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Merging peace and politics: DRIVERS, DILEMMAS AND OPTIONS FOR THE AU'S NEW GOVERNANCE SETUP

POLITICAL ECONOMY DYNAMICS OF REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN AFRICA

PEDRO

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The merger of the African Union Commission's Department of Peace and Security and its Department of Political Affairs is one of the most prominent changes that African Union (AU) reform has delivered. Subscribing to a global trend of adopting more integrative approaches to conflicts and their political causes, the merger yields potential for streamlined AU action.

This paper identifies three possible scenarios of how the African Governance Architecture (AGA) might fare in the merged Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS). AGA might see marginalisation, magnification or simply more of the same. Arguing that a stronger AGA through magnification is desirable, the paper analyses how different drivers of the security-governance merger – such as institutional complexity, ambivalent conceptions of 'governance', a clash between non-indifference and sovereignty, AU leadership and international partners – jointly account for a situation where the governance agenda risks being sidelined compared to the AU's peace and security activities.

Making the merger a success from a 'governance' perspective will depend on fine-tuning institutional arrangements to: leave space for AU leadership to take hold, prevent new governance-security silos emerging, and rapidly deliver a few AGA quick wins through election observation, mediation and early warning. Separately, stakeholders can help enhance political traction by establishing a new governance narrative that factors in member states' concerns, with AGA 'doing less, but better'. Finally, the magnification of governance requires fine-tuned external funding partnerships to support PAPS without constraints, and substantive partnerships with international and civil society organisations that enhance the department's operational capacity.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Acronyms	iii
Introduction: organisational change and the African governance agenda at a crossroads	1
1. The PAPS merger on paper	3
1.1. Rationalisation	3
1.2. Pursuing synergy	4
1.3. Constructing a super-department	6
2. Looking back: drivers of the security-governance merger	8
2.1. Institutional complexity dilutes good intentions	8
2.2. Ambivalence around different conceptions of 'governance'	11
2.3. Non-indifference vs sovereignty: member states' limited appetite for a strong AGA	12
2.4. The need for effective AU and AUC leadership	14
2.5. The contribution of international partners	15
3. The way ahead: making the most of the merger	16
3.1. Fine-tuning institutional arrangements	17
3.2. Enhancing political traction	20
3.3. Partnerships to enable PAPS success	22
Conclusions	24

List of Boxes

Box 1: The global record on merging peace and politics	5
Box 2: What is AGA?	8
Box 3: The APRM - building on traction for parts of the governance agenda	12

List of Figures

Figure 1: Organogram of the merged PAPS	7
Figure 2: Institutional complications of the AU's PAPS setup	10

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Acronyms

ACDEG	African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance
ACERWC	African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ACFTA	African Continental Free Trade Agreement
ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
AfCHPR	African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights
AGA	African Governance Architecture
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
ASF	African Standby Force
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
AUDA-NEPAD	African Union Development Agency-New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CEWS	Conflict Early Warning System
CSCPF	Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework
CSO	Civil society organisation
CSVRA	Country Structural Vulnerability Mitigation Strategy
DPA	Department of Political Affairs
DPO	Department of Peace Operations
DPPA	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
ECOSOCC	Economic, Social and Cultural Council
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
JFA	Joint financing arrangement
MNJTF	Multi-National Joint Task Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OSCE	Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe
PAPS	Political Affairs, Peace and Security

PCRD	Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development
PEDRO	Political Economy Dynamics of Regional Organisations in Africa
PoW	Panel of the Wise
PRC	Permanent Representatives Council
PSC	Peace and Security Council
PSD	Peace and Security Department
PSO	Peace Support Operation
PSOD	Department of Peace Support Operations
RCI-LRA	Regional Cooperation Initiative – Lord’s Resistance Army
REC	Regional Economic Community
RM	Regional mechanism
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDG	Sustainable development goal
UN	United Nations
WANEP	West African Network for Peacebuilding
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

Introduction: organisational change and the African governance agenda at a crossroads

Who gets to have a say in political decisions matters, all the more in times of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic brings renewed attention to the political and social governance issues, particularly democracy and elections integrity as well as social and health measures. Political decisions, from restrictive lockdown to vaccine procurements affect everyone directly even if in differentiated ways.

In the second year of the COVID-19 era, it has become clear that corners are being cut. Whether to be able to react more quickly and more forcefully, or because the pandemic provides a convenient pretext for more authoritarian approaches, many countries around the world have witnessed a degradation in how they are governed. African countries are no exception, and in the first half of 2021 alone, a half-dozen major electoral landmarks have presented several examples, from re-elections of presidents for a sixth term in Uganda and Chad, to postponement of controversial elections in Somalia and Ethiopia. These very different examples are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the risk of COVID-19 exacerbating a pre-existing trend of overall democratic recession (Alizada et al. 2021).

While governance has deteriorated in some countries, at the continental level the AU is reforming its leadership to help address this issue. The African Union Commission (AUC), is undergoing numerous reforms to increase its financial autonomy, effectiveness and ownership by its member states, and elected its senior leadership earlier this year based on strictly-observed stringent new rules (Byiers & Apiko 2021).

The new AUC has a role to play in improving governance in its member states, as agreed by the Heads of its member states. Indeed, the AU has been in the business of promoting governance norms since its foundation in 2002. At the centre of this work stands the adoption and implementation of the ambitious **African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG)**, a major legal document that lays out normative commitments on democratic governance and integrity by AU member states.

To promote, maintain and enforce some of these norms, the AU sends electoral observers during elections in member states (Aggad & Apiko 2017), for example. When political crises arise, the AU also makes use of diplomatic, mediation and coercive measures. It issues statements and can introduce sanctions such as suspending members. The coercive measures are particularly applied when there is a case of unconstitutional change of power - like a military coup - in a member state. While the AU generally applies a 'no tolerance' approach to unconstitutional changes of government, it is not always uniform in its punitive measures.

The AU applies its governance norms in a varied way and with mixed results. The latest illustration of this is the AU's lenient response to Chad's military take-over of government, following the death of President Idris Deby Itno¹. This reflects the balance between seeking to incentivise and hold its member states accountable on their performance on governance while being responsive to the decisions of Heads of State - often the beneficiaries of breaches to these norms. This makes its interventions on questions of governance particularly sensitive.

¹ For more on this see: [Communiqué 996 of the AU PSC](#) and [Handy and Djilo, 2021](#).

In 2021, as part of its institutional reform process, the AU Commission merged the former department for Peace and Security (PSD) with the Department of Political Affairs (DPA). The newly created 'super-department' on Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) will seek to play a pivotal role on these key issues under the leadership of its new commissioner. But the new PAPS Department will have to balance different responsibilities and prioritise among a diversity of objectives and at times competing interests of member states. The merger therefore raises questions about the implications for the AU's role on governance: whether the merger will boost or undermine its governance role, while offering an opportunity to look towards the future of this agenda. It also reinforces existing questions about the role of the AU in the domestic politics and governance of its member states, and how in turn, member states' expectations of the AU determine its work.

This paper looks at *how the ongoing institutional reforms at the AU and the constitution of the new AU Commission, in particular the merging of peace and security with governance, will affect the governance agenda*; whether they might strengthen or reduce the role of the AU in pursuing it; and what can be done in pursuit of a positive outcome.

Three scenarios for the future of the AU's governance agenda: marginalisation, magnification or more of the same?

At the time of writing, little is known for certain about how the merger will be implemented, or the implications for the governance agenda. But inputs from stakeholders consulted during this study can be summarised by three broad narratives, reflecting three possible scenarios for the governance agenda. They are by no means prescriptive, nor mutually exclusive. The actual impact of the merger on the AU's governance agenda will manifest itself in more complex ways than can be neatly summarised in three distinct scenarios. Nonetheless, they help to frame discussions going forward.

In the *marginalisation* narrative, governance as a theme is a 'political orphan' at the AU because African governments do not want the continental organisation to interfere with domestic politics. In this picture, the institutional reconfiguration confirms that there is no space for a standalone commissioner on political affairs, and downgrades governance to a secondary issue bundled with the more prominent security agenda, on which a more significant portion of the AU budget is spent (Vanheukelom & Desmidt 2019). Under this narrative, it is a net loss for governance, or at least the logical conclusion of a reality check that although the AU was born in a phase of normative enthusiasm, it does not have the political traction to meddle in national governance at the moment.

In the second *magnification* narrative, the linkages between political governance and security are so intertwined that the two agendas of peace & security and political affairs *need to be tackled together*, and the merger offers just such an opportunity². In other words, governance work can be seen as upstream conflict prevention, while peace operations are downstream political affairs. From this perspective, the traditionally weaker political affairs portfolio could stand to gain from being bundled with one with unambiguous support by member states, and is placed under the leadership of a prominent commissioner. The AU's record on conflict *prevention* has been less successful than other parts of its security portfolio, and the merger could help remedy this (Engel 2018; Noyes & Yarwood 2013). In this scenario, the merger would be the tipping point for a magnified governance agenda after a challenging phase.

Under the third narrative, *more of the same*, the merger is a mere technical component of an institutional overhaul aimed at institutional efficiency and effectiveness, neither amplifying nor obscuring the governance agenda *per se*. In this narrative, political factors and namely the interests of member states and relational dynamics

² Interviews with senior AU observers and analysts, February-May, 2021.

among them, define if and how the AU works on governance, and the institutional arrangements of the AU Commission are secondary. For example, the AU's work on some aspects of governance such as election observation, voluntary peer review and socio-economic rights were appreciated while member state's appetite for an AU with prominent roles in political, integrity and constitutional matters is limited. According to this narrative, the merger on its own may change organograms but it is less likely to change the salience of governance on the AU's agenda one way or another.

These three narratives offer quite different potential outcomes of the institutional rearrangements and potentially for the African Union's continental governance agenda, although some combination of the three is likely.

