in meeting the demand for rapid and well-resourced responses to emergent crises. Instruments such as the **EU's ERM** have played an important role in providing an immediate source of funding for crisis response initiatives to RECs and RMs. The first phase lasted from 2009 to 2015 under the APF and the second phase was incorporated transitionally into the NDICI. It covers mediation, political negotiations, shuttle diplomacy, support for the deployment of security and human rights observers as well as fact-finding missions in preparations for peacekeeping operations. The ERM structure was demand-driven and served as a positive example of EU support that facilitates subsidiarity, since the AUC forwarded requests of initiatives from RECs to the EU. The EU would then assess the relevance and design of the request; if approved, funding is then made available immediately. The tool has been **widely used to strengthen REC-led initiatives due to the short processing time, but its application also reflects EU political priorities**. For instance, EU support for the EAC has been restricted to preventive diplomacy initiatives, although the EAC has been soliciting funding for its regional peacekeeping force in eastern DRC. This is a major security concern for African leaders, but not the EU's top priority

in contrast to the Sahel and the Horn of Africa which are closely linked to European migration and security interests¹¹⁷. *Ad hoc* security initiatives by RECs have also been funded through the APF, such as the initial deployment of the ECOWAS Military Intervention in the Gambia or IGAD efforts to revitalise the implementation of conflict resolution in South Sudan. Other ERM initiatives have included ECOWAS initiatives to prevent electoral violence in Sierra Leone and support for SADC's Preventive Mission to the Kingdom of Lesotho. The ERM approach has generally been praised by African partners for its flexibility and being adapted to the needs of RECs to respond early and bolster their leadership role in mediation and preventive diplomacy. Its setup also contributes to improved decision-making between the AU and RECs.

RECs are also able to receive **funding from the EPF**. EPF funds have been used to bolster the capacities of the armed forces of Mauritania and to support deployment of the Rwanda Defence Force in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, to fight against violent extremism¹¹⁸. The EU had not only earmarked EUR 89 million in non-lethal equipment and supplies for the units trained by its mission, but it also provided financial support to the SADC Mission to Mozambique Peacebuilding Support initiative that sought to build capacity among police as well as correctional officers and foster dialogue among civic leaders¹¹⁹. However, the specifics of EPF allocations are the subject of heated debates among REC Member States, as well as between RECs and the AU. The contention straddles **issues of subsidiarity and value-based goals in development cooperation in security domains**. For instance, the EPF is primarily geared towards nation-states and undermines the previously more prominent role of RECs. In addition, the instrument promotes hard security interventions that involve political sensitivities. In Southern Africa, SADC Member States were at loggerheads over the EU's support for the military component of the SADC Mission to Mozambique in 2021 since the EPF as a European instrument, that lacks any formal joint decision-making process with African partners. The assistance also came during Portugal's presidency of the Council in 2021, which raised suspicions among African officials regarding the country's political and economic interests in its former colony. Regardless of the amount of assistance provided, the lack of inclusive decision-making over EPF allocations remains a significant source of contention in the EU's relations with RECs. Additionally, the option of bypassing of regional structures promotes an estrangement between the EU and the RECs in security matters.

Tensions arising from new funding instruments would typically be mediated through **political dialogue mechanisms**. An option would be to use the JAES configuration, which covers dialogue on peace and security issues and APSA implementation, but this arrangement is often viewed as too remote and impractical in discussing emerging and pressing issues. Even more problematic is the lack of clarity in dividing responsibilities between the AU and RECs. Invoking it as a mechanism for dialogue on ongoing security concerns also requires a number of protocol procedures¹²⁰. Another option is for the EU to deal with RECs directly through ministerial level dialogues. However, such

¹¹⁷ V. Hauck and L. Tadesse Shiferaw, '[How can we judge the AU-EU partnership of peace and security](#)', *ECDPM*, Great Insights, 26 October 2020.

¹¹⁸ Council of the European Union, '[European Peace Facility: Council adopts assistance measures in support of the armed forces of five countries](#)', Press Release 1022/22, 1 December 2022.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ N. Pirozzi, B. Venturi and N. Sartori, '[The Joint Africa-EU strategy](#)', Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union, European Parliament, PE603849, 2017.

gatherings have been infrequent, even with ECOWAS and SADC, due not only to the Covid-19 pandemic, but also to the inability to find compromises on contentious issues. In other RECs, such as those in Central and North Africa, weak dialogue mechanisms can be attributed to a lack of administrative capacity.

3.3.8 European bilateral ties with the AU

Below the bicontinental EU-AU relationship level, individual European states also entertain partnerships with the AU, both EU Member States and non-EU states. These countries are the **core members of the EU's like-minded group at the AU**. The UK used to be a significant contributor to the EU's partnership with the AU before Brexit. It now has a substantial bilateral cooperation portfolio with the AU, including financial contributions to ATMIS troop reimbursements in Somalia and early warning activities¹²¹. Similarly to arrangements with the USA, the UK operates an extensive train and equip portfolio with ATMIS troop-contributing countries. Despite Brexit, **the UK continues to be firmly anchored in the group of like-minded European countries** with continued and sustainable contributions to the AU. Other states in that group include **Norway and Switzerland**, which also maintain a cooperation portfolio with the AU. Among EU Member States, **Germany** stands out with particularly substantial financial and in-kind support, with regular bilateral high-level political contacts also being maintained. The EU undertakes regular informal consultations with these other partners and is also considering joining the Joint Financing Agreement arrangements through which many European countries contribute to the AU Commission budget. Overall, cooperation with the AU holds great potential for a Team Europe approach, although individual countries' desire for visibility will persist, especially among non-EU countries.

¹²¹ House of Lords, ['The UK and Sub-Saharan Africa: Prosperity, Peace and Development Co-Operation - Select Committee on International Relations and Defence'](#), 1st Report of Session 2019-21, 10 July 2020, §162.

4 Case studies

This chapter analyses two case studies to illustrate how divergence and convergence arise in practice between the EU and the AU. The first case study concerns the AU's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The second case study examines the regional and international security partnerships that have emerged in response to the Sahel crisis since 2012.

4.1 Case Study 1: The AU's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and ensuing impacts

European observers and decision-makers have been surprised by the **reticence of many African states and the AU to adopt clear positions in favour of Ukraine and against** Russia since the start of the war. This section provides a bigger picture and analyses: the key **factors** that have shaped African states' positions; the **impact** of the war on Africa; the **way the AU has reacted**; and the **effects on AU-EU relations**.

4.1.1 Historical legacies, the principle of non-alignment and anti-Western sentiment

Although all three UNSC African members in February 2022 (Kenya, Ghana and Gabon) immediately condemned Russia, a much more **dispersed voting pattern has since prevailed at the UNGA**. No African state has joined Western sanctions against Russia or provided substantive support to Ukraine. Diplomatic, military and economic ties with Russia have been maintained and, in some cases, strengthened. The pushback that Ukraine, EU Member States and the EU have received in response to demands for explicit pro-Ukrainian solidarity suggested that Africa would align with Russia's violation of territorial integrity and sovereignty, even though it was precisely these norms that African states cherished the most during and after their pursuit of independence. Europe's surprise at Africa's hesitancy in defending such norms in the case of Ukraine reveals an **underestimation of historical ties and principles rooted in anti-colonial resistance**.

