

Understanding the Eastern Africa Standby Force

A regional mechanism without a political home

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This background paper is part of a series on the Political Economy Dynamics of Regional Organisations (PEDRO). It was prepared in March 2017. 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, the studies analyse key policy areas of seventeen regional organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa. In doing so they address three broad questions: What is the political traction of the organisations around different policy areas? What are the key member state interests in the regional agenda? What are the areas with most future traction for regional organisations to promote cooperation and integration around specific areas? The studies aim to advance thinking on how regional policies play out in practice, and ways to promote politically feasible and adaptive approaches to regional cooperation and integration. Further information can be found at www.ecdpm.org/pedro.

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List of Acronyms

AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
APF	African Peace Facility
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
ASF	African Standby Force
AU	African Union
BMZ	General Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CNDD-FDD	National Council for the Defense of Democracy - Forces for the Defense of Democracy
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
COMIFAC	Central African Forest Commission
CONOPS	Concept of Operations
EAC	East African Community
EACDS	Eastern African Chiefs of Defence staff
EASBRICOM	Eastern African Brigade coordination mechanism
EASBRIG	Eastern African Brigade
EASF	Eastern Africa Standby Force
EASFCOM	East African Standby Force Coordination Mechanism
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EPA	European Partnership Agreement
FOC	Full operational capability
FoE	Friends of EASF
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HQ	Headquarters
ICGLR	International Conference on the Great Lakes Region
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IOC	Initial Operational Capability
LAPSSET	Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport Corridor
LOGBASE	Logistics Base
MAPROBU	African Prevention and Protection Mission in Burundi
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NACS	Nordic Advisory and Coordination Staff
NBI	Nile Basin Initiative
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
PEDRO	Political economy dynamics of regional organisations in Africa
PLANELM	Secretariat and Planning Element
POM	Policy Organs Meetings
PSC	Peace and Security Council
REC	Regional Economic Community
RM	Regional Mechanism
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America

1. Introduction

This report, based on desk-based review of literature and interviews in Addis Ababa and Nairobi, presents a political economy analysis of regional cooperation in the field of peace and security in Eastern Africa under the Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF). The EASF was established in 2007 and reached full operational capability (FOC) in December 2015, a year before schedule. The EASF is one of the five regional standby brigades as part of the African Standby Force and has a broad-ranging membership in terms of geographic location. The EASF includes a number of larger member states (Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda), a number of coastal countries in the Horn of Africa (Djibouti, Somalia and Kenya), two small landlocked Central African states (Rwanda and Burundi) and two island states (Seychelles and the Comoros)

The EASF is the product of several factors that have defined regional integration in the field of peace and security in Eastern Africa (and the Horn of Africa). These include long-standing and continuing tensions between countries of the region and the threats to peace and security, including internal wars, environmental degradation, terrorism and unconstitutional changes of government. The EASF also operates within a complex constellation of various regional organisations, with overlapping memberships and commitments by countries in the region. Certain other regional organisations in the region have a more established role in political aspects of conflict prevention and management, notably the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The role of EASF stretches into countries that are members of the East African Community (EAC) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR). As such, it is situated in between political and security related dynamics in the regions of the Horn of Africa, East Africa and Central Africa.

This reports aims to answer three questions: i) What is the political traction of the EASF and its mechanism to encourage the implementation of its mandate, and the current agenda and reforms to do so? ii) What are the interests of key EASF member states for addressing governance and peace and security challenges through EASF? and iii) Which are the specific areas of traction and most potential for the EASF in terms of peace and security?

The report is based on desk research of public domain material and consulted policy documents and management material of the EASF. The team also undertook a field mission to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Nairobi, Kenya, from 1-9 December 2016 and held telephone interviews with stakeholders from the region and international partners of the EASF. The list of interviewees is in the Annex.

2. The political traction of the Eastern Africa Standby Force

2.1. Historical foundations and organisational structure

Background

In 2003, the African Standby Force (ASF) was established, following the adoption of the *Policy Framework for the Establishment of the African Standby Force and Military Staff Committee*. This followed the adoption of the Peace and Security Council Protocol one year earlier during the first Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union. The PSC Protocol included provisions for the establishment of the various bodies that would support the PSC in its peace and security mandate, including the ASF. Eastern Africa is one of the five regions envisaged for the ASF.

Given the lack of an all-encompassing Regional Economic Community (REC)¹ a new regional organisation had to be established in order to coordinate the activities of the EASF. In 2007, the East African Standby Force Coordination Mechanism (EASFCOM) was established, with a Secretariat and Planning Element (PLANELM) based in Nairobi, Kenya, and a Logistics Base and Force Headquarters based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The history of the establishment and operationalisation of the EASF, and the EASFCOM, sheds a light on the competition between countries in the region.

Historical foundations of the Eastern Africa Standby Force

Initially, the Eastern African Chiefs of Defence Staff (EACDS) decided that the interim coordination roles for the operationalisation of the EASF (then still called Eastern Africa Standby Brigade, EASBRIG) would be handled by the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) (Bayeh, 2015). IGAD subsequently organised a number of meetings over the course of 2004. In September 2004, the Policy Framework for the establishment of the EASBRIG was approved by the EASF Council of Ministers, and subsequently approved by the first meeting of the Assembly of EASBRIG Heads of State and Government in April 2005, where IGAD's interim coordination role was confirmed (Besada (ed.), 2011). This meeting committed the then 13 EASBRIG member states² to the further establishment of the ASF. Lastly the Assembly adopted a Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of the EASBRIG and a budget (Besada (ed.), 2011).

At this juncture, the establishment of the EASBRIG encountered challenges. Firstly, a number of non-IGAD member states objected to the monopoly over the brigade by a number of (larger) states in the region (Bayeh, 2015). According to Bayeh (2014), IGAD was initially regarded as appropriate as a temporary convening mechanism until non-IGAD members, such as Rwanda, joined the EASBRIG. Secondly, the idea of further integrating the EASBRIG in IGAD structures was challenged by IGAD member states, notably Kenya, in objection to further dominance by Ethiopia (Jacobsen & Nordby, 2013). Other IGAD member states, such as Eritrea, refused to contribute until the coordination issue was solved, equally fearing a dominant Ethiopia (Besada (ed.), 2011). At the end of this dispute, it became apparent that IGAD did not have the required structures to give technical and political coordination to EASBRIG (EACDS, 2005). The EACDS established a Technical Committee of Experts to study the issue of coordination (Besada (ed.), 2011). But protests by IGAD member states increased over the next years, slowing down the establishment of the EASBRIG considerably. The issue was solved only following the intervention of Heads of State and Government (Cilliers, 2008) and in March 2007, the EASBRIG Council of Ministers approved the creation of a coordination mechanism (EASBRICOM) to assume coordination from IGAD. In 2010, the name EASBRIG was changed to East African Standby Force (EASF), to reportedly reflect the multidimensional nature of the envisaged regional force.

Organisational structure

Unlike the Western, Central and Southern regional standby forces, the EASF is not attached to a dedicated regional economic community (REC). Under the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) of the African Union, the EASF is labelled officially as a Regional Mechanism (RM). While the day to day coordination of the EASF is in the hands of the EASF Secretariat, the political management and guidance is provided through the so-called Policy Organs of the EASF organised at three levels. The highest level consists of the Assembly of the EASF Heads of State and Government

¹ This was also the case for North Africa, where the North African Regional Capacity was established to coordinate and oversee the establishment of the North African Standby Force.