Considering the current crossroads, this paper aims to better understand the role and limits of the AU as a governance actor in 2021, and understand the scope for AU governance action in relation to its member states, while assessing the significance of the institutional reforms for the wider continental governance agenda. Finally, it seeks to make suggestions on how to make the merger a success in light of these dynamics; and point towards what different stakeholders - from continental and national level to civil society through external partners and funders - need to know and could do going forward.

The paper is structured as follows: the next section (1) outlines the rationale for the merger, and the shape it is taking so far; another one (2) goes back to actors and factors that shape the AU's political affairs, peace and security nexus to substantiate views on the merger, and a last section (3) draws a number of implications for all parties concerned, on how to make the merger a success and what to watch for the time being.

1. The PAPS merger on paper

1.1. Rationalisation

The AU's political affairs, peace and security (PAPS) merger is one component in a wider array of reforms of the African Union. The impetus for this overall reform process came about in 2016, led by Rwanda's president Paul Kagame who presented a report on "The Imperative to Strengthen our Union".³ The report was responding to growing concern at the time about the **effectiveness of the AU, its financial autonomy and the dysfunctions between member states, AU Commission and other AU organs**. It was made public just prior to President Kagame assuming the annual chairmanship of the AU in 2018. Key objectives of the proposed reforms are to ensure the organisation is fit for purpose: focused on key continental priorities, administratively lean and efficient, financially more autonomous, better connected with citizens and results oriented (Vanheukelom 2017).

Amongst other reforms, in 2018 the AU developed an Administrative Reform Roadmap which proposed ways of **making the leadership of the AU more effective and efficient** by improving the staff recruitment process⁴. In the same year and in the spirit of making the AU leaner and focused, the AU Assembly decided on structural reforms to merge some of the departments of the AUC and in doing so reduce the number of Commissioners from eight to six (ECDPM 2021). The PAPS is a result of the merger between DPA and PSD - this is its rationale in terms of institutional setup.

In a context of reduced financial and human resources - as highlighted by the Kagame Report - **organisational setups need to be rationalised and streamlined as much as possible**. This rationalisation exercise is a matter of increasing

³ See full report here: <https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/34915-file-report-20institutional20reform20of20the20au-2.pdf>

⁴ For more on this see the [roadmap](#) 2018-2021.

the AU's legitimacy by showing value for money. The AU has beefed up its efforts to mobilise finances from its member states - both in terms of yearly assessed contributions to the general AU budget and in terms of contributions to peace and security. These efforts have only partially resulted in more funding by member states, so its reliance on external partners persists. Funding is rather programme or project based which, compounded by lean management rules, has left the peace and security and especially the smaller political affairs department, severely understaffed, and hence unable to fulfill all their missions (Engel 2020, 30).

1.2. Pursuing synergy

From a substantive point of view, the natural synergy - or even continuum - between the governance and peace and security agendas is well recognised - including by the AU.⁵ By and large, violent conflicts in the continent have their roots in governance issues and especially so-called 'governance deficits' relating e.g. to the (mis) management of economic resources, political transitions and representation, usually reinforced by histories of contested narratives and memories⁶. Moreover, peace enforcement or stabilisation and peacebuilding involve political processes and (post-) conflict reconstruction essentially includes socio-economic reconstruction and political change to sustain peace over a long period⁷. There is therefore a strong logic for merging the two thematic areas.

Reinforcing the synergy between the political affairs and peace and security areas has been a priority of the AU for a long time (Matlosa 2014). But **it proved difficult to define the strategic and operational overlap between the AGA and the APSA**⁸ - the main continental 'blue prints' on governance and peace and security respectively (Aggad & Apiko 2017). One such attempt was the development of the 2014 Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework (CSCPF) to strengthen the AU's efforts at direct prevention by assisting Member States in the arduous task of addressing and identifying the structural vulnerability of countries to conflict at an early stage (Aggad and Desmidt 2017). This assessment is conducted on a voluntary basis and very few member states have volunteered or are in the process of undergoing the assessment so far (Ghana, Zambia and Cote D'Ivoire)⁹. While that presents a limitation, it shouldn't take away from the fact that the assessment when and if taken up by member states, offers a concrete example of where the AU's governance and peace and security agendas converge. The AGA Platform includes a number of AU institutions also active in peace & security - and in fact generally most active in this field so far -, including the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC - a key institution when it comes to funding) and the RECs, both of which play a pivotal role in continental/regional responses to governance crises.

At the operational level, **many observers noted that the DPA and the PSD weren't "talking to each other" figuratively and literally**. Communications between the leadership of the two departments has been limited and there were some contestations on mandates especially when it came to preventive diplomacy¹⁰. The prominence of the peace and security agenda at the AU, due to its political importance to both member states and partners, contributed to a power imbalance between the DPA and PSD in favor of the latter. The need for the two departments to work together was clear even if hard to come by. To address some of these issues, AU also set up an Inter-

⁵ AGA, APRM, 2019. [The Africa Governance Report](#).

⁶ Interview, AU long term observer and analyst. 11 February, 2021.

⁷ African Union, 2014. [PCRD policy](#).

⁸ See box 2 (below) on the AGA. The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) provides a framework and tools for the AU and (sub-)regional organisations to play an active role in preventing and resolving conflicts in Africa. It is composed of five structures: the Panel of the Wise (PoW), Conflict Early Warning System (CEWS), the African Standby Force (ASF) and the Peace Fund, with the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the AU at the centre. With these institutions and structures, and in close coordination with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) which are considered 'building blocks' of APSA, the APSA serves as a conflict prevention, conflict management and peace building instrument of the African Union (AU) (see [AU 2012](#) and [ECDPM 2016](#)). The APSA is not the P&S counterpart of the AGA, however. (Kariseb & Okoloise 2020)

⁹ Interview AU staff, 8 June 2021.

¹⁰ Interview AU close advisor, 31 May, 2021; interview REC official 4 June, 2021; interview AU staff 8 June 2021.

Departmental Task Force on Conflict Prevention and one on Post Conflict Reconstruction to bring together relevant units of the DPA and PSD (Mukundi, 2017).¹¹ These task forces struggled to bring the synergy needed at the strategic level, even if they enabled interactions and coordination between the two departments at the operational level with mixed results¹².

The idea of merging DPA and PSD, and wider suggestions on how to draw connections between APSA and AGA, have been around for some time.¹³ The PAPS merger can therefore be seen as an obvious response to existing shortcomings on interdepartmental coordination and AGA-APSA synergy. Désiré Assogbavi (2021) argues that the newly merged department “has a unique opportunity to effectively work on the root causes of the conflicts and not just react to the conflicts when they occur with their already devastating consequences and implications. That connection has been missing in the previous setting and operational model of the AU Commission”, despite the abovementioned efforts.

The merger is also to some extent a ‘return’ to a previous configuration, since the AU’s predecessor, the **organisation of African unity (OAU)**, already combined these portfolios. When the AU was launched at the turn of the millennium, the general mood was more propitious for adopting ambitious democratic norms and institutional mechanisms. A separate department to deal with governance reflected this ambition for a strong agenda, although the proposal for an AUC “Governance” department with a high profile was derailed, reportedly at the level of ambassadorial meetings, in favour of the DPA that includes governance, human rights, humanitarian affairs and refugees matters.¹⁴

Box 1: The global record on merging peace and politics

Many organisations have sought to close the gap between security and governance, as part of objectives to promote policy coherence and to address policy nexuses efficiently.

The United Nations (UN) have long pursued an integrative approach to security and governance (UN 1992). In 2019, the UN Secretariat conducted a merger very similar to the AU’s PAPS merger by establishing a Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA). While a separate Department of Peace Operations (DPO) continues to work on peacekeeping, the former Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office merged into DPPA with a single structure of regional desks for analysis and advice on prevention, peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding (UN 2018).

Other organisations, including the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have undertaken similar merger efforts, but focused on specific, more limited conflict dimensions (EU-CIVCAP 2018). The EU has set in place a similar policy framework through the ‘integrated approach to external conflicts and crises’, which has however not led to any institutional reforms (ibid.).

Many African RECs, including ECOWAS, ECCAS and SADC, also have similar institutional arrangements that combine political and security affairs¹⁵. These arrangements present an opportunity for the merged PAPS department to engage with structurally similar partners on the African continent.

¹¹ 2014: [Report Of The Chairperson Of The Commission On The Follow-up To The Peace And Security Council Communiqué Of 27 October 2014 On Structural Conflict Prevention](#); 2016: [African Union press release](#). There have been consistent reports of “weak synergies between the APSA (and principally its enforcement mechanism, the PSC) and the APRM, on the one hand, and the AGA and the AGP on the other.” (Kariseb & Okoloise 2020)

¹² Interview 5 February, 2021; ISS, 2017. [What will be the impact of AU reforms on peace and security](#).

¹³ See [Bedzigui 2018](#); [Matlosa 2014](#); [Wachira 2017](#).

¹⁴ Interview with former OAU and AU senior official, October 2020.

¹⁵ Interview with senior REC official, February 2021; ISS, 2017. Op. cit.

1.3. Constructing a super-department

The PAPS merger effectively came into effect with the election of a new college of commissioners at the AU in February 2021. The merger brought about concrete changes in terms of administrative structure of the AUC. The two departments were merged as planned, and a single PAPS Commissioner, Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, was elected to head the new structure. Some of the changes in terms of structures, staffing and funding are still subject to uncertainty, for instance due to upcoming recruitment processes. These will be covered in section 3 below. The rest of this section covers what is set on paper as of the time of writing.

