



POLITICAL ECONOMY DYNAMICS OF REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN AFRICA

PEDRO

The Eastern African Standby Force: A regional mechanism without a political home¹

This paper sets out to better inform stakeholders about why the Eastern African Standby Force and its national level stakeholders operate as they do. It concludes with implications for support.

Political traction, member states interests and potential

The Eastern African Standby Force (EASF) was established in 2007 as one of five regional mechanisms in the military component of the African Union's overall continental peace architecture.² It was established to address threats to peace and stability in Eastern Africa and the Horn of Africa. The EASF bridges different Regional Economic Communities but is not politically associated with any one of them. The challenges it faces include long-standing and continuing tensions between countries of the region as well as internal wars, environmental degradation, terrorism and political crises around unconstitutional changes of government.

The EASF has a well-defined governance system and mandate, politically steered by a summit of heads of state and government of its ten member states.³ The EASF Secretariat has managed to set up and operationalise a standby force for the region, with some financial and operational buy-in from its member states, as well as support for the buildup of military capabilities. But since its establishment in 2007, it has not been given a full mandate to move from preparedness into putting peacekeepers on the ground, despite the numerous violent conflicts and threats to stability in the region.

The EASF operates within a complex constellation of various regional organisations, with overlapping memberships and commitments by countries in the region. The interests of Kenya and Ethiopia concerning the security architecture in the region diverge from other members, as reflected in the institutional make-up and support provided to the EASF.⁴ Certain other regional organisations in the region have a more established role in political aspects of conflict

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² Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF), Northern Standby Brigade (NARC), Western Africa Standby Brigade (ECOWAS), Central African Standby Brigade (ECCAS), Southern Africa Standby Brigade (SADC).

³ Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda.

⁴ The EASF Secretariat and Planning Element (operational planning) are based in Nairobi, Kenya; while the force's headquarters are based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

prevention and management, notably the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD). IGAD, however, has no mandate to deploy peace support operations. EASF and IGAD representatives exchange on crises on an ad hoc basis.

Further, the relationship with the African Union (AU) has not always been straightforward as the EASF Secretariat feels insufficiently consulted and the AU has preferred to mobilize troops for peace support operations bilaterally or through member states of other organisations such as IGAD. While the Secretariat has attempted to expand its activities to conflict prevention, mediation and election observation, led by member states the EASF political leadership has prioritised military aspects. The EASF has reached a fair level of operationalisation and state of 'readiness', yet the member states mainly see it as a training facility as well as a means to intensify collaboration in the security field rather than an actor. Still, it has been welcomed as offering an important new platform for regional heads of state and government, as well as their ministers of defense and foreign affairs and their senior officials, to hold high level discussions on political and security threats in the region.

The political crisis in Burundi - one of the member states of the EASF - highlighted some of the major obstacles to its proper functioning and institutionalisation, ranging from differences among political leaders in the member states, diverging approaches or positions of the other regional organisations through which these member states exercise their influence, and the strong adherence to the principle of non-interference. Burundi was against any activity on its territory and successfully vetoed action, both by the AU peace architecture and by the EASF. The EASF's rather limited role in the region as 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.

It appears that the EASF enjoys only limited traction in the region for 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. But it remains to be seen whether these capabilities will ever be put to use and deployed in the context of peace operations, either in the region or in the broader context of the African Standby Force. There appear to be too many regional organisations and countries in the region with diverging interests, with no regional champion that can muster sufficient political support behind actual troop deployment in the region.

External partners have provided rather low-intensity support so far, mainly consisting of financial and technical assistance. They have established a loose cooperation network of the "Friends of the EASF", with little or no direct exchanges with the political leadership of the EASF itself. A more politically oriented and concerted cooperation among internal supporters on how to support the EASF more strategically does not exist.

Implications for support

1. Donor support and efforts to cooperate at the current level of ambition seem to be appropriate given the limited willingness of member states to move to the deployment of peace operations in a context with numerous threats to peace and stability:

- The absence of a more strategic direction set by the EASF member states and of a substantive political dialogue with international partners, as well as with the African Union, do not justify higher ambitious or expectations.
- Cooperation among donors through the Friends of the EASF should be maintained as it helps explore opportunities for effective engagement with EASF.
- Efforts need to be undertaken to explore bridging the divide between the Friends of the EASF and the EASF - especially its political leadership - in order to overcome the isolation that feeds further mistrust in external partners in such a sensitive area as peace, security and peace operations.

2. There are a number of champions for EASF to move from narrow military preparedness to peace and security operations. Some external supporters of EASF have also access to international, regional and national level organisations with peace and security mandates. Therefore, these core donors need to:

- Identify opportunities and explore ways of providing hands-off donor support to key domestic stakeholders who are supportive of EASF taking up more political roles in conflict prevention and conflict mediation.
- Use access by well-connected donors to other key continental and international players in the peace and security arenas to help create a conducive environment for EASF to expand its roles towards conflict prevention and mediation.

Behind the formal structures of regional organisations is a messy world of regional power and politics. This messiness is often difficult to capture in the language of development cooperation and institutional development. Working with regional organisations and their programmes therefore implies engaging with complex, multi-level power and interest dynamics.

PEDRO, the Political Economy Dynamics of Regional Organisations, is an ECDPM project that looks at the politics behind regional organisations, and the structural factors, institutions and incentives that ultimately define the way in which countries and different stakeholders engage at a regional level. PEDRO covers 17 African regional organisations and 11 policy areas. For each of these, ECDPM has applied a political economy approach to help understand the dynamics and their effects in different regions and policy areas.

The studies are framed around three key questions: the first relates to the political traction of the regional organisation as this helps assess whether the regional organisation has enabled regional decision making and if it has contributed to implementation. The second focuses on the member state interests in engaging with the regional organisation, especially the more resourceful and powerful ones (the so-called 'swing states'). The third looks at the areas with most traction where regional and national level interests seem to be most aligned for regional outcomes.

The reports aim to present information and insights that can help regional stakeholders navigate the obstacles and better respond to reform opportunities. Rather than providing specific operational recommendations, the political economy approach encourages more reality-based discussions among practitioners and reformers about feasible ways to address regional challenges. It is hoped that this may help tailor the ambitions and approaches of donors and reformers and help identify ways to support national or regional champions or coalitions to take regional cooperation and integration forward.