

SYNTHESIS REPORT

AU REFORMS

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ADAPTING INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY

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Context

Building on the findings of the Kagame report (see [introductory Spark](#)), a series of institutional reforms have been underway at the AU, all seeking to raise the effectiveness of the continental body, but also the levels of ownership by its states.

The internal reform agenda relates to the way the AUC is itself staffed and organised – including the AUC electoral procedures and a restructuring of the organisation that saw the political affairs and peace and security departments merge. Externally-focused reforms relate to one of the goals of the AU: to provide a common platform and representational voice for African states on the world stage. This has led to a new partnership strategy that seeks to address the weaknesses of the past, including the AU's representational role, and to discussions of how, if at all, the UN might be reformed to better reflect African concerns and priorities.

As our different analyses underline, each of these different areas has also come up against the difficulty of convening states around a common agenda, when national interests can sometimes be perceived to be better served by operating unilaterally.

Inside the AU – revising the AUC elections process

One of the issues cited by the Kagame report was the **lack of transparency** around AUC appointments, and the **representation** of women and regions. In response his proposals included making recruitment of the Deputy Chairperson and Commissioners more competitive, taking account of gender and regional diversity, and reviewing the structure and staffing needs of the AUC. This was intended to help improve the sense of ownership of member states and thus help make the AU more effective and responsive to its member states. But as with all policy reforms, it runs the risk of altering formal structures with limited impact on actual functions – the topic of this analysis.

A process was put in place to improve the AUC elections taking place in early 2021, with new rules requiring 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 were women (five out of eight), partly due to implicit agreement that the previous Commissioner Faki would continue.

Even though those rules arguably complicated the selection process – given a more limited pool of female candidates overall, by process of elimination, once some posts were filled, candidates for others were no longer legitimate due to their region or gender – they were nonetheless followed.

In broad terms, 'formal institutions' won over background, informal 'deals'. This is likely the case precisely because the rules, particularly on regional representation were in the interests of member states, given regional relations built up over time between leaders engaging through the RECs, and historical solidarity. By sticking to its own rigid rules, the AU has shown it can go beyond intentions, thus helping to improve the chances of greater ownership by member states given regional representation in this area and providing a precedent for reforms in other areas.

Gender parity as per the final nominated AU commissioners per portfolio ahead of elections



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



Economic Development, Trade, Industry and Mining (EDTIM)



Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (ESTI)



Infrastructure and Energy (I&E)



Political Affairs, Peace & Security (PAPS)



Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development (HHS)



African Union Summit and elections: Something old, something new

As the only nominated candidate for the position of chairperson of the AUC, Moussa Faki Mahamat, was re-elected with [51 out of 55 votes](#). Though his previous mandate was not entirely free from [criticism](#), the show of solid support comes from his past record and the [vision](#) he laid out for the AU. That highlighted eight priorities that include finalising the institutional reform of the AU and strengthening the leadership of the AU Commission.

With her election to deputy chairperson of the AUC, Ms. Monique Nsanzabaganwa from Rwanda is the first woman to occupy this position. This had to be the case given the [recently revised election rules](#) to ensure regional representation, gender parity and merit-based selection. But by selecting a Rwandan, who will have a key role in continuing the AU reforms begun under Rwandan President Kagame, this also offers hope for continuity in that agenda.



Photo courtesy of Andrew Moore via Flickr

The revised election process also brought far more scrutiny and transparency around the selection process than in the past. That said, COVID-19 related lockdowns and travel restrictions limited the [background lobbying](#) and negotiation that are part of the election process, making it harder for prospective candidates to convince voters. Unlike the previous elections in 2017, there was no public debate held this time, yet that process, known as ‘[MjadalaAfrika](#)’, was seen as a way of engaging more citizens in the election of the AUC leadership.

The [historical unanimous](#) election of [Ambassador Bankole Adeoye](#) to the helm of the new Political

Affairs, Peace and Security Department suggested strong support from member states for someone who was widely respected as Nigeria’s ambassador in Addis Ababa.