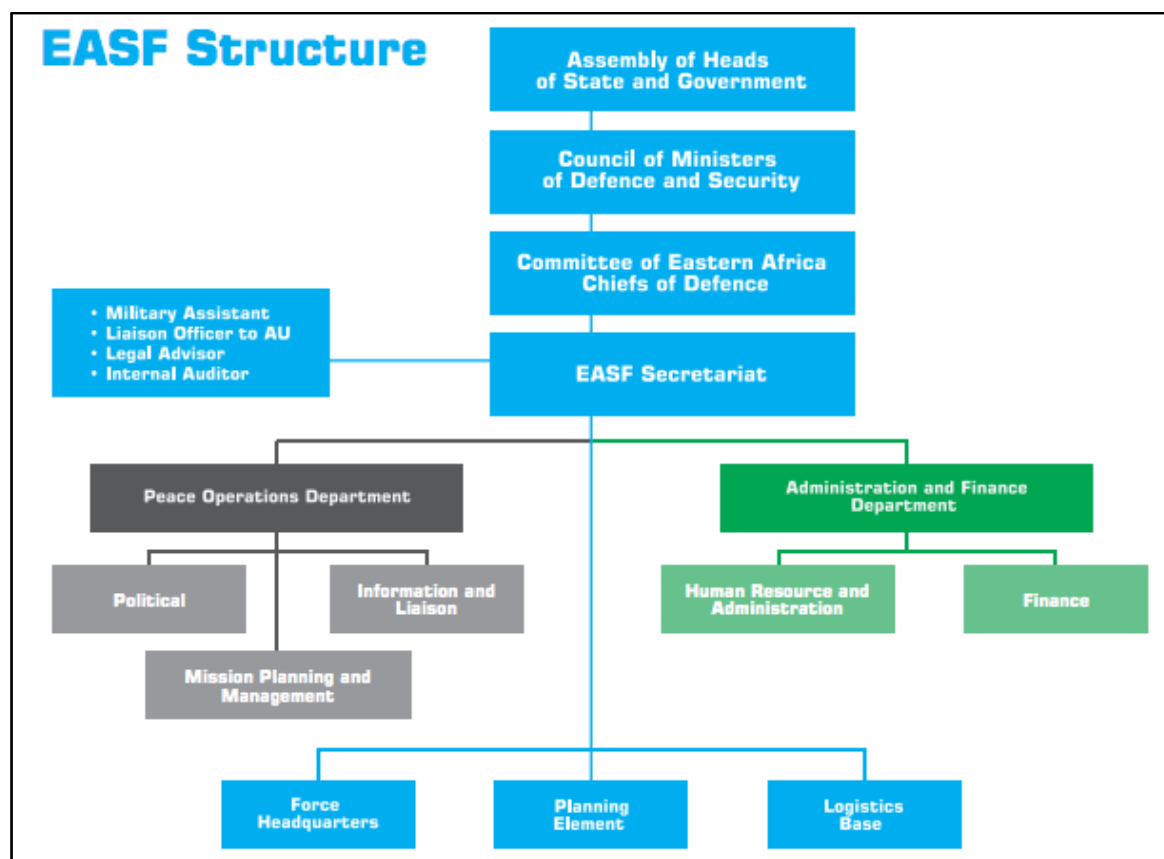
² Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Tanzania. While Eritrea signed the initial 2004 Memorandum of Understanding for the Establishment of the Eastern African Standby Brigade (EASBRIG), it is no longer a member. Eritrea suspended its engagement in the process due to hostile relations with some of the other countries, most notably Ethiopia. Tanzania, Madagascar and Mauritius chose to join the Southern region (Cilliers and Potgieter, 2010).

of the ten member states. Unlike the Council of Ministers, the Assembly does not meet regularly. In a case of emergency or when a mandate is sought to deploy the EASF (which has never happened to date), an EASF Assembly will be called. In 2016, there was one meeting of the Assembly, on the situation in Burundi³. Below the Assembly is the East Africa Council of Ministers of Defence and Security, supported in its work by the Committee of Eastern Africa Chiefs of Defence. The Council appoints the commander of EASF, while the Committee of Chiefs of Defense Staff has an advisory role to the Assembly and the Council. The Committee also directs and manages the Planning Element (PLANELM), the EASF Headquarters, and the Logistics Base (LOGBASE) (Bayeh, 2015). Similar to other regional organisations, the meetings of the Committee precede the meeting of the Council (and the Assembly respectively, in the case an Assembly is called to meet). Together, the work and meetings of the Assembly, the Council and the Committee are called the Policy Organs Meetings (POM).

The EASF is further composed of four main sets of structures (see organogram below), which are split over two locations, namely Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and Nairobi (Kenya). Firstly, the EASF Secretariat coordinates and supports all EASF activities, and is based in Nairobi, Kenya. As mentioned above, the Secretariat receives its political directives (and will not move without them) from the Policy Organs Meeting, primarily the Council of Ministers, which is supported by the Committee of Chiefs of Defense Staff. Some have noted that the Committee takes over some of the roles and functions of the Secretariat, which remains in charge of calling for meetings and organisation trainings. Thirdly and fourthly, the EASF has a logistical base (LOGBASE) and an EASF Headquarters (HQ) located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The LOGBASE serves as the base for sub-depots and for maintaining, storage and management of the logistical infrastructure of the EASF, such as the rapidly deployable and Forward Force Headquarter, recently purchased with the support of the United Kingdom and Denmark. The EASF HQ is composed of regional military and civilian staff on secondment from EASF Member States. It serves as a command headquarters for force preparation and operational command of the Standby Force. While this dual location of EASF structures is part of an understanding at the very outset of the establishment of the EASF between strong holders Ethiopia and Kenya, one interviewee noted that it makes sense given the position of Addis Ababa as a logistical hub. Lastly, the EASF's Planning Element (PLANELM) is located in Nairobi, Kenya, and serves as the full time planning headquarters for EASF within the framework of the African Standby Force (ASF).

³ [Communiqué](#) of the 4th Extra Ordinary Meeting of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Eastern Africa Region, 30 January 2016.

Figure 1: EASF structure



Source: EASF Annual Report 2015

2.2. Structural and institutional drivers and obstacles

Extending the Eastern arm of the African Standby Force

The establishment of the EASF in 2007 took place within the wider continental process of establishing the African Standby Force⁴. At the time there were no regional efforts to establish such a regional force across various regional organisations. Given the multitude of historical animosities and conflicts across the region and the heterogenous nature of the countries across East Africa, regional integration has been notably slow in East Africa (Hull, Skeppström and Sörensen, 2011). There was not one regional organisation able to establish a shared agenda around conflict prevention, management and resolution that involves all 14 states⁵. The envisaged regionalised structure of the

⁴ In October 1997, a group of military experts and observers from 45 African nations met in Harare, to draft peacekeeping proposals for consideration by the Second Meeting of the Chiefs of Defence Staff of the Central Organ of the OAU. Following these meetings, which produced over fifty concrete recommendations were approved for consideration and adoption by the political organs of the OAU. Importantly, there was agreement on the need for African efforts to strengthen UN capacity for peace operations by providing the bulk of a ready force package for utilisation by the UN, and for the OAU to be more assertive in placing African crises on the UN agenda. (Besada (ed.), 2011).

⁵ There is no fixed delineation of East Africa. Yet, usually, the following 14 states are considered to be part of East Africa: Burundi, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Somalia, Seychelles, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. Eastern Africa can also be divided into four, somewhat overlapping, sub-regions: The Horn of Africa (Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya and Uganda), East Africa (Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi); the Great Lakes region (Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya and Tanzania); and the Indian Ocean Islands (the Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and the Seychelles) (Francis, David J., 2006. *Uniting Africa: Building Regional Peace and Security Systems*. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, p. 216).

ASF around the five regions of Africa precipitated the EASF's establishment and directly shaped its original agenda. The Secretariat of IGAD was given initial responsibility to coordinate the activities around setting up the first meetings and for drafting some of the founding documents. The membership extended to Central Africa (including Burundi and Rwanda), with fears that Ethiopia would dominate the EASF when homed under IGAD. Furthermore, there were two island states (Comoros and Seychelles) that were no member of IGAD, so the latter was not seen to be the appropriate regional organisation to further lead the operationalisation of the EASF. Several interviewees noted that IGAD is (still) seen as dominated by Ethiopia. One interviewee, however, noted that IGAD is probably still the most viable option if there was ever a decision to integrate the EASF in a REC, as, should IGAD membership expand, it would make it less easy for Ethiopia to dominate an extended group of countries (Interview, December 2016).

Evolving regional peace and security context

Many of these initial external factors continue to be relevant today, while efforts for regional integration in East Africa, in other areas such as trade and customs, and thus outside the EASF agenda, have gained traction too. Member states of the EASF have through various other regional organisations such as COMESA and the EAC, invested in regional trade, infrastructure and transport corridors. In recent years, however, disagreements in the region have intensified and the relationship between some member states of the EASF have deteriorated in the other regional organisations of which they are member, notably the East African Community (EAC). Tanzania (not a member of the EASF) and Kenya, for example, disagree on the number of regional trade and transport route related issues. The decision by Tanzania not to sign the European Partnership Agreement (EPA) is part of a wider disagreement on who benefits most from regional economic integration.

