The African Union's twin
APSA and AGA agenda -
Moving beyond donor dependence
and member states' resistance?[1]

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Abstract

The African Union (AU) has embarked on a substantial twin policy project in the fields of peace/security and democracy. However, at least until very recent implementation of both the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the complementary African Governance Architecture (AGA) has been fairly slow. In this article two factors are discussed that might help to shed some light on what could be named a difficult "implementation environment" for APSA and AGA: First, the inability or unwillingness of AU member states to provide stable and substantial finance and, second, resistance to the reform agenda by some member states. After a discussion of the high levels of donor dependence as well as failure of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) to implement AGA compliance mechanisms, more recent developments – the African Union looking for alternative sources of finance and reforming its governance – are assessed to gauge the Union's chances to overcome financial dependence and member states' resistance. In the end it is argued, that there is reason for some cautious optimism that the

African Union Commission, but also a sufficient number of member states are getting serious about establishing control over the continental reform process and the twin APSA/AGA agenda.

Introduction

The African Union has embarked on a substantive twin policy project in the fields of peace/security and democracy. In 2002 the continental body – it was established in 2001 as successor to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, 1963) – has adopted the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council that lays out the institutions and instruments of an *African Peace and Security Architecture*; and in 2007 the Union agreed on the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) which summarizes the principles and practices of a complementary *African Governance Architecture*. The two documents represent the core of the Union's political ambitions (African Union 2002, 2007; AU Assembly 2014).

However, implementation of this double project has been tardy. Initially meant to be realized by 2010, the APSA only some five years later became somewhat operational, though important elements, in particular with regard to the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), are not fully implemented. The ratification process of the African Charter took five years, i.e. until 2012 – implementation is largely pending. The reasons for slow and/or incomplete implementation of the twin agenda are manifold – apart from institutional or capacity issues not the least the dramatic workload and crisis in the areas that APSA/AGA are supposed to address, are to be mentioned (see below). In this article two additional factors are discussed that might help to shed some light on the difficult "implementation environment" for APSA/AGA: namely the inability or unwillingness of AU member states to provide stable and substantial finance (which led to high levels of dependency on donors and international partners, and undermined ownership) as well as resistance to the reform agenda by some member states.

After briefly introducing the APSA and AGA agenda in the next section, this article will proceed by developing the main argument. The third section on donor dependence will briefly look at budget trends, the dynamics of member states' contributions as well as the role of donors in supporting certain parts of the budget; the subsequent fourth section on member states' resistance to AGA will discuss failure of implementing AGA compliance

mechanisms, namely effectuating regular progress reports on the state of democracy and governance in member states. This will be linked to a discussion of the authoritarian nature of a considerable number of member states represented in the institution which is overviewing implementation of the AGA compliance mechanisms, i.e. the Peace and Security Council. Finally, more recent developments – the African Union looking for alternative sources of finance and reforming its governance – will be assessed with a view to discuss chances of the Union to overcome financial dependence and member states' resistance. In the end it is argued that there is reason for some cautious optimism that the African Union Commission, but also a sufficient number of member states are getting serious about establishing control over the continental reform process and the twin APSA/AGA agenda.

The twin architecture of APSA and AGA

Against the backdrop of historical events after the end of the Cold War – including widespread conflicts in Western Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes Region and the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 as well as the failure of UN peace-keeping in some parts of the continent and the withdrawal of the West (Reno 2011; Williams 2011; Straus 2015) – and based on an analysis of the weaknesses of the 1993 OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (Munyangwa/ Vogt 2000), the OAU was transformed into the African Union (Welz 2013). Whereas the OAU had focussed on the processes of decolonisation as well as the struggle against settler colonialism and apartheid, the new continental body mainly had to deal with daring democratic transitions and the scourge of violent conflict.

The African Union is based on new norms and institutions (African Union 2000; Murithi 2009; Mwanasali 2008; Williams 2007). Though it reaffirmed important OAU norms, such as sovereignty of member states and non-interference in each other's "internal affairs", it also introduced an innovative principle to Africa's intra-state relations: "The right of the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity …" [African Union 2000: §4(h)]. Institutionally, APSA is made up of the AU Commission (AUC) that is supposed to act as the secretariat to the highest decision-making body of the Union, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government (AHSG); a Peace and Security Council (PSC) that is based on

regional representation, with renewable membership of two to three years and without veto-rights; the African Standby Force (ASF) with its five regional brigades for rapid deployment; an advisory Panel of the Wise of elder statespersons; the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) that is monitoring, analysing and preparing response options to violent conflict; and the AU Peace Fund as a funding mechanism (on APSA see, for instance, Besada 2010; Franke 2009; Engel/ Gomes Porto 2010).

