CONCEPT PAPER

for a policy research seminar on

The African Union (AU): Regional and Global Challenges

Cape Town, South Africa

27-29 April 2016

Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), Cape Town, South Africa

March 2016
Introduction

The Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR) in Cape Town, South Africa, will hold a two-day policy research seminar at the Vineyard Hotel in Cape Town, South Africa, from 27 to 29 April 2016, on the theme “The African Union (AU): Regional and Global Challenges”.

The policy seminar builds on previous work undertaken by CCR within the framework of a four-year Africa programme focusing on “Region-building and Regional Integration in Africa”. Since 2004, the Centre has convened a series of seminars and published over 50 reports and 16 books, including The African Union and Its Institutions in 2008, which remains one of the very few comprehensive assessments of the continental body and its institutions to date. This project represents an effort to update this volume, taking into account developments over the past eight years. In partnership with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), CCR hosted a major international colloquium in Berlin, Germany, in August 2012 on the theme “The African Union at Ten: Problems, Progress, and Prospects”.2

The April 2016 Cape Town seminar will revisit the performance and prospects of the AU at a critical juncture when Africa and the world at large are witnessing significant geo-political, socio-economic, demographic, and environmental challenges.

Seminar Objectives and Themes

With these issues in mind, the Cape Town seminar will bring together prominent African and Western policymakers, scholars, and civil society activists to reflect critically on the historical mission, achievements, challenges, and prospects of the AU in a changing regional and global environment. The meeting will also provide a platform for generating concrete ideas on developing the capacity of the AU and re-positioning the continental organisation as an effective vehicle for promoting sustainable peace, democratic governance, and socio-economic development in Africa. The seminar will seek to achieve the following seven key objectives:

1. To review the performance of the AU 15 years after its creation, against the backdrop of its historical mission to achieve continental integration;
2. To identify and elucidate the current regional and global dynamics that impact on the agency of the AU;
3. To assess the effectiveness of the AU’s peace, security, and governance architectures;
4. To explore ways in which the Addis Ababa-based AU Commission can be capacitated to drive the agenda of the Union more effectively;
5. To develop concrete ideas for building viable regional organisations and strengthening the relationship between the AU and Africa’s regional economic communities (RECs);
6. To make proposals on how to encourage South Africa and other regional leaders to become institutional champions in the interest of an effective AU; and
7. To identify the ingredients for more constructive partnerships between the AU and its external partners, including the African Diaspora.

Deliberations at the seminar will be focused under eight broad themes: Pan-Africanism and the African Diaspora; the AU’s peace and security architecture; the AU’s governance challenges; the AU’s socio-economic challenges; the AU Commission; the AU and Africa’s regional economic communities; South Africa and the AU; and the AU’s relations with the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and China.

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1 This concept paper was prepared by Dr Fritz Nganje, CCR Consultant and Post-Doctoral Research Fellow with the South African Research Chair in African Diplomacy and Foreign Policy, University of Johannesburg.
1. Pan-Africanism and the African Diaspora: From the OAU to the AU

As a philosophy and ideology, Pan-Africanism affirms the rich cultural heritage of African societies and the importance of achieving freedom through African unity, solidarity, and self-reliance. Pan-Africanism developed as a political movement in the twentieth century through the efforts of Africans in the Diaspora such as Henry Sylvester-Williams and W.E.B. Du Bois, who convened five Pan-African Congresses in Europe between 1919 and 1945. The Fifth Pan-African Congress held in Manchester in 1945 was attended by a large delegation from continental Africa, and served as an inspiration for post-war liberation struggles in Africa. Attendees such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya would go on to lead their countries to independence and champion the Pan-African cause. This period also witnessed the emergence of divergent interpretations of the Pan-African vision and the corresponding strategies to achieve it, as evidenced in the enduring tensions between advocates for an immediate continental political union (the Casablanca group) and the majority who favoured a gradual approach to unity (the Monrovia and Brazzaville groups).3

The creation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in May 1963 brought an end to these rival blocs, and reflected the triumph of the gradualist approach to continental unity over its radical counterpart. However, despite its success in achieving the decolonisation of Africa and ending apartheid in South Africa, the OAU proved to be ineffective in taking forward the Pan-African ideals of regional integration and development, amidst the proxy wars waged by the United States (US) and the Soviet Union across the continent and over 40 French military interventions in Africa to prop up or replace assorted autocrats. Poor governance and military rule also proliferated across the continent.4 The pan-continental body was further criticised for its lack of engagement with the African Diaspora, thereby undermining the global unity of Africans in their struggle for liberation.5