While the Russian Federation has maintained relatively limited relations with Africa for much of its first two decades of existence, **African political actors have not forgotten the Soviet Union's historical ties with many African countries**. Many of today's African heads of state and government received scholarships for studies in the Soviet Union, as well as substantial support in their fight for independence and decolonisation. For example, South African politicians often point to the Soviet Union's anti-Apartheid policy at a time when Western Europe still traded extensively with the apartheid regime. Even if this reading of history is selective, given the Soviet Union's own trade relations during apartheid¹²², the anti-imperial narrative continues to be successfully mobilised, for instance when the African National Congress Youth League participated as observers in Eastern Ukraine referendums which were declared illegal by the UNGA¹²³. President Putin's rhetoric has been tailored to this audience. By way of illustration, since September 2022 his speeches have started to brand the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) states as 'colonial'¹²⁴, which resonates with Pan-Africanist and youth movements that have long decried Western interventions in Africa or the

¹²² H. van Vuuren, *Apartheid, Guns and Money*, Hurst & Company, London, 2018, pp. 256ff.

¹²³ P. Fabricius, ["A Beautiful, Wonderful Process" — ANCYL Defends Sending Observers to Russia's Sham Referendums in Ukraine](#), *Daily Maverick*, 27 September 2022.

¹²⁴ Reuters, ['Extracts from Putin's speech at annexation ceremony'](#), 30 September 2022.

lack of monetary sovereignty in the CFA Franc zone. Putin purposefully conceals any suggestion that today's Russian involvement in Africa is not rooted in liberation struggles, but rather resembles a revamped version of the neo-colonial *Françafrique* network, based on clientelist relationships with authoritarian heads of governments eager to remain in power, albeit without the cultural dimension¹²⁵.

Even more important than historical ties with the Soviet Union is Africa's **historical commitment to non-alignment in international affairs**. Observers today broadly agree that Africa's policy of non-alignment in the Cold War was effective in avoiding excessive punitive action by the great powers. This allowed the pursuit of 'African agency' by maintaining relations with both sides, as well as with other non-aligned powers across the globe¹²⁶. The NAM, an interstate grouping that emerged in 1961 and is still active today, continues to promote this foreign policy stance, though with a leaning towards non-Western powers. For instance, all BRICS members (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), powerful as they might currently be, are either members or observers of NAM, within which African states take a central role, particularly in the group's presence at the UN. Uganda will host the chair of NAM and the 2023 summit, confirming Africa's commitment to the organisation's principles¹²⁷. When facing the crisis in Ukraine, African states therefore 'do not wish to be seen as swing states in the battle for the preservation, or contestation, of the Western-led liberal international order'¹²⁸.

Contemporary African perspectives on non-alignment **emphasise great power rivalry, rather than sovereignty and non-interference**. Seen through this lens, the war in Ukraine is a result of great power contestation between the West and Russia. Although an overwhelming majority of African states do not approve of Russia's invasion, the narrative that it was reacting to a provocation from NATO has nevertheless been successful. Based on this analysis, Africa's historically informed and contemporaneously motivated baseline position is neither alignment with Russia nor Ukraine's allies. This stance comes with the cost of glossing over Russia's blatant violation of sovereignty, territorial integrity, as well as principles of non-aggression and non-intervention, which figure prominently among the NAM's foundational Bandung Principles. Africa thus faces a **conflict between non-alignment as a power-based foreign policy strategy and the norms traditionally carried by that same movement**. The pursuit of non-alignment has translated into the unwillingness of some states to risk alienating Russia together with its key vote and veto within the UNSC. By seeking equidistance from the great powers directly and indirectly involved in Ukraine, African states satisfy a core tenet of non-alignment, but at the cost of overlooking violation of the territorial integrity norm.

Africa's hesitancy at aligning with EU positions on the war in Ukraine should not just be read as the result of successful Russian influence. While some African citizens in specific countries hold pro-Russian views, many are simply 'generally indifferent' or negative towards Russia¹²⁹. Rather than

¹²⁵ L. Rajaoarinelina, '[Poutine l'Africain](#)', Note de la FRS n°02/2023, *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique*, 6 January 2023.

¹²⁶ K. Mathews, '[Africa and Non-Alignment](#)', *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 43, No 1, January 1987, pp. 40–51.

¹²⁷ R. Atukunda, '[Uganda to Assume Chairmanship of Non-Aligned Movement at 2023 Summit](#)', *SoftPower News Uganda*, 17 January 2023.

¹²⁸ M. Carbone, '[When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers: the Russo-Ukrainian conflict and the decentring-recentring conundrum in EU-Africa relations](#)', *Journal of European Integration*, 2023.

¹²⁹ South African Institute of International Affairs, '[African Social Media Indicates Indifference towards Russia](#)', *SIIA*, 11 November 2022.

simply thinking in terms of geopolitical opposition, the EU and its Member States have increasingly to **reckon with a generalised anti-Western sentiment** that overshadows historic positions by EU Member States against Apartheid and imperialism. Seeking distance to the EU in this mindset becomes an act of protest against the perceived post-colonial and neo-colonial influence the EU seeks to exert in Africa, which overshadows the position of many EU Member States during the Cold War.

4.1.2 How Russia's invasion of Ukraine affected Africa and the AU

Attempts to consider the war on Ukraine as an exclusively 'European war' have faded considering the reality of its significant impacts across the African continent. The **economic effects** of this invasion materialised quickly, albeit indirectly at first through globally constrained growth and inflation that increased the cost of African commercial and government borrowing¹³⁰. Global **energy prices** have risen by 60 % in a year with very few African countries managing to offset this increase through new energy partners or advantageous contracts with Russia¹³¹. African countries have also relied considerably on Russian and Ukrainian exports of **cereal food staples and mineral nitrogen-based fertilisers**. Russia imposed additional export controls on fertilisers in 2022, further aggravating Africa's import challenges¹³². High import dependence and low diversification of trading partners meant that global supply chain disruptions had a particularly harmful effect on African countries.

Though many European partners, including the EU, underline their commitment to continued partnership with Africa and sustainable funding for these partnerships, nevertheless they are experiencing a **palpable fear of a lower European financial commitment to development and security cooperation with Africa**. Although various EU Members have advocated for a more transactional development aid with political conditionalities related to converging with the EU on Ukraine¹³³, actual funding cuts have not yet materialised in the long-term EU instruments and programmes supporting the AU as a result of the African position towards Ukraine. The divergence of opinions on whether the **appropriate reaction to African non-alignment should be a punitive reduction of funding or rather an increase in order to prevent Russia or other authoritarian states expanding their presence** has not been resolved and thus has not yet affected existing commitments at EU-AU level. However, in the current context, any reduction of EU funding – even if it had been foreseen before 2022 – raises suspicions of being politically motivated. For instance, **already planned reallocations of EU funding from the AU into bilateral or ad hoc assistance are perceived by AU actors interviewed for this study as an effect of the Ukraine war**, either because of a diversion from Africa to Ukraine or as a punitive measure. This impression was exacerbated by the coinciding transition of the main financial instrument for the African Union – the APF – into the EPF, from which the bulk of EU support to Ukraine was financed. The EU's announcement of a EUR 600 million package for 2022-24 through the EPF has done little to reassure African partners and nor has the Council of the EU's commitment to the EPF's financial sustainability

¹³⁰ World Bank, '[African Governments Urgently Need to Restore Macro-Economic Stability and Protect the Poor in a Context of Slow Growth, High Inflation](#)', Press Release, 4 October 2022.

¹³¹ World Bank Group, '[Commodity Markets Outlook: Pandemic, War, Recession](#)', October 2022.