The merged department's setup - see figure 1 - introduces some **changes in structure**, such as the integration of early warning and governance monitoring into different regional desks, rather than as a separate organisational unit as before. The merged department has two directors: one for Conflict Management, and another one for Governance and Conflict Prevention respectively. These reflect the focus of the two formerly separate departments, in some ways therefore suggesting a measure of continuity from the previous setup.¹⁶

In terms of funding, the merger has **reduced the overall cost of the AUC's security and governance activities to member states**. There is "a concern that, in an attempt to cut budgets, AU member states risk significantly reducing the merged PAPS' capacity" (ISS PSC 2021). Reflecting this concern, the merged department is smaller - in terms of personnel - than its two separate predecessors. In addition to seconded and peacekeeping staff, PAPS will now count a total of 111 positions, with 56 staff in Conflict Management and 35 in Governance and Conflict Prevention. At 111, the new PAPS staff count on paper is considerably lower than DPA and PSD combined, which accounted for about 210 staff members before the merger.¹⁷ The merged department considerably reduces the number of short-term positions in favour of permanent staff contracts. At first glance then, the merger would seem to meet the objective of streamlining, though it raises doubts around the possibility to effectively oversee and effectively pursue the department's mandate.

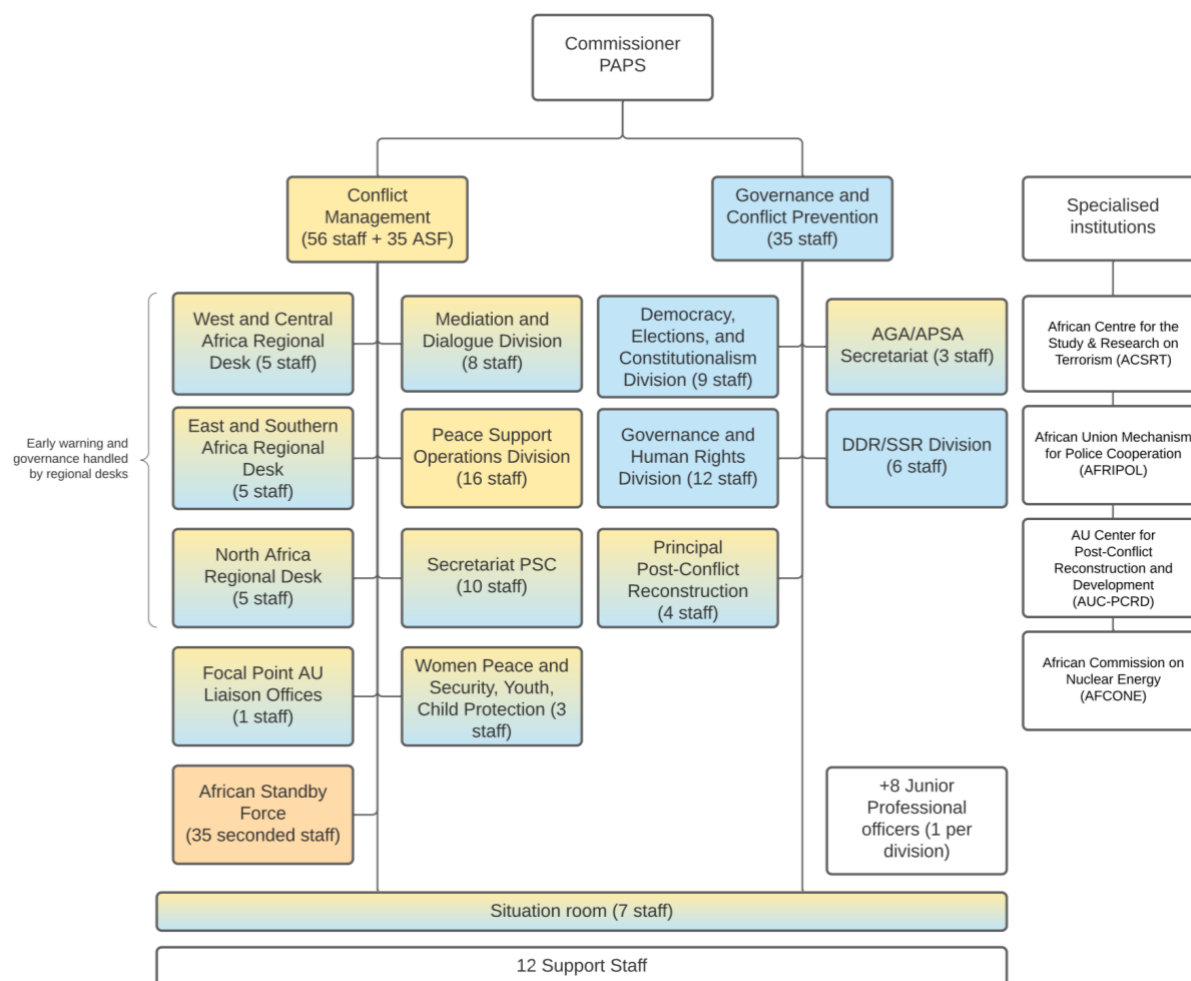
This has pushed the AU to look into **innovative ways of covering its broad mandate in a cost-effective manner**. Some of the suggestions put forth include the AU partnering with national CSOs or recognised analysts as parts of its early warning and preventive work so that much of the analysis and early warning work can be done by such experienced partners rather than AU staff who would otherwise be stretched beyond their limits.¹⁸

¹⁶ Not everything from the two departments has been merged into PAPS. Humanitarian affairs has been moved to a new department called Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development (HHS).

¹⁷ Interviews with AUC staff members and partners; European Court of Auditors 2018, 24.

¹⁸ Interview, AU close advisor 31 May, 2021.

Figure 1: Organogram of the merged PAPS



Source: authors based on Annex to AU Executive Council decision EX.CL/Dec.1073(XXXVI)

These basic contours already suggest a few things. **First, the merger may be about seeking institutional efficiency but it is also following a clear ‘theory of change’ that seeks to create synergies. Second, it avoids a reconstruction of two silos under PAPS** matching the previous setup of separating peace and security and governance/political affairs. As made visible in figure 1 through color distribution, many units relate to both governance and conflict prevention and conflict management (peace and security). Although there is a logic to combine these two areas of work, this reform is limited to the institutional dimension of streamlining governance and peace and security for now. Getting from institutional change to tangible impact requires political buy-in from member states, which is related to but separate from institutional arrangements.

The next section further looks at what shaped past work on governance and the drivers of the merger in practice, going beyond what is on paper. These actors and factors will likely continue to play a role in the operationalisation of the new PAPS department and are thus important to understand.

2. Looking back: drivers of the security-governance merger

AU efforts to influence the governance agenda in its member states have faced an uphill struggle over the past decade. Challenges relate to the institutional arrangements, member states' buy-in, as well as the space for AUC leadership on what is a politically sensitive area. With a view to the PAPS merger, these factors will remain key in shaping the progress of a new department that combines the two missions of AGA and APSA. To increase the chances of a successful PAPS merger, stakeholders will need to take account of these interacting factors, and develop a more fine-grained understanding of the limits and potential for reform.

2.1. Institutional complexity dilutes good intentions

The AGA Platform comprises more than a dozen organisations, all seeking to play a role in assessing and addressing the state of governance in Africa. The **Platform is aimed at increasing synergies, coordination and lessons sharing between these different actors.**

However, in practice its institutional complexity makes it easy to lose momentum on an issue. AGA's ambitious normative corpus, including ACDEG, is well-established and clear, but the implementation of measures to encourage better governance on the continent is shared between multiple institutions and frameworks (Matlosa 2014; Kariseb & Okoloise 2020). This fragmented responsibility raises coordination costs and the potential for inefficiencies and overlaps between actors with similar roles, for example the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), APRM and the AGA Secretariat. While this can undermine its effectiveness as attention between different initiatives and formats is divided, some argue that this is by design (see below).

Box 2: What is AGA?

The African Governance Architecture (AGA) is a platform for dialogue between the official structures mandated to promote 'good governance' and strengthen democracy in Africa, in addition to translating the objectives of the legal and policy pronouncements in the AU Shared Values.

The AGA Secretariat is located in the AU Commission (formerly DPA) and convenes members of the AGA Platform. It coordinates, but does not oversee the work of the members of the AGA platform. Conceived as a multi-level platform, the AGA brings together the AU Commission, the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the Pan-African Parliament, AUDA-NEPAD, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR), the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), the AU Advisory Board on Corruption, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), the African Union Commission on International Law, as well as the AU's recognised regional economic communities (RECs).

AGA's normative role is related mainly to the implementation and compliance with AU norms on governance and democracy stipulated in the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), which has been ratified by 34 AU member states. ACDEG contains provisions on themes of Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights, Culture of Democracy and Peace, Democratic Institutions, Democratic Elections, Sanctions in Cases of Unconstitutional Changes of Government, Political, Economic and Social Governance. In practice, the AGA platform's essential activities revolve around coordination, convening dialogues, publishing reports and keeping track of AU member states' implementation of the ACDEG, although progress on this last item has been limited.

The lack of institutional clarity lays a burden on an AU institutional architecture that is often short on resources and that struggles to coordinate effectively between different organs. The linkages between the activities of the AGA secretariat and APRM are one example of this, as both produce governance-related reports, but they only sometimes cooperate, for example on the African Governance Report. This institutional fragmentation also means that besides the most urgent problems, some more fine-grained issues within the governance agenda such as ACDEG provisions on economic and social governance (including health for example) are not actively addressed.¹⁹

The **AU's current, narrow focus on unconstitutional changes of government** is a case in point. Indeed, the principle of not tolerating coups is sometimes challenged but largely upheld - see the latest case of Mali, although there are also cases where the AU has recently been more lenient on unconstitutional changes in government, such as in Chad.²⁰ However, longer term drivers of conflict through illegitimate changes to constitutions and flawed elections are much less in the focus of actors in the AGA Platform, not least because each organisation is separately preoccupied with more immediate crises and there is no broad political consensus for reaction.²¹

Through the involvement of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the principle of subsidiarity, the AU's response to governance challenges adds complexity to the institutional landscape, further requiring **continental-regional coordination mechanisms**. Challenges arise especially around reconciling the primacy of the AU to deal with peace and security, and the legal (and political) autonomy of RECs and other regional mechanisms that sometimes hold more sway. Although Article 16 of the PSC Protocol provides for harmonisation and coordination with regional mechanisms, RECs are often more suitably placed than the AU to intervene in governance crises in their member states.