A new wave of optimism about Africa’s future swept through the continent, resulting in the creation of the African Union in July 2002 in South Africa’s port city of Durban under the stewardship of Thabo Mbeki. The birth of the AU was expected to mark a new era in the quest for Pan-African unity. However, its existence over the past decade and a half has been animated by the same debates over the meaning, timing, phasing, and sequencing of the Pan-African project of regional integration and socio-economic development. It is now evident that the creation of the AU was not underpinned by a shared understanding among African leaders of the organisation’s place in the global order, nor is there consensus on the degree of sovereignty that member states are expected to cede to the AU in order for the organisation effectively to drive the contemporary Pan-African project and make it relevant to the aspirations of Africa’s one billion citizens.6

Thus, although the AU adopted its new development framework, Agenda 2063, in 2013 with a call for Africans to rediscover the Pan-Africanist ideal, Pan-Africanism as a political movement appears to have lost its appeal. Similarly, while the African Diaspora has been identified as a sixth AU region and its financial and technical contributions to the socio-economic development of the continent has been encouraged by African leaders, the Diaspora has played a more symbolic than substantive role in the work of the AU.

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2. The AU’s Peace and Security Architecture

Since 1990, Africa has experienced a wave of political change, moving from protracted civil wars and autocratic rule towards peace and more democratic governance. However, violent conflicts in places such as Somalia and the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have proved intractable, while new wars have re-emerged in the Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, South Sudan, and Burundi. These conflicts are embedded in complexes of insecurity that encompass poverty, inequality, crime, state violence, social violence, and environmental degradation.

Within this context of instability and a broad range of security determinants, and consistent with the principles of its Constitutive Act of 2000, the AU established the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) in 2001. The normative underpinnings of the APSA reflect a fundamental shift from the non-intervention ethos of the OAU to a collective security approach that is founded on a human security paradigm. The APSA is composed of five pillars: the Peace and Security Council (PSC); the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS); the Panel of the Wise; the African Stand-by Force (ASF); and the Peace Fund, with each pillar intended to be replicated at the sub-regional level. This evolving security architecture has had some successes such as the 22,126-strong AU Mission in Somalia’s military progress against al-Shabab militants. However, these relative successes mask serious weaknesses in Africa’s institutional capacity to address conflicts, exemplified by the difficulties of operationalising the ASF.

The AU has been developing the African Standby Force since 2004 to provide the Union with the capacity to respond to conflicts in a decisive and timely manner. Initially scheduled to be launched in 2010, the AU was only able to hold its first major training exercise in South Africa in 2015. The security gap engendered by this delay, which was brought to the fore by the perceived failure of the AU to intervene effectively in Mali and the CAR in 2013, with France deploying troops to both former colonies, resulted in a decision by the AU in May 2013 to create the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC). ACIRC is premised on three key principles. First, it is based on the willingness and ability of individual African states to deploy troops voluntarily within 15 days. Second, the initiative is expected to be self-sustaining, with member states paying for their own deployment. Third, ACIRC adopts a continental rather than a regional collective security approach. Notwithstanding its noble goals, the operationalisation of the force has also been marked by significant challenges. Only 13 AU member states have pledged support for the initiative, despite the fact that it was endorsed by AU Assembly in 2013. Key players such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, and Kenya have expressed reservations, while South Africa has strongly championed the force. Moreover, while ACIRC was originally conceived as a temporary measure to address the need for rapid deployment until the ASF was fully developed, concerns have emerged over apparent competition between the two initiatives. Some observers have argued that ACIRC is divesting resources and political energy away from the finalisation of the ASF.

The difficulty in operationalising the ASF speaks to broader challenges of insufficient funding and political will, poor coordination capacity, and continental rivalry that have hamstrung the effectiveness of the APSA. Over 95 percent of the AU’s security work is funded by external donors. These challenges are also reflected in the tenuous relationship between the Peace and Security Council on the one hand, and other institutions of the APSA such as the Early Warning System and the Panel of the Wise on the other. As the case of Mali and South Sudan suggest, the coordination between the APSA and sub-regional mechanisms for resolving conflicts also remains underdeveloped.

