

BRIEFING NOTE No. 124

Election watch: THE RACE FOR AFRICAN UNION TOP POSTS

POLITICAL ECONOMY DYNAMICS OF REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN AFRICA

PEDRO

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November 2020

The year 2021 holds great promise for the African Union (AU) leadership, marking the first elections for the AU Commission (AUC) positions since the Union's reform process began in 2017. The election is, therefore, a stress test for the new recruitment, selection and election process for the incoming AU Commissioners as well as ensuring the key principle of gender parity.

This brief discusses the role that the AU's institutional management reforms will play in the upcoming elections – especially when it comes to meeting the key requirement of gender parity.

The election process began in September 2020, when AU member states submitted their list for candidates to be nominated to the AUC. The incumbent Commission's Chairperson, H.E. Faki Mahamat, is also up for re-election, although this is not an automatic guarantee: he will need a two-thirds majority vote to keep his post. The new rules require the top AU leadership to display gender parity, requiring that if the AUC Chairperson is a man, his Deputy should be a woman – and vice-versa. Most of the candidates for the role of Deputy AU commissioner are women (five out of eight) but, to date, no woman has held this role.

However, only 29% of the total nominees for the position of the six AU commissioners were women, with only eight becoming part of the twenty-five candidates who made it to the final shortlist – ringing, once again, the alarm bell on the need for gender parity in the AUC election process.

The composition of the next AU commission will play a pivotal role in shaping and implementing Africa's continental policy priorities for the next four years.

Acknowledgements

This background paper is part of ECDPM's African Institution and Regional Dynamics work on the 'Political Economy Dynamics of Regional Organisations in the time of COVID-19,' (PEDRO II). It builds on earlier works conducted under the Political Economy Dynamics of Regional Organisations (PEDRO). In line with ECDPM's mission to inform and facilitate EU-Africa policy dialogue, and financed by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ. Further information about previous related projects can be found at www.ecdpm.org/pedro.

The authors are grateful for the valuable input from Dr Bruce Byiers for the comments and insights received on the paper. Thanks to Valeria Pintus and Yaseena Chiu-van't Hoff for their support on the graphic design. Thanks also to Virginia Mucchi, Inna Perova and Carlotta Maria Paschetto for editing and layout work.

Any errors remain the sole responsibility of the authors. The views expressed do not reflect those of ECDPM or BMZ. For comments and feedback please get in touch with Luckystar Miyandazi (Imi@ecdpm.org) and Philomena Apiko (pha@ecdpm.org).

Introduction

Elections around the world and in Africa have been getting a lot of attention of late. With further presidential, legislative and referendum elections due in Burkina Faso, Ghana, the Central African Republic, Niger and Somalia in the coming weeks, less attention is being paid to another election under preparation - that of the African Union (AU 2020). At the forthcoming 34th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the AU in January/February 2021, all African Heads of State and Government will cast their votes for the next leaders of the AU Commission (AUC). Specifically, they will choose the Chairperson, and the Deputy Chairperson, the two key positions within the AU. This is the first AUC election that will include all 55 Member States of the AU, since Morocco rejoined in

2017. It will also be the first AUC election since the Assembly adopted the recommendations of the 2017 Kagame Report on AU institutional reforms (Kagame 2020). The election is therefore, something of a stress test for the AU reform process. The role to promote gender balance will be under particular scrutiny, not least as the way the process is unfolding may mean the gender rule has a decisive role in some of the key positions.

The AUC performs the AU's executive functions of coordination, facilitation, and liaison with member states, regional bodies, and increasingly external partners. Thus, it is critical that its leadership is fit for the task. Even more important is that the next AUC leaders have the full backing and support of the AU Assembly, made up of the Heads of State and Government of AU Member States: the leadership and legitimacy of key states and champions helps determine which agendas are implemented and how (Byiers et al. 2019). This goes as much for internal institutional organisation, continental agendas, and interaction with Regional Economic Communities (RECs), as for presenting Common African Positions and establishing partnerships outside Africa (Miyandazi 2016). The elections will therefore also have implications for the AU-EU partnership (Byiers 2020) as well as new external partnerships with countries such as the United States of America, China, Turkey, India and Japan (Madueke 2020).