In general, the current conflict context in Eastern Africa has deteriorated significantly in the past years in comparison to the years of the EASF establishment 2003-2007. This has affected efforts for regional integration, including infrastructure construction and regional trade. Since mid-2014, Lamu County has been subject to attacks by Al-Shabaab, which is obstructing the construction of the *Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor*⁶. Lamu's location will require high levels of maritime security in order to avoid oil cargo ships becoming victims of piracy attacks (PGI Intelligence, 2015). Increasing security concerns in Kenya, along with South Sudan's civil conflict, are further deterrents to most potential investors (Browne, 2014). At the same time, Kenya was the staunchest supporter of South Sudan joining the EAC in 2016, having heavily invested in the country and keen to offer Mombasa as the export basis for Chinese tapped oil in South Sudan. While the situation in Somalia has slightly improved, the country remains vulnerable to attacks by Al-Shabaab. The political situation in Ethiopia has deteriorated significantly since late 2015 and the political crisis in Burundi has put increased focus on the added value of existing conflict prevention and management structures in the region.

Overlapping memberships and multiple commitments

Countries in the region continue to balance various interests across the various regional organisations active in Eastern Africa. These include the EAC, IGAD, COMESA as well the ICGLR (as concerns the two Central African Member States of the EASF, Rwanda and Burundi). Multiple and overlapping membership is seen as beneficial by countries in the region as it gives them opportunities for forum-shopping, but has arguably not helped the EASF in carving out a dedicated space. Much of its new strategic plan contains new areas of work where other regional organisations have already

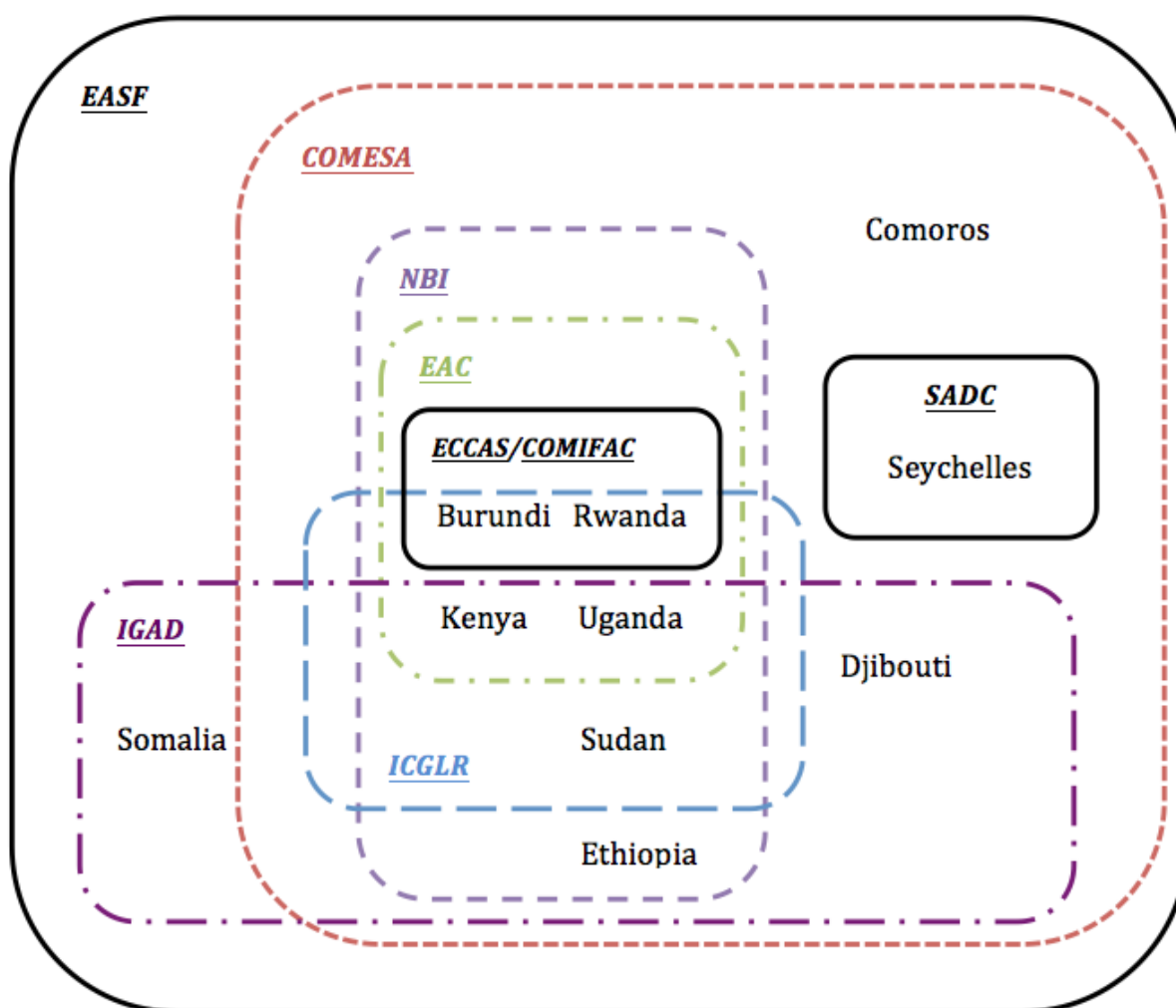
⁶ LAPSSET is a corridor infrastructure project, and the largest of its nature in Eastern Africa, intended to become Kenya's second largest transport corridor once the project has been completed. Among others, the project will entail the following: A port at Manda Bay, Lamu; a standard gauge railway line to Juba in South Sudan and Addis Ababa in Ethiopia; road network, oil pipelines (Southern Sudan and Ethiopia), an oil refinery at Bargoni, Kenya; three airports, and three resort cities.

established themselves, primarily IGAD and the African Union as regards conflict prevention, early warning and conflict mediation. This backdrop of overlapping memberships is also what is driving the EASF to formulate more direct linkages and exchanges with the other regional organisations.

This has seen little result so far, although several interviewees noted there seems to be a growing recognition at the level of the EASF Council of Ministers that avoiding duplication could be beneficial, and that joint efforts would benefit the various organisations. Indeed, the same participants of the Council of Ministers also meet each other in other configurations and platforms in the EAC, IGAD, as well as the AU Assembly and the AU Peace and Security Council. The EASF Secretariat was mandated in October 2016 by the Policy Organs Meeting to develop Memorandums of Understanding with the EAC, IGAD, COMESA and ICGLR. One interviewee from the Secretariat noted that prior to the mandate from the Policy Organs Meeting to develop these MOUs, it never really tried to work explicitly with other RO/RECs “because they didn’t have the political directive from above” (Interview, December 2016).

It is not clear how the relations between member states in other regional organisations have an influence on the EASF and its functioning. Kenya, Burundi and Rwanda are both part of the EASF and the EAC. As a result of deteriorated relations within the EAC, including between Kenya and Tanzania, between Rwanda and Burundi, and between Kenya and Rwanda respectively, implementation of the EAC agenda has slowed considerably. Based on the interviews conducted, it seems these deteriorated relations have not negatively impacted the functioning of the EASF.

Figure 2: Overlaps between the East African Standby Force (EASF) and other Regional Organisations.



Abbreviations:

COMESA – Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
 COMIFAC – Central African Forest Commission
 EAC – East African Community
 EASF - Eastern Africa Standby Force
 ECCAS – Economic Community of Central African States
 ICGLR – International Conference of the Great Lakes Region
 IGAD – Intergovernmental Authority on Development
 NBI – Nile Basin Initiative
 SADC – Southern African Development Community

Haphazard political guidance

The lack of a dedicated home continues to form a challenge for the commitment and relevance of the EASF. There have been previous attempts to explore the merging of the EAC and IGAD, including when the Foreign Ministers of IGAD and EAC countries held a meeting on the margins of the Extraordinary Summit of the African Union in October 2013. The meeting, hosted by the Chairperson of the Executive Council of the AU, the Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Tedros Adhanom, deliberated on a wide range of issues affecting the countries of the two regional blocs (Dersso, 2013). The fact that the EASF lacks a “political home” is a defining aspect of the EASF. As one interviewee noted, “the EASF is politically quiet”. This should not necessarily be seen as a weakness. According to one interviewee, the lack of political attention (and meddling) might have allowed the EASF to move significantly faster than other regions. At the same time, the lack of strong strategic guidance from the

regional Heads of State is felt as an impediment to further integration and progress by certain interviewees from the Secretariat. As one noted: “Ministers [of Defence and Foreign Affairs] move because they have support from Heads of State, but we can’t move without explicit political agreement” (Interview, December 2016).