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7 See Adekeye Adebajo, UN Peacekeeping in Africa: From the Suez Crisis to the Sudan Conflicts (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner; and Johannesburg: Jacana, 2011).
especially in the context of the latter’s claim to better capacities and institutional experience in conflict management than the AU.  

3. The AU’s Governance Challenges

Against the backdrop of previous commitments to improve the state of governance in Africa, the AU launched the African Governance Architecture (AGA) in 2011. The AGA seeks to strengthen the coherence and relevance of continental governance. Its three pillars are: shared norms and values centred on the promotion of democracy, sovereignty, and human rights; a set of institutions encompassing the AU and the RECs; and a platform comprising agreed processes for interaction adopted by institutions, states, and civil society actors. The AGA is still in its infancy – the platform was only officially launched in 2012 – but builds on some positive changes in African governance, including a strengthening norm against unconstitutional changes of government, and an increasing number of democratic transitions. Between 1960 and 1990, only in Sierra Leone did a ruling party lose power in Africa and only four heads of state willingly stepped down from power. Since 1990, African countries have held regular elections and ruling parties have been voted out of power in Zambia, Lesotho, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Kenya, Malawi, and Mauritius. Civil society in Africa has also become more assertive in holding governments to account.

Notwithstanding these positive developments, the continent continues to face significant governance challenges. While the AU and Africa’s RECs have developed norms and principles that provide a platform for more participatory and improved governance, African states have struggled to translate consistently declaratory commitments into practice. National sovereignty remains jealously guarded, while the continent’s institutions continue to lack resources, collective authority, and popular legitimacy. What is more, new and worrying trends are taking root in different parts of the continent that raise serious questions about the commitment of African leaders to democratic shared values. “Constitutional coups”, or “third termism” have seen African leaders manipulate their national constitutions in a bid to bypass presidential term limits. Since 2000, no less than 15 African heads of state have tried to remain in power by changing their country’s constitutions to prolong their term in office or remove presidential term limits all together. Many of these attempts have succeeded in countries such as Cameroon, Chad, Uganda, and most recently Burundi and Rwanda. While constitutional amendments to increase term limits or to scrap them are not necessarily inimical to democratic governance, the authoritarian and manipulative tactics that characterise these processes do not augur well for the trust and consensus that is required to build democratic polities in Africa. In Rwanda, for example, president Paul Kagame’s successful bid in December 2015 to change the constitution to allow him to run for a third term occurred against the backdrop of accusations that the government was stifling free speech, dissent, and political opposition. In neighbouring Uganda, president Yoweri Museveni extended his 30-year rule in February 2016 after winning elections which, according to EU and Commonwealth observers, lacked transparency and were marked by government intimidation. Another significant trend is the use of alleged security measures to stifle genuine dissent and civil liberties, in the context of a growing threat of terrorism on the continent.

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) was introduced by the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) in 2003 as a voluntary mechanism to provide Africans the opportunity to

11 For example, the AU adopted the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance in 2007, which came into effect in February 2012. The Charter gives legal force to successive non-binding instruments adopted by the AU on the promotion of “good governance”, human rights, and democratic principles.
evaluate their own progress towards sound governance and democratic principles. The aim of the mechanism is to help countries address democratic deficits and create the economic transparency required to attract investment and nurture growth. In particular, the APRM has initiated dialogue between private and government stakeholders and civil society actors on areas for improvement and challenges such as corruption, capital flight, and tax avoidance. The mechanism has further overseen progress on governance and electoral reform, and has usefully focused political attention on important events that have challenged African governments – for example, xenophobic violence in South Africa in 2008; and the violence that accompanied national elections in Kenya in 2007/2008. However, only 17 out of 35 states have been reviewed in 13 years by the APRM. Furthermore, the organisation is confronted with severe financial difficulties and is currently facing huge budget deficits. At a February 2016 APRM Heads of State meeting, its newly-appointed chief executive officer, South Africa’s Eddie Maloka, expressed his concern over the non-payment of annual subscription fees of $100,000 by its member states. The organisation has been mainly relying on funding from South Africa and Nigeria.