RECs and the AU can disagree about the principle of subsidiarity in a specific crisis. **Institutional competition sometimes prevails over considerations of governance and early warning on conflicts**, even though examples such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Gambia, and Mozambique are examples of the AU-REC subsidiarity principle being applied. Alongside the PAPS merger among AU reforms, a revision of the protocol governing the relationship between the AU and RECs is being undertaken. This may help resolve challenges around task division though it is not clear that new, rigid frameworks are the solution.²² In the case of conflict management and peace operations, the AU has learned to embrace ad-hoc coalitions, such as, the G5 Sahel, Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the Regional Cooperation Initiative – Lord's Resistance Army (RCI-LRA) which are not managed by recognised RECs (Vanheukelom & Desmidt 2019), rather reflecting a degree of flexibility and adaptability that may be more suited to navigating the multitude of overlapping mandates of different stakeholders at different levels. This more adaptive approach could in turn inspire working methods on governance.

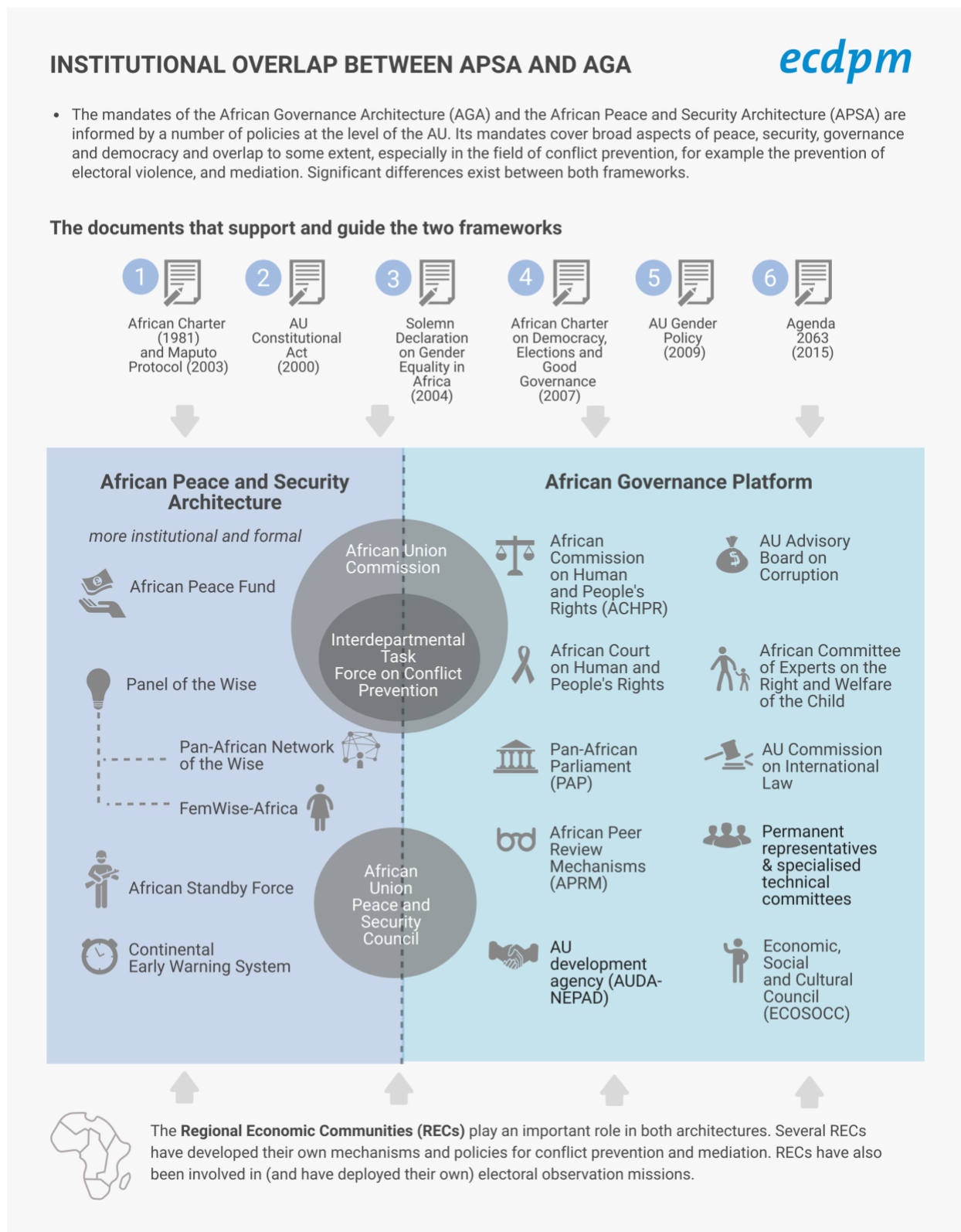
¹⁹ The ACDEG also includes commitments towards civil society engagement, institutional reforms, public sector efficiency, disease prevention etc. For more on this see the ACDEG charter; chapter 9.

²⁰ ISS 2021. "The AU reneges on its stance against coups d'état".

²¹ Also, there is no consensus on whether the removal of sitting heads of state caused by civilian popular uprisings constitutes a breach of constitutional order, and under which conditions.

²² Regional economic communities (RECs) which are regional groupings and regional mechanisms (RM) are considered 'building blocks' of the AU's economic integration and peace and security objectives. The AU and RECs at times have overlapping mandates for example on peace and security where peace processes, sanctions or mediation can be pursued by a REC or the AU. In order to clarify division of labour and coordinate better, the AU and RECs are in the process of reviewing their relationship which is often based on the 'principle of subsidiarity'. In theory this principle means RECs can take a lead in resolving matters that arise in their region. However, there are different takes on whether and how this principle should be applied. For more on this see: [ISS, 2019](#).

Figure 2: Institutional complications of the AU's PAPS setup



Source: adapted from Desmidt, S., Apiko, P. and Fannar Sævarsson, K. 2017.

2.2. Ambivalence around different conceptions of ‘governance’

The challenge for the AGA setup is heightened by different actors and institutions pushing for different conceptions of governance. Under a generic definition of **governance as the ability of a state to exercise its authority to set and enforce rules and provide** services, it is possible to distinguish between approaches that emphasise the *forms* of so-called ‘good governance’, such as the holding of regular elections; the *functions* governing state-society relations such as ascertaining that leaders are accountable to citizens; and the *outcomes* of governance, such as whether countries deliver inclusive development results, regardless of the ways in which they achieve those (Rocha Menocal 2020).

Hence, **‘governance’ is an umbrella under which stakeholders see very different priorities**. Among African continental structures, political support for some aspects of the governance agenda is higher than others – fair and free elections for example enjoy much higher approval than addressing corruption. Indeed, risks of violent spillovers resulting from election related upheavals and from unconstitutional regime change are high on member states’ agendas, not least due to their regional dimensions in case conflicts spread. But beyond that, there is a tendency to focus on developmental outcomes and exercise restraint in judging how countries should be governed politically.

It follows that **the AU often focuses on particularly serious violations of norms**. Non-constitutional changes in government are the most prominent case of this. The AU has also built up its election observation mechanisms, whose ability to improve the free and fair character of elections is uneven over time and space, but which provides a baseline of information. On the other hand, the range of norms within AGA and ACDEG in particular are much more expansive than those that leading AU actors, such as the PSC, usually act upon. They include aspects of social and economic governance as part of wider sustainable development, for example.

These different mandates, tools, rules and regulations to tackle different problems at different levels are also institutionally reflected. The APRM operates on a much broader norms basis and has also started incorporating the AU’s Agenda 2063 on sustainable development in its work, which succeeds in building member states’ support (see box 3). Regarding ACDEG, AGA only has the role of convening rather than monitoring, with the exception of one process undertaken with Rwanda in 2018-19. In the words of Kariseb & Okoloise (2020), “the AGA only has a promotional role to play”, as opposed to being able to encourage compliance with the continentally agreed governance principles.

Box 3: The APRM - building on traction for parts of the governance agenda

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) has evolved substantially as an AU organ, shedding light on the constraints and opportunities that affect the member states' governance agendas. It is a self- and peer-monitoring system in which member states voluntarily and independently submit to review their performance along four thematic areas: democracy and political governance, economic governance and management, corporate governance and socio-economic development. The APRM was integrated into the AU in 2014, including in its budgetary processes since its 'revitalisation' of 2018, and it is a member of the AGA platform, for which it collaborates on the formulation of the African Governance Reports.

The voluntary nature of the review mechanism has its advantages and limitations. It can only cover countries that agree to join - although universal (automatic) accession is being discussed -, and their cooperation is required both in terms of formulating the diagnostics and pursuing recommendations. But that is also a strength in the sense that it allows member states to discuss sustainable development, learn from and compete with each other. This is often the preferred framing for member states as it allows for good publicity or constructive discussions on the otherwise relatively vague 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 for sustainable development. Beyond member states learning from each other through the peer-review mechanism, implementing the recommendations that come out of the APRM reports remains to be a challenge for most member states.

