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Ulf Engel

**The African Union's
Early Warning System:
An Easy Come,
Easy Go Regionalism?**

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The African Union's Early Warning System: An Easy Come, Easy Go Regionalism?

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Introduction

The African Union (AU) is a pan-African globalization project that has led to a specific form of regionalism.¹ Established in 2002, the AU was the successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which was founded in 1963 to protect the newly won independence of African states. Headquartered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the Union has become a hub for a wide range of continental policies. Through several spokes, it is also connected to the African Regional Economic Communities (RECs).² And externally, the Union is linked through various interregionalism practices to other regional organizations, for instance the European Union (EU), as well as the League of Arab States (LAS).

The AU is a dynamic, yet constantly renegotiated regionalization project. Sometimes progress is gone as quickly as it was achieved. This has been the case with the early warning component of the AU's African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which currently is at a critical juncture.³ During the recent institutional reform of the Union,⁴ which, among other changes, has led to the merger of the previously separated departments of peace and security, on the one hand, and of political affairs, on the other, the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) was "dropped": it no longer is part of the Union's organigram – whether by mistake or due to a lack of insight into the functioning of the mechanism.⁵ As a consequence, important early warning functions are no longer performed. This concerns both the division of labour between the AU Commission (AUC) and the RECs as well as long-term, structural conflict prevention and the relation with member states, which partake in consultative processes assisted by the CEWS and which are aiming at the mitigation of the structural or root causes of conflict on the continent. Currently, in-house negotiations have begun on how to restore some of those key CEWS functions.

Against this background, this working paper reconstructs the emergence and practices of the CEWS. First, the focus is on the establishment of the CEWS as one of the five APSA pillars. Second, the Union's early warning practices are analysed. Historically, the CEWS started off by concentrating on the development of early warning capacities relating to the direct, short- to mid-term dimension of conflict prevention. Over the past decade, it has also developed practices that address the structural, long-term side of conflict prevention to address the root causes of violent conflict on the continent. This working paper provides insights into how the early warning function is operating both within the complex structure of the AUC and how it is working with the early warning mechanisms of the RECs – thus, detailing some aspects of a very specific form of regionalism.⁶ This is followed by conclusions.

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- 1 The is the focus of subproject B07 of the German Research Foundation's (DFG) Collaborative Research Centre (SFB) 1199: "Processes of Spatialization under the Global Condition". Since 2016, it is examining various forms of region-making around questions of peace and security, involving regional, continental and non-African organizations. The DFG support is gratefully acknowledged.
 - 2 The following eight RECs are officially recognized by the Union: the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Before the establishment of the African Union (AU), the idea was entertained that the RECs could become the building blocks of African unity.
 - 3 See U. Engel, "African Union 2.0: Relaunching the Pan-African Project", in: J. W. Harbeson and D. Rothchild (eds.), *Africa in World Politics: Sustaining Reform in a Turbulent World Order*, 7th edn., London: Routledge, forthcoming.
 - 4 AU Assembly, "Decision on the Institutional Reform" (adopted at the 11th Extraordinary Session of the AU Assembly, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 17–18 November), 2018, Ext/Assembly/AU/Dec.1 (XI); see P. Kagame, "The Imperative to Strengthen Our Union: Report on the Proposed Recommendations for the Institutional Reform of the African Union" (tabled at the 28th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 29 January), 2017.
 - 5 The AU had commissioned a consultancy company to draw the organigram for the merged the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS). The first draft was immediately rejected because of the many obvious flaws (July 2019). In the second draft, not only the CEWS was "forgotten" but also the AU Border Programme (AUBP), the Programme Management Team (PMT), and the Silencing the Guns (STG) unit. See U. Engel, "The African Union's Conflict Early Warning System Is No More: What Now?", *The Conversation*, Africa edition, 24 May 2022, <https://theconversation.com/the-african-unions-conflict-early-warning-system-is-no-more-what-now-183469>.
 - 6 See U. Engel, "Regional Organisations and Regionalisms", in: S. Marung and M. Middell (eds.), *Spatial Formats under the Global Condition*, Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019, pp. 310–333.

Establishing the Continental Early Warning System

“Bridging the gap between early warning and early action” has become a common-sense mantra in international relations after genocides were orchestrated in 1992 and 1995 in Bosnia and in 1994 in Rwanda. Ex post facto, many observers argued that these gross atrocities and human rights violations could have been prevented, provided the right international norms and institutional mechanisms had already been in place in those days. In the late 1990s and departing from the United Nations (UN) secretary-general’s Agenda for Peace,⁷ conflict prevention quickly became an important norm to guide international organizations, line ministries, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in this field.⁸ It also mattered for the OAU and the AU.