Source: commentary [here](#)

Inside the AU – merging peace and governance

Part of the AUC reform process has centred on prioritising themes and rationalising bureaucratic structures. **One key reform here was to merge the AU’s peace and security department with that of political affairs, effectively merging the continental peace and governance agendas.**

Though there is a logic for better connecting the two areas of work – instability is often a result of flawed [election processes](#) or political and constitutional crises – the implications of the merger must also be understood in terms of interests and incentives. Given the AU's challenges in enforcing the governance agenda and some of the underlying principles, the merger raised questions about whether the merger would bolster the governance agenda, sideline it, or indeed simply reflect a superficial shuffling of the cards with little real impact. These suggest three possible outcomes: magnification, marginalisation, or 'more of the same'.

Arguing that a stronger governance agenda through *magnification* is desirable, the paper analyses how different drivers of the security-governance merger – such as institutional complexity, ambivalent conceptions of 'governance', a clash between non-indifference and sovereignty, AU leadership and international partners – jointly led to a situation where the governance agenda got little traction compared to the AU's peace and security activities. It concludes that **since the drivers of these dynamics are political, institutional changes made to the AUC may be useful but not sufficient for real change.**

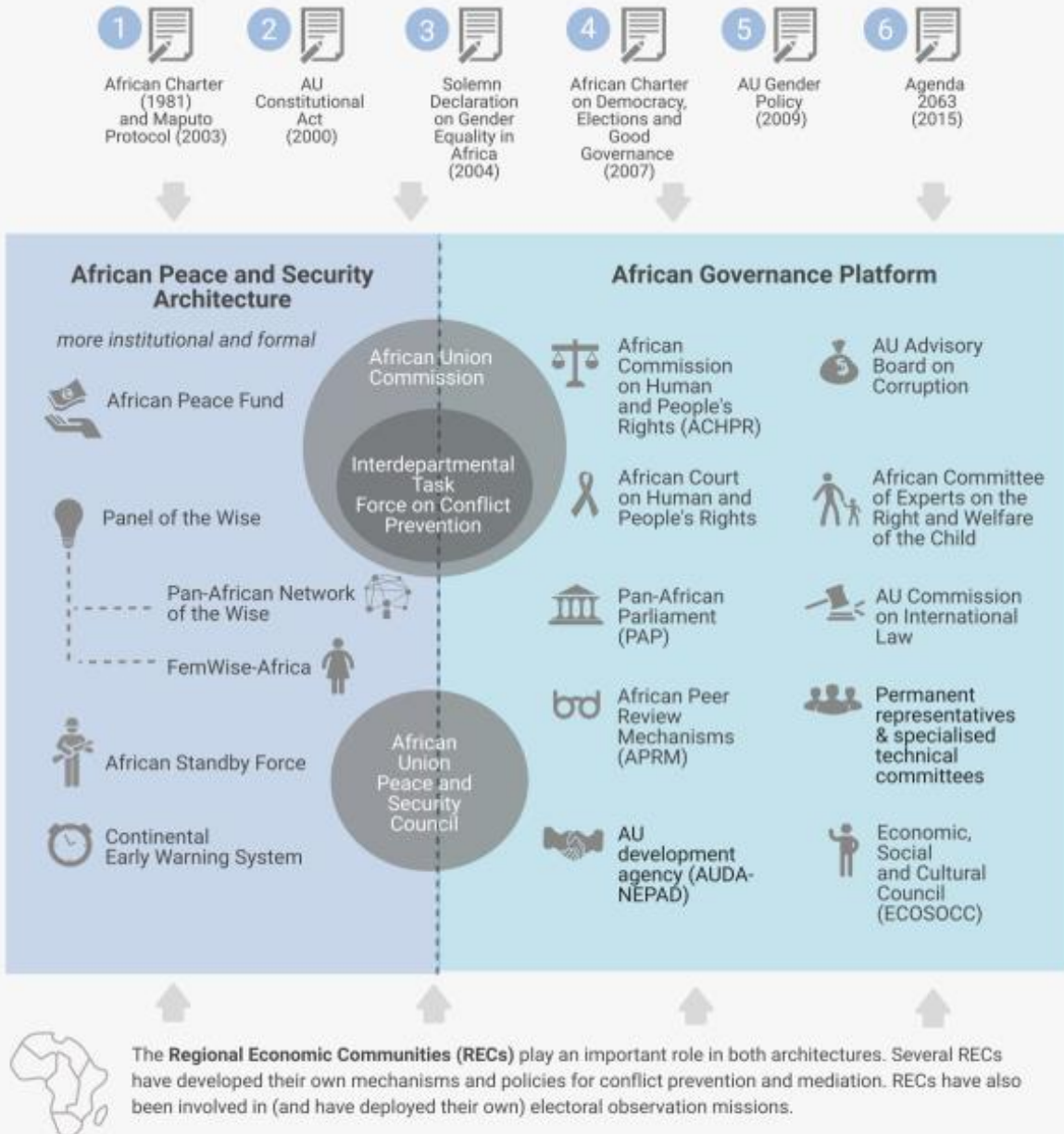
The analysis suggests that success from a 'governance' perspective would depend on political buy-in from member states as much as it does on fine-tuning institutional arrangements to: leave space for AU leadership to take hold, prevent new governance-security silos emerging, and rapidly deliver a few quick wins through election observation, mediation and early warning.