4. The AU’s Socio-Economic Challenges

The global commodity boom in the first decade of the 2000s, attributed mainly to rising demand from emerging markets such as China, placed many African countries on a steady trajectory of economic growth. However, the “Africa Rising” narrative – popular in mainstream Western media – that has been associated with this economic trend, masks enduring negative socio-economic dynamics on the continent. For the most part, the gains of economic growth have not been inclusively shared, leaving the continent with high levels of poverty and unemployment especially among the youth. Most African economies are also highly unequal, with an average Gini co-efficient of 43.6, even as 46.8 percent of sub-Saharan Africans live in poverty. Africa is also often at the receiving end of the negative effects of climate change such as rising temperatures, and increased risks of drought and floods.

The continent’s socio-economic development has long been on the agenda of African organisations as well as donor governments. However, finding a durable and effective development model has so far remained elusive. A decade ago, when optimism was high, South Africa’s Thabo Mbeki spoke of an “African Renaissance” as a vision for a prosperous future for the continent. NEPAD was to be the vehicle through which the Renaissance would be fulfilled. Both were based on the idea that Africa’s socio-economic and political challenges could be addressed through continental initiatives supported by external assistance. As a socio-economic programme of the AU, NEPAD seeks to, among other objectives, eradicate poverty; promote sustainable growth and development in Africa; and end the marginalisation of the continent in the globalisation process, while fully integrating the continent into the global economy.

And yet, despite NEPAD’s lofty and admirable goals, the programme has become hampered by implementation constraints. Early commitments in terms of donor and private sector funding have not materialised. The annual funding gap for NEPAD’s infrastructure projects stands at $40-45 billion. Thus, despite developing important continental development strategies such as the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), NEPAD stands the risk of being seen as yet another failed attempt at Africa’s socio-economic development. Civil society was also not properly consulted

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16 For more on this, see CCR report, “The African Union at Ten”.
17 Most recent World Bank data, <available at http://data.worldbank.org/>. These figures exclude several conflict-affected countries for which no data was available, including Somalia and Zimbabwe.
in the crafting of the programme which was seen by critics as a top-down process and a self-imposed neo-liberal structural adjustment programme (SAP).\textsuperscript{21} NEPAD is, however, still used as the blueprint for Africa’s development in discussions with new donors like China in making decisions on how development assistance can best be employed.\textsuperscript{22}

The AU’s Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) adopted in 2003 has sought to prioritise the agri-business sector, which generates between 35 and 40 percent of the continent’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and provides employment for about 70 percent of its population. The programme seeks to promote an African-owned and led farming sector and has an agreed target of 10 percent of national budgets to be spent on agriculture. It also outlines a range of measures to strengthen food production and distribution and to alleviate poverty. A sub-regional and country implementation process forms the backbone of CAADP, providing a set of tools for analysis, design, implementation, and evaluation of agricultural investment programmes.\textsuperscript{23}

Although public spending on agriculture across Africa has increased by an average of seven percent since the programme was adopted in 2003, only eight countries have consistently attained the target of spending 10 percent of their budgets on agriculture.\textsuperscript{24} Development and implementation of policies in line with the CAADP framework remain uneven at sub-regional and national levels, and the programme needs to promote greater ownership by, and more partnerships among, its signatories. In addition, CAADP has failed to address adequately the challenges that climate change poses to rain-fed agriculture, and participating farmers have been less than forthcoming about the environmental issues that they face.\textsuperscript{25}

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by world leaders at the UN in New York in September 2015 to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)\textsuperscript{26} offer another important framework that can potentially contribute to the socio-economic development of Africa. The 17 SDGs seek to tackle pressing development challenges such as extreme poverty and hunger; rising global inequality; climate change; unemployment; and rapid urbanisation. Through the Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda that was adopted in January 2014, the AU played an important role in having African priorities such as industrialisation and job creation incorporated into the SDGs. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda that was adopted at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development held in Addis Ababa in July 2015, also includes provisions that can contribute significantly to Africa’s development efforts, including the establishment of a Technology Facilitation Mechanism to promote science, technology, and innovation.\textsuperscript{27} The challenge now is for the AU to align the opportunities inherent in these global frameworks with Africa’s development initiatives, notably Agenda 2063. The AU adopted Agenda 2063 in 2013 with a promise to address Africa’s socio-economic challenges more directly. It builds on previous commitments and frameworks such as NEPAD and the 1980 Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) to aspire for, among other goals, a prosperous, peaceful and secure Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development. These goals are to be achieved through greater emphasis on infrastructure development, regional integration, and rapid industrialisation. Agenda 2063 is expected to be operationalised through five 10-year implementation plans, the first of which was adopted by the AU in June 2015.