The CEWS is one of the less researched APSA pillars. Outside of the institution it is almost invisible; its practices are difficult to trace. Although some attention has been paid to the early warning function of the OAU Mechanism,⁹ there is no academic “state of the art” on the CEWS and early warning policies of the Union to speak of. The few articles published on the topic often lack institutional insight and have little (or no) understanding of the day-to-day practices and challenges of early warning in the context of the AUC and the RECs. A perspective of practice certainly is missing.¹⁰ A comprehensive overview on the design and early practices of the CEWS was published by a group of practitioners and academics involved in the making of the CEWS.¹¹ However, as this is a very dynamic policy field even the more substantial academic publications become outdated fairly quickly.¹² The relevant AUC division has regularly documented progress of the development of the Union’s early warning system.¹³

The transformation from the OAU into the AU from 1999 to 2002 was accompanied by a normative shift from the principle of “non-interference” to “non-indifference”.¹⁴ In order to address the early warning component of conflict prevention, the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the

7 United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG), “An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-Keeping”, 17 June 1992, A/47/277 – S/24111.

8 See U. Engel, “Early Warning”, in: M. Middell (ed.), *Routledge Handbook on Transregional Studies*, London: Routledge, 2019, pp. 573–581.

9 N. C. J. Bakwesegha, “The Role of the Organization of African Unity in Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in the Context of the Political Evolution of Africa”, *African Journal on Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution* 1, no. 1 (1996), pp. 4–22; C. D. Coning and H. Solomon, “Enhancing the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution”, *Politeia* 19, no. 1 (2000), pp. 13–30; M. Munyangwa and M. A. Vogt, *An Assessment of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, 1993–2000*, New York: International Peace Academy, 2000.

10 For some examples, see A. Behabtu, “The PSC and the Continental Early Warning System: Challenges and Operationalization”, in: T. Murithi and H. Lulie (eds.), *The African Union Peace and Security Council: A Five-Year Appraisal*, ISS Monograph, no. 187, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2013, pp. 45–55; A. H. Noyes and J. Yarwood, “The AU Continental Early Warning System: From Conceptual to Operational?”, *International Peacekeeping* 20, no. 3 (2013), pp. 249–262; and I. K. Souaré and P. S. Handy, “The State of Conflict Early Warning in Africa: Theory and Practice”, *African Security Review* 22, no. 2 (2013), pp. 1–10.

11 E. G. Wane et al., “The Continental Early Warning System: Methodology and Approach”, in: U. Engel and J. G. Porto (eds.), *Africa’s New Peace and Security Architecture: Promoting Norms, Institutionalizing Solutions*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2010, pp. 91–110.

12 L. Nathan, “Africa’s Early Warning System: An Emperor with No Clothes?”, *South African Journal of International Affairs* 14, no. 1 (2007), pp. 49–60; G. D. Carvalho, “Conflict Prevention: What’s in It for the AU?”, ISS Policy Brief, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2017; A. Gnanguènon, “Pivoting to African Conflict Prevention? An Analysis of Continental and Regional Early Warning Systems”, Brief, no. 3, Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2021.

13 African Union Commission (AUC) Conflict Management Division (CMD), African Union Continental Early Warning System: The CEWS Handbook, Addis Ababa: AUC PSD Conflict Management Division (mimeo), 2008; AUC CMD, “Meeting the Challenges of Conflict Prevention in Africa: Towards the Operationalization of the Continental Early Warning System”, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2008; AUC CMD, “Meeting the Challenges of Conflict Prevention in Africa: Towards the Operationalization of the Continental Early Warning System”, 2nd rev. and extended version, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2014; AU, “Conflict Prevention and Early Warning”, Addis Ababa: AUC Peace and Security Department, 2018; AU, “Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework: Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessments (CSVRA), and Country Structural Vulnerability Mitigation Strategies (CSVMS)”, Addis Ababa: African Union, 2018.

14 With respect to conflict prevention, see M. Mwanasali, “From Non-Interference to Non-Indifference: The Emerging Doctrine of Conflict Prevention in Africa”, in: J. Akpoperi, A. Ndinga-Muvumba and T. Murithi (eds.), *The African Union and Its Institutions*, Auckland Park: Jacana, 2008, pp. 41–61.