The AU Assembly elects the AUC Chairperson for a four-year term, renewable once (AU 2020a). The last election, held in January 2017 appointed H.E. Dr Moussa Mahamat Faki¹ from Chad as the new Chairperson of the AUC, and H.E. Mr Thomas Kwesi Quartey from Ghana as the deputy.² 2021 will be the fourth year of their first terms, thus requiring fresh elections for these positions and those of the six commissioners who ensure the smooth functioning of the AUC.

This paper discusses how the AU's institutional management reforms will affect the upcoming elections, especially in meeting the key principle requirement of gender parity, and what the new leadership may mean for EU/AU relations. In doing so,

the paper underscores the importance of the new AU commission leadership to be elected in 2021 in shaping and implementing Africa's continental policy priorities for the next four years.

From institutional reforms to transparent elections

In 2016, African leaders agreed on the Institutional Reform of the AU as an urgent process to, among other things, enable the AU to better steer the continent towards achieving Africa's Agenda 2063 (AUC 2015). His Excellency Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda was mandated to establish a pan-African advisory committee of nine experts to assist him in the process.³ They reviewed and submitted proposals for a system of governance for the AU and released a report in 2017, endorsed by member states. Amongst other things, they recommended reforming the structure of the Commission to be leaner and more efficient, and revising the AUC election processes (Kagame 2020). In particular they recommended changes to the selection process for Commission leadership (Kagame 2017). This included making recruitment of the Deputy Chairperson and Commissioners more competitive, taking account of gender and regional diversity, enhancing the managerial responsibilities of the AUC Chairperson and reviewing the structure and staffing needs of the AUC.

Various recommendations have already been implemented. One of these is to establish clearer terms of selection for each position in the AUC, guided by five key principles. These are (AU 2018):

1. equitable regional representation and gender parity;
2. predictable inter and intra-regional rotation;
3. attracting and retaining Africa's top talent;
4. accountable and effective leadership and management; and transparent and
5. merit-based selection.

To follow-up on this decision, a team of ten recruitment experts was appointed from the five AU

geographical regions (North, South, West, East and Central) to support the AUC in developing and revamping its recruitment system (AU 2019). The AU assembly also established a Panel of Eminent Africans, including one per AU geographical region (AU 2018). The panel developed the profiles and competency requirements for the Commissioners and prepared the shortlist for each position based on the approved criteria (AU 2020b). An Administrative Reform Roadmap has also been established to make the recruitment of AUC staff more efficient and transparent (AU 2018a). Though according to the AUC Statutes the list of candidates for the two top posts and Commissioners are circulated to the Member States at least three months before the election (AU 2016), this was extended to ten months in 2018, as part of the above reform process. Amendments AU Articles of Statutes of the Commission are expected to reflect this (AU 2018).

Election is by secret ballot with the winner requiring a two-thirds majority of votes from Member States eligible to vote.⁴ If no candidate achieves a majority, according to the AUC Statutes (AU 2002), the Chairperson should, in consultation with the Chairperson of the Executive Council, appoint one of the Commissioners to act until a new Commissioner has been appointed in accordance with the Rules. However, past experience suggests the sitting commissioner stays in post and elections are suspended until the next session of the Executive Council and a new list of candidates is proposed. A new round of voting would then take place at the next AU Summit, held once a year with extraordinary sessions as thought necessary. This has happened in the past when H.E Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma of South Africa was chairperson.

The 2021 AUC elections: a second-term for H.E. Dr Moussa Mahamat Faki?

At the end of August and early September 2020, countries and regions nominated candidates for the top AUC posts. From that list, current chair H.E. Dr Moussa Faki Mahamat seems set to be re-elected: in fact, he is the *only* candidate that has been nominated for the position. Nonetheless, the former AU Ambassador to the United States, H.E. Dr Arikana

Chihombori Quao, from Zimbabwe reportedly filed her nomination papers for the position of chairperson (DNT 2020) but did not receive endorsement from the Republic of Zimbabwe, which endorsed H.E. Dr Faki instead. The president of Ghana also nominated former ECOWAS president, H.E. Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas, from Ghana for the position but he withdrew his nomination just 48 hours later (Amandla 2020). It is not clear why, though some suggest behind the scenes bargaining, potentially over representation in other bodies.