2.3. Expanding agenda and implementation challenges

Widening the agenda, reluctantly

Much of the interviews for this report confirmed that there is a lack of a coherent strategy amongst member states of where the EASF should go. This confirms previous research by Hull, Skeppström and Sörensen (2011) who noted that there was “not yet a consensus amongst members on the future direction of the EASF endeavour”. However, discussions have been held at the level of the Secretariat (but, according to the information researched, not at the level of the higher organs of the EASF) which have made clear that there are attempts to broaden the agenda. These focused among others on the establishing an Early Warning System and first exchanges between IGAD, EAC and EASF staff in this regard have already taken place.

It is unclear yet if there is a broader consensus on whether the EASF should broaden its mandate and if so, in which direction. In 2011, Hull, Skeppström and Sörensen wrote that “The MOU on the EASF only mandates the organisation to prepare the EASF. It is important for partners to remember that broader ambitions may only represent the aspirations of certain member states and EASF elements. [...] it is only the narrower interpretation of EASFCOM’s mandate that has been agreed upon by the EASF member states, as well as the AU” (Hull, Skeppström and Sörensen, 2011).

Despite a new MOU⁷, which was signed by all 10 Member States of the EASF in June 2014⁸, it seems that the AU continues to see the EASF through a more narrow lens. According to the new Agreement, the EASF is “a regional mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution in the Eastern African Region”⁹. According to the Agreement, the objective of the EASF is to “carry out in a timely manner the functions of maintenance of peace, security and stability, as authorised by the EASF Assembly and Mandated by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union”¹⁰. By and large however, the Secretariat of the EASF feels frustrated by the lack of attention it has received from the AU and other RECs (notably IGAD), especially during the recent crisis in Burundi and during discussions on the regional protection force in South Sudan. Interviewees from the Secretariat conveyed that to be fully operational and relevant, the EASF and its Secretariat should be involved much earlier in early warning, crisis mediation and planning for deployment, which would be technically in line with the 2014 Agreement. From the perspective of the AU, the EASF is (merely) seen as a facility, and a (potential) channel to request troops or resources from the EASF. However, these types of requests have not happened to date, and exchanges between the EASF and the AU remain haphazard and limited (Interviews, December 2016).

Partly as a result of feeling ‘isolated’ and underused by the AU, the Secretariat has nevertheless made attempts to broaden its agenda beyond the narrower interpretation of its role. This seems to concur with earlier findings from Hull, Skeppström and Sörensen (2011) that, when attempts are

⁷ Officially called Agreement on the Establishment of the Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF).

⁸ In 2014, a new Memorandum of Understanding between the ten Member States replaced the first memorandum, which was signed in 2004. The initial legal basis of the EASF was seen as relatively weak (Tlalka, 2013). While it offered member states the ability to join the regional mechanism without joining any REC, it also meant that opting out of the EASF was less problematic and has minor implications (Tlalka, 2013). The current MOU has been ratified by six member states’ parliaments so far, with full ratification expected by June 2017.

⁹ Agreement on the Establishment of the Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF), June 2014.

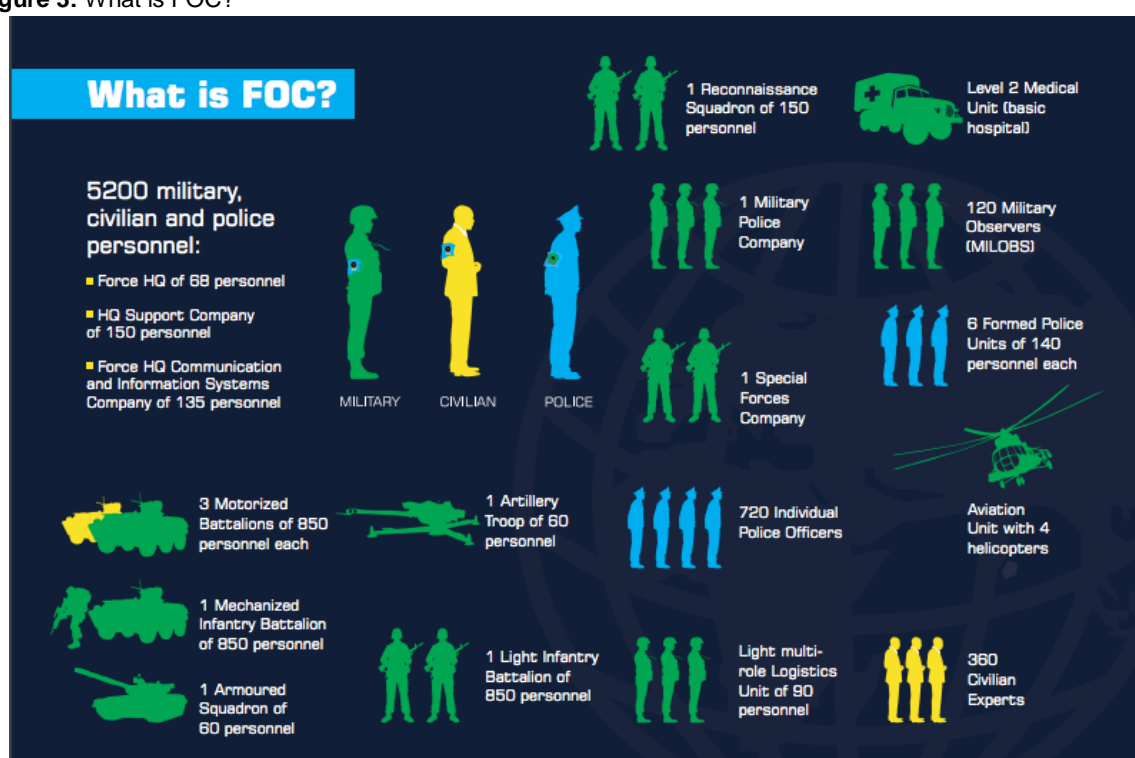
¹⁰ Ibid.

made to broaden activities, these are driven by certain elements in the EASF or by specific Member States, but not by the EASF as a whole. For example, the EASF has undertaken election observations in the Comoros and has sent military experts to Somalia as part of AMISOM.

Fully operational, but not fully appreciated

The lack of appreciation of the EASF and its achievements so far links back to the issues of a broader or more narrow interpretation of the EASF agenda. Most interviewees agreed that the EASF had come a long way since its establishment and recognised the organisation is still fairly young. As mentioned above, the EASF attained Initial Operational Capability (IOC) in 2010 and Full Operational Capability (FOC) in 2015 (see picture below), well before other regions. When the EASF attained its FOC, it provided a detailed report and presented its achievement to the African Union. This can be seen as part of the EASF's (and mainly the Secretariat's) ongoing efforts to gain more explicit recognition from the AU Commission.

Figure 3: What is FOC?



Source: EASF Annual Report 2015

Further, according to interviewees, the Council of Ministers' meetings have allowed for a degree of exchange on shared peace and security challenges between rather different countries, in terms of interest, as well as between different ranks of the military hierarchy between these countries. This was not the case before the establishment of the EASF and is widely seen as one of the EASF less tangible but nevertheless very positive achievements. One interviewee of the African Union noted that the EASF had created a platform for coordination, exchange and harmonisation of training. However, it was also pointed out that the EASF Member States engage on the basis of their national interest in other regional organisations and at the level of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the AU, suggesting that the EASF was perhaps not so unique a platform.

Yet, the EASF Secretariat feels insufficiently consulted by the African Union, and some members of the EASF Secretariat have also lamented the lack of investment and strategic thinking on behalf of the EASF Member States. While the AU confirms that the EASF is part and parcel of the African Standby Force, a representative from the Secretariat noted that the AU has not sufficiently taken its

responsibility to truly achieve the necessary cooperation. Interviewees also considered bilateral donors and the United Nations to have special responsibilities in this area. By supporting and funding too many organisations they contribute to the fragmentation of a patchwork of peace and security organisations in Eastern Africa.