Peace and Security Council conceived of the CEWS as one of the five pillars of APSA.¹⁵ In terms of early warning capacities, the AU could already build upon a Conflict Management Directorate (CMD) with an infant early warning function that was part of the 1993 OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. Institutionalizing and professionalizing an AU early warning capacity required continued political support from member states and the RECs (i.e., organizing a buy-in), overcoming several technical challenges, and adapting to changing institutional frameworks. With the operationalization of the CEWS, the scope of early warning practices was widened from the early focus on operational, short-term to structural, long-term conflict prevention. Although the CEWS is the Union's centre for producing early warning information, by no means is it the only entity doing so. In fact, it is competing with other organizational units and persons for attention, human resources, and funds.¹⁶

The AU's early warning system is detailed in paragraphs 12 and 16 of the PSC Protocol. The CEWS was designed to "facilitate the anticipation and prevention of conflicts".¹⁷ It consists of "an observation and monitoring centre".¹⁸ This was actually the Situation Room (SitRoom) that already existed in the Conflict Management Directorate of the OAU Mechanism. The CEWS had three main functions: (1) data collection and monitoring, (2) conflict and cooperation analysis, and (3) the preparation of policy options for decision-makers (to "recommend the best course of action")¹⁹ – mainly the AUC chairperson, and through it, the Peace and Security Council (PSC). The CEWS was not meant to be a response mechanism in itself. The SitRoom was supposed to be linked to the "observation and monitoring units of the Regional Mechanisms".²⁰

A first challenge in the institutionalization of the CEWS was to translate some of the PSC Protocol's specifications into concrete practices. This, for instance, applies to the notion of "an appropriate early warning indicators module", because in 2002 nothing of this nature existed elsewhere in the world. On this issue, the PSC Protocol states that the early warning module shall be based "on clearly defined and accepted political, economic, social, military and humanitarian indicators".²¹ The second formidable challenge was how best to engage with decision-makers and how to create feedback loops between the early warning unit and the upper echelons of the AUC in charge of formulating and implementing early action.

A third challenge relates to the exact nature of the relation between the CEWS, on the one hand, and the RECs and the Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (RMs), on the other. In this respect, the PSC Protocol is not always crystal clear: sometimes it addresses the relation between elements of APSA and the RECs, and sometimes between APSA and the RMs. The division of labour between the Union and the RECs is described in terms of "comparative advantage", to be determined by "the prevailing circumstances".²² The PSC Protocol furthermore states that the Union has the primary responsibility for promoting "peace, security and stability in Africa" and the RMs "are part of the overall security architecture of the Union".²³ The AUC chairperson shall "harmonize and coordinate" the activities of the RECs "to ensure that these activities are consistent with the objectives and principles of the Union".²⁴ In this regard, the PSC Protocol details two coordination mechanisms, the establishment of liaison offices at the AU and the RECs respectively and the signing of a memorandum of understanding.²⁵

15 AU, "Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council", Durban: African Union, 2002.

16 See U. Engel, "Knowledge Production at the African Union on Conflict Early Warning", *South African Journal of International Affairs* 25, no. 1 (2018), pp. 117–132.

17 AU, "Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council", para. 12[1].

18 *Ibid.*, para. 12[2].

19 *Ibid.*, para. 12[5].

20 *Ibid.*, para. 12[2].

21 *Ibid.*, para. 12[4].

22 *Ibid.*, para. 16[1].

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*, para. 16[8–9].

Finally, a fourth challenge arose from the PSC Protocol's section on collaboration between the CEWS and partners. Working closely with the "United Nations, its agencies, other relevant international organizations" was uncontroversial, but extending this collaboration to "research centers",²⁶ academic institutions, and NGOs caused some debates among member states.²⁷ The same applied to collaboration with the Pan-African Parliament and African Commission on Human and People's Rights, on the one hand,²⁸ and civil society organizations (CSOs), on the other.²⁹ The latter were seen very critically and as a threat to regime security by some member states. However, already in 2007, the CEWS started preparing a "strategic partnership" with CSOs.

Organizationally, the CEWS was originally part of the Union's Peace and Security Department (PSD). It was located within the CMD, one of the four divisions of the department at that time.³⁰ The SitRoom, together with early warning officers, belonged to the Early Warning Unit. With the expansion of the AUC in terms of staff and the evolution of a more complex administration, this arrangement changed over time. By 2011, the CMD had become the Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division (CPEWD), one of the six PSD divisions. It was made up of four units: apart from the CEWS, there was the SitRoom, the Secretariat for the Panel of the Wise, and the AU Border Program (AUBP). With the institutional reform of the AU, as of 2021 there has been no unit that is still called CEWS. In the merged new Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), the SitRoom serves both the reorganized CMD as well as the Governance and Conflict Prevention Division (GCPD). Early warning and governance monitoring are supposed to be handled by desk officers, which are now grouped into three regional desks (West and Central Africa, East and Southern Africa, and North Africa), each staffed with five analysts. Obviously, their work is dominated by conflict management, with extremely little time for any serious analytical work on conflict prevention.