¹³² Interfax, '[Russian Govt Extends Fertilizer Export Quotas until End of 2022, Opening Export Window in June](#)', 31 May 2022.

¹³³ V. Chadwick, '[Exclusive: Internal report shows EU fears losing Africa over Ukraine](#)', *DEVEX*, 22 July 2022.

through a EUR 2 billion increase of the EPF budget¹³⁴. The EU's new security funding instruments under the EPF and the NDICI-Global Europe have created further confusion by enabling leaner and more cost-effective support through other partners than the AU, which drives some of these (foreseen) reallocations from one African recipient to others.

4.1.3 Speaking with one voice about Ukraine? The AU's setbacks and achievements

African countries' responses to the war in Ukraine have been strikingly diverse, ranging from the widely cited speech of Kenya's Ambassador to the UN strongly opposing the Russian invasion referencing Africa's history¹³⁵, to governments open reliance on the Russian mercenary group Wagner to remain in power, such as the Central African Republic and Mali. In this context, **the AU has had difficulty in forging a common African position on Ukraine**. Nonetheless, the issue has sparked much debate, resulting not only in various setbacks, but also certain advances for the AU as a continental organisation with multilateral ambitions.

On the negative side, the **AU was reminded of its institutional limitations regarding foreign security matters**. The PSC did not reach a consensus on formally putting the Ukraine crisis on its agenda, given that its mandate is to focus on intra-African security¹³⁶. Hypothetically, the extensive global impact of the war in Ukraine could have constituted a basis for the PSC to issue a statement in line with its general mandate to 'promote peace, security and stability in Africa'¹³⁷. **Given that the PSC has taken positions on international issues such as the Palestinian case, climate change and the 2003 Iraq War, its mandate would also have made possible a stance on Ukraine**. Challenges in food security, violations of the principle of territorial integrity and changes in the global geopolitical climate could have provided a foundation for the AU to 'speak with one voice' for Africa. However, due to the PSC's lack of unequivocal competencies, Addis-based AU Ambassadors referred this issue to national capitals and their statements in the UN Emergency Special Session on Ukraine.

In contrast, the AU Commission's leadership and the AU Chair were more successful in coining AU foreign policy. For the first time since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the **AU leadership took an official stance on a security crisis outside of the African continent**¹³⁸. This is undoubtedly a procedural step forward for AU diplomacy, regardless of the substance in positions taken. It should be stressed, though, that only the Chairperson of the AU Commission and the Chairperson of the Assembly, Senegalese President Macky Sall, issued statements and not the Assembly or Bureau of the Assembly.

The AU leadership's initial statements pertained to **condemning the crisis** overall, calling 'on the Russian Federation and any other regional or international actor to imperatively respect international

¹³⁴ Council of the European Union, '[European Peace Facility: €600 Million for Support to the African Union](#)', Press Release 385/22, 21 April 2022; Council of the European Union, '[European Peace Facility: Council Agrees €2 Billion Increase of the Financial Ceiling in 2023](#)', Press Release 1087/22, 12 December 2022.

¹³⁵ The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kenya, '[Statement by Ambassador Martin Kimani, during the Security Council urgent meeting on the situation in Ukraine](#)', United Nations Security Council 2021-2022, 21 February 2022.

¹³⁶ African Union, '[African Union Calls its Member States to Discuss Russia-Ukraine Crisis Impacts and Common African Position for COP27](#)', Press Release No 109/2022, 13 June 2022.

¹³⁷ African Union, '[Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union](#)', 9 July 2022, Article 3a.

¹³⁸ African Union, '[Declaration of the African Union on the Iraqi Crisis - Iraq](#)', Central Organ of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution of the African Union, meeting at Summit level, 3 February 2003.

law, the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Ukraine'¹³⁹. The statement also 'urge[d] the two Parties to establish an immediate ceasefire and to open political negotiations without delay, under the auspices of the UN, in order to preserve the world from the consequences of planetary conflict, and in the interests of peace and stability in international relations in service of all the peoples of the world'¹⁴⁰. The wording seeks to **uphold the principles of sovereignty and non-interference** enshrined in the UN Charter as well as the NAM, without one-sidedly putting the burden on Russia. A second statement then focused on the **plight of African citizens fleeing Ukraine**. Reports of discrimination against Africans at EU external borders quickly swept across the African social media sphere and motivated a strongly worded joint statement by the AU Commission Chairperson and the AU Chair about 'reports that African citizens on the Ukrainian side of the border are being refused the right to cross the border to safety', asserting that '[r]eports that Africans are singled out for unacceptable dissimilar treatment would be shockingly racist and in breach [of] international law'¹⁴¹.

Despite differing national positions, the **AU leadership succeeded in 'speaking with one voice' in external affairs by travelling abroad to address a non-African security crisis through high-level diplomacy**. The AU Bureau authorised the AU Chairperson and AU Commission Chair to travel to Russia and Ukraine for high-level meetings¹⁴². Shortly before the Russia leg of the trip, the AU Commission Chairperson publicly referred to a 'joint mission to Russia and Ukraine'¹⁴³. However, AU leaders cancelled the trip to Ukraine as they claimed to have received insufficient written security guarantees and had not received a formal written invitation¹⁴⁴. This resulted in a highly one-sided visit of AU leadership to Sochi to meet Russian President Putin. The situation was aggravated by factually incorrect statements made by both AU leaders about supposed Western sanctions on grain and fertiliser exports¹⁴⁵. The AU leadership's trip was thus a sign of progress for active AU foreign policy. However, **the one-sided implementation of this trip failed to reflect accurately the AU's non-aligned identity and the deeply divided views among AU Member States**. As a result, the AU leadership appears now to have settled for disengagement from high-level diplomacy regarding the war in Ukraine. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs issued a written invitation to the AU Commission Chair in November 2022 and additionally President Zelenskiy asked to address the AU assembly during the AU Summit in February 2023¹⁴⁶. Even if the AU does not directly reject these opportunities, procedural pretexts and delayed decisions suggest that both attempts for a stronger Ukrainian voice at the AU are unlikely to materialise, at least in the short term. For the AU, the Sochi visit was a clear indicator of the difficulties in maintaining a neutral position within practical involvement. In the same vein, there is **no unanimous position yet on whether or not the Russia-**

¹³⁹ African Union, '[Statement from Chair of the African Union, H.E President Macky Sall and Chairperson of the AU Commission H.E Moussa Faki Mahamat, on the Situation in Ukraine](#)', 24 February 2022.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ African Union, '[Statement of the African Union on the Reported Ill Treatment of Africans Trying to Leave Ukraine](#)', 28 February 2022.

¹⁴² This was announced at a press conference of German Chancellor Scholz and Macky Sall, see Bundesregierung, '[Pressekonferenz von Bundeskanzler Scholz mit Präsident Sall am 22. Mai 2022 in Dakar](#)', 22 May 2022.

¹⁴³ M. Faki Mahamat [@AUC_MoussaFaki], [Tweet](#), Twitter, 1 June 2022.

¹⁴⁴ Authors' interviews in Addis Ababa, January 2023.

¹⁴⁵ President of Russia, '[Meeting with African Union Chairperson, President of Senegal Macky Sall](#)', Kremlin, 3 June 2022; M. Faki Mahamat [@AUC_MoussaFaki], [Tweet](#), Twitter, 3 June 2022.

¹⁴⁶ Authors' interviews in Addis Ababa, January 2023.