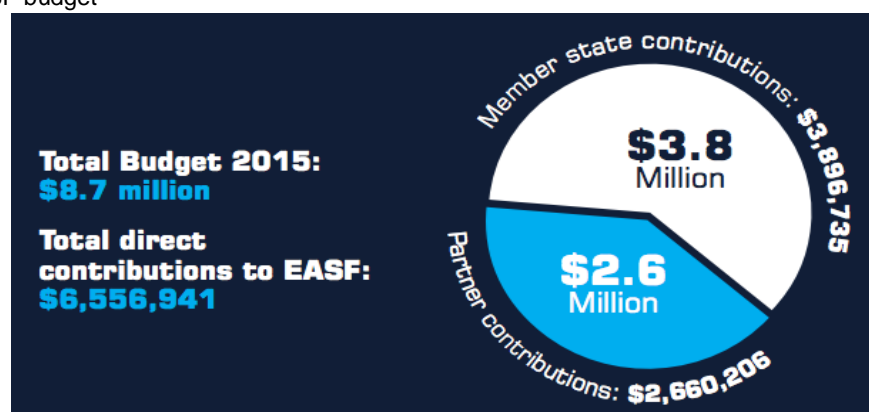
The perceived lack of appreciation and consideration for the EASF emerged in particular as regards to the situation in Burundi (see section 3.2). It points to some glitches in the relationship between the AU and the EASF, and the lack of political mandate from the EASF Assembly to the Secretariat to take a leading role. While the Secretariat seems to have designed a procedure for mandating a regional force when requested to do so, it felt that it was involved quite late in the planning and preparation for the force by the AU in 2015. The mission to Burundi ultimately was blocked by the AU Heads of State and Government in January 2016. Despite some coordination between the AU and EASF as regards the concept of operations of the potential mission to Burundi, interviewees at the Secretariat expressed frustration about the lack of involvement in the more political aspects of the crisis such as mediation and early warning. Many interviewees agreed that the Burundi case was an important test for the force and relations between the AU and the EASF, reflecting painfully the failure to involve the EASF timely in regional peace and security issues when it might be needed, according to its mandate.

2.4 Financing and supporting the EASF

Financing the EASF

Several interviewees confirmed that most member states were paying their contributions to the EASF, but exact numbers on the contributions of individual members states were not obtained. In 2015, the EASF was financed by its Member States for one third against a total budget of \$8.7m, while donors contributed \$2.6m. Sudan has not paid its contributions for some time. This relates primarily to the independence of South Sudan since 2013 and the wish of Sudan to see its contribution rate diminished in line with its decreased territory. As a result of sanctions, one interviewee noted that Sudan cannot pledge or contribute troops. However, the current budget will not suffice in case of deployment or extra exercises. In light of the EASF efforts to gain legitimacy, this is an obstacle. The EASF is expected to be able to finance a deployment for at least six months, which would be difficult with the current budget. The new 2014 Agreement also pledged to establish an EASF Peace Fund to finance the deployment of peace support operations, with funds to be generated from a variety of sources, including amongst others 12% of the annual budget, voluntary contributions, and external sources such as the EU's African Peace Facility (APF)¹¹.

Figure 4: EASF budget



Source: EASF Annual Report 2015

¹¹ Agreement on the Establishment of the Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF), June 2014.

Supporting the EASF

Support by partners is channeled through two principal ways: either directly to the EASF and EASF budgets or by bilateral partner support, guided by MOUs, directed to certain programmes managed by EASF¹². Besides direct funding, the EASF receives technical advice as a number of donors support the Secretariat through military advisors. In 2015, there were military advisors present at the Secretariat from the United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway, and a police and civilian advisor from Germany. Germany decided to end its capacity building project to the Secretariat, implemented by the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ). This decision came as a bit of a surprise to some staff members in the German institutions, and was taken without sufficient intra-German consultation according to some interviewees. Germany is also considering to second a military advisor to the Secretariat, but a final decision has not yet been taken.

In 2007, the 'Friends of EASBRIG' group was formed, later renamed as the 'Friends of EASF' (FoE). This group mainly consists of Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States (EASF Annual Report 2015). China and Russia are not considered part of the group but they, in particular China, have expressed interest in membership of the Friends. In addition, organisations like the EU occasionally partake in Friends of the EASF meetings (Hull, Skeppström, and Sörenson, 2011). Turkey and Thailand have participated in meetings when interested. It is unclear which countries attend Friends of EASF meetings most regularly, but from interviews conducted, the core group seems to consist of the Nordic countries, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States, while Canada and The Netherlands were seen as good supporters and as "traditionally" interested in coordination. One interviewee noted that the United States has over 50 military advisors working in Kenya and the wider region and possesses thereby considerably stronger manpower in the field of military cooperation in the region compared to other international actors.

The FoE came into existence as a way to facilitate coordination and harmonisation of the support provided to EASBRICOM but has so far not worked optimally (Hull, Skeppström, and Sörenson, 2011). It remains a loosely organised and informal group, limiting its activities to the exchange of information between members of the group. One interviewee noted that there had been some discussions about the degree of formality needed for the exchanges between the FoE and the Secretariat. Currently, there is no intense collaboration between the Friends and the EASF (both Secretariat and the Policy Organs Meeting). The Friends of the EASF has mainly functioned as a venue for information exchange between donors but has had little to no direct exchange with the EASF elements itself. According to one interviewee, it has even been challenging to access information at times. Most of the information is provided through the (mainly military) advisors that are working at the Secretariat.

The military advisors currently play a key role in the capacity development of the Secretariat, which according to some interviewees, risks undermining the autonomy and incentive for the Secretariat to develop its capacity in a way that is sustainable. Amongst the Nordic military advisors, there is the perception that the current way of working is achieving results and that sustainability on the longer term is taken into account. There is a relatively strong military-technical orientation amongst the advisors present in the Secretariat, including among the Nordic countries, which is unsurprising given that most advisers have a military background and focus. As such, most of these advisers focus on technical and military matters, which risks downscaling the attention to be given to organisational processes and strategic management and related capacity building of the Secretariat. In late 2008,

¹² The United States of America (USA) does not support the EASF because the EASF is deemed an "amorphous" organisation, which does not allow Congress to channel budgets to. As a result, there is only bilateral support between the USA and EASF Member States. As one interviewee from a European donor country noted, the level of military advisers and support given bilaterally in East Africa by the USA "is impossible to compete with" (Interview, December 2016).

Defence Ministers from Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland and Sweden decided to improve the coordination of their support given to the EASF and established the Nordic Advisory and Coordination Staff (NACS) established in 2009 (Hull, Skeppström, and Sörenson, 2011). It is not very clear how the NACS and FoE coordinate, if at all. It seems that there is more alignment between the Nordic countries, the United Kingdom's military advisor and, to some extent and in a more ad hoc way, the US Military Advisors.

Capacity challenges of the EASF Secretariat

The Secretariat of the EASF takes its political directives from the Policy Organs Meetings and will not move without such a directive. At the same time, some have questioned the engagement and understanding of EASF Member States of the EASF, which has led to moves to expand the EASF Secretariat's agenda unilaterally. Some interviewees saw clear challenges as regards the capacity of the EASF Secretariat, which was said to focus too much on training and courses, and an ever changing staff based on a secondment system. The Secretariat's leadership specifically rotates on an alphabetical rotation system following the first letter of the Member State. Some interviewees noted that EASF member states did not always send the right staff for the position. Interviewees from donors side also expressed some frustration with the lack of strategic and proactive thinking at the EASF Secretariat. There could be, for example, two yearly work plans, which would guide the implementation of the EASF's Strategic Plan. Currently, the Secretariat drafts only annual activity plans, in the period of September to November, but these are perceived as insufficiently strategic or forward-thinking. Some interviewees noted that no training exercises of the EASF itself had taken place since the Full Operational Capability was reached late 2015, which was seen as part of the lack of proactiveness of the EASF. One interviewee noted that only GIZ was supporting the capacity-building of the Secretariat as a whole, and that the end of this support project left quite a gap. Some donors indicated willingness to pick up parts of the project, such as paying for individual courses, but not in a comprehensive manner.