Building the CEWS started in October 2003 with an AU expert workshop with member states. In March 2005, this led to the formulation of a draft Roadmap for the Operationalisation of the CEWS (2005) – the only early road map for the operationalization of APSA, apart from the one on the African Standby Force.³¹ In April 2006, a consultative workshop was held with the RECs and international partners; this was followed by another workshop with experts from member states that was convened in December 2006 in Kempton Park (Johannesburg), South Africa. This workshop basically agreed on the parameters for the CEWS Indicator Module and other implementation details.³² Importantly, the meeting also adopted the draft road map – now called the Framework for the Operationalisation of CEWS – and decided that the CEWS would be working strictly on the basis of gathering open sources only. These were arranged in various baskets, ranging from AU field mission reports to online news articles. Intelligence-based data deliberately was left to another institution, the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services in Africa (CISSA).³³ After the endorsement of the principles worked out at Kempton Park by the AU Council of Ministers in January 2007,³⁴ the early warning unit

26 The English applied in AU documents is not consistent – sometimes American English is used, sometimes British English.

27 AU, "Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council", para. 12[3].

28 *Ibid.*, paras. 18–19.

29 *Ibid.*, paras. 20.

30 In the original so-called Maputo Structure (i.e., the organization chart that was adopted at the 2nd AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, held in July 2003 in the Mozambican capital), there were units for early warning, post-conflict, and structural prevention.

31 J. K. Cilliers, "Towards a Continental Early Warning System for Africa", ISS Papers, no. 102 (2005), Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.

32 AUC CMD, "Meeting the Challenges of Conflict Prevention in Africa", 2008.

33 Today, in addition to the CISSA, two more organizations have become crucial in this field: the African Center for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) and the African Police Cooperation Organization (AFRIPOL). See AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), "Communiqué" (issued after the 1073rd PSC meeting, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 6 April), 2022, PSC/PR/COMM. 1073 (2022); see L. Hutton, "Regional Security and Intelligence Cooperation in Africa: The Potential Contribution of the Committee on Intelligence and Security Services of Africa", in: J. G. Porto and U. Engel (eds.), *Towards an African Peace and Security Regime: Continental Embeddedness, Transnational Linkages, Strategic Relevance*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2011, pp. 179–193.

34 AU Council, "Decision on the Outcome of the Meeting of Governmental Experts on Early Warning and Conflict Prevention" (adopted by the 10th Ordinary Session of the AU Executive Council, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 25–26 January), 2007, EX.CL/Dec.336 (X).

produced *African Union Continental Early Warning System: The CEWS Handbook*, and in January 2008 the Union signed a memorandum of understanding with the RECs/RMs.³⁵

When the PSD began to work on the CEWS, there were no off-the-shelf technical toolboxes and no standard analytical models for early warning available. On the technical front, the CEWS first had to develop IT independence (including establishing an autonomous AU server, sufficient bandwidth, connectivity with the RECs, etc.). With the old system from the days of the OAU Mechanism still in place, it had to build, populate, and regularly update a database; recruit personnel; develop routines (standard operating procedures, SOPs); and invent new workflows. For the collection of structural data, the CEWS developed IT applications, including the Indicators and Profiles Module (a database) and Africa Prospects (a trained algorithm to assess the structural vulnerability of countries and forecast through probability scores).³⁶ For the collection and monitoring of events or dynamic data, the CEWS developed the Africa Media Monitor (AMM; a machine that was jointly developed with the EU's Joint Research Centre [JRC], based in Ispra, Italy, to archive thousands of internet media reports every ten minutes around the clock), the Africa Reporter (which gathers primary data from AU field missions and liaison offices, based on incident reports and related templates), LiveMon (a geo-coded display of live news from RSS feeds), and the Conflict Alerting and Analysis System (CAAS; based on the AMM, this is a trend detection tool). In combination, these tools allowed constructing and monitoring baselines of conflict-relevant activities.

The whole toolkit was integrated into the CEWS Portal, which not only is shared with the RECs, but also serves as an interface for exchanging early warning information. On the analytical side of early warning, the CEWS works with a combination of tools, including a series of Strategic Conflict Assessments (SCA), timelines, conflict mappings, and dynamic conflict analysis of conflict aggravators, triggers, and inhibitors. On this basis, the CEWS develops scenarios for planning and decision-making, applying a three-part set (status quo, worst case, and best case) that should be considered regarding the Union's mandate, interests, instruments, and past practices. By now, this important early warning function has been put on hold due to constraints of time and human resources. Finally, on this basis, the CEWS is producing various outputs, ranging from News Highlights, Daily Reports, and Flash Reports to substantial analytical Early Warning Reports. In addition, the CEWS contributes to a number of statutory reports tabled by the AUC chairperson to the PSC or the AU Assembly.