Separately, **stakeholders could help enhance political traction by establishing a new governance narrative** that factors in member states' concerns and interests in seeing an African governance agenda that combines socio-economic and (not only) political benchmarks. Finally, the magnification of governance requires the AUC's proactive engagement with member states, fine-tuned external funding to support PAPS without constraints, and substantive partnerships with African civil society organisations that enhance the department's operational capacity.

INSTITUTIONAL OVERLAP BETWEEN APSA AND AGA

- The mandates of the African Governance Architecture (AGA) and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) are informed by a number of policies at the level of the AU. Its mandates cover broad aspects of peace, security, governance and democracy and overlap to some extent, especially in the field of conflict prevention, for example the prevention of electoral violence, and mediation. Significant differences exist between both frameworks.

The documents that support and guide the two frameworks



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

The AU looking out – seeking a continental partnership strategy

Beyond its internal reforms and institutional structures, the African Union (AU) is mandated to promote and defend African common positions on issues of interest to the continent. **One of the AU's key objectives is to encourage international cooperation with external partners to meet its Agenda 2063 vision of Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner.**

Exploring that agenda, and how member state interests play out, this paper discusses the AU's Partnerships Strategy and Policy Framework which is being developed as part of its ongoing reform process. The objective of the strategy is to reformulate how the AU engages with external partners – again with a view to improving member state ownership and the AU's agency and autonomy.

The AU has a number of partnerships with countries, regional organisations and international institutions, but within the AU there is a growing realisation that past approaches to partnerships are no longer fit for purpose, often reflecting a donor-recipient relationship rather than the oft-cited 'partnership' that is sought. But the relationship between the AU and its member states has often made it difficult to define priorities when engaging with partners, while external partners often perceive Africa as a passive player at the crossroads of global power – these have undermined past attempts to arrive at a common strategy towards external partners.

With the rise in partnerships, since the 2000s in particular, there has been an accelerating frequency of Africa summits and partnership meetings with third countries and regions. These include strategic partners with established summit frameworks such as the EU, China, Japan, India, Korea, Turkey and the Arab League, but also through summits with other countries like Russia, France, the United Kingdom and the United States once in 2014 under the Obama administration, with another planned under the Biden administration next year. With 55 AU countries, this can lead to a mass mobilisation of African leaders, and place a high burden on the diplomatic services of AU member states, at times with unclear direct benefits for the participating countries.

KEY ACTORS IN AU PARTNERSHIP ARCHITECTURE AND SOME CHALLENGES

ecdpm

Partnerships Management and Resource Mobilisation Directorate (PMRM) (merges the PMCD* and resource division of SPPMERM**)



ROLE

Manages and coordinates partnerships and resource mobilisation within the AUC and for the continent.