One other element raised as potentially undermining the capacity of the Secretariat was the role currently played by the Committee of Chiefs of Defense. The Committee prepares recommendations and reports for the meetings of the Council of Ministers as part of the Policy Organs Meetings. Several interviewees confirmed that the Secretariat feels that the division of labour between the Committee and the Secretariat is not clear, and that certain parts of their work could be done by the Secretariat.

Lack of strategic thinking and engagement by EASF donors

Donors, some interviewees noted, found it difficult to engage meaningfully with EASF as it found demands not very strategic and narrowly focused on raising financial resources, training and technical assistance. One interviewee suggested that donor's influence had diminished in light of declined amount of donor funding. Donors also seem to be aware that certain issues or topics pushed by donors might not have been within the core mandate of the EASF, such as transnational crime. In other cases, some policies were developed with little internal traction or commitment. Example in this regard include the EASF gender policy and discussion around monitoring and evaluation. One interviewee suggested also that the Secretariat relies on too many advisors. This has created a sort of safety net of (human and financial) resources on which to rely and has taken away the incentive to reform the Secretariat and to develop its own capacity. One interviewee suggested that the military advisors who are present are certainly doing good work contributing to the training needs and working towards maintaining Full Operational Capability, but do not necessarily look beyond the technical and military advice given their primarily military background.

At the same time, several interviewees noted that there was very little strategic thinking among donors about how to engage with an organisation such as the EASF and how to support it in more coherent

manner. One interviewee noted that, so far, donors have been unable to find “a proper dialogue between donors and the EASF’s Policy Organs Meeting” (Interview, December 2016). Furthermore, meetings rotate physically and take place across the region, which has made it difficult to create systematic attendance (Interviews, December 2016). One interviewee noted that donors are not welcome at Policy Organs Meetings, and that there is no direct exchange between the Policy Organs Meeting and the donors.

3. Political interests within the EASF

3.1. Political interests of EASF Member States

Predominance of military aspects

Interviewees were not explicit about the political interests of EASF member states, but some patterns emerge relatively clearly. One interviewee concurred that while there were no clear political objectives from any of the EASF member states, the military pillar of the EASF and its activities has received more attention as opposed to the civilian and police elements. Several interviewees noted that smaller member states of the EASF by mandate had equal influence as larger member states. The fact that the Comoros held the directorship of the EASF Secretariat was given as an example; while all staff members of the Secretariat are seconded by Member States on a predefined rotational system.

Varying levels of influence

Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda contribute most to the EASF budget and are perceived as having the most influence in the policy organs meetings and capacity (various interviews, December 2016). Rwanda and Burundi are the two states from Central Africa that decided to join the EASF, and both have pledged several battalions and equipment. Somalia, Sudan and Djibouti are the three states from the Horn of Africa, and provide smaller contributors. Lastly, the Seychelles and Comoros are the two island states that have sought to gain more access to mainland security structures through joining the EASF (Interview, December 2016). Sudan has not paid its contributions since 2013, when South Sudan became independent.

Some member states have voiced specific interests to be added to the agenda. For example, the Comoros and the Seychelles have requested more training and attention to be given to maritime security, against the background of piracy threats in their respective areas. This also suggests the Seychelles and the Comoros have invested in the EASF from the outset with the assumption that the EASF would be the best venue to see these interests addressed.

Diversity in quality of rotational staff

One aspect that indicates the influence of a specific member state at a given moment seems to be the quality of staff and motivation and interest of certain individual staff members. Several interviewees noted the significant difference in quality of staff seconded by a particular member states. Staff seconded by the larger member states is not necessarily better, while staff seconded from smaller member states, such as Somalia, Sudan and Djibouti, were perceived of being highly qualitative and dedicated. Leadership appointments in the EASF Secretariat happen on a rotational basis based on alphabetical names of the EASF Member States. While there does not seem to be a clear issue-based preference by any of the Member States, Ethiopia has been perceived as not always contributing in a constructive manner through its staff contributions to the EASF Secretariat (various interviews, December 2016).

EASF as a training facility

By and large, most Member States as well as the African Union, see the EASF and its Secretariat as a facility to conduct training and access funding which might otherwise be more difficult to access. Donor representatives noted that initial focus and emphasis was almost exclusively on trainings, which were found to be expensive. For this reason, GIZ introduced training needs assessments to coordinate demands and requests among EASF Member States and curb and streamline the number of trainings. As opposed to the other regional organisations active in peace and security (such as IGAD, the EAC or ICGLR), the EASF does hold a significant niche as regards its ability to organise and facilitate trainings for Member States in terms of military, civilian and police aspects of deployment. IGAD, for example, does not have a peace support operations component.

A young Regional Mechanism, providing opportunities for testing new regional exchanges

The EASF is still fairly young as an institution, and is the first mechanism in its sort. As such, EASF member states might still see the EASF in the phase of 'testing the water', to see what it can deliver and what not, and experimenting with new forms of (institutional and military) exchanges. As mentioned before, one of the greater achievements perceived by most stakeholders, including interviewees, has been the EASF offering a platform of exchange on peace and security issues for a diverse group of countries facing a considerable amount of security challenges. One interviewee noted that it would have been impossible for him to enter barracks of another member states 10 years ago, while now, exchanges between chiefs of defense and defense experts are extensive, both at the strategic and working levels.

3.2. The case of Burundi - the proof of the pudding

Testing the capacity of the EASF

The escalating violence in Burundi over the course of 2015 was deemed a litmus test for the EASF according to many interviewees, for a combination of reasons. As the EASF was the first Regional Mechanism (RM) under the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) to reach 'full operational capability' under the ASF, it was regarded as technically ready for deployment. Given that Burundi is a member of the EASF, and the EASF is responsible for the regional standby force in Eastern Africa, it would have been the 'RM of choice' to lead and deploy interventions in the country. According to interviews held at the Secretariat, the Secretariat had already started with contingency planning in May 2015 and the build-up of the political conflict situation in Burundi was being closely monitored. While the Secretariat was keeping a close watch on the unfolding events, there was no mention by interviewees of attempts by the Secretariat to call a meeting of the Assembly of the EASF Heads of State and Government to discuss the situation in Burundi and a possible deployment by the EASF before December 2015.

On 17 December 2015, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) (meeting at the level of PSC ambassadors) authorised the deployment of the African Prevention and Protection Mission in Burundi (MAPROBU), and requested "the Chairperson of the Commission, *in collaboration with the EASF* and with the support of the UN and other international partners, to take the necessary steps for the urgent development of the concept of operation of MAPROBU"¹³. The EASF was present at this meeting of the PSC, an indication that the AU was willing to work with the EASF and its member states. According to one interviewee at the Secretariat, the Secretariat was subsequently invited by the AUC to review the concept of operation (CONOPS) of MAPROBU, established by the EASF Secretariat, over the course of a couple of days. Meanwhile, an extraordinary meeting of the EASF Assembly was called by the Secretariat to officially inform the EASF Heads of State and Government of the AU PSC's request to the EASF (Burundi did not join this Summit)¹⁴.

During this EASF Assembly, which took place on the sidelines of the AU Assembly in Addis Ababa, on 30 January 2016, the EASF Heads of State and Government welcomed the decision of the PSC to authorise the MAPROBU and "pledged the support of the EASF to form part and take a lead role in MAPROBU under the African Union"¹⁵. During this meeting, EASF Heads of State and Government, however, also noted the importance of the consent of Burundi "as an independent and sovereign State, as the beneficiary of the process [...]"¹⁶. As such, they approved the recommendations of the Council of Ministers of Defence and Security (which always meets prior to Assembly meetings to develop recommendations for Heads of State and Government), to authorise the deployment of the EASF "as part of MAPROBU" but "subject to consent by the Republic of Burundi"¹⁷. De facto, this decision effectively ruled out the deployment of a peace operation in Burundi, given that the EASF Assembly operates through a consensus rule.

One interviewee noted that the EASF was overall more reactive in its response. Given the early planning already taking place in May 2015, this perception seems primarily a result of the absence of a mismatch between the willingness of the Secretariat to do early planning and the lack of a political mandate given to the Secretariat to move ahead. There is a general inclination of the EASF

¹³ Communiqué of the African Union Peace and Security Council, 565th meeting, Addis Ababa, 17 December 2015.