Like many other AU components, the CEWS relies heavily on support from international partners. With regard to seconding staff, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) played a major role. On infrastructure, the main sources of finance came from the EU's Africa Peace Facility (APF),³⁷ the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the German Development Agency (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH, GIZ), and the governments of Denmark, Japan, and other like-minded donor countries. Applications, expertise, and capacity-building for the SitRoom has been supported by the EU's JRC and the GIZ. The development of analytical tools and related training has been strongly supported by the GIZ. Donors command different capacities: some invest into programme and budget funding, while others support procurement. Most of the external finance is fairly flexible; few donors deploy highly specialized experts on the ground. Interestingly, donor support is demand driven, with detailed specifications and control by the PSD. Challenges often exist with regard to donor harmonization and limited AU absorption capacities. Donor support is still ongoing.

The CEWS became fully operational in the early 2010s. The remaining general challenges to the CEWS continues to include the systematic organization of feedback loops on the CEWS products

35 AU, "Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Area of Peace and Security between the African Union, the Regional Economic Communities and the Coordinating Mechanisms of the Regional Standby Brigades of Eastern Africa and Northern Africa", Addis Ababa: African Union, 2008.

36 This actually is the only forecasting function in the CEWS. The rest of the analytical tools are grounded in analysis and scenario-building.

37 The APF was replaced in March 2021 by the European Peace Facility (EPF).

with decision-makers, coordination, and harmonization between the CEWS and the some of the RECs, sustaining quality control throughout all stages of the early warning method and securing stable finances. And more specifically, the CEWS operates in an environment that is characterized by a constant fire-fighting mode, simply because of the number of conflicts and crises the AU has to attend to at any given time. In the second part of the 2010s, the focus of the CEWS was very much on the long-term transregional conflicts in Africa – such as the ones in Libya, the Sahelo-Saharan region, the Great Lakes region, and the Horn of Africa (including Somalia and Darfur) – the related Nouakchott and Djibouti processes, as well as the routinely upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections. Given the nature of violent conflict on the continent, current priorities of the AUC chairperson, the commissioner for peace and security, and the PSC are more geared towards crisis management than conflict prevention. As a consequence, the CEWS suffers from a huge amount of daily ad hoc decisions that divert attention away from the core mandate of early warning as detailed in the PSC Protocol.³⁸ In combination with shortages in human resources, in the late 2010s this led to a situation in which early warning reporting became based no longer on the development of scenarios and the development of response options to guide decision-makers on the best course of action, but rather on several shortcuts to *The CEWS Handbook*.

Early Warning Practices

Direct conflict prevention

With respect to direct conflict prevention, early warning capacities were developed in two institutional settings, within the AUC itself (and vis-à-vis the PSC) and within the framework of cooperation between the Union and the RECs/RMs. Between 2008 and 2013, the CEWS exclusively focused on direct, short-term conflict prevention. It was only in 2013 that a complementary structural, mid- to long-term dimension of conflict prevention was developed. It is still rather a marginal phenomenon.

In March 2013, and in the context of a debate on preventive diplomacy, the PSC decided to make systematic use of the CEWS and invited member states for periodic reviews, at least once every six months, “of the state of peace and security on the continent, using horizon scanning approaches, on the basis of updates provided by the CEWS, relevant AU institutions, such as the Panel of the Wise, African and international think tanks, civil society organization and other stakeholders”.³⁹ This decision was not just an acknowledgement of the utility of the CEWS, but for the first time also established a direct briefing link between the CEWS and the PSC. In addition, and with a view to tackle the distinctive silo mentality within the AUC, the PSD prepared a document through which some form of horizontal integration was introduced, an Inter-Departmental Task Force on Conflict Prevention (IDT-FCP), which was meant to bring together all departments working on conflict-relevant topics in order to organize a regular exchange of information.⁴⁰ Apart from the PSD, this included the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), Department of Social Affairs (DSA), Department of Rural Economy and Ag-

38 AU, “Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council”, para. 12 [5].

39 Explicit horizon scanning meetings were held twice, on 30 May 2016 (601st PSC meeting) and on 13 December 2019 (901st PSC meeting); see AU PSC, “Communiqué” (issued after the 360th PSC meeting, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 22 March), 2013, PSC/PR/COMM. (CCCLX). On the method, see United Nations Security Council (UNSC), “Horizon-Scanning Briefings: UN Security Council Working Methods, Security Council Report”, 3 October 2017, www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-security-council-working-methods/horizon-scanning-briefings.php (accessed 12 January 2020).