\textsuperscript{21} See, for example, Patrick Bond, Fanon’s Warning: A Civil Society Reader on the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Trenton, NJ; African World Press, second edition, 2005).

\textsuperscript{22} See, for example, Kweku Ampiah and Sanusha Naidu (eds.), Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon? Africa and China (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 2008).

\textsuperscript{23} CCR, “The African Union at Ten”.


\textsuperscript{25} CCR, “The African Union at Ten”.


5. The AU Commission

The AU Commission was established in 2002 to serve as the permanent secretariat of the organisation, with a mandate to implement the decisions of different AU organs, and provide strategic guidance in efforts towards greater political and socio-economic integration in Africa. Since its creation, the Commission has come under much criticism for its organisational inefficiencies and failure to provide strategic direction to the AU. A December 2007 report from the audit of the AU – chaired by Nigeria’s Adebayo Adedeji – was scathing about the administrative and management failings of the Commission under its first chair, Mali’s Alpha Konaré. Between 2004 and 2007, there was a lack of implementation of programmes, with only 50 percent of approved tasks implemented in 2006, and most directorates under-spending by 70-90 percent.\(^{28}\)

The AU Commission oversaw the transformation of the OAU into the AU, and successfully drafted several important policy documents that have fleshed out the progressive principles contained in the AU’s Constitutive Act of 2000. However, over the past decade and a half, the Commission has struggled to establish its independence. AU bureaucrats have sometimes been accused of demonstrating loyalty to the priorities of their national governments at the expense of the agenda of the organisation. The Commission also continues to rely heavily on external donors for financing its activities. More than half of its $417 million annual budget in 2016 is still funded by external donors. In this context, the effectiveness of the Commission continues to be hampered by the absence of effective coordination and low staffing levels.\(^{29}\) As of January 2014, the Commission had 1,444 staff including those at its headquarters and regional offices. The EU Commission, in stark contrast, currently has a staff component of 32,966.\(^{30}\)

The election of South Africa’s Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma as the new AU Commission chair in July 2012, after a highly contested process that paralysed the Commission for six months, was eventually welcomed with optimism. The new chair’s domestic reputation as an effective bureaucratic reformer, after serving as South Africa’s minister for foreign and home affairs, held out the prospect of much needed improvements in creating a more effective AU Commission. However, less than six months before her first term expires, Dlamini-Zuma’s tenure at the AU Commission has had both critics and supporters. She has been credited with giving greater visibility to gender issues, while also widely considered to be advocating for the AU to be financially self-sufficient by increasing the annual dues of its member states and raising funds from the private sector. Dlamini-Zuma’s tenure at the AU Commission has also seen the adoption of Agenda 2063; a new human resource strategy to professionalise the Commission; and a 2014-2017 Strategic Plan. However, some critics have also noted that, in addition to poor governance and continuing conflicts in Burundi, South Sudan and the CAR, the Commission is still plagued by issues of bureaucratic inefficiency and lack of implementation capacity.\(^{31}\)

6. The AU and Africa’s Regional Economic Communities

The 1991 Abuja Treaty aspired for continental unity through the establishment of an African Economic Community (AEC) over a period of 34 years. This was to be achieved through six defined stages of progression. In the context of the preferred gradual approach to continental integration, the Abuja Treaty identified RECs as the building blocks of the AEC.\(^{32}\) The AU has recognised eight

\(^{28}\) See Audit of the African Union: Towards a People-Centred Political and Socio-Economic Integration and Transformation of Africa (Addis Ababa, 2007).


RECs as the pillars for regional integration in Africa. These include: the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA); the East African Community (EAC); the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); the Southern African Development Community (SADC); the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD); the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU); and the Economic Community of Sahelo-Saharan States (CENSAD). There are, however, about 19 RECs across the continent, with substantial differences in their objectives, capacities, and levels of functionality.