In the same vain AGA has summarised core values and principles as well as desired practices in the field of democracy. In contrast to the voluntary African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) under the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NePAD) initiative, the Charter is binding for all AU member states. Basically, the Charter is meant to promote adherence of AU member states "to the universal values and principles of democracy and respect for human rights"; "(…) adherence to the principle of the rule of law premised upon the respect for, and the supremacy of, the Constitution and constitutional order in the political arrangements" of member states; and "(…) the holding of regular free and fair elections to institutionalize legitimate authority of representative government as well as democratic change of governments" [African Union 2007, §2(1-3)]. In addition, the Charter speaks out very clearly against unconstitutional changes of government (UCG) in member states "as a serious threat to stability, peace, security and development"; it wants to "promote and protect the independence of the judiciary" as well as to "nurture, support and consolidate good governance by promoting democratic culture and practice, building and strengthening governance institutions and inculcating political pluralism and tolerance (…)" [ibid. §2(4-6)].

Furthermore, the Charter calls on member states to domesticate the principles of the Charter and bring through "legislative, executive and administrative actions" all member states' national laws and regulations into conformity with the Charter [ibid. §44(1)]. And, finally, the Charter established a reporting and compliance mechanism: Beginning from 15 February 2012 (when the Charter entered into force) signatories were supposed to submit every two years a report to the AU Commission "on the legislative or other relevant measures taken with a view to giving effect to the principles and commitments of the Charter" [ibid. §49(1)]. The AU Commission was then to prepare and submit to the AU Assembly, "through the Executive Council, a synthesized report on the implementation of the Charter" – with the

Assembly tasked to "take appropriate measures aimed at addressing issues raised in the report" [ibid. §49(4)].

Generally speaking, after the end of the Cold War the number of violent conflicts in Africa at first had escalated, then decreased, and since the mid-2000s are on the rise again. According to the Heidelberg Conflict Barometer (based on HIIK 2003-2018) the overall number of conflicts on the continent has risen from 48 in 2002 to 122 in 2014 (and slightly fallen to 106 last year). The Heidelberg Conflict Barometer defines three types of violent conflict and two forms of non-violent conflict: wars, limited wars and violent crisis as well as non-violent crisis and disputes (as to the method see HIIK 2018: 6-8). During the period 2002 to 2017 the number of wars in Africa has increased from 2 to 11; the number of limited wars rose 2006 from 5 to 14 and, after some easing, again 2012 from 7 to 13; and incidents of violent crisis increased rapidly: in 2005 from 12 to 25, in 2008 from 24 to 33, in 2012 from 40 to 48, in 2014 from 47 to 55, in 2016 from 51 to 63; and decreased again to 57 last year (based on HIIK 2003-2018; see also AU Assembly 2016a, 2017). For the mid- to late-2000s these trends have been attributed to an increasing number of *coups d'etat* and other unconstitutional changes of government, electoral violence and presidential third-term debates that turned violent (AUC Chairperson 2009, 2010). Since the so-called Arab Spring, i.e. the popular uprisings in Northern Africa in 2011, and their failure, a huge fall-out can be observed that is also linked to the spread of terrorism and violent extremism (AUC Chairperson 2011, 2014).

Partly these developments translated into a decrease of the average quality of democracy and governance as measured by Freedom House, i.e. "political rights" and "civil liberties". As the US political scientist Larry Diamond has observed, there is a global "democratic recession" that is also clearly shown in the data on African countries (Diamond 2015). Accordingly, between 2005 and 2013 the average score for "political rights, which in itself is a composite index, in the 49 countries of Sub-Saharan Africa on a reconfigured scale with standardized scores, ranging from 0 to 1, has decreased from 0.53 (2005) to 0.49 (2013) while at the same time the rates for "civil liberties" went down from 0.41 to 0.46 (ibid.: 149).

In this period, the nature of violent conflict on the African continent has also changed from one used to be dominated by non-ideological post-Cold War "new wars" around ethnic identities and the rise of non-state armed actors (see the classic claim made by Kaldor 1999), to situations that are increasingly

characterized by, at least, the following features (AUC Chairperson 2011, 2014):

- violent actors with a multiplicity of actor roles (depending on the situation they can be illegal traders, "rebels" or Jihadists);
- the emergence of transnational networks rather than clear-cut national groups (e.g. Jihadists in Mali, Somalia, etc.);
- growing links between these groups and transnational organised crime in drugs, cars, counterfeits, humans, small arms and light weapons, etc.;
- development of conflicts increasingly in the margins of territories and in transnational theatres of operation (the spaces in between, the borderlands) rather than in containerized states;
- a rise in "transterritorial deployments" (see Callaghy et al. 2001) – meaning external actors deployed to Africa that maintain their external identity (for instance, UN refugee camps, US special forces, mercenaries, INGOs, etc.);
- and, increasingly, targeting of civilians, especially women and children, including systematic rape and massive displacements etc.

In a recent report by the African Development Bank (2014) the spaces of violent conflict have been described as "fragile states".

Against this background, the African Union and the RECs have engaged in a wide range of activities from pre-conflict mediation and preventive diplomacy, to peace support operations and counter-terrorism policies during conflict, to post-conflict reconstruction and development (see, for instance, AU Assembly 2016a, 2017). All these interventions require substantial amounts of predictable funding.