That said, H.E. Dr Faki's re-election is not automatic. Already the election in 2017 was marked by some criticism. Aside from being nominated at the last minute, some perceived him to be too close to France and subject to outside influence. Nonetheless, he won the hotly contested elections, with some crediting this to having an upper hand over the other candidates when it came to selling himself and his vision for the AU (Mohamed 2017), having already held key continental positions, including chair of the Peace and Security Council and of the AU's Executive Council.⁵

As in the last election, a public broadcast debate is anticipated in which H.E. Dr Faki must present his vision and ideas on the continued implementation of the AU's Agenda 2063 and its flagship projects to gain votes (AU 2020c). He will also be expected to make a formal presentation to the AU Assembly outlining his vision and proposed priorities for his term in office prior to being elected. However, a pan-African civil society organisation has called for the AU chairperson to extend the nomination deadline by two months and postpone elections to April 2021, to give more candidates the opportunity to enter the race for the Chairperson's position and allow for a democratic process with more than just one unopposed candidate. (DNT 2020). They suggest that the special circumstance of the current COVID-19 pandemic may have prohibited candidates from meeting the deadline.

Building on past performance?

H.E. Dr Faki is generally commended for doing a good job leading and coordinating a quick continental response to COVID-19 in collaboration with the Africa

Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) and the Bureau of the Assembly of the African Union Heads of State and Government (Medinilla et al. 2020). He has been vocal in the support for collective continental action to address COVID-19, including through the Joint Continental COVID-19 Strategy; the AU COVID-19 Response Fund; and the AU's Medical Supplies Pool Platform which is essential in bolstering the capacity of the Africa CDC (Mahmat 2020). H.E. Dr Faki also supports the bilateral and multilateral negotiations being carried out by the AU Special Envoys appointed to mobilise international economic support for the continental fight against COVID-19 (AU 2020d). Further, he has pushed forward partnerships, such as that with the EU (Miyandazi 2020). He has also been vocal on peace and security issues including the condemnation of terrorism, steered the Nairobi Extraordinary Summit on the fight against Terrorism and overseen 2020 as the thematic year for, 'Silencing the guns: creating conducive conditions for Africa's development' by seeking African solutions to the peace and security challenges the continent faces (Apiko 2020).

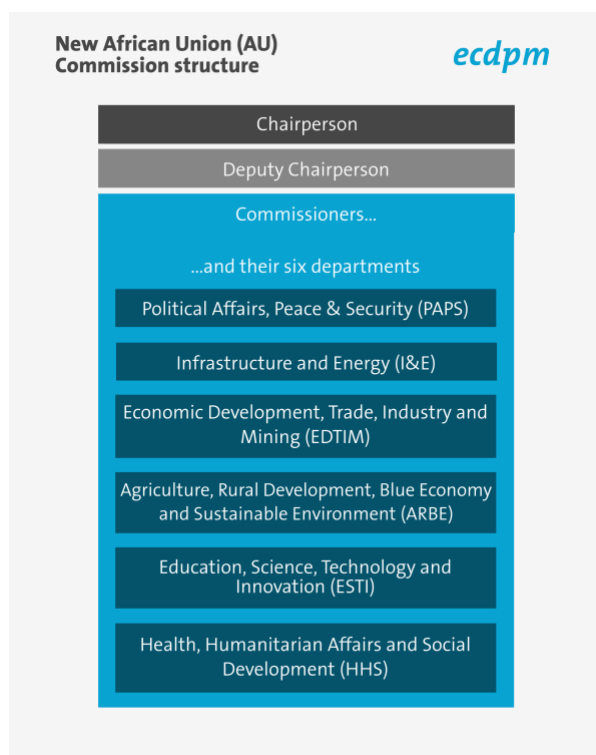
Nonetheless, his first term has not been smooth. The Commission has had several management challenges. For example, the recruitment, selection, and appointment processes for key positions within the AUC, such as the Commissioners and staff members, prior to the rigorous selection now in place, were seen as being highly politicised and neither transparent nor based on merit, with allegations of cronyism (Allison 2020). Owing to this, the AUC is still perceived by some as ineffective, lacking accountability, and therefore lacking the confidence of most Member States and AU citizens.