CHALLENGES

- Under-resourced in both financial and human capacity.
- Lack of senior staff to engage with partners (director position is currently vacant).

Member states



ROLE

Implement AU Assembly decisions including on partnerships.



CHALLENGES

- Position coordination issues have arisen where consultations between member states and AUC have been deficient.
- National interests may be pursued at the expense of continental interests.

African Union Commission (AUC) technical departments



ROLE

Manage the thematic portfolios of the AUC and are responsible for initiating and implementing the programmes and projects to be supported by the partners.



CHALLENGES

AUC technical departments at times by-pass the partnerships unit when dealing directly with partners leading to coordination problems.

Regional Economic Communities (RECs)



ROLE

Building blocks of the AU and important actors in implementation of continental programs at the regional level.



CHALLENGES

RECs have their own mandates and may lack the financial and human resources to implement continental programmes.

African Union Development Agency (AUDA)–New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD)



ROLE

Coordinate and execute priority regional and continental projects to promote regional integration towards the accelerated realisation of Agenda 2063 goals.



CHALLENGES

In the past the AUDA NPCA (now replaced by AUDA-NEPAD) wasn't fully integrated into the AU and at times there was lack of synergy with the AUC.

Private sector, civil society and diaspora



ROLE

As part of key AU stakeholders, they participate in the building and development of the African continent.



CHALLENGES

Non-involvement in the partnership management process of the AU, yet some priority areas would benefit from their engagement.

Sub-Committee of the Whole on Multilateral Cooperation (SCWMC)



ROLE

Subcommittee of the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) responsible for matters relating to Africa's multilateral partnerships with the rest of the world.



CHALLENGES

Communication gaps including the lack of clarity on whether the partnerships unit or technical departments, lead the way in the preparation and organisation of consultations with partners.

AU Partners Group



ROLE

Enhance partners' cooperation in their engagement with the AU, providing a forum for coordination and harmonisation among the donors accredited to the AU.



CHALLENGES


Partners at times by-pass the partnerships unit and engage directly with technical departments and/or AUC Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson offices, which undermines the credibility of the partnerships unit and leads to coordination problems.

*Partnerships Management and Coordination Division **Directorate of Strategic Policy Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Resource Mobilisation.
Source: Author's compilation adapted from the AU Executive Council (2019) Revised report of the Permanent Representatives' Committee (PRC) on the evaluation of the strategic partnerships, EX.CL/1104(XXXIV)iii Annex 1

Source: Partnerships paper [here](#)


The AU Assembly in 2006 adopted a decision on bilateral summits between African countries and an individual external partner country, colloquially known as the 'Banjul Formula', to try and ensure effective representation and bargaining in such summits. But Member states also raised concerns about the formula's effectiveness. Some AU member states voiced concerns that the Banjul Formula didn't allow for adequate representation of all member states given the absence of adequate rotation in representing Africa vis-a-vis the partner. Given the above challenges, the 2017 Kagame Report recommended that Summits convened by external parties be reviewed with a view to providing an effective framework for AU partnerships. However, continuing concerns meant that the AU Assembly at its 2020 Summit finally decided upon representation aspects – shown below. This new format is arguably a mere revitalisation of that old format of representation, with representation by a select group of leaders on behalf of all AU member states.


FORMULAS OF REPRESENTATION AT PARTNERSHIP SUMMITS BETWEEN AU AND THIRD COUNTRIES





Banjul formula


The total number of participants from Africa of 15 heads of state, chosen by the AU to represent the entire African continent



Outgoing AU Chair



Incumbent AU Chair



AUC Chair



NEPAD HSGIC Chair



NEPAD* Algeria



NEPAD* Egypt



NEPAD* Nigeria



NEPAD* Senegal



NEPAD* South Africa



Chair AMU



Chair COMESA



Chair CEN-SAD


Chair EAC



Chair ECCAS



Chair ECOWAS



Chair IGAD



Chair SADC


Kagame report recommendation



Outgoing AU Chair



Incumbent AU Chair



Incoming AU Chair



AUC chair



Chair AMU



Chair COMESA



Chair CEN-SAD


Chair EAC



Chair ECCAS



Chair ECOWAS



Chair IGAD



Chair SADC


AU Assembly/AU/Dec.762(XXXIII)