40 AU, “Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework”, Addis Ababa: African Union, 2013; AU PSC, “Communiqué” (issued after the 527th PSC meeting, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 29 July), 2015, PSC/PR/BR. (DXXVII).

riculture (DREA), Department of Women and Gender (DWG), Department of Legal Counsel, and so on. However, although the IDTFCP started its sessions in 2013, it was only meeting intermittently. One reason for this was the competition between the PSD and the DPA over responsibilities relating to the African Governance Architecture (AGA). Another important dimension of developing a division of labour within the AUC regarding early warning was the establishment of an office within the Bureau of the AUC chairperson to reconcile information coming from the CEWS (open source-based early warning), on the one hand, and the CISSA (intelligence-based early warning), on the other.

In developing the coordination function delineated in the PSC Protocol, or the vertical integration of early warning, the CEWS also started to engage the early warning systems of the RECs. Two regional early warning systems had actually preceded the establishment of the CEWS: the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN), established by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in 2002,⁴¹ and the Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), founded in 2003.⁴² In addition, there are the Conflict Early Warning System (COMWARN) of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA),⁴³ the East African Warning Mechanism (EACWARN) of the East African Community (EAC), the Central Africa Early Warning System (MARAC) of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Regional Early Warning Centre (REWC) of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Two RECS, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) and the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), still have to establish their own early warning systems.

Cooperation and harmonization of early warning practices between the AUC and the RECs is mainly done at the desk officer level. In 2008, the CEWS started to set up regular technical meetings (initially on a quarterly basis, then every six months, and during the Covid-19 pandemic no such meetings took place). It conducted joint trainings on *The CEWS Handbook*, licensed centrally purchased IT tools, created the CEWS Portal for information sharing, organized staff exchanges, and established secure intranet communication between the CEWS, on the one hand, and the EAC and ECOWAS, respectively, on the other. After four years or so, the technical meetings moved from merely exchanging information on the status of implementation and training to jointly developing the early warning agenda. Among other issues, the AU and the RECs discussed the role of media – and following the popular uprisings in North Africa in 2011 especially new social media – in early warning, horizon scanning techniques (see below) or gender mainstreaming in early warning. Out of these meetings, an institutionalized learning culture emerged. The current cooperation between the AU and the RECs is robust at the technical level, though less so at the strategic (or policy) level.

Structural conflict prevention

A second set of early warning practices evolved around attempts to strengthen the dimension of structural conflict prevention. In principle, the concept goes back to discussions following the UN secretary-general's Agenda for Peace.⁴⁴ A prominent example coined in this context is the EU's policies in this field under the notion of "structural stability", which depicts a situation defined by "sustainable economic development, democracy and respect for human rights, viable political structures

41 K. P. Apuuli, "The Intergovernmental Authority on Development's Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism: Can It Go beyond Pastoral Conflicts?", *African Security Review* 22, no. 2 (2013), pp. 11–25.

42 Both were actually using similar IT components for data collection and monitoring. Those were developed by a Boston-based consultancy company and financed by the GIZ.

43 J. G. Porto, "COMWARN: COMESA's Distinctive Contribution to the Continental Early Warning System", in: U. Engel and J. G. Porto (eds.), *Towards an African Peace and Security Regime: Continental Embeddedness, Transnational Linkages, Strategic Relevance*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, pp. 125–151; O. Etyang, T. H. Chinemhute, and T. Abdulkadir, "Conflict Prognosis: The COMESA Early Warning System in Perspective", *International Journal of Scientific Research and Innovative Technology* 3, no. 11 (2016), pp. 1–16.

44 UNSG, "An Agenda for Peace".

and healthy environmental and social conditions, with the capacity to manage change without resort to conflicts".⁴⁵ Or as veteran peace researcher Fen Osler Hampson put it, structural prevention "involves measures that address the root causes of violence such as discrimination and economic deprivation, societal stress, military threats and sources of insecurity, and various environmental and resource degradation problems that may contribute to political instability and conflict".⁴⁶ Internationally, support for the principle of structural conflict prevention was renewed a few years ago.⁴⁷