¹⁴ Three members of the PSC in December 2015 are also members of the EASF, namely Uganda, Ethiopia and Burundi itself, as well as Tanzania, member of the EAC leading the mediation.

¹⁵ Communiqué of the 4th Extraordinary meeting of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Eastern African Region, Addis Ababa, 30 January 2016.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Secretariat to await political directives from the Policy Organs Meetings (POMs), such as the Council of Ministers and Defence and Security. A related discussion to whether or not the EASF should do early warning and conflict analysis, as some argue, is not within their mandate. However, at the heart of the issue is the absence of a political mandate given to the Secretariat to move on political decisions. As such, one interviewee noted, “the Secretariat will rather hold back and do nothing until POM [Policy Organs Meetings] decides.”

While various interviewees noted that the achievement of Full Operational Capability was impressive, and acknowledged the value of the regional exchanges that the EASF allows for, the proof of the pudding remains in the eating. The situation in Burundi was seen as a first important litmus test for the capacity of the EASF to deploy and manage a peace support operation and a stabilisation process in its own backyard. Without actually deploying, several interviewees noted, the relevance and capacity of the EASF to deliver on its core mandate could not be truly tested. The Burundi crisis was a pivotal moment to test the Full Operational Capability, but the EASF was not given the space and another regional organisation, namely EAC, took the lead. A variety of push and pull factors were at play.

Testing regional relationships and responsibilities

The EASF did not receive the political mandate to take a leading role from the EASF Assembly. While the Secretariat is attempting to expand its efforts on the more “political” side of conflict management and prevention, in line with the newly signed 2014 EASF Agreement, in reality it remains primarily busy with maintaining the Full Operational Capability for the time being. Following the AU assembly in January 2016, both EAC and the AU were keen to give mediation another chance. Between the PSC decision to deploy MAPROBU and the AU Assembly 2016, Burundi had responded to calls from the Ugandan government to a dialogue for the first time since the July 2015 presidential election (albeit ceremonial) (Bouka, 2016). Furthermore, by the time AU Heads of States discussed MAPROBU, there was no evidence of imminent mass violence as early 2016 saw a drastic reduction of violence in Burundi compared to December 2015 (Bouka, 2016; ACLED 205-2016).

The relationship between the AU and the EASF is not always straightforward, and is situated within the larger complexities of inter-institutional relations between the AU and regional organisations. On the one hand, the ongoing development of the ASF provides an opportunity for the AU to widen its relationship with the region and - as is the case in Eastern Africa - has by means of the EASF complementary mechanisms to a) reach out to AU member states and b) potentially mobilise troops for African-led Peace Support Operations, trained by the EASF. Some interviewees from the Secretariat however noted that the AU had not taken its responsibility. The AU has the responsibility to make the EASF part and parcel of the ASF, for example by advising on how to link up with IGAD. Referring to ECOWAS and West Africa, the interviewee noted that [even] Nigeria was against hegemonic thinking and trying to contribute to a REC where all member states are accommodated (Interview, December 2016). As the EASF is not a REC, stakeholders feel that the AU is dealing with it rather as a (technical) facility instead of a regional player that matters. As mentioned above, interviewees from the EASF Secretariat felt they were not sufficiently involved by the AU during the Burundi crisis.

From the information researched, it appears that the EASF Secretariat is seeking more legitimacy and recognition by expanding its agenda to the more political aspects of conflict management and prevention, and it sees the AU as obstructing this expanded agenda, rather than supporting more integration between the efforts of other regional organisations, such as IGAD and the EASF. The interviewees from the Secretariat did not refer to the Policy Organs Meetings or member states as the ones obstructing this expanded mandate. On the other hand, however, as one interviewee from the AU noted, there is a lot of (informal) consultation between the AU Commission and countries from the region at the level of the AU, through the AU PSC and the AU Assembly, and that member states of the EASF behave according to the same parameters of national interests both at the regional as at

the continental level (Interview, December 2016).

The parameters of regional interests

A closer look at how the interests of member states played out at the various levels of decision-making (PSC, AU assembly, EASF) sheds some light on how these national interests are at play in the crisis in Burundi. As Bouka (2016) noted while the AU is often viewed as a unitary actor, in fact it is composed of multiple layers of actors and power dynamics that may impact on its response to any given crisis. There seems to have been some lack of alignment between the Heads of State and Government in the AU Assembly, the Ambassadors in the PSC and the AU Commission. The Chairperson of the Commission, Dlamini-Zuma, was instrumental in keeping pressure on the Burundian government through numerous comments and statements on the crisis. Zuma was very vocal about her views that the current ruling party (National Council for the Defense of Democracy–Forces for the Defense of Democracy, CNDD-FDD, one of the main rebel groups during the civil war) was not only violating Arusha but also the constitution. She announced that the AU Commission would not be sending electoral observers for the Burundi poll. This was a clear rejection of the electoral process (Bouka, 2016). In terms of the deployment of MAPROBU, the EASF was de facto aligned with the AU Commission and PSC ambassadors, as demonstrated by the invitation of the EASF to the PSC meeting in December 2015.

While PSC ambassadors approved MAPROBU they were rebuffed by Heads of State and Government. MAPROBU's deployment could have been acted on at the level of the PSC if Burundi's response had been positive, but Burundi's rejection of MAPROBU moved the issue out of the PSC's hands (Dersso, 2016). According to International Crisis Group (2016), the lack of alignment at the level of the AU illustrates the limits of AUC's and PSC's freedom to act without the full support of leaders. The potential first time ever use of Article 4(h) touched a raw nerve with those member states with poor democratic credentials and human rights records and who feared it might one day be applied to them (International Crisis Group, 2016). Invoking that article raised the stakes considerably, and according to observers, some PSC delegations did not understand the ramifications of its use or consult sufficiently with capitals. (International Crisis Group, 2016) It should be noted that three members of the PSC in December 2015 are also members of the EASF, namely Uganda, Ethiopia and Burundi itself (while the latter was not invited to the PSC meeting of December 2015), as well as Tanzania, member of the EAC, leading the mediation.

Strong opposition at the AU level to a peace operation in Burundi seems to have come from the region, notably from Burundi, Tanzania and Uganda. In Burundi, itself, a political elite demonstrated that a small country can hold the AU, RECs and EASF ransom around a clear cut issue. The government dismissed MAPROBU as an "invasion and occupation force", shocking some in the AUC, which was convinced that Burundi would grudgingly accept the mission. Burundi watchers said the AU lacked credible situational analysis¹⁸ and misread Nkurunziza's character. MAPROBU had been conceived as a threat of last resort with which to push Nkurunziza into a dialogue, rather than a tangible rapid reaction force, but Nkurunziza called the AU's bluff (International Crisis Group, 2016). Uganda, and President Museveni as leading EAC mediator, received a great deal of scepticism by the opposition and many observers, given that Museveni himself is no hallmark for democracy¹⁹ (Bouka, 2016). Yet, together with Tanzania, Uganda was in favour of maintaining the status quo in Burundi. This is in contrast with Rwanda, who has been critical of how Nkurunziza has ruled the country (not necessarily his aim to extend his stay in power) The EAC, as a whole, was divided on the issue, which

¹⁸ Some observers have argued that the situations in the Central African Republic and South Sudan were more suitable to trigger Article 4(h) than Burundi (Dersso, 2016).

¹⁹ At the time of his mediation, he was himself seeking another term as president of Uganda after 30 years in power. With his own electoral campaign under way, Museveni delegated the mediation to his defence minister, Crispus Kiyonga, who according to observers lacked the necessary gravitas to compel Burundian actors to the table (Bouka, 2016).

ruled out the possibility of a consensus, and Burundi capitalised on that (Bouka, 2016).

4. Areas with traction for enhanced regional cooperation

We can only cautiously answer questions about potential areas of traction in the EASF to enhance regional cooperation. Taking into account the information and analysis provided above, there appears to exist only limited space to create traction and to promote enhanced East African regional exchange and integration in the domain of security and peacebuilding.