Perhaps more importantly, the new election rules call for gender balance between the AUC Chairperson and Deputy level, and also state that the AUC Chairperson and Deputy shall not be from the same region. Given that South Africa has nominated two male candidates for deputy Chairperson, some see this as an attempt to indirectly block H.E. Dr Faki's re-election due to the AUC's own rules on gender balance (Du Plessis 2020). It is therefore important to look further into the gender angle of the election process.

Gender equality gains or losses in the list of admissible candidates per portfolio

The lists of nominees for each of the AUC portfolios was released on 8 September 2020. The new structure of the AUC is to be composed of eight members as

follows: Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and six Commissioners (AU 2020e). This is the first AUC election since the AU's reform process started in 2017. As such, the former eight Commissioners have been reduced to six, with the merger of the roles of Commissioner for Peace and Security with Political Affairs, and of Commissioner for Economic Development with Trade and Industry.



PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Mauritius was selected as an independent African advisor to the Panel of Eminent Africans, to oversee the pre-selection of the senior leadership positions of the AUC after an open call for bids from firms, in early 2020.⁶ They jointly conducted their assessment and shortlisted candidates. On October 7 2020 the ranked pool of pre-qualified candidates for the election of

Commissioners for the AUC was conveyed to the AU's permanent missions (AU document on file with the authors 01). From this pool, as per the new rules, the six AU Commissioners will be elected and appointed by the Executive Council (AU 2018).

Although the AUC rules mandate gender parity among the elected candidates, women comprise only 29% of the nominations list. This will have implications for the selection process, or whether the AU can enforce its own rule. The AU's vision of gender parity is enshrined in Agenda 2063, specifically Aspiration 6, which calls for *"An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children."* This is also in line with other gender instruments such as; the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), the 2009 Gender Policy, the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa; and the AU's Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) Strategy, to ensure the inclusion of women in Africa's development agenda (AU 2020f). Below is a detailed discussion of gender parity in the nomination of the six Commissioner positions.

Candidates for the position of Chairperson

H.E. Dr Faki is currently the only candidate for the position of AUC Chairperson. That means that to reflect the new rules on achieving gender balance, if a male is deputy then new elections will have to be called and female candidates nominated for the post of AUC chair, or the AU would risk overruling its own gender balance rules. That would mean that for the 2021 elections, H.E. Dr Faki may yet need to compete for the post.

Since 2002–03, when the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) became the AU, the institution has had one interim and four Chairpersons, among whom one has been a woman: H.E. Dr Nkosazana Clarice Dlamini Zuma from South Africa from July 2012 to January 2017. H.E. Dr Zuma's appointment was lauded as a major achievement from a gender perspective but also due to her spearheading the adoption of Agenda 2063 as Africa's blueprint and master plan for sustainable

development and economic growth of the continent, making her the “mother of Agenda 2063” (NEPAD 2020).

Candidates for the position of Deputy Chairperson

In the list of admissible candidates shared by the AUC, five out of the eight candidates nominated for Deputy Chair position are women (AU document on file with the authors 02). These include: Hasna Barkat Daoud, a Djiboutian lawyer and former government minister; Professor Pamela Kasbiiti Mbabazi, a university professor from Uganda; Dr. Monique Nsanzabaganwa from Rwanda who is the deputy governor of the national bank of Rwanda; Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, a Ghanaian diplomat; and Fatoumata C.M. Jallow-Tambajang, the former vice president of the Gambia.

This shows a strong move towards having a gender balance at the AUC chair and Deputy positions and is in line with the recommendation of achieving gender parity as outlined in the continental Agenda 2063. Regionally, only the north and central regions are not represented among the nominees. The reason is likely as H.E. Dr Faki is from Chad in the north-central region of Africa, and if a female candidate is voted to deputy he will retain his position. That said, as mentioned above, if South Africa’s nomination of two male candidates were to succeed, this would implicitly block H.E. Dr Faki’s automatic re-election (Du Plessis 2020).