Africa Business Summit, due to be held in summer 2023 in Saint Petersburg, should figure on the official AU agenda. Given the AU Chairperson's central role in AU external matters, the rotation principle will also affect the organisation's positioning. While the incoming Chairperson from Comoros has indicated more understanding of Ukraine's situation, the mandate will go to a North African president in February 2024, hence a greater likelihood that Russia will be able to exert greater influence.

Aside from routine calls for the cessation of hostilities and negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, the AU primarily seeks to **avoid this thorny issue so as not to deepen divisions within its membership.** Hence, both Russia and Ukraine are kept as far off its agenda as possible, which can be viewed as a disadvantage for Ukraine. Ukraine only has a Chargé d'Affaires, but no Ambassador in Addis Ababa and thus lacks the capacity to counter Russian narratives on the war. The AU has shifted its discourse from the actual war to the subsequent consequences for Africa. The AUC has formed a dedicated taskforce to this effect¹⁴⁷. This allows the AU to refocus on issues where the views of its members are more likely to converge, namely on food security, the effects of sanctions and energy production.

4.1.4 Effects of the Ukraine war on the EU-AU partnership

The invasion of Ukraine has put more strain on the EU-AU partnership than any previous security crisis, be it global or regional. The EU's steadfast support for Ukraine, including its granting of accession candidate status in June 2022, entailed that the country received **substantial diplomatic support from the EU in Africa, including at the AU level.** The EU reached out to the AU leadership and AU Member States to counter factually incorrect narratives around EU sanctions and seek support for Ukrainian positions in the UNGA's Special Emergency Session on Ukraine. **The AU and its Member States, though, lacked consensus and would have preferred for the partnership to exclude geopolitical questions;** some AU stakeholders interviewed for this study have called the invasion of Ukraine a 'distraction to the partnership'.

Within different EU-AU partnership formats, **devising a common language to describe the war in Ukraine has been a sticking point** (see also Section 3.3). While the 6th EU-AU Summit occurred just a few days before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the 13th Annual Joint Consultative Meeting between the AU PSC and EU PSC on 10 June 2022 failed to agree on the contents of an outcome document due to insurmountable differences about Ukraine. This was a significant failure for the partnership's ambitions. The Joint Parliamentary Assembly between the EP and the ACP countries also clashed over Ukraine during its plenaries in 2022. In November 2022, the 11th C2C meeting between the EU and the AU found minimal common ground again in declaring that 'the war in Ukraine further adversely impacted the economies of Europe and Africa'. They referred to national positions as expressed in the UNSC and the UNGA. The European Commission 'condemns in the strongest possible terms the war of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which is illegal, unjustified and unprovoked and causing immense human suffering, and demands its complete and

¹⁴⁷ African Intelligence, '[African Union mobilises task force to counter effects of Ukraine war](#)', 10 October 2022.

unconditional withdrawal from the territory of Ukraine¹⁴⁸. The EP-PAP Inter-Parliamentary Meeting on 8-9 December 2022 included a paragraph using quasi-identical language¹⁴⁹.

Proximity to Russia has become an attractive option for many AU Member States to demonstrate non-alignment with the EU's stance on Ukraine. However, regarding the AU's substantive cooperation with the EU, no such trend can be said to apply. While Russia has a notable diplomatic presence in Africa with 40 embassies and is an important security actor with 20 bilateral military cooperation agreements and a preeminent role in Africa's weapons imports¹⁵⁰, **Russian involvement at the AU and the APSA remains minimal, both in terms of financial contributions and participation in international partnership meetings**. The EU and its Member States are still by far the most plentiful and motivated partners in terms of support for the African continental integration process. More precisely, cooperation across the AU Commission's many areas of development and integration work continues. Furthermore, during interviews conducted for this study, EU officials in Addis Ababa underscored that the EU has reportedly enhanced its visibility and active participation across the AU. Even if many African states do not align with the EU's steadfast stance on Ukraine's territorial integrity, their interpretation of non-alignment is not black-and-white regarding partnerships. Member States broadly wish to maintain close EU-AU links but without precluding their relations with other partners.

4.1.5 Food security: multilateral solutions and their limits

The EU has played a significant role in alleviating Africa's food crisis that resulted from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The AU Commission has for many years been involved in **on-going activities concerning food security and agricultural development, the vast majority of which have been funded by the EU**. However, given a revised context, the AU's 2022 theme, 'Strengthening Resilience in Nutrition and Food Security on the African Continent', suddenly gained unexpected relevance in light of the war¹⁵¹. The AU also convened a High-Level Food Security and Nutrition Conference, partnering with: the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN; and the African Development Bank¹⁵². Initiatives for food security are also part of the AU's economic flagship programme, the African Continental Trade Area and its projected agricultural chains throughout Africa. The EU combats Africa's food security crisis through various bilateral and multilateral channels, including the World Food Programme, as well as funding deliveries of grain donated by the government of Ukraine, although there is no direct AU role in these humanitarian efforts. The EU is also an important stakeholder in the 'Initiative on the Safe

¹⁴⁸ European Commission, '[9 months after Summit: European Union and African Union Commissions take stock of the implementation of the February Summit commitments](#)', Press Release, IP/22/7247IP/22/7247 28 November 2022.

¹⁴⁹ Pan-African Parliament and European Parliament, '[Declaration](#)', European Parliament-Pan-African Parliament Inter-Parliamentary Meeting (EP-PAP IPM), Brussels, 8-9 December 2022, p. 3.

¹⁵⁰ G. Lanfranchi and K. de Bruijne, '[The Russians are coming! The Russians are coming? Russia's growing presence in Africa and its implication for European policy](#)', CRU Report, *Clingendael*, June 2022.

¹⁵¹ African Union, '[Decision of the African Union Theme of the Year for 2022 "Strengthening resilience in nutrition and food security on the African continent: strengthening agro-food systems, health and social protection systems for the acceleration of human, social and economic capital development"](#)', Thirty-Fifth Ordinary Session, Assembly/AU/Dec. 813(XXXV), Assembly of the Union, 5-6 February 2022.

¹⁵² African Union, '[Galvanizing Support to Build Resilient and Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition In Africa](#)', Press Release, 15 October 2022.

Transportation of Grain and Foodstuffs from Ukrainian Ports', commonly referred to as the 'Black Sea Grain Initiative', which also seeks to alleviate African grain import challenges. These multilateral solutions respond to immediate humanitarian needs. In the medium term, though, **the EU is well-placed to work with the AU and its Member States in developing agricultural self-dependence and food systems security**. The issue of food security also provides Ukraine with a less-controversial topic for its diplomatic relations by being able to brand itself as a strategic partner for the AU and as a donor of grain to African countries¹⁵³.

4.2 Case Study 2: Security partnerships in the Sahel

4.2.1 One decade of multi-crisis in the Sahel

Starting in 2012, violence by rebel groups in northern Mali rapidly escalated into a complex armed conflict that today involves a multitude of national armies, armed non-state actors and external forces across most of the Sahel region. During the past 10 years, **violent conflict and instability have spread from Mali to the surrounding area, particularly affecting the neighbouring Niger and Burkina Faso**, killing thousands of people and uprooting millions of residents. 2022 is estimated to have been the bloodiest year since the conflict started in 2012¹⁵⁴. In addition to the crisis of insecurity, the Sahel also suffers from a crisis of jihadist extremism and in recent years also a crisis both of democracy and global rivalry.