The APRM has a strong network of national chapters tasked with monitoring key processes at national level, where essential governance dynamics - including in the socio-economic realm - take place. In theory, this in-country presence allows the APRM to provide overall monitoring and evaluation services where it collects data and designs tools on member states' progress via-a-vis key continental or global commitments such as the SDGs or the ACFTA. In practice it is less clear how APRM dynamics affect governance considerations in peer reviewed countries

Based on the recognition of APRM's strategic positioning, in 2018 AU member states welcomed "steps taken to position the APRM as an early warning tool for conflict prevention" in the context of APSA-AGA synergy. This has also prompted some experts to suggest that the APRM should more explicitly work on delivering the AGA's mandate of monitoring the implementation of ACDEG by member states, building on its "long standing record and experience in handling State party reports relating to democracy and governance" (Kariseb & Okoloise 2020). In order to try and foster greater momentum with member states, and to avoid 'reporting fatigue', the APRM has recently introduced governance targeted gap analysis reviews, to advise governments themselves, while staying clear from any form of finger-pointing addressed to governments.²³ Meanwhile, reportedly work to expand the APRM mandate to monitor "key governance areas" on the continent is being leveraged to allow APRM to monitor governance trends in all 55 AU Member States, and not just the 41 States that have acceded to the APRM.²⁴

2.3. Non-indifference vs sovereignty: member states' limited appetite for a strong AGA

The biggest challenge in linking governance and security at the AU in the past has been member states' 'ownership' of the governance agenda. Frequently, the willingness of heads of state to be held accountable by the continental organisation does not live up to the stated ambition of the AU's governance agenda. Regime survival is a key driver of state action, often at the cost of non-adherence to agreed governance norms. AU member states do not eschew the idea of a governance agenda altogether, but when facing domestic crises, power and interests often trump compliance with institutional frameworks. The dilemma between the AU's role in promoting norms AU and the principle of non-interference by the AU (hence safeguarding national sovereignty) helps explain member states'

²³ Interviews with senior APRM official and senior researchers, 2020-21.

²⁴ Interviews with former AGA official, June 2021.

limited political will to create and empower an effective AGA, raising questions about whether the PAPS merger can really change this.

There is a fundamental tension running through the AU's normative framework. On the one hand, since the founding of the OAU, states have maintained the importance of national sovereignty and non-interference. This is also reflected in the AU's decision-making process that rests on the consensus of heads of states. On the other hand, the wave of democratic revolutions on the African continent in the 1990s, along with major crises, including the Rwandan genocide, has led to the integration of a strong body of norms in the AU Constitutive Act. These include the norm of non-indifference towards grave human rights violations in a member state and rejection of non-constitutional changes in government, which constitutes one of the most important changes from the OAU to the AU (Williams 2007; Nash 2021). These principles are strongly anchored in the practices of the PSC, and as norms without specific enforcement mechanisms also in AGA.

Despite efforts to empower the AU Commission in recent years, **the AU's institutions remain driven by an essentially intergovernmental logic** that relies heavily on Heads of State. Both small and large member states, for their own reasons, resist anything that seems to undermine their sovereignty as AU member states. Large member states, or what have been termed 'Swing States' (McNamee 2016), in particular can sway negotiations towards their own specific domestic interests (Vanheukelom 2017).

Considering how states-driven the AU's agenda is, it is a remarkable **paradox of AGA that member states have allowed the AU institutions to develop an ambitious governance agenda**,²⁵ based on agreements such as the ACDEG, but when it comes to implementing the norms developed at AU level, the same member states struggle and sometimes resist. The complex interests at play within and between states regarding governance at the AU, combined with weak follow-up and enforcement of continental commitments are therefore a challenge for any continental agenda so will also potentially affect the results of the PAPS merger, regardless of the strength of logic behind it.

While member states espouse high normative commitments and uphold norms in the rhetoric of AU commitments, they often appear more interested in the benefits of claiming allegiance to these norms rather than their implementation. Many member states insist on protecting their sovereignty and object to a normative body meddling in domestic governance affairs. **The gap between rhetoric and action in the AU's governance agenda can also be explained by the "not in my backyard" problem where interventionism may be good for others, but not oneself.** While upholding the general principle of a strong governance agenda is easily agreeable, allowing the AU to act on governance crises in one's domestic affairs can be much more demanding, as seen in recent governance crises in Mali and Chad.

In other words, though the AU has developed strong norms and even a significant architecture to implement it, key factors block the possibility of implementing large parts of the agenda. While there is a "credible normative component" (Ncube 2019), implementation does not follow suit because the AU depends on member states to ratify and domesticate agreements, implement norms and engage in consultative processes at the continental level (Ncube 2019). Solidarity among African states, *realpolitik* and an insistence on sovereignty as non-interference have hindered progress of the AU's governance agenda in terms of promoting democratic norms and sanctioning non-compliance. **A gap between norms and practice is a fact of life in all countries' governance**, and need not necessarily

²⁵ When the AU was launched in 2002, the world was still in the so-called 'third wave of democratisation', which resulted in high hopes for the governance agenda and contributes to explaining the choice of a standalone portfolio on political affairs. Under the OAU prior to that, the continental institutions had much less of a mandate on governance, but they managed to set some processes in motion, for instance setting up the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which came to fruition progressively.

be ‘the’ priority problem, but in the context of the AU’s governance agenda, existing institutions and principles, including those identified in ACDEG, have been left underused.

Political traction for a strong AGA is to a large extent inversely proportional to the magnitude of governance challenges in AU member states. The stakes involved in preventing a strong and far-reaching AGA are all the higher in countries with the largest governance-related challenges, which have a strong interest to keep the AU from promoting its norms.²⁶ Informal networks and the election and hiring of trusted people are key for keeping the AU out of these countries’ governance. Countries with governance challenges therefore are invested in the AU’s governance agenda, but with interests of their own (Söderbaum 2012), such as controlling the narrative and steering work away from what might challenge them. This results in the **apparent paradox of countries with a more problematic governance record being sometimes more vocal** and/or investing highly in being represented at the continental institutions (expert interview). Meanwhile, other countries that do well in governance, such as Mauritius or Cape Verde, are less vocal. Reportedly, Ghana is an exception as a country both doing well on governance and very active in the AU arena. For the PAPS merger to succeed in ‘magnifying’ the governance agenda would require a re-balancing of influence on the agenda between these two groups.

The merged PAPS will have to grapple with the fact that many AU member states agree with the idea of normative development at the AU level, but insist on doing so while upholding state sovereignty. At the country level, they do not want the AU to have a specific say in their governance issues. At the AU, member states therefore prefer to control the narrative of norm development. AU election observation is a good example: it started in this way - doing in-house the monitoring to keep foreign observers in check - and only later attained some degree of independence.²⁷ Due to a strong preference of member states for intergovernmentalism in regional and continental relations, the AU operates a governance agenda without strong enforcement mechanisms and little civil society participation.

For all these reasons, some analysts are pessimistic about the AU being able to have a meaningful impact on governance challenges on the continent: “AGA officers are expected to engage in uncomfortable but necessary conversations with various leaders, some of whom may not receive their message well, (...) so they must be able to exert influence”, but to expect that countries with problematic governance situations can “be cajoled by informal processes and programmes is wishful thinking” (Ncube 2019).

Member states have different interests, different capabilities (diplomatic, economic, military, bureaucratic) and different resources to engage with the AU to reinforce or obstruct the operations or initiatives of the merged PAPS. It is clear from this section that **it is better not to assume that member states support the continental governance principles, simply because they have been voted or agreed at the AU summit level.**

2.4. The need for effective AU and AUC leadership

The PAPS merger has the potential to affect institutional arrangements and political traction for AGA among AU member states, but this will depend on its ability to develop a framework for effective leadership in the AUC, beyond the issues of state buy-in discussed above. Leadership matters for a successful implementation of an ambitious agenda. The AUC departments before the merger lacked a common vision and fine-grained coordination of their work. Leadership can help instill a new collaborative spirit between residual institutional silos.

The vision of individual people in leadership of the organisation and think tanks who advise them (Tieku, Gänzle & Trondal 2020) play an important role (and places more importance on recruitment procedures). This observation is

²⁶ Interview with an expert on AU affairs, February 2021.

²⁷ Interview with an expert on AU affairs, February 2021.

particularly relevant in the case of the AUC. According to some long-term observers of the AU, the personalities, leadership styles and backgrounds of the AU's first commissioners of the peace and security department and the department of political affairs can help explain the differentiated salience of peace and security and governance agendas of the AU.²⁸ It was for example suggested by interviewees that PSD Commissioner Smail Chergui had a strong grasp of security affairs in his department, even if that sometimes came at the expense of bureaucratic standard operating procedures.²⁹ Meanwhile, Commissioner Cessouma Minata Samate reportedly faced a more difficult situation in a smaller and more isolated Political Affairs Department. Previously, there have also been reports of member states deliberately selecting lower-profile candidates to keep the governance agenda in check.³⁰

With the new Commission of the AU and the appointment of Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, there is a great deal of optimism among AU observers that the PAPS - and with it the governance and security agendas of the continent - are in 'good hands'. When asked about their reflections on how the new setup could affect the governance agenda, many interviewees mentioned that **the new Commissioner will have a key role to play in steering and balancing the agendas of the PAPS - starting from his selection of the two Director positions within the 'super-department' - two positions which are yet to be filled at the time of writing.**

The leadership of the PSD and DPA did not cooperate well. The presence of two Commissioners for two separate departments has been an obstacle to delivering on the AUC's mandate in security and governance effectively. Therefore, part of how the governance agenda of the AU will fare in the next few years will be determined by the strategic guidance and operational management of the leadership of the PAPS. Leadership with vision is needed to overcome complex constellations of interests and institutions.

2.5. The contribution of international partners

A common vision for a successful merger also needs to include the AU's international partners. **The AU remains highly reliant on partner funding despite a commitment to financial self-reliance.** This is well-documented for instance on peace and security, where the AUC planned to cover 25% of its peace and security costs. Despite the AU's ambitious reform plans, external partners have continued to pay above 90% of the AU's peacekeeping budget and 75% of its programme budget (African Union 2021a). As regards the funding of governance-related activities in the past, DPA's reliance on external funding within the programme budget has been as high as 90% in the past, with funding for the AGA secretariat coming for instance from sources such as German development cooperation or the European Union. This funding happens both via earmarked funds or through financing personnel and particular activities, where partner priorities are targeted, or via contributions to the AU budget that come with fewer strings attached.