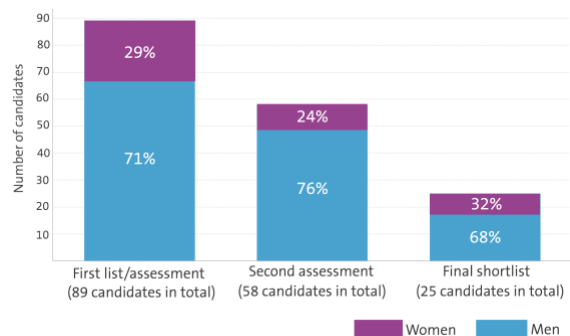
To date, no woman has held the position of Deputy AUC Chairperson and it is hoped that with the new rules mandating a gender balance, the 2021 elections will alter this precedent.

Candidates for the six Commissioners

The rules from 2018 stipulate that the six Commissioner posts be equally distributed by gender across the three regions that are not represented at Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson level (AU 2018). The regions with candidates elected to the position of the Chairperson or the Deputy Chairperson are therefore ineligible for consideration for the six Commissioner posts.

Gender parity in the pre-qualified candidates for the election of AU commissioners

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A tally of the nominated candidates from the AU member states that made submissions shows a majority are male candidates for each of the six commissioner positions. Out of the eighty-nine candidates submitted by member states per geographical region, in September 2020, only twenty-six were women (AU document on file with the authors 03). Following the first-round assessment by the Panel of Eminent Persons and consultants, fifty-eight candidates moved on to the next stage, including fourteen women. After the second round of assessments comprising, competency- based interviews, a simulation group exercise and psychometric assessments, twenty-five candidates made it to the short-list (AU document on file with the authors 01). This included only eight women.

The Panel then developed a ranking method with a pass mark of 70% and classified candidates accordingly (Ibidem).

Political Affairs, Peace & Security (PAPS)

Three women out of fifteen candidates were nominated for this position which merges the political affairs and peace and security departments of the AUC. They are: Maria Mauela dos Santos Lucas from Mozambique; Liberata Rutageruka Mulamula from Tanzania and the incumbent H.E. Minate Samate from Burkina Faso who is seeking re-election. Regionally, only the central region did not nominate a candidate for this portfolio.

Prior to the mergers, the Commissioner for Political Affairs position was filled by female candidates since 2003. In contrast, the Commissioner for Peace and Security position has always been a male candidate since 2003. The term of the current Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smaïl Chergui from Algeria is ending after two terms since 2013. This position has been dominated by Algeria in the past.

Within the AUC structure, peace and security is a big docket, taking up a large proportion of the AU budget. Now with the merger of the two departments, the election for this post will depend on which candidate can balance the two portfolios: though interrelated, the new post comprises a vast workstream incorporating the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the African Governance Architecture (AGA). The logic for the merger includes the push for more synergy in the AU's focus on early warning and prevention of conflicts which encompass elements of governance and peace and security as seen in election-related violence around the continent. However, there is some skepticism on the merger, with concerns that peace and security issues will dominate the agenda, leaving little space for the AU's governance, human rights and justice issues. In fact, the merger reverts back to the structure under the OAU, when these issues were jointly dealt with.

Some of Africa's largest economies, including Morocco, Nigeria and South Africa all proposed candidates for PAPS nomination in September. The final shortlist comprises two women and two men, showing gender parity in the final nominations. Incumbent H.E. Minate Samate from Burkina Faso and Liberata Rutageruka Mulamula from Tanzania are the shortlisted two female candidates. However, the candidate with the highest score for this portfolio is H.E. Ambassador Bankole Adegboyega Adeoye from Nigeria, a seasoned diplomat who has served as the Permanent Representative to the AU and UNECA for the Federal Republic of Nigeria.⁷ If a male candidate is elected for this post, this may work against the gender parity ambition by continuing the AU's tradition of peace and security portfolios being dominated by male officials.

Economic Development, Trade, Industry and Mining (EDTIM)

Under the reform process, this position will also cover what were two commission departments; economic affairs and trade and industry. Only three out of the sixteen nominated candidates were women. Including Jacqueline Nyibol Benjamin Ajongo from South Sudan, Nezha Hayat from Morocco, and Malado Kaba from Guinea. Regionally, only the central region did not nominate a candidate for this portfolio, although they nominated candidates for others. For this position, H.E. Victor Harison, from Madagascar, the current AUC Commissioner for Economic Affairs, and H.E. Albert M. Muchanga from Zambia, the current for Trade and Industry, are both contending.