The Sahel region has witnessed serious political turmoil in the past two years, including two military takeovers in Mali and two in Burkina Faso, one illegitimate transfer of power in Chad and an attempted *coup d'état* in Niger. Return of the military and the rise of violent Islamist insurgencies demonstrate how fragile democracies in the region are and indicate a **fundamental challenge of existing state institutions being considered as neither effective nor legitimate by local inhabitants in the area**. Actors with some connection to al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State have been able to seize control of significant areas of the region not only through the use of violence, but also by tapping into long-standing grievances as well as toppling existing political and power structures¹⁵⁵.

Furthermore, a **steadily growing number of external actors have intervened in the region with support from local regimes**¹⁵⁶. The Sahel has become a space for many of these actors to test their security instruments, both from the outside – primarily the EU and its Member States (particularly France), the USA, the UN and increasingly Russia – and from within Africa, primarily ECOWAS, the G5 Sahel and the AU. This section now further examines the Sahel from a perspective of EU-AU relations.

¹⁵³ A. Khrebet, '[As Ukraine looks West, Russia wins over Africa](#)', *The Kyiv Independent*, 26 September 2022.

¹⁵⁴ H. Wilkins, '[Deaths, Instability Increase Across the Western Sahel in 2022](#)', VOA, 29 December 2022.

¹⁵⁵ E. Baldaro, '[Rashomon in the Sahel: Conflict dynamics of security regionalism](#)', *Security Dialogue*, Vol 52, No 3, 2021, pp. 266-283.

¹⁵⁶ B. F. Obamamoye, '[Trans-state security complexes and security governance in West Africa](#)', *African Security Review*, Vol 29, No 2, 2020, pp. 152-174.

4.2.2 Frictions between G5 Sahel, ECOWAS and AU

Crisis in the Sahel has raised **questions of subsidiarity for the AU**. At the height of Mali's constitutional crisis in 2014, the AU adopted a Strategy for Mali and the Sahel, launching inclusive peace talks between Malian parties and lending support to regional cooperation made through the Nouakchott Process inaugurated in 2013. In that same year, the G5 Sahel was created by the presidents of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger as an **ad hoc coalition focused on hard security collaboration and counterterrorism**, leading to the launch of a Joint Force with 5 000 soldiers¹⁵⁷. The Concept of Operations of the Joint Force was validated on 8 March 2017 and endorsed by the AU PSC on 3 April 2017¹⁵⁸. G5 Sahel countries later announced setting up a Trust Fund to gather international voluntary contributions to the Joint Force. Apart from the five formal members, the EU and France have played a key role in supporting the G5 Sahel initiative through extensive financial and military support, as well as providing strategic blueprints for its organisation¹⁵⁹. EU financial support to the G5 Sahel Joint Force amounting to EUR 50 million was announced by the EU High Representative at the EU-G5 Summit held in Bamako on 5 June 2017¹⁶⁰. This was increased to EUR 100 million, with an additional EUR 50 million being announced at the Brussels Sahel Conference on 23 February 2018¹⁶¹. Support has been directed toward multinational operations, addressing some of the Joint Force's remaining needs and allowing the G5 Permanent Secretariat to operationalise its Trust Fund as well as coordinating international contributions. The G5 Sahel has also complemented French military interventions in the region, chiefly Operation Barkhane.

The G5 Sahel operations have created friction with both ECOWAS and the AU. The G5 Sahel effectively **established a new regional delineation that cuts across the existing AU cartography** and is based on a notion of Sahelian identity that excludes other countries of the region¹⁶². While Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are members of ECOWAS, Mauritania and Chad belong to other RECs.

Any REC would naturally be uneasy with the G5 Sahel. **ECOWAS attempted to claim a leading role**, arguing that West Africa as a whole is affected by the crisis and stretching the need for socio-economic rather than military solutions in policy areas where the organisation has established wide-ranging responsibilities. The G5 Sahel is also deepening the rift between anglophone and francophone states, which ECOWAS has sought to overcome. Inter-organisational competition reflects rivalry for regional leadership between France as the main security actor in the G5 Sahel – and thus potentially extending to the EU – and Nigeria as the leading ECOWAS country.

¹⁵⁷ E. Pichon and T. Fardel, '[The G5 Sahel and the European Union: The challenges of security cooperation with a regional grouping](#)', Briefing, European Parliamentary Research Service, PE 652.074, 2020.

¹⁵⁸ African Union, '[Communique of the 679th PSC Meeting on the draft Strategic Concept of Operations \(CONOPs\) of the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel](#)', PSC/PR/COMM(DCLXXIX), Peace and Security Council, 21 April 2017.

¹⁵⁹ M. Dieng, P. Onguny and A. Ghouenzen Mfondi, '[Leadership without Membership: France and the G5 Sahel Joint Force](#)', *African Journal of Terrorism and Insurgency Research (AJoTIR)*, Vol 1, No 2, 2020, pp. 21-42.

¹⁶⁰ European Commission, '[EUR 50 million for new Joint Force of the Sahel countries: EU steps up its support for security in the region](#)', Press Release, IP/17/1542, 5 June 2017.

¹⁶¹ African Union External Action Service, '[Sahel: The EU mobilises €414 million in international support](#)', 23 February 2018 [archived content].

¹⁶² For a comprehensive discussion, see: E. Baldaro and E. Lopez Lucia, '[Spaces of \(in-\) security and intervention: spatial competition and the politics of regional organizations in the Sahel](#)', *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 2022, pp. 1-19.

Creation of the G5 Sahel has further created friction due to its **implications for the AU's PSOs doctrine and capabilities**. *Ad-hoc* coalitions are not foreseen in the AU's ASF scenarios and other decisions on providing intervention capacity on the African continent. There is a lively but as yet unsettled debate about whether these *ad-hoc* formats undermine or enhance formal and longitudinal institutional arrangements¹⁶³. A clear effect can be seen in G5 Sahel's establishment having drawn EU resources from formal RECs, RMs and the AU. This in turn has left the AU in search of a new role, as its existing oversight of peace enforcement deployment capabilities is not relevant for the G5 Sahel. As a result, the AU has struggled to assert itself *vis-à-vis* the G5 Sahel. **The very active role of external actors and effective circumvention of APSA directly put into question the AU's relevance** and its mantra of 'African (Union) solutions to African problems', thereby causing pronounced unease at the PSC¹⁶⁴. In response, the AU attempted to root reactions to the Sahel within APSA by launching the Nouakchott Process¹⁶⁵. However, the proposed geographical Sahelo-Saharan delineation of the region also did not correspond to an existing REC (except for the Community of Sahel-Saharan states, despite the lack of its capacity or authority to act) and directly competed with ECOWAS¹⁶⁶. It was advocated by Algeria, who was neither a member of G5 Sahel nor ECOWAS, but aimed to insert itself in conflict resolution of what it considered its regional sphere.

A second initiative by the AU to play a more prominent role in the Sahel was an **AU decision to deploy 3 000 African troops to the conflict**¹⁶⁷. This initiative was proposed by the then Commissioner Chergui of Algeria, but has since struggled to materialise and keeps being postponed. A major issue has been the funding of this deployment, as proposals to use ECOWAS resources for an AU-labelled mission have met clear opposition from Nigeria and other ECOWAS countries. At the same time, the complementarity of an AU deployment with the existing G5 Sahel force has not been clarified. Finally, there has been increasing realisation that a military response to the Sahel crisis faces clear limitations and has to some degree even been counterproductive, thus requiring an approach focused on governance and development.