Going back to the foundational factors determining the creation of the EASF and the core mandate given to this Regional Mechanism, the limited space – i.e., the EASF's current focus on preparing military and police components of the EASF – jumps out as a key element to be considered in the analysis. Derived from this more narrow interpretation of its mandate, the EASF has been concentrating on military and security related trainings and discussions, has helped to create enhanced capacity of military personnel of the ten EASF member states, has facilitated exchange among military personnel of different ranks (and helped to break down barriers among military personnel across borders) and has helped political leaders dealing with peace and security to exchange and dialogue on security related issues among different countries and governments. These are assets which have been created over the past years and which are highly appreciated by different stakeholders we have been talking to. It has in addition created a mechanism through which the AU potentially can – in addition to the other channels it has – channel requests for mobilising and engaging troops for African peacekeeping operations, as envisaged in the original conceptualisation of the ASF.

But the analysis shows also that the EASF did not become a mechanism through which its member states started to engage more strategically in the region and to use it for more far-reaching political integration. Attention to issues such as governance and the rule of law, prime concerns in political and violent crises as well as post-conflict situations, is low. Where the EASF has engaged on these issues, such as the elections in The Comoros, it has been rather haphazard. Though the new Agreement signed by the ten EASF Member States in June 2014, established the EASF as a regional mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution, a clause that was absent from the preceding 2005 MOU. Conflict analysis and early warning were further noted as one of the functions of the Secretariat. Beyond this function, however, the core of the Secretariat's work, and by extension the EASF, remains focused on enhancing and maintaining the operationalisation of the regional standby force. In practice, the EASF mandate has so far not substantially moved towards the more political aspects of peacebuilding, like early warning and mediation, and the EASF has therefore not been able to play a more political or strategic role.

The Burundi crisis was a pivotal moment to test this, but the EASF was not given the space and another regional organisation, the EAC, was given the lead based on the blocking role of Burundi (also a member of the EAC) and the interplay of different regional organisations (including the AU) and countries, most notably Uganda and Tanzania. This interplay also resulted in the decision not to choose another regional body, the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, as the preferred option to politically deal with the Burundi crisis²⁰. The absence of one strong regional organisation to which the EASF could have been associated - as this is the case with the West African Standby Force, homed under ECOWAS - also contributed to the restriction on the role of the EASF.

²⁰ See complementary political economy study on the ICGLR - "More than a conference, alone".

EASF member states have a rather diverse set of geopolitical interests guiding their behaviour in the region, most notably embodied in the divide of the institutional arrangements of the EASF institutions between Kenya and Ethiopia, as well as the differing views about the organisations that should take a lead in the region, in particular, prevent that the EASF is getting a political home. Both countries are seen to dominate “their” respective RECs, namely the EAC and IGAD. At the same time, both pursue strictly national interests in their peace and security commitments across the region, for example in South Sudan and Somalia. But there are more divides which we have documented and analysed above.

We have further analysed that the AU does not have any particular interest to support the growth of another regional body with a more political mandate, which the AU would have to deal with – IGAD and the EAC are already in place and most EASF member states are either part of one of them or both. This explains the main interest in the EASF as a training facility and as a potential channel to mobilise troops for the AU peacekeeping operations.

In terms of widening the mandate of the EASF, allowing for more space to become active in the domain of peacebuilding, some member states appear to have some sympathies in this regard. This appears from more recent developments and is reflected in internal EASF discussions among stakeholders. Kenya appears to belong more to this line of thinking, precisely to counter the dominance of Ethiopia and its engagement in IGAD (we extract this from our analysis, while clear evidence on this assessment is limited). From the bits and pieces we have picked up during the interviews, we understand that Ethiopia would probably be against this widening of the mandate, as well as the AU. The views of Sudan and Rwanda on the same issue could not be obtained during the study. The Burundi crisis, where African continental political bodies discussed an intervention through a peace support operation in Burundi to protect human rights, displayed a painful absence of the EASF in the political dimension and showed that its role de facto remains limited to a potential trainer, mobiliser and provider of troops.

To create more traction for regional integration through the EASF, more space for engagement in peacebuilding processes would be needed. This would include an involvement of the EASF in different phases of the conflict cycle whereby EASF bodies would be able to provide inputs at the interface between diplomatic activities, early warning, mediation and the provision of generating the necessary troops for peace support operations. Such a wider engagement would be in line with the new Agreement, adopted in 2014. But given the particular political situation in East Africa and the absence of a single regional hegemon, promoting a more political and operational space of the EASF in the domain of peacebuilding would be difficult. One should also question whether the creation of such space would be feasible given the many contradictory elements and positions amongst EASF member states within the region.

5. Conclusions

In 2007, the EASF (then called the EASFCOM) was created as an element to operationalise the establishment of an African Standby Force to counter violent conflicts in Africa. The EASF, situated between different RECs and not politically associated to one of them, is the product of several factors that have defined regional integration in the field of peace and security in Eastern Africa (and the Horn of Africa). These include long-standing and continuing tensions between countries of the region and the threats to peace and security, including internal wars, environmental degradation, terrorism and unconstitutional changes of government.

Despite this wide variety of conflicts and threats to stability in the region, the EASF has operated with a rather restricted agenda. While attempts are made from the Secretariat to expand its activities to

conflict prevention, mediation and election observation, it has been kept at a distance by the EASF's political leadership and has mainly focused on military aspects. However successful in that regard, given the level of operationalisation and state of 'readiness', the EASF is mainly seen as a training facility by its member states, not as a political actor.

The EASF operates within a complex constellation of various regional organisations, with overlapping memberships and commitments by countries in the region. Certain other regional organisations in the region have a more established role in political aspects of conflict prevention and management, notably the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The relationship with the African Union has not always been straightforward from the Secretariat's perspective, which feels insufficiently consulted. It seems that EASF Heads of State and Government do not see a political role carved out for the EASF. However, as a rather young Regional Mechanism the EASF has been welcomed as an important relatively new platform for regional heads of state and government (and their ministers of defense and foreign affairs) to meet and discuss political and security threats in the region at a high level. In 2015, the situation in Burundi was an important litmus test, both in terms of the EASF's expanding agenda and in terms of its ability to effectively deploy a peace support operation. The EASF's rather limited role in the region (a military training facility) was confirmed during this crisis as it did not receive the political backing of its member states to get involved in conflict resolution.

From the research it appears that the EASF can create only limited traction in the region for more enhanced regional cooperation beyond the current level. The EASF has produced some valued (military- and police related) capabilities through the functional cooperation between member states and it has created more trust among key actors through regular exchanges at different political and technical levels. The external support to these processes has been highly valued and - if continued - will contribute to further enhance capacities in the domains for which the EASF has been created originally. Whether these capabilities will be ever used in the context of the African Standby Force needs to be seen - evidence so far reveals that this will rather not be the case in view of too many regional organisations and countries present in the region displaying diverging interests and the absence of a regional champion who could influence key political decisions on peace and security in the region followed by all parties.

External partners have provided a rather low-intensity and 'easy' support so far with no particular strategic engagement and strong (political) coordination among each other. The loose network of the "Friends of the EEAS" is witness to this. This is a defensible position for external players in view of the absence of a more strategic direction set by the EASF member states and the absence of a more substantive political dialogue of these member states with international partners. But questions should be raised about the expectations of international partners in supporting the EASF and to what extent they hope that their contribution can overcome regional hurdles and create more regional integration.

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Annex - List of interviewees

1. Ambassador Ismail Chanfi, Director, EASF Secretariat, Nairobi, December 2016
2. Major General Gitau, Joint Chief of Staff, EASF Secretariat, Nairobi, December 2016
3. Sivuyile Bam, Head of Peace Support Operations Department, African Union Peace and Security Department, Addis Abeba, November 2016
4. Major General Francis Okello, Chief Planning and Operations, African Union Peace and Security Department, Addis Abeba, November 2016
5. Oliver Lanzer, Police Advisor, GIZ, Addis Abeba, November 2016
6. Silke Hampson, Better Migration Management (BMM) (previously Strengthening EASF Secretariat), GIZ, Nairobi, November and December 2016
7. Joern Fiedler, Defence Attaché, German Embassy, Nairobi, Nairobi, December 2016
8. Julia Kronberg, First Secretary, German Embassy, Nairobi, Nairobi, December 2016
9. Søren Knudsen, Defence Attaché, Danish Embassy, Nairobi and Chair of the Friends of the EASF, Skype interview, December 2016
10. Joern Rasmussen, Defence Attaché, Danish Embassy, Nairobi and Coordinator of the NACS – Nordic Advisory and Coordination Staff, Skype interview, December 2016