Prior to the merger of these departments, the Commissioner for Economic Affairs post has been filled by male officials since 2003. In contrast between 2003-2016, the position of Commissioner of Trade and Industry was filled by female commissioners, with Muchanga being the first male commissioner elected to this post in 2017.

Although both incumbent commissioners Harison and Muchanga are up for re-election, from the pre-qualified candidates, only Muchanga achieved the score required for the shortlist. As the AU's Commissioner for Trade and Industry, Muchanga has spearheaded the organisation's efforts in driving the negotiations, conclusion and ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) process (African Business 2020). This might increase his chances for re-election to ensure continuity in the implementation of this AU Flagship programme which will be the largest free trade area by membership established under the World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, bringing together 55 African Member States with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) estimated at more than US \$ 3.4 trillion and population of 1.3 billion people. Even so, Muchanga was ranked second behind Dr David Fashole Luke from Sierra Leone, also a trade policy expert and director at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) who currently coordinates the African Trade Policy Centre.⁸

To advance gender parity at top AU institutional positions, as forwarded by the AU's Gender Parity Project⁹, the reasoning would have been to have a female in this position to complement the current first Secretary-General of the AfCFTA Secretariat in Ghana, Mr. Wamkele Mene from South Africa. The AU under the leadership of President Cyril Ramaphosa has declared 2020-2030, the Decade of Women Economic and Financial Inclusion. Having female leadership in this key AUC merged department would send a strong signal of its commitment to this vision and help underline the important role of women in trade, whether at the small-scale informal level or more formal activity. However, after assessment, no female candidate has been shortlisted amongst the candidates in the final list for this portfolio.

Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment (ARBE)

Four out of the fourteen Member States' nominated candidates for Commissioner of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment were women. Including Dr Suad Mustafa Elhag Musa from Sudan; Yanira Mseka Ntupanyama from Malawi; H.E. Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko, from Angola, who is up for re-election¹⁰ and Tahany Mostafa Youssef Selit from Egypt. Regionally, only the central region did not nominate a candidate for this portfolio.

After assessment, the number of candidates who were shortlisted to progress for interviews was reduced to eight, two women and six men. After interviews, in the final rank of shortlisted pre-qualified candidates, only one is a woman and three are men.

This position has typically been held by female commissioners since 2003. As the only woman and highest ranked in the final short-list, there is a likelihood of Sacko's successful re-election. In Sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture accounts for approximately 17.23% of the continent's GDP (AfDB 2020). Women contribute 60-80% of the labour used in African agriculture (Palacios Lopez et al. 2016). As a leading African Agronomist, Sacko has strongly advocated for gender empowerment and strengthening the role of small farmers in Africa (WBLive 2020).

Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (ESTI)

Five out of the seventeen nominated candidates for this position were women. These included Latifa El Abida from Moroccan; Odile Attanasso from Benin; Dr. Rita Bissoonauth from Mauritius; Hajer Gueldich from Tunisia; and Hirut Woldemariam from Ethiopia. All five regions were represented among the nominees. In the final list of candidates, two female and three male candidates remain. The two candidates are, Hirut Woldemariam and Dr. Rita Bissoonauth. Still, the highest ranked candidate for this position is male, Dr Molapo Qhobela from South Africa.

All the commissioners prior to 2017 under this portfolio were male. However, H.E. Professor Sarah Mbi Enow Anyang Agbor, from Cameroon was elected as the first female commissioner under this post in July 2017. Within Africa, there has been greater recognition for the inclusion and participation of girls and women in education, specifically science, math, engineering and technology (STEM) education, skills and training. Having a female representative at the helm could be a positive message being sent by the AUC towards commitment to achievement of Aspiration 1 of Agenda 2063, which calls for "a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development" (AU 2020g). Requiring that Africa makes significant investments in education with the aim of developing human and social capital through an education and skills revolution emphasising innovation, science and technology (Ibidem).

Additionally, the AU has developed a number of strategy documents covered under this portfolio to promote its work in the area of education and Science Technology and Innovation (STI) development in the continent. Such documents, including, the AU Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA), the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Continental Strategy and the establishment of the Pan-African University (PAU) among others, emphasise the important role of gender and inclusivity at all levels of education. This is more pertinent with the onset of the fourth Industrial revolution and the

need to close the digital gender divide to ensure women benefit from digitalisation.

Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development (HHS)

Out of the eighteen candidates proposed by AU Member States for this position, eight were women, the most number of women nominated among the six Commissioner posts. The nominated women were: Amal Mohamed Ibrahim El-Hengari from Libya; Hala Yassin Elkarib from Sudan; Sahar Fawzy Gad El Sonbaty from Egypt; Flore Gangbo from Benin; Berthe Zinga Ilunga from the Democratic Republic of Congo; Hadiza Mustapha from Nigeria; Wapula Nelly Raditloane from Botswana; and Aicha Vall Verges from Mauritania. All regions were represented among the candidates nominated. The final list of short-listed candidates has one woman and two men. The only female candidate to go through is Aicha Vall Verges. Past commissioners under this post have consisted of three women and one man, H.E. Mustapha Sidiki Kaloko from Sierra Leone in 2012. The highest ranked candidate after the assessment is a male candidate, Justin N'Guessan Koffi from Côte d'Ivoire.

The selected commissioner for this portfolio is expected to drive the formulation and implementation of health, humanitarian affairs and social development policies, programmes and strategies in line with the aspirations of Agenda 2063, the associated medium-term plans and other key continental legal and policy frameworks.¹¹ Further, lead engagement with the AU Member States and strategic partners in the delivery of the portfolio's continental priorities. This is an important portfolio given its mandate covering health, an important sector for Africa as it builds back better in the COVID-19 recovery. In addition, this portfolio covers labour, employment, migration, drug control, crime prevention, sport and cultural agenda.

Infrastructure and Energy (I&E)

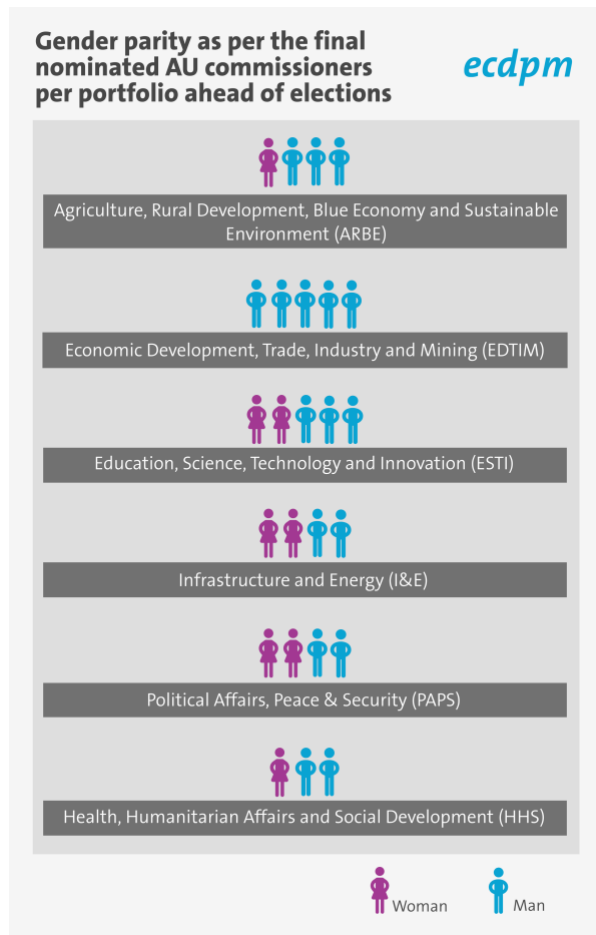
The nominated candidates here comprised three women out of a total of nine candidates. They were: H.E. Amani Abou-Zeid from Egypt, up for re-election; Bah Kadiatou Balde from Guinea; and Coletha Uniweza Ruhamy from Rwanda. This post has in the past AUCs been filled by three women and one man,

H.E. Bernard Zoba from Congo in 2003. Two of the three women, including the incumbent Abou-Zeid made it to the final shortlist, which has a total of two women and two men showing gender parity in the final nominations. Abou-Zeid, an electrical engineer, has a prestigious career in infrastructure and energy. Under her tenure the AU launched the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), one of the flagship programmes of the AU. Following the assessment, the highest ranked candidate was Engineer Amos Marawa from Zimbabwe.