4.2.3 EU-AU cooperation beyond the G5 Sahel

With the G5 Sahel facing an impasse due to profound divergences between Burkina Faso and Mali on one side and the EU and its members on the other side, **a new window of opportunity for EU-AU engagement has emerged**. The AU has bolstered ties with the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) since 2018, when the AU PSC endorsed a Regional Strategy for the Stabilisation, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected areas of the Lake Basin Region¹⁶⁸. Although the LCBC is

¹⁶³ P. D. Williams, '[Can Ad Hoc Security Coalitions in Africa Bring Stability?](#)', *IPI Global Observatory*, 14 January 2019; Y-F. Reykers, J. Karlsrud, M. Brosig, S. Hofmann, C. Maglia and P. Rieker, '[Ad Hoc Coalitions in Global Governance: Short-Notice, Task- and Time-Specific Cooperation](#)', *International Affairs*, iiac319, 30 January 2023.

¹⁶⁴ African Union, '[Report of the Peace and Security Council on its activities and the state of peace and security in Africa](#)', Twenty-second Ordinary Session, Assembly/AU/4(XXII), Peace and Security Council, 30-31 January 2014.

¹⁶⁵ K. Döring, '[The changing ASF geography: From the intervention experience in Mali to the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises and the Nouakchott Process](#)', *African Security*, Vol 11, No 1, 2018, pp. 32-58.

¹⁶⁶ U. Engel, '[Peace-building through space-making: The spatializing effects of the African Union's peace and security policies](#)', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol 14, No 2, 2020, pp. 221-236.

¹⁶⁷ African Union, '[Decision on Libya and the Sahel](#)', Thirty-Third Ordinary Session, Assembly/AU/Dec.792(XXXIII), Assembly of the Union, 9 February 2020.

¹⁶⁸ African Union, '[African Union regional strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery & Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin region](#)', August 2018.

not a REC recognised by the AU, its membership offers an alternative delineation that includes Nigeria but excludes Algeria as well as Burkina Faso and Mali, which are both currently suspended from AU and ECOWAS due to unconstitutional changes of government. This also provides an **opportunity for the EU and its Members to align with the AU and to complement its own military engagement with human security aspects**, such as the effects of climate change. Moreover, cooperation with the LCBC offers a new geographical constellation, as relations with Burkina Faso and Mali continue to deteriorate, amidst anti-French and anti-Western sentiments which has led to expulsion of the French ambassador and the retreat of French and German troops¹⁶⁹. An additional concern, which has received increased attention in the context of the war in Ukraine, is the presence of **foreign mercenaries in the region**, particularly those from the Wagner Group. In Burkina Faso and Mali, the Wagner Group have become part of the new political leadership's strategy to remain in power. In line with its Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa¹⁷⁰, the AU is concerned about these developments, but lacks consensus to change AU member states' national prerogatives in inviting foreign fighters onto their territory.

Despite geographical shifts, **the AU remains largely confined to playing the role of a political umbrella for the Sahel**, providing continental legitimacy to ECOWAS and other sub-regional initiatives, and exercising limited political leadership in cooperation with relevant sub-regional groupings and institutions, for example through special envoys. The AU has had to compete with the G5 Sahel and ECOWAS in terms of legitimacy, mandate and resources, often struggling to find its role. International partners have also been reluctant to fund the AU's initiatives or to give the AU a more prominent role in their Sahel policies. The recent **increase of unconstitutional changes of governments in the region is potentially generating a window of opportunity for the AU**, since this topic figures high on the agenda of its Commission, which has already provided support for countries in political transition towards democracy, as was the case for Mali for a limited period. These topics would allow the AU to concentrate on a political rather than military role and provide collaboration opportunities with the EU, which shares the AU's concern. Nevertheless, the AU has also faced criticism of double standards, as it sanctioned unconstitutional changes of government in Mali and Burkina Faso but excepted Chad, not unlike the EU¹⁷¹.

Finding a coherent response to the Sahel crisis has also been a **challenge for the way in which both AU and EU are structured internally**. As with the absence of an REC covering the entire Sahel, the region has similarly been spread over different administrative geographical desks in Brussels and Addis Ababa. Moreover, where dedicated Sahel desks have been created, the focus on Sahel is often very target-oriented and not sufficiently embedded into the continental relationship. The Sahel is not a top priority in EU-AU relations and conversely the EU-AU relationship is not a core aspect of the EU's Sahel engagement.

¹⁶⁹ B. Fox, '[EU-Africa relations: Counting the spillover costs from Russia's war](#)', *Euractiv*, 6 January 2023.

¹⁷⁰ African Union, '[Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa](#)', CM/817 (XXIX) Annex II Rev.1, 22 April 1985.

¹⁷¹ Amani Africa, '[Sanctions and Enforcement Capacities: Deterrence Against UCG](#)', 15 August 2022.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

This study has examined the AU's major ambitions as the continent moves towards political integration, whilst at the same time negotiating the EU-AU relationship's foreign, political and security aspects. In this respect, **African political integration will continue to exhibit regional, institutional and thematic variations**. In supporting such progress, the **EU's approach is far from monolithic** as it strives for new levels of political and security unity. The EU and AU can **renew and sustain their partnership only through a shared paradigm of reciprocity**. Based on this general premise, the concluding chapter briefly summarises this study's key findings and proposes recommendations for the EU-AU relationship regarding funding, format and substance, considering also Ukraine and the EP's activities.

The AU has seen **significant institutional developments** in recent years, including the establishment and/or operationalisation of various organs and wide-ranging initiatives. It is now a **central reference point regarding peace and security** matters in Africa. The AU has also begun to play a selective role in foreign policy beyond the continent. Despite these advancements, the AU still faces **numerous challenges in the field of foreign and security policy**. These include:

- intergovernmental constraints due to concerns about national sovereignty;
- deep-seated divisions among certain AU Members;
- insufficient funding and administrative capacity;
- the formation of *ad-hoc* coalitions outside the AU framework;
- a lack of strategic guidance and initiative towards international partnerships.

The EU-AU relationship receives considerable critical scrutiny from both continents and beyond. Despite criticism, **the partnership is unparalleled for both sides regarding the density of interregional formats and cooperation mechanisms**. Among the AU's current and potential partners, there are **no viable alternatives to replace the EU's sustained institution-building support in the short to medium terms**. Only in the long term beyond 15-20 years could a real change in the nature of the partnership unfold. This deep involvement also means that compared with other interregional partnerships, there is a strongly pronounced asymmetry, which contrasts starkly with the rhetorical commitment to an eye-level partnership. **Asymmetry is most visible in the unidirectional funding flows but also in agenda-setting within the partnership**. This partnership is understandably sensitive to perceptions of lecturing and paternalism, given colonial legacies, which make constructive and open-minded deliberation difficult.

Disagreements over the war in Ukraine show that the AU's loyalty to the EU is not a given and that the partnership has not yet created sufficient space for constructive disagreement. Moreover, thematic divergences have become more pronounced over time. This is not necessarily an expression of antagonism, but it may indicate a new-found willingness to seek accommodation of more substantive discussions and contentious politics within the partnership in future.

Based on the findings of this study, we formulate the following set of **recommendations for the EU and specifically for the EP**.

On a partnership beyond funding

While maintaining funding for the AU's peace and security efforts, the authors recommend that the EU and AU collaborate to **develop scenarios for transitioning out of the current finance-based relationship**. The organisations need to distinguish areas with a significant financial and political EU role that: (i) need to be maintained; (ii) can be transformed into more cost-effective assistance; or (iii) might be shifted into decentralised formats of conflict prevention and peace support. The EU and the AU need to assess the potential impact of a lower EU funding share and determine how to mobilise sustainable alternatives. This would ensure that if the partnership transitions out of a money-based relationship, **the EU's substantial investment in African security does not vanish due to a hasty retreat, while allowing the AU to progress towards financial autonomy**. Balanced modalities that enable joint initiatives where ownership and accountability are equally divided between both parties should underpin future cooperation.