In the past, being funded by external partners has tended to reflect poorly on the AU bodies dealing with governance in the eyes of those member states that were concerned about supranational interference. In other words, **while they helped bridge funding gaps, external partners have not always helped bridge legitimacy gaps of similar importance when it comes to pursuing the governance agenda.** The PAPS merger offers an opportunity to help address these divergences of vision, since it generates natural 'moments' for a renewed discussion of the priorities and methods within the PAPS agenda, whether internally to the AU or at the level of formulating funding approaches.

²⁸ Interview with a former senior AU official, October 2020.

²⁹ Interviews with AU member states and international partners, March 2019.

³⁰ Interview with a former OAU and AU official, 2021.

International partners have played an important role in establishing and sustaining AGA, but their interests have not always aligned with those of member states and AU leadership. International partners have supported the AGA Secretariat financially, and a JFA for Governance has funded significant parts of the former DPA's activities, in close discussion with the AUC. International partners also have an important role to play in - carefully - underwriting the democratic progress in AU member states that the latter enshrined in the AU's normative corpus, and in supporting governance via civil society. As long as self-funding remains problematic, this discussion will need to include international partners. **A careful balance will also need to be maintained, given the sensitivities around the presence of external partners in the governance agenda and the slippery slope towards foreign interference that lacks legitimacy.**

In the past, international partners have been overly optimistic about the traction of an ambitious agenda and the level of buy-in into a strong AGA among member states. By continuing to fund activities with limited member state buy-in, while member state funding remains insufficient and unpredictable, they allowed the continuation of a situation where buy-in into AGA institutions remained limited, and their effectiveness at collaboration with member states remained low. Hence, **despite the best of intentions, by funding an expansive agenda with little political traction and by keeping it focused on areas without political traction, international partners have been part of the challenge** that the AUC faces to achieve effective leadership in governance.

The merged PAPS however creates **a space for international partners, member states and AUC leadership to re-align their priorities and funding behind a more realistic agenda.** There is no obvious formula as to how this re-alignment should be done. International partners are required to find a fragile balance between aligning with PAPS reforms and encouraging change proactively. Partners need to mainstream the premise that only African institutions can effectively lead processes when it comes to governance on the continent. At the same time, respecting that premise does not mean that international partners cannot use their role to encourage the AU's own efforts to go beyond the lowest common denominator of those African member states which reject most of the governance agenda.

3. The way ahead: making the most of the merger

The PAPS merger is yet to unfold and show its full potential. This makes the reform a moving target for all stakeholders. Nonetheless, to see the AU's governance agenda succeed in the new PAPS structure, stakeholders need a shared vision and understanding of where the reform is going. The PAPS Commissioner has released a "100 day + 1 year plan" which gives an idea of the priorities of the merged department. While the department has not moved at the pace indicated in its 100-day plan, the planned activities are indicative of what it will be working on in the short, medium and long term. While the merger can instill a positive dynamic for the AU's governance agenda, its success is not decided within PAPS alone.

The success of the merger depends on the institutional fine-tuning, political traction, and effective partnerships - the three themes covered in this section. At the centre stand the political will of Heads of State to give some degree of power to the AU to oversee and enforce commitments taken. The support from AU partners based on the AU's own identified priorities is also key to making the PAPS fit for purpose and the AU governance agenda concrete, although it is of secondary importance.

This paper began by outlining three possible outcomes of the merger: *marginalisation* of the governance agenda; a successful *magnification* where governance and security create mutual synergy, and *more of the same* in the

governance agenda. **Of the three scenarios, the preferable outcome in the authors' opinion is magnification - an effective merger that does generate synergies.** This section identifies concrete trends that stakeholders of a successful merger can watch out for, support and strive towards. It focuses in particular on institutional arrangements, political traction among member states, and the enabling environment through partnerships.

3.1. Fine-tuning institutional arrangements

Enabling the right leadership for a merger - not an acquisition

With a new AUC leadership and a freshly elected PAPS Commissioner in place, the merged department is now getting to work. The crux in implementing the reform is to enable synergies without risking the marginalisation of governance likely to happen if the merged department prioritises conflict management over governance. As the AUC itself concluded in early 2021, **while the merger “provides an opportunity to enhance the much-needed nexus between AGA and APSA, care must be taken to ensure that one does not overshadow the other”** (African Union 2021b, 22). A good starting point is to explicitly recognise that AGA is no ‘APSA for governance’: the two departments do not have the same track record and political traction among member states. It is also important to recognise that the two merged departments arrive in PAPS with different roles, methods, and ways of interacting with member states, which also requires different responses to and ways of adapting to the new structure.

As mentioned previously, **personalities matter - whether in the bureaucracy or as a political champion.** Unlike previous reform attempts, for example those outlined in the 2007 Adedeji report, the present AU reform process has benefited from the hands-on leadership of President Kagame. As signals from the new PAPS Commissioner are good, stakeholders need to hold back and allow the PAPS leadership to take ownership of the reformed AUC. Additionally, it may be helpful to **appoint a political champion among Heads of State** to give increased visibility to the newly combined agenda, so not only to lead on the new department but to ensure the synergies are made explicit and built upon. The AU Assembly has appointed champions on a range of issues, including migration, gender, infrastructure development, and nutrition.³¹ An AU Champion for Peace and Governance could help expedite a balanced fine-tuning of the merger.

In the short run, the new department will be able to reflect a balanced approach to the merger by hiring equally qualified and well-respected candidates to the positions of Director for Conflict Management and Director for Governance and Conflict Prevention. The AUC leadership, including Chairperson Faki and Commissioner Adeoye, now have an opportunity to prove their leadership in the merged PAPS. As one close AU observer argues, the AUC needs to ensure the two Directors due to be recruited by June 2021 are of similar political clout, as a more profiled appointment for conflict management “will contribute to sweeping governance under the carpet.”

Maximising coordination within PAPS and the AU

Even a merged department will understandably continue to have separate internal processes and arrangements. APSA and AGA are, after all, two very different frameworks for AU action. While holding space for specialisation in the two respective areas, the AUC will do well to **boost information sharing and intra-departmental collaboration.** To help this, PAPS should develop an explicit theory of change about how merging the governance and peace and security areas will lead to effective change in governance and security agendas, with the underlying assumptions made explicit. Such an explicit theory of change should not only be AUC-centric but also Union-wide, taking onboard

³¹ In the case of AfCFTA, the appointment of Mahamadou Issoufou, President of the Republic of Niger, had a tangible impact on political traction for the institutional arrangements being set up. With the appointment of Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, as AU Champion for the Revitalisation and operationalisation of the policy on Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD), member states have already demonstrated their willingness to underwrite AU organs such as the AUC Center for Reconstruction and Development (AUC-PCRD) with influential figures among AU leaders.

the mandate and delivery capacities of the broader governance organs and RECs. This will then help provide a basis for monitoring the full implementation of the merger.

A successful merger that balances security and governance will require PAPS **to prioritise the organs and processes relating to governance at early stages of the conflict cycle and recovery, while not undermining well-established arrangements for conflict management.** A key example is re-energising the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) in a new department structure would help improve the AU's level of information about nascent political and security crises. Early warning takes a crucial role in connecting the AUC's on-going efforts in governance with conflict management. In the new organogram (see section 1.3). In the merged department, early warning is integrated in the regional desk offices, which are linked to the situation room and are to deliver analysis on emerging or ongoing conflict trends. The notable change of the merger is that a standalone CEWS unit does no longer exist. PAPS will also benefit from paying close attention to how analyses from the situation room and regional desks feed into preventive diplomacy. Working in concert with RECs' will be particularly important to achieve more synergy through the PAPS regional desks and RECs' own early warning structures and liaison offices. In this line, ECOWAS now has a permanent representative to the AU, a step up from EU-funded REC liaison officers in place for more than a decade.

The merger offers **a chance for all relevant structures to re-engage where they may have been or felt marginalised.** If it succeeds in these linkages, a successfully merged PAPS will reinvigorate cooperation with some bodies previously sidelined, including the Panel of the Wise and FemWise. The merger can also help PAPS reinvigorate the contributions of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) - via the promotion of human rights as a stabilisation factor, or via human rights and international justice through the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, as tools to address conflict situations for instance - and of the APRM, but maybe even of such different initiatives as the Transitional Justice Policy Framework that is intended to support transition countries, to its early warning activities.

The new PAPS should make sure that the spirit of the merger overrides any potential silo effects of the department's organogram. For this to happen, there needs to be a focus on better coordination between governance and security actors and activities across the conflict cycle - something that may be helped by having an explicit theory of change, as mentioned above. A new joint AGA/APSA Secretariat has been created, placed under the Governance and Conflict Prevention Directorate. The specific mandate and activities of the AGA/APSA Secretariat are a litmus test for the merger's integrative implementation. Under the old setup, initiatives such as the Interdepartmental Task Force on Conflict Prevention went in the direction of such efforts to link AGA expertise and tools to early warning. Learning from the achievements and limits to such a task force, these efforts can now be stepped up more organically within a single department under the PAPS umbrella.

The merged department can also intensify on-going efforts to **rationalise the complexity of AU institutional arrangements on governance through a clearer division of labour.** APRM-AGA cooperation has already seen some success, for example through the African Governance Report. The division of labour between the AGA/APSA Secretariat and APRM can further be clarified in time, to streamline the use of AUC resources. Linkages should also be maintained with the other AGP members to ensure coordination in the AU's governance and peace and security agenda.