Infrastructure and energy are key portfolios in the AU. For example, Aspiration 2 of Agenda 2063, places importance on the need for Africa to develop world class infrastructure that improve both physical and digital connectivity linking the continent by rail, road, sea and air and through Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as well as postal services (AU 2020h). The AU through continental frameworks such as the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) provides a common framework for African stakeholders to build the infrastructure necessary for more integrated transport, energy, ICT and trans-boundary water networks to boost trade, spark growth and create jobs (Ibidem). It is important to address the gender gaps within the African energy sector and explore opportunities and strategies to integrate and empower women within the energy sector value chain (AU 2020i). This portfolio also includes tourism, which is a key sector for economic and socio-development in most African countries. The tourism sector has been heavily impacted by COVID-19 as people's economic lives are halted and their freedom of movement curtailed (Adam 2020). As a majority of women are employed in the tourism sector, countries should take gender considerations into account, especially in their economic recovery plans towards building back better post- COVID-19, to ensure benefits are extended to women.

Overall, as Figure below shows, the results across commissioner positions retain a gender disparity in the nominations of candidates for AUC top positions from Member States, limiting the possibilities when it comes to finally allocating positions. Only two of the

portfolios have an equal number of women and men in the shortlist of candidates: PAPS and I&E, while in ESTI there are three men and two women in the shortlist of candidates.



necessitating a new process. Given the importance being attached to gender at the AU level, and assuming that H.E. Dr Faki has the support of member states, the Deputy position will therefore have to be a woman.

For the commissioner positions, in spite of the good intentions that have played through the election system up to now, in the final shortlist some portfolios have either one woman, such as in the agriculture (ARBE) and health (HHS) roles, or *none*, as in the case of the trade and economic role (EDTIM), where all the shortlisted candidates are male.

Nomination is a fundamental process to ensuring that the best talent in Africa is pooled towards the AU leadership. However, this requires Member States to actively nominate both men and women for these positions to increase the chances of achieving gender parity in the final candidates shortlisted. Ultimately the final AUC composition of the six commissioners will likely achieve gender parity as seen in the past AUCs. Nevertheless, in order to realise the broader vision for gender parity in the Agenda 2063 and the key AU gender instruments, nominations of candidates from the AU Member States should reflect this gender balance to avoid a situation where few/no women are shortlisted for key AUC portfolios.

Conclusion

As the discussion shows, the upcoming AUC elections will really put the new electoral rules to a test. While they reflect laudable ambitions of ensuring regional and gender representation in key posts, accompanied by a clear and transparent process, they also create a puzzle that must be solved.

That is a practical issue, but also highly political, with important consequences within the continent, and for the AU's external partners. With only one candidate for the Chair position, election of a male to the deputy position risks either breaking the gender parity rule, or

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- ² About [H.E. Quartey Thomas Kwesi](#).
- ³ [AU Reforms Advisory Committee](#).
- ⁴ Under the AU's new sanction regimes, intermediate sanctions for Member States in financial arrears for one year include the sanctions listed in Article 23(1) of the Constitutive Act, including denial of the right to vote or to present candidates for any post or position within the Union. See African Union Decision on the New African Union Sanctions Regime for the Non-Payment of Contributions (AU 2018).
- ⁵ About: [H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat](#).
- ⁶ [Recruitment of an Independent African Consultancy Firm to Assist the Panel of Eminent Africans in the Pre-Selection of the Senior Leadership Positions of the African Union Commission](#). February 06, 2020 to March 13, 2020. Bid number: AUC/BCP/C/003.
- ⁷ About [H.E. Bankole Adeoye](#).
- ⁸ About [Dr David Luke](#).
- ⁹ The AU Gender Parity Project aims to achieve gender equality in the institutions and organs of the AU i.e a 50/50 representation of women and men's representation and also to have 35% of youth (between 15 and 35 years) in the staff component of the African Union by 2025. For more information see ["Ten quick facts about the African Union Gender Parity Project 2025"](#).
- ¹⁰ About [H.E. Ambassador Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko](#).
- ¹¹ [About the Commissioner, Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development \(HHS\)](#).

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In addition to structural support by ECDPM’s institutional partners: The Netherlands, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark and Austria, this publication mainly benefits from funding of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

ISSN1571-7577