The EU should make a distinction **between guaranteed and discretionary contributions to the AU. This would allay fears of politically motivated funding cuts, while ensuring buy-in from EU Member States**. Guaranteed contributions would be committed over longer periods of time, whereas discretionary contributions are subjected to reassessment of needs, implementation capacity and political convergence. The EU would thereby set itself apart from other partners whose contributions are volatile or subject to significant discrepancies between announcements and disbursements. The EU should also consider whether it wants to occupy a specific niche rather than covering the entire scope of the AU's security portfolio.

Funding African peace and security is not equal to funding the AU, especially as the EU's new-generation instruments offer the EU flexibility for spending through other channels. The EU should avoid hasty financial disengagement from the AU, which would be detrimental not only to the AU and its peace missions, but also to the EU's general reputation. A transition of this magnitude would need to be gradually implemented. A 'vacuum' left by the EU is unlikely to be filled quickly by other partners. Like-minded or not, there is no serious contender for the EU's long-term and substantial support. Rather, a precipitated disengagement from the AU's programmes risks undermining the long-term investment in African security institutions that the EU has undertaken since the 2000s. The next three-year window of EPF to the AU (2025-2027) and the NDICI-Global Europe's programming after the midterm review in 2024 offer an opportunity to maintain a **commitment to sustainable funding solutions for the AU**, not least to assuage fears of short-term reallocations related to the war in Ukraine. In parallel, the EU will need to develop a communication strategy to address apprehensions about potentially lowered financial commitment to Africa. Another dimension to ensuring a smooth transition would be to start fully associating the AU to EU decision-making security spending in bilateral, sub-regional and *ad hoc* channels. Concretely, this would entail only funding regional security efforts after the AU PSC authorised them, rather than giving the AU PSC a rubberstamping role after the fact. The EU's commitment to sustainable funding can also take different forms than direct payments, for instance by pursuing Joint Financing Agreements with other international partners in Addis Ababa.

On a global level, the EU should constructively engage with the AU's proposal for **UN assessed contributions from the UN's peacekeeping budget for AU PSOs**. Related proposals have not been formalised despite almost a decade of exploratory work¹⁷². The AU agreed a Consensus Paper on predictable, adequate and sustainable financing for AU peace and security activities during its 2023 Summit. This Consensus Paper forms the basis for African engagement on the topic to convince the UN that the AU's 2016 commitment to finance 25 % of the funding modality covers all AU peace and security activities. If the EU is keen to use its instruments for African security elsewhere than the AU, this proposed modality would present a **cost-effective way to enhance AU-UN-EU cooperation for effective multilateralism**: In 2022-24, the 27 EU Member States account for 23.52 % of the UN peacekeeping budget¹⁷³. Thus, EU Members could reduce their overall share by supporting AU PSOs through the UN and in return accept a reduced oversight role. The UN's political clout and universal membership make this proposal viable also for the new partnership paradigm referred to throughout this study.

At the UN, the EU should also intensify efforts to enhance coherence of the Western European and Others Group, Eastern European Group, as well as EU Member States, in order to **align with the AU's Consensus Paper**. As part of this effort, the EU should seek to cooperate with the AU in feeding experiences and lessons-learned with sustainable funding for regional security responses in Africa. The EU should be mindful that such arrangements need to be considered on a case-by-case basis, as intended by many veto powers on the UNSC, while also supporting the sustainability and predictability of AU security funding. The EU should support the diplomatic process by contributing to structuring and pacing the diplomatic process so that AU members can prepare a formal position and fall-back positions for text-based negotiations on a possible framework resolution.

On diplomacy with the AU regarding Russian aggression in Ukraine

Despite the significant role the EU plays for the AU as an international partner, it has struggled to convey the importance of its position on Ukraine to African partners. The AU has taken a principled stance based on a particular interpretation of non-alignment. The EU does not need to abandon a value-based approach with the AU, even if their positions have become entrenched and joint EU-AU declarations have bracketed the issue. Rather than focusing on UNGA votes or pushing the AU to side with the EU against Russia, the EU should continue to assist **Ukraine's diplomatic outreach** at the AU. In contrast to Russia, Ukraine lacks comparable diplomatic, media and military networks in Africa. It relies mainly on EU support to counter Russian narratives. While Ukraine must define its own Africa policy independently and decide on upgrading its presence in Addis Ababa¹⁷⁴, the EU can add authority, visibility and information to Ukraine's diplomatic efforts. The EU should engage the AU and its Member States in various dialogue formats to enhance mutual understanding about African and European views. Renewed exchanges between Ukraine and AU Member States on food security is particularly promising. The EP can play a special role in this effort by engaging African

¹⁷² African Union and United Nations, [Joint Communiqué](#), Sixteenth (16th) Annual Joint Consultative Meeting Between Members Of The United Nations Security Council And The African Union Peace And Security Council, New York, 14 October 2022.

¹⁷³ UN General Assembly, [Implementation of General Assembly resolutions 55/235 and 55/236. Report of the Secretary-General](#), Addendum, A/76/Rev.1/Add.1, 28 December 2021.

¹⁷⁴ It is currently unclear whether the planned expansion of Ukrainian diplomatic presence in Africa will include an Ambassador to the African Union: The Kyiv Independent news desk, '[Ukraine will open embassies in 10 African countries](#)', *The Kyiv Independent*, 23 December 2022.

parliamentarians, also from opposition parties, in open-minded exchanges about the effects and solutions to the various negative consequences triggered by Russia's invasion.

It is recommended that the EP plays a leading role in facilitating **visits to Africa and the AU by members of the Ukrainian parliament, Russian and Belarussian opposition as well as Ukrainian civil society**. The EP could also envisage a joint parliamentary delegation with Members of the Ukrainian Parliament to the PAP. Such an initiative would tie in with the EP's specific concern regarding anti-democratic disinformation campaigns.

Concerning efforts to end the war in Ukraine, the EU needs to decide and clearly communicate if it views and expects a future role for the AU, such as contributing constructively with its mediation and post-conflict reconstruction expertise. This would afford the EU the chance to elevate the EU-AU relationship from a singular focus on 'African problems' towards a genuine multilateral partnership.

On effective and representative multilateralism

The pursuit of 'rules-based' multilateralism is a declared goal of the EU, and the partnership with the AU can play an even greater role in achieving it¹⁷⁵. Despite different interpretations, the EU and AU broadly agree on the need for effective multilateralism. Best practices emerging from EU-AU cooperation on multilateralism underscore intense and regular outreach from the EU to African partners with a genuine goal of understanding interests and justifications, rather than what some African stakeholders widely across the democracy-autocracy spectrum call 'EU lecturing' about its norms and achievements. The authors recommend that the EU intensifies **gradual rapprochement and confidence-building in UN hubs through regular interactions that include both formal and informal modalities**. The EU-AU Group at the UN in Geneva is such an example of co-owned and productive multilateral collaboration. Besides working on specific resolutions, the EU needs to build solid foundations for an inclusive process of active listening and outreach to African countries. In terms of topics for joint engagement for effective multilateralism, the EU and AU can still spend even more energy on finding issues of mutual interest or new angles on established topics, including youth, the digital divide, food security and pandemic preparedness.