The AU PSC stated twice very strongly that it was in favour of the principle of structural conflict prevention. On 27 October 2014, it commended ongoing efforts by the AUC to develop a tool to assess structural vulnerability in member states.⁴⁸ The tool is meant to identify a country's structural vulnerability to conflict at an early stage. It specifically emphasizes drivers of violent conflict in the following areas: (1) socioeconomic development; (2) good governance, rule of law, democracy, and human rights; (3) security sector; (4) environment and climate change; (5) gender and youth; (6) post-conflict peace-building; and (7) transitional justice and reconciliation. In response to this call, the CEWS finalized the Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework (CSCPF) as a tool to promote a AUC-wide and coordinated approach to structural prevention.⁴⁹ And in order to facilitate the identification at an early stage of a country's structural vulnerability to conflict, the PSD came up with a Country Structural Vulnerability Assessment (CSVA, meanwhile renamed the Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment [CSVRA]) and a Country Structural Vulnerability Mitigation Strategy (CSVMS).⁵⁰ The CSVRA is anchored in *The CEWS Handbook*, in particular in the Africa Prospects forecasting tool, which looks at the vulnerability of countries to conflict, "based on country profiles or sets of structural indicators".⁵¹ Through the CSVMS, the CEWS wants to identify "dimensions upon which the AU and the RECs can best support the actions to be undertaken" by the government conducting this exercise.⁵² The process of engaging with the method was partly modelled along the lines of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM).⁵³ Upon request by an AU member state, the CEWS and the relevant REC would organize and prepare a country assessment team nominated by a member state.

The first AU member state to voluntarily implement this tool was Ghana (a country that has also made very active use of the APRM process). Piloting the Union's policy on structural conflict prevention, the government of Ghana held national and regional level consultations in October and November 2017 in Accra, Tamale, and Kumasi.⁵⁴ In 2018, the AUC and the government of Ghana presented a final report. Among other findings, this report highlighted challenges around topics such as rising unemployment, especially among the youth; corruption; a lack of accountability; and the abuse of public

45 EU Commission, "The European Union and the Issues of Conflicts in Africa: Peace-Building, Conflict Prevention and Beyond", 16 March 1996, SEC (1996) 332, p. 7.

46 F. O. Hampson, "Preventive Diplomacy at the United Nations and Beyond", in: F. O. Hampson and D. M. Malone (eds.), *From Reaction to Conflict Prevention: Opportunities for the UN System*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002, pp. 139–158.

47 See World Bank and United Nations (UN), "Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict" (conference edition), Washington DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2018.

48 AU PSC, "Communiqué" (issued after the 463rd PSC meeting, held in Addis, Ethiopia, on 27 October), 2014, PSC/PR/COMM. (CDLXIII).

49 Partly inspired by Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), "The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework", Abuja: Economic Community of West African States, 2008, MSC/REG1/01/08.

50 AU PSC, "Communiqué" (issued after the 502nd PSC meeting, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 29 April), 2015, PSC/PR/COMM.2 (DII).

51 AU, "Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework: Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessments (CSVRA), and Country Structural Vulnerability Mitigation Strategies (CSVMS)", p. 6.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 6f.

53 The APRM is a voluntarily African self-monitoring mechanism that originated in 2002 from the New Economic Partnership for Africa (NEPAD) process. It looks into democratic, political, economic, and corporate governance; see K. Matlosa, "Pan-Africanism, the African Peer Review Mechanism and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance: What Does the Future Hold?", Occasional Paper, no. 190 (2014), Braamfontein: South African Institute of International Affairs. By now, NEPAD and the APRM have been integrated into the AU. As of mid-2022, 38 out of 55 AU member states participate in the APRM – though with very different degrees of commitment and earnestness; see A. B. H. Chikwanha, "Governance", in: U. Engel (ed.), *Yearbook on the African Union*, vol. 2, Leiden: Brill, 2021, pp. 85–107.

54 AU, "Press Release", 3 November 2017, www.peaceau.org/uploads/press-release-v2.pdf.

office.⁵⁵ This pilot exercise remained partly incomplete as no detailed, results-based CSVMS was ever drafted. Rolling out the structural conflict prevention tool to other member states then was stalled by the Covid-19 pandemic. In early 2020, Côte d'Ivoire actually had indicated that it was willing to be the second country to voluntarily apply the tool.⁵⁶ However, due to Covid-19 the process did not make much progress. Meanwhile, in 2021 Zambia became the third AU member state to start the CSVMS process.

Perspectives

Early warning and conflict prevention are permanently trying to respond to the changing landscape and nature of violent conflict on the continent. In recent years, the CEWS has widened its thematical focus to include so-called non-traditional challenges to peace and security such as the consequences of climate change and pandemics (e.g., HIV/Aids, Ebola, Covid-19, etc.), as well as human rights atrocities that are below the threshold of violent conflict, transhumance nomadism, and the relation between new IT and AI technologies and violent conflict. Apart from updating software tools and different products, the CEWS is moving towards an Integrated Early Warning System (IEWS) for the AU. A pilot in this respect is being developed with the (previous) DREA on the nexus between climate change and peace and security. The CEWS is also spearheading the early warning dimension of the AU Youth for Peace (Y4P) Africa Programme.