Incumbent AU Chair



First Vice-Chair



Second Vice-Chair



Third Vice-Chair



Rapporteur



AUC Chair



AUDA-NEPAD HSGOC Chair



Chair AMU



Chair COMESA



Chair CEN-SAD


Chair EAC


Chair ECCAS


Chair ECOWAS


Chair IGAD


Chair SADC

AU = African Union, Chairs are elected for one year on a rotational basis between the AU's five geographical regions

AUC = African Union Commission, the Chair is elected for a 4-year term.

NEPAD = New Partnership for Africa's Development

HSGIC = Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee (HSGIC) of NEPAD* = founding member of NEPAD

AMU = Arab Maghreb Union

COMESA = Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa

CEN-SAD = Community of Sahel-Saharan States

EAC = East African Community

ECCAS = Economic Community of Central African States

ECOWAS = Economic Community of West African States

IGAD = Intergovernmental Authority on Development

SADC = Southern African Development Community

AUDA-NEPAD = African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development

HSGOC = Heads of State and Government Orientation Committee of AUDA-NEPAD

Source: Authors compilation adapted from AU Assembly/AU/Dec.131(VII); AU Assembly/AU/Dec.762(XXXIII) and Kagame (2017) *The imperative to strengthen our union: Report on the proposed recommendations for the institutional reform of the African Union.*

PROS

- Seen as a way to balance representation rather than having all AU member states convene before one partner.

CONS

- Lack of rotation of all AU MS.
- Elevated the 5 NEPAD founding members over other AU MS.
- National interest may be pursued at the expense of regional and continental interests.

PROS

- Troika ensures continuity among the AU leadership on the reform process.

CONS

- Troika excludes all 5 geographical regions of the AU.
- Excluded NEPAD-AUDA.

PROS

- Bureau represents all 5 geographical regions of the AU.

CONS

- Excludes private sector, civil society and diaspora.
- Seen as a revitalisation of the Banjul formula.

Source: Partnerships paper [here](#)

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Even though this format of representation has now been endorsed by the AU Assembly, it is still to be seen if member states and partners will respect this format going forward.

Like the other AU institutional reforms discussed above, the partnership strategy is also a challenge for formal institutional reforms to address state interests and incentives. While it seeks to find ways for the AU to represent and streamline representation of its member states, past experiences show the challenge of combining continental and national interests. This seems a case of the need to explore where the AU can bring added value, on what topics, and with what level of acceptance from member states, rather than seeking to impose rigid rules that are later ignored, like the Banjul formula.

3 of our ECDPM staffs' views on The AU's role in African and global affairs:

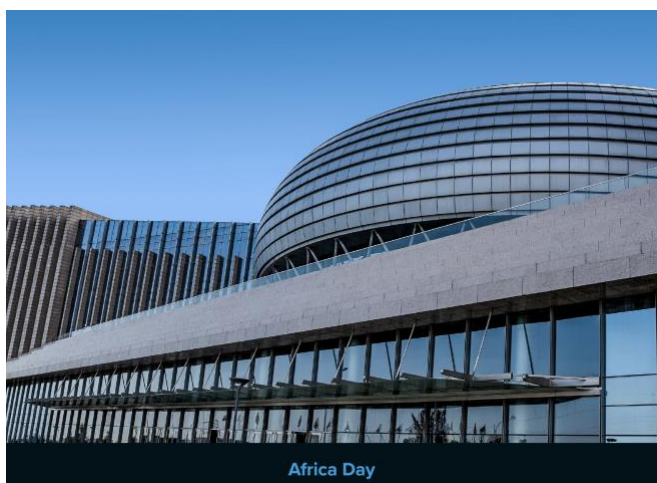


Photo courtesy of Solen Feyjssa via Unsplash

For Africa Day 2021, commemorating the founding of the African Union (AU)'s predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), we asked our team working on African institutions and regional dynamics to share their thoughts on key processes shaping the AU's role in African and global affairs.