Historically, RECs have been created and evolved independently of the OAU/AU, although by virtue of their centrality to the African regional integration project, there have been continued efforts at the continental level to strengthen their performance, while harmonising and coordinating their policies and activities with the agenda of the OAU/AU. A Protocol on Relations between the AEC and the RECs was signed in February 1998, providing for horizontal and vertical cooperation and harmonisation of programmes. The July 2001 OAU Summit in the Zambian capital of Lusaka reaffirmed the status of RECs as building blocks of the newly established AU, and initiated a review process of the existing protocol between the RECs and the AEC, resulting in the adoption of new instruments to structure the relationship between the AU and the RECs. Presently, the interface between the AU and the RECs is guided by a 2008 Protocol on Relations between the RECs and the AU; as well as a 2008 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation in the Area of Peace and Security between the AU, RECs, and the Coordinating Mechanisms of the Regional Stand-by Brigades.

Notwithstanding the existence of these legal and institutional mechanisms, the AU’s mandate to coordinate the RECs has generally proved difficult to implement in practice. While there have been improvements in the flow of information between the RECs and the AU, coordination of policy and decision-making has been difficult. First, the development of RECs as vehicles for sub-regional integration has been uneven, in the context of considerable differences in regional political dynamics. Together with long-standing rivalries among Africa’s regional hegemons such as South Africa and Nigeria, this uneven development has often created tensions between the RECs and undermined effective coordination between the RECs and the AU, particularly in the area of peace and security. Second, because RECs are legal entities in their own right and are not bound by the Abuja Treaty in the same way that AU member states are, their commitment to the continental integration project has sometimes been compromised by the dominant national interests that drive the respective sub-regional organisations.

Africa’s attempts to deepen economic integration through the creation of free trade areas, as well as customs and monetary unions, have also achieved comparatively little success. Africa remains the only continent in which a mere 12 percent of total trade is conducted among regional states. In comparison, intra-regional trade in North America, the EU, and Asia stand at 49, 61, and 62 percent respectively. Most African countries continue to export raw materials and cash crops, thus creating a

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35 South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation, “The Role of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as the Building Blocks of the African Union”, <available at http://www.dfa.gov.za>.


continental market that is more competitive than complementary. In addition, a number of African countries belong to more than one regional economic community, which has hindered the coordination of sub-regional trade liberalisation timetables. Membership dues are also irregularly paid.

7. South Africa and the AU

South Africa is the dominant economic force in the Southern African Development Community (accounting for 60 percent of its economy), the second largest economy in Africa after Nigeria, and plays an important role on both the continental and global stages. The country has twice served as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2007-2008; and 2011-2012. Tshwane (Pretoria) is also the only African member of both the Group of 20 (G-20) major economies and the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) bloc. South Africa has generally sought rhetorically to use these platforms to promote Africa’s voice and issues while pursuing its own interests.

Under president Thabo Mbeki, South Africa played a key role in transforming the OAU into the African Union between 1999 and 2002, and enshrining a right for the organisation to intervene against military coups and egregious human rights abuses in its 2000 Constitutive Act. South Africa also spearheaded the establishment of NEPAD in 2001 and the APRM in 2003. Tshwane’s support for the AU has also involved contributions to its peacekeeping missions in Burundi (2003-2004) and Darfur (2004-2007), in addition to hosting the AU Pan-African Parliament (PAP) and the NEPAD and APRM secretariats.

In recent years, South Africa has demonstrated its continental leadership aspirations by, among other things, vigorously and successfully campaigning for Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma to head the AU Commission. Similar to Nigeria, South Africa was re-elected to the 15-member AU Peace and Security Council in January 2016. In addition, Tshwane has championed the creation of the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises from May 2013. However, South Africa’s diplomacy in Africa, in particular, its support for the institutions and agenda of the AU, has also come under criticism under the presidency of Jacob Zuma since 2009. As the country has sought increasingly to address its domestic challenges of underdevelopment, poverty, and insecurity, fears have also mounted that mercantilist approaches and parochial concerns have increasingly shaped its foreign policy towards Africa. Moreover, South Africa has been accused of squandering opportunities to promote the core values espoused by the AU, while at times also stoking divisions within the continent through its involvement in conflict situations such as in Côte d’Ivoire and the CAR. More recently, Tshwane announced that it would withdraw its 850 peacekeepers from the AU/UN Mission in Darfur by April 2016, and appears to be tiring of the dangerous intervention mission in the eastern DRC, launched in 2013.