A second field of expansion of the CEWS activities is related to the emergence of National Infrastructures for Peace (NI4P) in AU member states and attempts by the RECs to build Regional Infrastructures for Peace (RI4P). The CEWS is actively supporting the RECs in establishing REWCs as well as National Early Warning Centres (NEWCs). Using funds available under the EU's APF, efforts have been supported to strengthen the exchange of experiences between the RECs, for instance the EAC and ECOWAS. The CEWS is also trying to develop the early warning reporting capacities of CSOs in the Horn of African and East Africa, quite similar to the successful network of CSOs in ECOWAS, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), which was founded in 1998.

Engaging with the CSVRA and the CSVMS has shown that many of the policies that need to be put in place to support structural stability in member states are actually beyond the means of the AU. It simply lacks the finances and the instruments, for instance, to invest heavily in the educational sector of members states or to enlarge the absorption capacity or to provide access of labour markets, and so forth. This kind of long-term and substantial investment calls for new partnerships. In 2020, the AU therefore established a working group that brings together possible partners in such an endeavour: the African Development Bank, the UNDP, the World Bank, the RECs, and others.

Acknowledging the contribution of the APRM in addressing some of the structural root causes of conflicts on the continent, particularly in the area of governance, the PSC decided in March 2020 to make use of the APRM as an early warning tool for conflict prevention.⁵⁷ In the future, the APRM Secretariat will brief the PSC twice a year, just as the CEWS does. Among other concerns, the decision was based on a careful consideration of governance reports on Mozambique, Côte d'Ivoire, and Egypt. Evidently, this decision creates a need for closer collaboration between the APRM and the various pillars of APSA, particularly the CEWS, the Panel of the Wise, and the RECs/RMs. A joint coordination retreat planned for May 2020 fell victim to Covid-19.

55 AUC and Government of the Republic of Ghana (GRoG), "Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment and Country Structural Vulnerability Mitigation Strategy", Addis Ababa: AU Peace and Security Department, Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division, and the Government of the Republic of Ghana, 2018.

56 This was before the controversial presidential elections were held on 31 October 2020.

57 AU PSC, "Communiqué" (issued after the 914th PSC meeting, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 5 March), 2020, PSC/PR/COMM. [CMXIV].

Finally, in July 2022 the Commissioner Political Affairs, Peace and Security launched I-RECKE, a new platform for the inter-regional exchange of knowledge on early warning and conflict prevention between AUC and the RECs. I-RECKE is to be based in Addis Ababa. It will be co-chaired by the Commissioner and the AUC, on a rotational basis, one of the chief executives of the RECs. It remains to be seen, how this platform will operate in practice, in particular regarding the division of labour with CEWS.⁵⁸

Conclusions

Discussing the emergence of a division of labour between the continental AU and the RECs, this working paper concentrated on the early warning component of the AU's policy on conflict prevention, that is to say the CEWS. Before the institutional reform of the AUC in early 2021, the CEWS – one of the five pillars of APSA – was fully operational, although collaboration with some of the RECs remained work-in-progress (especially vis-à-vis the northern and central African regions). The technical systems were in place to fully support the early warning and conflict prevention function foreseen in the PSC Protocol, although a lack of human resources, the dominant working culture of ad hoc assignments, and functional overload were constraining factors. On the basis of *The CEWS Handbook*, adopted in 2008, and related SOPs, the CEWS is producing a range of well-defined products. There was an increasing demand for the CEWS from other APSA pillars such as the Panel of the Wise, to name but one. However, silo mentalities between departments and even between AUC divisions seem to prevail and the IDTFCP is still underutilized. And within the AUC, the CEWS is constantly competing for the attention of decision-makers with other sources of information on potential violent conflict or ongoing crisis.

Despite some shortcomings, the coordination and harmonization role of the AUC vis-à-vis the RECs/RMs seemed to be most advanced in early warning (this also goes for cooperation between the RECs). The AU has reinforced the principle of conflict prevention; it has also adopted a series of PSC communiqués that strongly support both the direct, short- to medium-term, and structural, long-term sides of conflict prevention. The PSC has regularly called on member states to make systematic use of these tools, especially the CSCPF. Finally, the CEWS has started playing an important role in supporting the building of regional and national Early Warning Centres. This progress was interrupted when the institutional reform disarmed the CEWS. The recent decision to explore ways of resurrecting the now defunct CEWS will hopefully lead to the full reestablishment of all CEWS functions. It would be ironic if one of the flagship projects for cooperation between the AU and the RECs were to fail.

58 See PSC Insights [Pretoria], 8 September 2022.

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