Hitting the ground running: Election observation, mediation, and continental early warning to prototype PAPS synergies

Intra-AU coordination will be needed to make the merger a success. However, striving for policy coherence and intensification implies a significant administrative burden. At this critical inception stage, PAPS will need to balance the costs and benefits of coordination. To sustain support for the merger within the AUC and also among AU member states, this may mean a need to **channel energy towards a set of ‘quick wins’ where a merged logic to governance and security demonstrates tangible results at comparatively little effort**. The AUC reform process, including the PAPS merger, concludes in 2023. Until then, the merged PAPS department will seek to demonstrate the viability of the merger through quick successes in a number of key areas. This time window also offers the opportunity to *pilot* some initiatives which may seem promising but whose ex-ante cost-benefit calculations are not good enough to qualify as ‘quick wins’.

A first ‘quick win’ in getting the merged department to deliver may be **election observation**. This is an area where the AUC has already started overhauling methodologies and where there is a consensus among member states on a strong and legitimate AU role in election observation. Holding free and fair elections is among the ACDEG norms most widely accepted among member states, and an opportunity for the AU to demonstrate its capacity to act on its principles. In addition to the ACDEG, the AU has developed guidelines on electoral observation ([AU, 2013](#)) and acknowledges that “the holding of free and fair elections is an important dimension in conflict prevention, management and resolution” ([OAU/AU, 2002](#)).

In the spirit of tackling the governance-security nexus through the PAPS, **paying more attention to election-related triggers of violence where they matter** and responding to them early on would further demonstrate the value add of the merger while helping address one of the most pervasive causes of political crises in many countries in Africa. In the longer term, PAPS can link up its electoral observation with early warning activities, such as the structural vulnerability assessments, and help develop the AU’s arsenal of options such as confidence-building’ missions or high-level dispatches to bring together political actors to deflate tensions ahead of elections.

The **Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework** (CSCPF), which supports member states to undertake (voluntary) country structural vulnerability/resilience assessments, offers an additional framework to revitalise the AU’s election observation. By developing and implementing country structural vulnerability mitigation strategies in collaborations with RECs, PAPS can roll out a merged approach to security and governance. Ghana undertook this analysis in 2017,³² though uptake by other member states is slow so far.

A second urgent and important quick win beside election observation is to **systematise the AU’s preventive diplomacy and mediation work**. With the Panel of the Wise - a formal mediation and preventive diplomacy tool of the AU - the good offices of the AUC Chairperson and his envoys, PAPS has a broad array of instruments in the service of conflict prevention and mediation. The new conflict prevention and mediation unit of the PAPS aims to take a wide and comprehensive look and liaise better, and systematise the working relationship across the Panel of the Wise, the former Mediation support unit and also the offices of the Chairperson/Special Envoys.³³ Particularly as PanWise and FemWise are operational but currently not sufficiently integrated in the department’s work, this makes synergy through the merger an easy win.

³² African Union 2017. National and regional consultations on country structural vulnerability and resilience assessment (CSVRA) of Ghana.

³³ Interview 3 June, 2021.

Finally, PAPS offers an opportunity to better reflect the principle of ‘post-conflict as pre conflict’ in its approaches to conflict prevention and resolution. By creating better synergies between post-conflict reconstruction, AGA and early warning, the department can invest in the sustainability of conflict resolution. On paper, the fact that Post-Conflict Reconstruction is housed in the Directorate for Governance and Conflict Prevention could be a sign that the AU is serious about tackling the long-term aftermath of conflicts. PAPS should also fully **avail itself of the expertise at the Center for Reconstruction and Development (AUC-PCRD)** based in Cairo, and the political leadership of President Abdel El-Sisi who champions the revitalisation and operationalisation of the policy on PCRD at the AU level. Compared to the 4 staff members working on post-conflict reconstruction at PAPS, AUC-PCRD can mobilise about 23 staff members (African Union 2020). The AUC-PCRD in Cairo and the PCRD Unit in PAPS together demonstrate the growing relevance of PCRD and its salience on the AU agenda over the years, at least in normative terms. The PAPS PCRD Unit being housed under the Governance and Conflict Prevention pillar of the PAPS is a positive indication that the AU recognises that PCRD is a long-term process which is intricately linked to governance and socio-economic structures, and not a short-term ‘intervention’ needed for stabilisation.

That said, having the right normative and institutional arrangement for PCRD does not guarantee that the AU will do better on PCRD in practice. The AU’s preoccupation with managing political crises and containing violent conflicts together with lack of adequate funding for PCRD is likely to continue to be a challenge for the AU. Moreover, post-conflict reconstruction touches on different themes and units within PAPS (e.g. mediation, peace support operation division (PSOD), women, peace and security (WPS), etc.) and these divisions would have to work in collaboration. All of them now being housed within the PAPS enables their potential collaboration at lower coordination costs but doesn’t completely eliminate the risk of organisational silos. Finally, the AU would also have to find its niche and role as this is a sector that largely falls within the remit of its member states and is occupied by other international development partners or international non-governmental organisations (INGOs).

3.2. Enhancing political traction

Establish a new governance narrative that bridges non-indifference and sovereignty

If the merger is to succeed in delivering a tangible difference in the AU’s work on governance, it needs to somehow seek ways to increase member state ownership of AGA. As identified earlier, member states do not universally agree on the *implementation* of an ambitious, expansive governance agenda. Concretely, it will be important to communicate the message that **consolidating achievements in areas with member state traction is more important than expanding - especially into more controversial areas of the ACDEG agenda**. PAPS has already insisted that safeguarding what has worked (e.g. election observation, membership suspensions) is useful. At the same time, it can also revise expectations on what has not fully worked yet, such as the AGA’s aspirational role in monitoring all of ACDEG’s implementation.

‘Prioritising among priorities’ is the order of the day for the merged PAPS to gain trust from member states. At the moment, AGA is supposed to do more than it is able to do. Monitoring ACDEG as a whole and creating an evidence baseline for the PSC to hold member states to account on dynamics across the conflict prevention-governance spectrum still greatly exceeds the merged department’s capacity, particularly as member states are likely to push back on issues with lower political traction. APRM could help share the load due to its mandate in this area, indicating the need to rationalise institutional complexity through a clear division of labour. **This exercise of prioritisation of what works should build on refreshed analysis of what has worked and a better understanding why** - especially in terms of political traction and perceptions by member states, which remains the main stumbling blocks of AGA. Focusing on areas with ‘quick wins’ identified above can guide the department in this exercise of prioritisation.

The consolidation of what works in AGA will require PAPS to establish strategic relationships with those member states that do well in governance. To address the predominance of states with a more problematic record and higher stakes in controlling the narratives, **PAPS will gain political traction by incentivising more active participation by AU members that do well on governance.** This participation can take a variety of forms, such as higher-level meetings (reportedly, on issues such as sanctions ministerial and heads of states levels are much more conducive to decisions than ambassadorial levels) or pushing for the delegates to receive a mandate to act or at least discuss issues from their respective headquarters. Increasing such a form of participation will benefit from a clear understanding of ‘swing states’ such as Nigeria and South Africa, who significantly impact the dynamics of political traction (Vanheukelom & Desmidt 2019).

To prioritise feasible goals does not mean eschewing more difficult aspirations. By consolidating a new narrative that is compatible with apprehensions about sovereignty losses in the short term, PAPS can contribute to a new governance narrative that bridges non-indifference and sovereignty in the long term. Through short-term progress in consolidation, AGA can also potentially enable *long-term* positive spillovers into more challenging areas. By engaging member states in areas where there is more political will, member states’ engagement with AGA institutions may build in trust, allowing the AGA/APSA Secretariat to eventually raise more contentious issues. Indeed, in the long term, the AU and its members still have major strides to increase the implementation of ACDEG, which currently stands at 34 ratifications, 46 signatures, 2 state Reports and numerous well-documented breaches every year.

Increase member states’ ownership by funding a PAPS that does ‘less, but better’

The overall reform project strives for the AUC to be ‘fit for purpose’. In practice, this boils down to doing ‘less, but better’. Member states have cut the AUC’s budget considerably in the past few years, a process that is compounded by the ‘austerity budget’ due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is always risky to try to achieve different objectives with a single policy choice (cf. the ‘one instrument, one goal’ Tinbergen principle), yet **the PAPS merger is both about delivering more and about saving costs. Managing these potentially conflicting goals requires good leadership by the AU and dedication to the reform’s implementation by member states.**

Along with a new narrative as presented above, PAPS has also embarked on a **path of closer engagement with member states through intergovernmental bodies and the AUC budgeting process** in particular. PAPS has an opportunity to enhance intergovernmental and national engagement with AGA/APSA and can make better use of APRM focal points in a two-way exchange of information. A new PRC Sub-Committee on Human Rights, Democracy & Governance suggests that there may be broad interest at least among some member states.

In terms of budgeting, the AUC will need to overcome the challenge of conflict management and prevention continuing to be handled in different budgeting processes. The AU has not abolished separate budget categories for Peace Support Operations, which are handled by PAPS in a different budgeting process from the one for the regular budget, where the AUC’s technical departments are in the lead. PAPS’ activities are funded by both the Peace Support Operations and programme budget (and in future by the Peace Fund), meaning that the department has the means to streamline engagement with member states to ensure a merged logic also applies in the budgeting process.

In this budgeting process, **a particular focus should be on hiring the necessary human resources to achieve PAPS’ ambitious plans.** The Administrative Roadmap is a first step towards **improving** the recruitment process at the AUC. In Phase I of the new AUC’s transition plans, no hiring at P2 and P3 levels are foreseen in 2021 during a staff assessment exercise, which may make it very difficult for the merged PAPS to deliver effectively for the time being.