Philomena Apiko – Rethinking AU partnerships
Lidet Tadesse – Greater integration, more coherent voice?

Martin Ronceray – AU reforms announce changes to the governance and security agendas

To read more on their views see [here](#)

Full webinar on [Merging peace and politics: how will the African Union address the governance agenda?](#)

The AU looking out – AU and UN's symbiotic relationship

Closely related to the complex dynamics around the AU's external partnerships are its relations with the UN, particularly between the AU's peace and Security Council (PSC) and the UN Security Council (UNSC). These dynamics are discussed in our paper on the power and politics of the [AU-UN peace and security partnership](#).

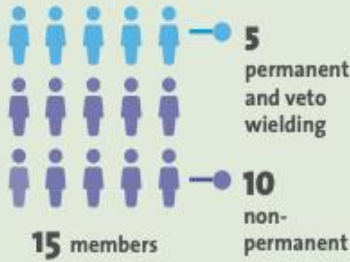
As the paper raises, recent years have seen a strengthening and growing momentum of the peace and security partnership between the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN). While much has been said about improving the technical and operational aspects of the partnership, this paper discusses the political dimensions, namely: the lack of permanent African representation in the UN Security Council (UNSC), despite 70% of UNSC agenda topics relating to Africa, as well as the challenges of securing funding for African peace support operations (PSOs).

The set up of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)



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UNSC is the ultimate decision maker on global peace and security. It is made of 15 states.



No African state occupies a permanent seat yet



Whilst **70%** of UNSC agenda pertain to Africa

In 2005, at the height of the UNSC reform agenda. African states - through the Common African Position on UN Reforms (Ezulwini consensus) suggested:



2 permanent seats with veto rights for African states



3 additional non-permanent seats for African states

In absence of progress on UNSC reform formally, the AU tries to influence UNSC decision through informal structures:



Making sure the A3 align with AU PSC decisions or positions during their term in the UNSC.



The A3 try to align their national positions when there's no PSC position.