The EU should carefully balance the symbolism and substance of the AU's ambitions to have a stronger voice in global affairs, such as in the G20 and the UNSC. While the EU has elaborate procedures for internal coordination, the AU's overstretched institutions will not immediately have the capacity for extensive and effective negotiations for common African positions. As the AU represents a continent historically marginalised in global affairs, having a seat at the table would already be an achievement. We recommend that the EU both **actively support a stronger African voice in global affairs and, where possible, help the AU to position itself in security crises beyond the continent**.

On the formats of the partnership

The EU-AU relationship involves many institutions and themes. To avoid redundancy and overburdening, the EU must ensure that its internal information exchange and coordination works smoothly, thus preventing duplication of efforts. **Existing formats should not be handled as**

¹⁷⁵ European Commission & HRVP, [Joint Communication To The European Parliament And The Council on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism](#), JOIN(2021) 3 final, 17 February 2021.

routine events but prepared with great care and flexibility, as the setback of one can have negative spill-overs on the rest of the relationship. This holds true for the upcoming PSC-to-PSC meeting in 2023, which presents a unique opportunity for finding new common ground and working towards a more constructive handling of political disagreements.

In light of the desire for greater EU-AU multilateral engagement, the EU will have to **reassess the current partnership formats that will remain pertinent**. We recommend that the EU conducts an in-depth evaluation to prioritise the most vibrant interaction formats with the AU. This should be a shared effort together with the AU to enhance joint ownership of the assessment and its outcomes. The EP should for instance engage African Members of Parliaments on how to deal with the overlap between the JPA and PAP.

The Sahel crisis illustrates a trend towards the creation of flexible and temporary formats that cut across established lines of the politically and institutionally consolidated AU structure and the RECs. This trend is reinforced by increased flexibility in the EU's funding instruments. We recommend that the EU engage in a dialogue with the AU **to assess doctrinal innovation in the partnership** to provide conceptual guidance when new regional formats are proposed. This concerns the appraisal and deployment of new collective security efforts, political guidance, partnership dialogues and donor coordination beyond the EU-AU relationship. While it is sensible for the EU and AU to acknowledge the dysfunctional state of some regional organisations, they also need to be mindful that a proliferation of *ad hoc* coalitions can have unintended negative effects on the AU.

On the substance of the relationship

Even a comprehensive partnership gains benefits from prioritisation. This analysis finds that not all topics and themes are equally able to generate positive momentum in the partnership. The general recommendation is that the EU should **interact more carefully with the AU in areas of superficial convergence**. In such areas, including EPAs, climate funding and migration management, the EU's significantly larger diplomatic capacity has in the past been used to rush through African agreements with outcome documents that did not sufficiently reflect the AU's considerations. Treating this relationship more as a multilateral rather than a development partnership would facilitate more strategic prioritisation on the EU's side regarding the thematic issues to be pursued. There are numerous areas, including green energy, vaccines and migration, where European concessions could unlock a higher degree of convergence in the partnership. Often, potential European concessions revolve around enhancing knowledge transfer, improving African access to intellectual property, enhancing African industrialisation and adjusting EU internal policies to mitigate deleterious effects for the African continent. More ambitious concessions would include reforming EU agricultural subsidies and combating Illicit Financial Flows and offshore economies more aggressively. In the realm of security, potential significant concessions could include stricter arms exports control, enhanced intelligence sharing and working towards shared African-European decision-making for CSDP missions deployed in Africa.

It is recommended that the EU takes advantage of areas where the partnership is already moving in tandem, including safeguarding and extending the AU's efforts in **early warning and conflict prevention**, as well as the importance of **governance** and preventing unconstitutional government changes. As a further recommendation, the EU should seek to merge an **environmental and digital dimension within existing security engagements**. More specifically, the EU could expand its work

on climate security, but also on cybersecurity dimensions to include good governance and PSOs. Work on the protection of critical infrastructures also needs to be developed further. Importantly all these areas provide opportunities for the two organisations to take a joint approach on shaping the global agenda.

Recommendations for the European Parliament

Achievements of the EP's parliamentary diplomacy in Africa take time to materialise. Support for legislative powers for the PAP or a more impactful parliamentary dimension at the EU-AU summits should remain a long-term priority.

To remain faithful to its mission, it is recommended that the **EP's parliamentary diplomacy advances its distinctive, but complementary position to the Commission, EEAS and Council by actively finding niches, approaches and formats that complement existing AU engagement** As a diplomatic actor with a significant presence through its Delegation to the AU, the EEAS is more inclined to adopt a pragmatic line and find common ground with African partners to maintain a regular working relationship. Regarding the war in Ukraine, this entails a greater disposition to 'agree to disagree' on how to end the war and how to deal with Russia, so as not to detract from areas of common interest where partnership with the AU is making progress. This context provides the EP with an opportunity to maintain its vocal value-based and principled stance on Ukraine, as well as on other contentious issues within the EU-AU relationship that are at the core of the EP's institutional identity, such as democracy, human rights and good governance. At the same time, there is scope to improve the EP's perception in Africa as an actor prepared for open dialogue, mutual learning and constructive exchange on contentious issues.

There is a considerable risk that **an overly vocal EP in EU-AU relations, be it MEPs, EP official bodies or officials, could generate resistance from African partners**, particularly if this is conveyed in a patronising manner, thereby lacking empathy for the AU's own difficulties in finding consensus on complex issues. The AU is no longer willing to overindulge the EU and hence if the EP appears too pushy, this could provoke severe tensions not only with the AU, but also between the EP and the EEAS. Accordingly, we recommend a constant dialogue between the EEAS and the EP, both on the ground and in Brussels, to ensure that different positions and styles of communication have complementary value. Without altering its positions, the EP needs to find ways of communicating in a new geopolitical context and renewed spirit of partnership. This includes an intensification of interparliamentary efforts, in some cases specifically with opposition MPs. The EP's communication should be based on the AU's existing positions on issues such as foreign mercenaries, territorial integrity and human rights reflected in its treaties and declarations. Doing so also requires acknowledging the EP's own shortcomings and demonstrating humility by inviting African partners to transfer their knowledge and experience for the benefit of the EU, whether in terms of post-conflict reconstruction or in combating corruption in continental parliaments. Similarly, election observations should be a reciprocal exercise. In practice, the EP should continue to contribute to the quality of democracy in Africa through election observations and assistance. However, it should also facilitate observation missions from African partners in Europe, including those in member states with democracy deficits.

The EP also needs to **maintain its efforts in countering the spread of false information in Africa, which has intensified with the war in Ukraine**. In order to gain credibility and avoid a one-sided approach, the EP would also need to demonstrate that it is serious in holding EU companies accountable for any harmful operations in Africa, by demonstrating a willingness to condemn not only Russia's covert clientelist engagements on the continent, but also those of individual EU members where they occur.

In addition, the EP needs to be **mindful of the very limited resources allocated to the Directorate-General for Parliamentary Democracy Partnerships and to the antenna in Addis Ababa, which allow for only a relatively small number of activities besides assisting MEPs and promoting the visibility of EP activities**. Finding stable and productive entry points at the AU Commission is a challenge even for international diplomats. We recommend that the EP antenna focuses on establishing an informal network not only with AU stakeholders, but also on communications and events, where the EU Delegation to the AU carries less capacity. Public events of the EP antenna should facilitate an open, albeit respectful dialogue on topics related to democracy.

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