8. The AU, the UN, the EU, and China

One of the key objectives of the AU is to create conditions for Africa to engage collectively with the outside world from a position of strength. The ambition and ideal at the founding of the AU in 2002 was that, given time, the organisation would speak on behalf of Africans on the global stage. A decade and a half later, the AU has not been able to develop an influential voice in international affairs, let alone serve as a platform for a common African foreign policy and diplomacy. The AU’s relations with external actors have also been largely defined by its dependence on their financial and

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material largesse, and the marginalisation that comes with such dependence.

**AU-UN Cooperation**

Relations between the AU and the UN, in particular, have over the years reflected the weak international agency of the former. The AU and the UN, however, have a shared interest in mutual cooperation. About 60 percent of the peace and security issues that the UN Security Council deals with have been in Africa, and although the Council has primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security, it has also increasingly recognised the comparative advantage that the AU and Africa’s RECs bring to peacemaking efforts on the continent. For its part, the AU needs the financial and material backing, and sometimes the global legitimacy, of the UN to deal effectively with conflicts in Africa. This has given rise to a partnership of necessity between the AU and the UN that has sometimes been criticised as “burden-shedding” by the UN rather than genuine “burden-sharing”.

The world body has played a role in the operationalisation of the APSA, including the creation of a ten-year capacity-building programme to benefit AU-linked institutions. These efforts have sought to strengthen the cooperation between the 15-member UN Security Council and the 15-member AU Peace and Security Council. Three important mechanisms have since been developed to enhance the partnership between the UN and the AU at the working level. These include: the establishment of a UN Office to the African Union (UNOAU) in Addis Ababa in July 2010; a commitment to undertake “collaborative field missions” to enhance synergy in monitoring, assessing, and responding to peace and security issues in Africa; and the creation of a UN-AU Joint Task Force on Peace and Security (JTF). Moreover, since 2007, the UN Security Council has held annual meetings with the PSC, although, in a bid to prevent a dilution of the UN Security Council’s authority, the US has emphasised that these meetings should not be construed as strategic engagements between two equal Councils.

Notwithstanding these mechanisms, relations between the UN and the AU have, for the most part, been characterised by deep tensions. Many African leaders complain that the Security Council treats AU initiatives with contempt, while the three Western permanent members of the Council – the US, Britain, and France – have often decried what they consider to be the AU’s lack of unity and decisional authority. Other factors that continue to bedevil AU-UN relations include the absence of a strong unified AU voice in New York; the difficult relationship between AU Commission Chair, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and UN Secretary-General, Ban-Ki Moon; divergent views held by the AU and UN on peace operations; as well as the thorny issue of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

**AU-EU Relations**

Cooperation between the AU and the EU, based on the 2007 Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES), have also embodied the duality of a rhetorical partnership on the one hand, and what many Africans perceive to be a patron-client relationship on the other hand. The EU-Africa “partnership” is the most comprehensive relationship between the AU and an external actor. The JAES aims to be a strategy that serves not only to streamline Brussels’ engagement with the continent, but also moves it beyond development aid and Africa-focused issues to include political dialogue and cooperation on issues of mutual interest and concern, as well as on global challenges. Besides other political,

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44 Conrad Rein, “EU-AU Interregional Relations and the Role of the UN”, *Ifriqiya* 1, 4 (June 2015).
45 Williams and Boutellis, “Partnership Peacekeeping”, pp. 258-259.
economic, and geo-strategic interests, the EU needs a strong continental organisation to deal with African issues. On the African side, partnership with Brussels not only raises the AU’s profile, but also provides resources for advancing its security and development goals. 49