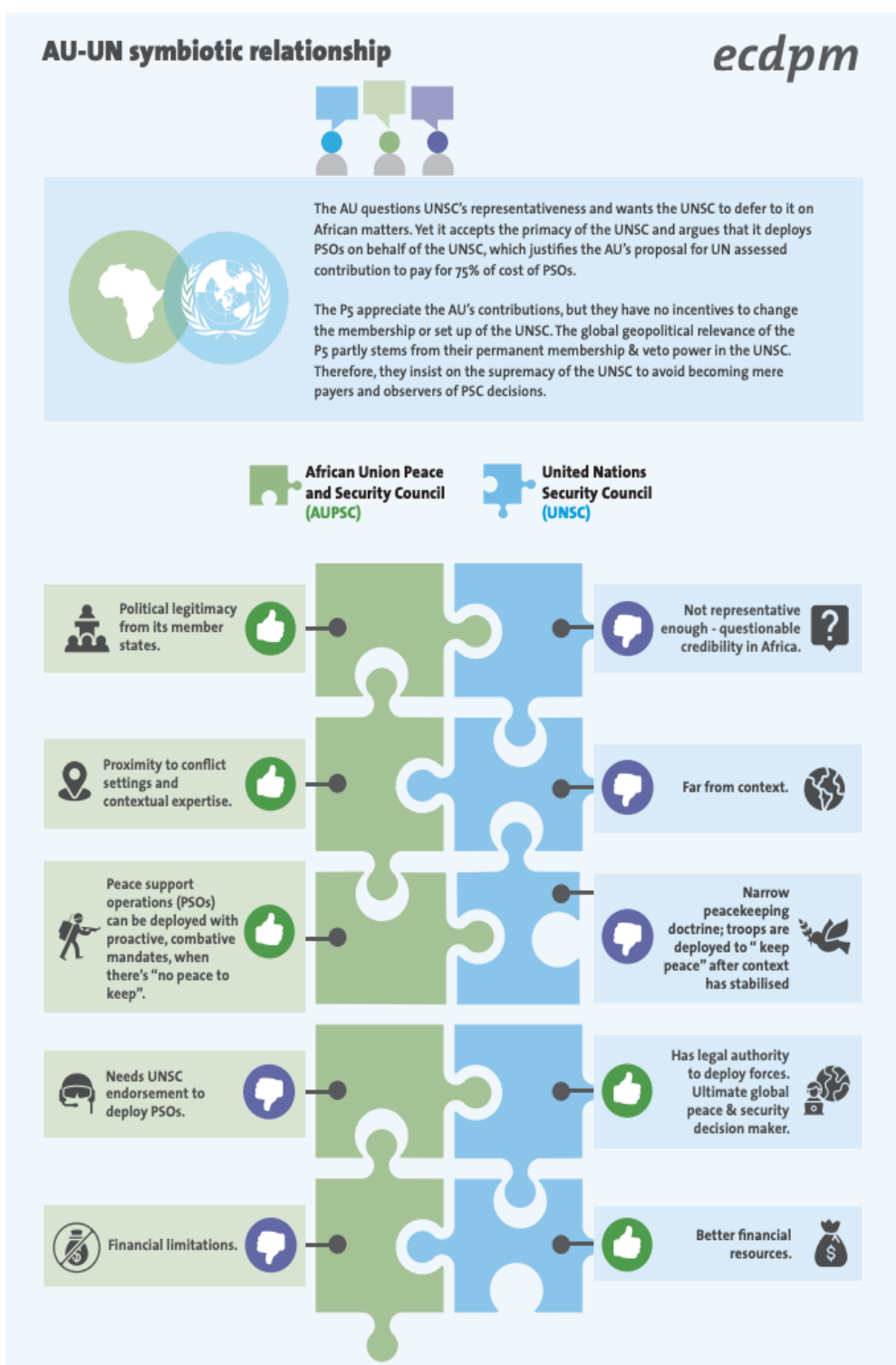


Encouraging the A3 to become 'pen holders' on African issues at the UNSC.



Enhancing the capacity of AU Permanent Mission to the UN to liaise between Addis Ababa and New York and to retain continuity as the constitution of the A3 changes

This paper argues that as much as the AU reject's the UNSC's attempts to project power over the PSC, and the permanent members of the UNSC work to maintain the status quo including the current membership of the UNSC and its legal legitimacy as the ultimate peace and security decision maker in the world – the AU and the UN have a symbiotic relationship. The AU questions the representativeness of the UNSC, it negotiates secured UN funding for African peace support operations based on the UNSC's ultimate responsibility to maintain global peace and security, including in Africa. Similarly, while the UNSC permanent members appreciate the role of the AU to deploy in contexts that the Blue Helmets can't go, the permanent members want to maintain their exclusive veto powers and be more than mere paymasters for peace support operations. These different elements are illustrated below.



For those working on and supporting the AU-UN peace and security partnership, it is important to recognise that the unresolved fundamental, political and power-related aspects of the partnership affect progress on the more technical and operational aspects of the partnership as well.

Overall, while there is a high level of frustration with low African representation on the PSC, even though many of its decisions affect Africa, states have thus far failed to find a common position to pressure for change in representation, with rotating representation on the PSC seemingly offering enough of a temporary solace to individual states to undermine the solidarity argument in the long run.

More on this topic is discussed in the following two summaries:

- [Overview: Regional organisations in Africa](#)
- [The AfCFTA – the political economy of connecting markets and people](#)

This synthesis note was created by Bruce Byiers and Isabell Wutz building on the work and inputs of Philomena Apiko, Amanda Bisong, Bruce Byiers, Alfonso Medinilla, Martin Ronceray, Lidet Tadesse and Ueli Staeger (external). For information about this guide and to know more about ECDPM's work on African institutions and regional dynamics, and on the PEDRO II project, please contact Bruce Byiers at bby@ecdpm.org.

[Click here to discover our previous work on Political Economy Dynamics of Regional Organisations in Africa](#)