PAPS should also **clarify the operationalisation of the Peace Fund**, which was revitalised long before the details of the merger were decided. The relationship between the AU and UN has focused the **Peace Fund** on the financing of AU PSOs in particular, with a view to accessing UN peacekeeping budget assessed contributions, for 75% of total costs. However, the Peace Fund's Window 1 (Mediation, Preventive Diplomacy) is highly relevant for PAPS work in governance and a welcome source of funding since member states' contribution to the African Governance Facility has been low. Until the Peace Fund is fully endowed by member states contributions and able to finance costly PSOs, a quick win in engaging member states on AGA would be to use the Peace Fund to finance PAPS activities that fully incorporated the security-governance merger.

In the long term, **success in engaging member states can be seen in more political will for an AU active in governance. Success can also be traced in member states' funding of the AUC's programme budget for PAPS.** If member states increase contributions and establish at least a paritary balance with international partners' contributions, PAPS can succeed in ensuring political traction.

3.3. Partnerships to enable PAPS success

Fine-tune external funding to encourage synergies without exacerbating complexity

Making the most of the merger raises questions for international partners about the **right balance to take in supporting reform implementation without imposing changes.** International partners need to make sure not to distort the AUC reform's incentives for member states to take a larger role in the AUC's operations. If governance does appear to be slipping in importance, it will be important to be able to point to evidence that this is the case, but also then understand the causal drivers of *marginalisation*, and to support PAPS in redressing the balance - in practice and not just on paper - if possible. This may also require a more explicit recognition of political resistance to the governance agenda from some Heads of State, something which is often avoided given the unifying, solidarity-based underpinnings of the AU.

A guiding principle for international partners' successful support of the merger will be to **consistently factor in a merged logic of governance and security in MoUs, funding agreements and partnership framework documents.** Partners do not and should not have a decisive impact on the *merger's* outcomes, but they may have some discretion in incentivising PAPS to drive it, to be exercised with restraint. International partners can enter the discussion based on the fact that the merger is a decision by AU member states, which therefore enjoys some political traction, which has historically been a challenge in parts of the AUC setup which they have supported for a while now. They also have a responsibility to ensure that they do not undermine with one hand what they support with the other, for instance by bypassing some structures or granting preferential treatment to others.

International partners can also **use their role as external funders to concretise and finalise the merger through partnership arrangements.** Through the AU Partners Group, the JFA Steering Group, leadership by lead partners and the AUC budget consultations with international partners, international partners can contribute to avoid re-creating governance and security silos in the AU budgeting processes. Those international partners contributing to the JFA Salaries, which pays salaries of conflict management staff, and the JFA Governance, which finances activities of the former DPA but saw less dynamism, are currently considering how to channel their funding after a trial year of a new generation of JFAs at the AUC. International partners also have a unique opportunity in supporting the AU's more synergetic approach in its representations through the JFA for AU Liaison Offices. The EU, as a member of the board of trustees on the Peace Fund, should also underwrite efforts to operationalise the Fund across all three Windows, including Mediation and Preventive Diplomacy. As the former PSD has a large group of non-Western partners, coordinating international partners' engagement with the merged department through partnership arrangements is crucial to avoid the marginalisation of AGA.

International partners should also factor in the uphill struggle for more political traction among member states in their AU policies. Partners will do well to continue their dialogue with the PRC on AU reform, institutional issues and resource mobilisation strategies, also with a view to fully implementing the PAPS merger. **Those AU partners that are also active in AU member states can mainstream the creation of synergies between AGA and APSA in their bilateral partnerships.** This applies particularly to AU partners assisting conflict management efforts in AU member states through bilateral training and support. Such mainstreaming however also needs to lead to “politically feasible margins for manoeuvre in often fragile contexts of violent conflicts”, and it should not “assume state capabilities” (Vanheukelom & Desmidt 2019). In the medium term, international partners should pursue the goal of a gradual move towards shared financing of the AGA-APSA Secretariat with member states.

Partnerships beyond funding: Meeting capacity needs through collaboration

The most recent PAPS organogram at the time of writing suggests that the new department is stretched for capacity in early warning and conflict prevention. **The merger holds considerable potential also for the department’s partnerships that go beyond funding.** The monitoring of conflicts and crises in member states requires considerable human resources, which the merged PAPS cannot mobilise in-house. Successful monitoring of governance and security will require innovative ways of working, perhaps through networks in the regions and nationally, to build up a good analytical basis and response.

Before the merger, the department had made major strides in joint situation analysis with some international partners. Particularly **UN-AU joint situation analysis is regular and delivers enhanced awareness of potential conflicts.** Such partnerships can support the implementation of the merger by fully incorporating it in their activities. The department has also established numerous partnerships at the strategic level with actors including the EU, China, Turkey, and the USA.

Another promising source of governance and security analysis comes from CSOs. Though it remains to be made clear what will happen to existing CSO engagement mechanisms such as the Livingstone Formula, the merged department could stand to **gain anticipatory capacity by increasing CSO inclusion in its early warning system.** The case of ECOWAS and SADC suggest some good practices in this regard (Aeby 2021). The inclusion of an analyst seconded from the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in CEWS is a start on which to build. According to interviewees, the AU’s ECOSOCC holds considerable - unrealised - potential. The organ needs a serious rethink structurally regarding its membership criteria and in terms of leadership, but it could make a significant contribution to CSO involvement.³⁴

A final area in which partnerships can benefit PAPS capacity is **clarifying the practical implementation of the principle of subsidiarity in AU-REC/RM relations, and related principles of proximity, complementarity and cost-sharing.** An MoU from 2008 is currently being renegotiated. This will also help improve management of overlapping regional and continental actors (member states, RECs/RM). The AU’s new PSO doctrine insists on “modalities for enhanced harmonised decision-making processes between the AU-RECs/RMs for the employment of the ASF in conducting and managing PSOs in the continent”. There is no shortage of opportunities to mainstream the spirit of the merger. Doing so will be beneficial particularly as many RECs have already merged their security and governance departments (see Box 2). Acting on this institutional set-up in partnerships can unlock considerable synergy.

³⁴ Interview with several AU observers, May 2021.

Conclusions

The merger is an ongoing process which, though started in 2021, is about organisational culture that is slow to change. The restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic may further slow down a process of institutionalisation of the merger that would have taken some time even without it. At the time of writing, there are more unknowns than certainties about how exactly the merger is and will be rolled out and therefore the implications for the governance agenda, even for stakeholders who are directly involved in the process. However, **there are increasingly more 'known unknowns'** that make this evolving process easier to follow. This paper has provided a framework and analysis to help stakeholders make sense of some of the dynamics taking place, to be able to identify the opportunities and risks, and to know what to look out for in the short and medium term.

Based on interviews, we offer three scenarios that summarise the merger's implications on the AU's governance agenda: **marginalisation, magnification or more of the same**. The merger can *marginalise* the governance agenda further in favour of peace and security, at a time of global democratic recession when it is increasingly difficult to deliver on the ambitious governance commitments adopted under the AU's aegis such as the ACDEG. Alternatively, there is a chance that it can *magnify* the importance of the governance agenda by fast-tracking the integration of governance and peace and security by emphasising the role of political governance in preventing violent conflicts. In the third possibility, the *merger may not change much for the governance agenda* either way, as the main blockers and enablers of the governance agenda relate more to political dynamics between the AU and its member states than to the institutional setup of the AUC's organograms.

While AU member states have signed up to quite expansive and progressive legal and political norms on governance - most notably through the ACDEG, **upholding commitments has been a challenge. This is particularly true when it comes to questions around political and democratic governance where member states have an ambiguous relationship with the AU** - while they recognise its role in norm promotion, they wish to keep the AU and the AGA at arm's length in their internal political affairs.

As a result of this ambiguity, **member states pick and choose between the various components of the governance agenda**. Many seek to emphasise and improve on their performance on socio-economic governance while shying away from critical discussion around their human rights records, constitutionalism or other political themes. This has led to a partial implementation of the AU's governance agenda whereby some topics such as election observation are welcomed by AU member states while other topics like ACDEG norms on political, economic and social governance are sustained mainly due to partner funding. The latter further reinforces AU member states' lack of ownership of some issues and institutions, which in turn challenges the AU's legitimacy and leadership to push things forward via-a-vis member states.

The governance agenda in the new PAPS structure risks lacking ownership, as institutional reform does not automatically lead to political traction. With the right leadership in PAPS, however, the odds are improved for institutional gains of the merger to help translate to changing dynamics in the politics of member states. Numerous examples demonstrate that in addition to political chemistry within and between AU member states, technical advisors within and outside the AU, and politically savvy and effective leaders within the AU bureaucracy, shape the relationship between the AU and its members. The new PAPS Commissioner will therefore need to seek strong allies among Heads of State to ensure the governance agenda is not marginalised.

International partners should not push too forcefully for a successful merger to unfold, given the uncertainties around how exactly the merger will roll out and the political and institutional dynamics that shape and indeed challenge the AU's governance agenda. Striking this balance is key not only because the merger is just one piece of the bigger member state-led AU reform process. Strong push from partners (real or perceived) without sufficient buy-in from AU member states could undermine the AU's credibility to push the governance agenda as its own. More targeted support to AU member states, especially those that have influence over the AU and other member states could help expedite the merger and ensure the governance agenda is not marginalised. That may help address the political blockages that limit the AU's role in governance - something the merger of AUC departments will not be able to overcome by itself.

All stakeholders need to position themselves and assess their strategies carefully and in coordination. One pathway is to engage with member states and to work with those that have exemplary records in good governance. Another is to stick to technical measures to enhance the AU's bureaucratic machinery and tools to promote and monitor governance across the continent on the basis of its own mandate. These two approaches are complementary and can be pursued in tandem by both the AU and its partners. The challenge however remains to do both or either without undermining the agency and authority of AU member states. **The merged PAPS Department has the right leadership to deliver on the ambitious institutional reform as well as on its new mandate to address security and governance challenges on the continent.** It alone can lead the charge to materialise these ambitions.

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