The evolving relationship between the EU and the AU has, over the years, lent itself to two dominant interpretations. On the one hand is the optimistic view that recognises obstacles in EU-AU relations but sees the relationship as work in progress and a pioneering experience in inter-regional cooperation. 50 This perspective is largely informed by the EU’s financial and technical support to Africa through programmes such as the African Peace Facility (APF), the EU-Africa Infrastructure Trust Fund (AITF), and the African Union Support Programme (AUSP). Since 2004, the EU has committed more than €1.1 billion to the APF. It has also provided €55 million to support the institutional reform process of the AU Commission, in addition to awarding over 80 grants for infrastructure projects in Africa worth over €6.5 billion. 51 On the other hand, a fairly pessimistic view argues that the rhetorical commitments emanating from political dialogue between EU and AU leaders are rarely matched by effective implementation, and that Brussels is little more than the AU’s most prominent paymaster. 52 The EU’s perceived imposition of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) on African countries also recently poisoned AU-EU relations. 53

The AU-China Partnership

The AU’s relationship with China also exhibits significant traits of dependence, accompanied by a rhetoric of partnership. However, unlike that with the UN and the EU, this relationship is founded on historical solidarity formalised since 1973 in the Group of 77 (G77) and China at the UN. In addition to financing the construction of a new AU headquarters that was inaugurated in January 2012, Beijing has increasingly supported AU peace operations, financially and materially. In September 2015, Chinese president, Xi Jinping, announced his country’s plans to create an 8,000-strong standby Chinese peacekeeping brigade for use in Africa, in addition to pledging $100 million over the next five years to assist the AU in establishing the ASF. 54 Almost 90 percent of Chinese peacekeepers in UN missions are deployed in Africa: Beijing had 2,622 peacekeepers in seven UN missions on the continent in March 2016. 55

Bilateral trade between China and Africa rose from $10.6 billion in 2000 to $91.06 billion in 2009, and more recently in 2015, to close to $300 billion. Beijing accounts for about 20 percent of imports to sub-Saharan Africa and about 15 percent of the region’s exports. However, with the contraction of China’s economy in recent years, the share of Africa’s exports to the Asian giant has started to decline, while the growth of Chinese imports into the continent has been rapidly accelerating. 56 China has also expressed its support for Africa’s development and integration aspirations, as embodied in the AU’s Agenda 2063. In 2014, Beijing established a $2 billion multilateral fund, which will be co-financed by the People’s Bank of China and the African Development Bank (AfDB), to support

50 Rein, “EU-AU Interregional”; p.2.
51 European Commission, “Key Facts”.
52 Rein, “EU-AU Interregional”; p.2.
development projects on the continent. The Chinese government also signed an MOU with the AU Commission in January 2015, which commits Beijing to supporting the AU’s infrastructure development and industrialisation efforts.

China established the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 as a platform for collective consultation and dialogue. The AU Commission was admitted as a full member of FOCAC in October 2011. At the December 2015 FOCAC summit held in Johannesburg, the Chinese government pledged $60 billion to assist the development of African countries in 10 priority areas, including infrastructure development, upgrading of health-care facilities, supporting drought-stricken countries, and providing scholarships for African students. The summit further adopted the Johannesburg Action Plan which is expected to be implemented between 2016 and 2018, and will seek to deepen political, economic, social, security, and diplomatic relations between Beijing and Africa. China’s evolving partnership with Africa should also be seen in the wider context of the BRICS grouping. Closer diplomatic ties between Africa and China, which is the dominant player in the BRICS, can benefit the continent’s development efforts. For example, the New Development Bank that was launched by the BRICS in July 2015 can be a potential source of much-needed investment for Africa’s infrastructure development needs.

China’s expanding support for the AU is not merely an act of benevolence. Successful integration in Africa is good for growing Chinese investments on the continent. As the example of Sudan and South Sudan illustrates, Beijing also has an economic interest in a peaceful and stable Africa. Significantly, China’s cooperation with the AU has evolved alongside its bilateral relations with individual African countries, which have sometimes been criticised for destroying textile industries and using 70,000 Chinese workers on projects rather than employing Africa labour.

Dissemination

Following the Cape Town policy research seminar in April 2016, a six-page policy brief and 30-page seminar report will be produced and widely disseminated to recipients on CCR’s publications distribution database, including African and non-African governments, African sub-regional organisations, diplomatic missions at the AU in Addis Ababa, the AU Commission, UN missions in New York, key foreign embassies in Africa, African university libraries, and African and relevant past participants at the Centre’s policy seminars. The policy report and brief will also be made available on CCR’s website. The seminar will further form the basis of an edited volume that will be widely disseminated and launched in key African capitals, and with the UN community in New York.

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