The AU budget: High levels of donor dependency

Generally speaking, documentation of the AU finances used to be fairly non-transparent and incomplete. No data was published for the first five years (2002-2006); only budget estimates were published (as opposed to real expenditure); there are no regular financial reports; data on expenditure for different AU structures is fragmented (though increasing in accuracy over time); there is no systematic data on voluntary contributions by member states or foreign donations outside the official budget; and there are supplementary budgets for 2011, 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2017 (here and in the following Engel 2015, 2017a, 2018).

In 2007, the first financial year (FY) when the proposal of the AU Executive Council (of Foreign Ministers) for the budget was published,[3] the total budget estimates were USD 133mn. This has peaked in FY2015 with a budget estimate of USD 522.1mn; in FY 2017 the budget has been set at USD 453mn. From 2009 (the first FY when this separation was documented) to 2017, the operational budget line has increased from USD 95.6mn to USD 163.4mn, while the programme budget line has increased from USD 68.7mn to USD 282.7mn (with a peak in FY 2015 at USD 379.4mn). During this period, the relative weight of the programme budget line increased from 58.2 percent (2009) to 72.7 percent (2015). At the same time the percentage of member states' contributions to the total budget decreased until 2015. This was felt in the programme budget line in particular. Increasingly the African Union got more and more dependent on international partners (while still managing to come up with the core funding form maintaining the institution). AU member states' contributions to the overall dropped 72.7 percent from (2007) to 28.2 percent (2015), as shown in graph 1. While they managed to raise almost 100 percent of the costs for the operational budget line, donors increasingly had to take care of the programme budget line. Their share of finance rose from 27.3 percent (2007) to 71.8 percent (2015). For further developments see below.

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[3] AU financial years are running from 1 January to 31 December.

Graph 1: AU member states vs. partners' budget contributions (2007-2018, in %)

Sources: © Engel 2018, based on AU Executive Council figures, 2007-2018. Note: No related figures published for FY 2012.

At the same time, a majority of AU member states have accumulated substantial arrears, fluctuating from ca. USD 45mn (FY 2011) to USD 76mn (FY 2015) (AU Commission 2016: 6). In 2017 the AU Commission for the first time admitted that on average only "67 percent of assessed contribution is collected annually from Member States. About 30 Member States default either partially or completely on average, annually" (AU Commission 2017). This has led some member states, over and above their accessed contribution, to shoulder a larger share of the financial burden. In 2007 Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Nigeria and South Africa decided to take over 15 percent each of the Union's budget. However, this formula had to be changed because of the so-called Arab Spring when both Egypt and Libya no longer could follow this formula. It was subsequently changed in FYs 2013 and 2015 when these countries (now without Libya) shouldered a total of 65.49 and 64.52 percent, respectively. Finally, in 2016 a decision was taken to the effect that each of the four would contribute 12 percent of the budget (AU Executive Council 2016). Libya couldn't put up a bigger contribution any more, Angola wasn't willing to do so (though it became the fifth most important contributor). Libya's place was actually taken over by Morocco – the country was re-admitted to the Union in January 2017.

A first hypothesis can be drawn from the above: In all likelihood the overall financial situation of the African Union may have had a negative impact on its ability to implement, and possibly also steer, the twin APSA/AGA agenda (and this statement obviously brackets general capacity and financial

absorption issues). It certainly did not create an environment conducive for implementation. Although there are no figures on the overall real disbursements related to peace/democracy (programme and otherwise), one ratio is indicative of the challenges the Union was facing: If one simply compares AU member states' contributions to the budget estimates of the Union on the one hand to the volume of international finance for UN peace-keeping operations in Africa on the other,[4] the Union's dependency ratio in this field alone consistently is above 97 percent (Engel 2015: 19). So far peace support operations in Africa are almost mainly funded through accessed UN contributions and the EU Africa Peace Facility (APF). Clearly this has raised serious questions of ownership and, arguably, heteronomy.

Member states' resistance against compliance mechanisms

The 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance only entered into force on 15 February 2012, after the required 15th member state had ratified the document and deposited the legal instruments. Comparing the group of AU member states that has ratified and deposited to the group of countries that hasn't even signed the text is interesting – because both groups are not simply made up of the usual suspects (see table 1).[5]

Table 1: Signatories and non-signatories of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (as of 9 January 2012)

Ratified & deposited (N = 15)	Not signed (N = 14)
Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Lesotho, Mauretania, Nigeria, Niger, Rwanda, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Zambia	*Algeria*, *Angola*, Botswana, *Cape Verde*, Egypt, Eritrea, Libya, *Madagascar*, *Malawi*, *Seychelles*, Somalia, Tanzania, *Tunisia*, Zimbabwe

Source: African Union (2012). Adopted on 30 January 2007; entered into force on 15 February 2012. As of 18 June 2018, 46 out of 55 members have signed and 32 deposited; countries in *italics* signed and ratified after 2012 (Somalia and Zimbabwe have signed).
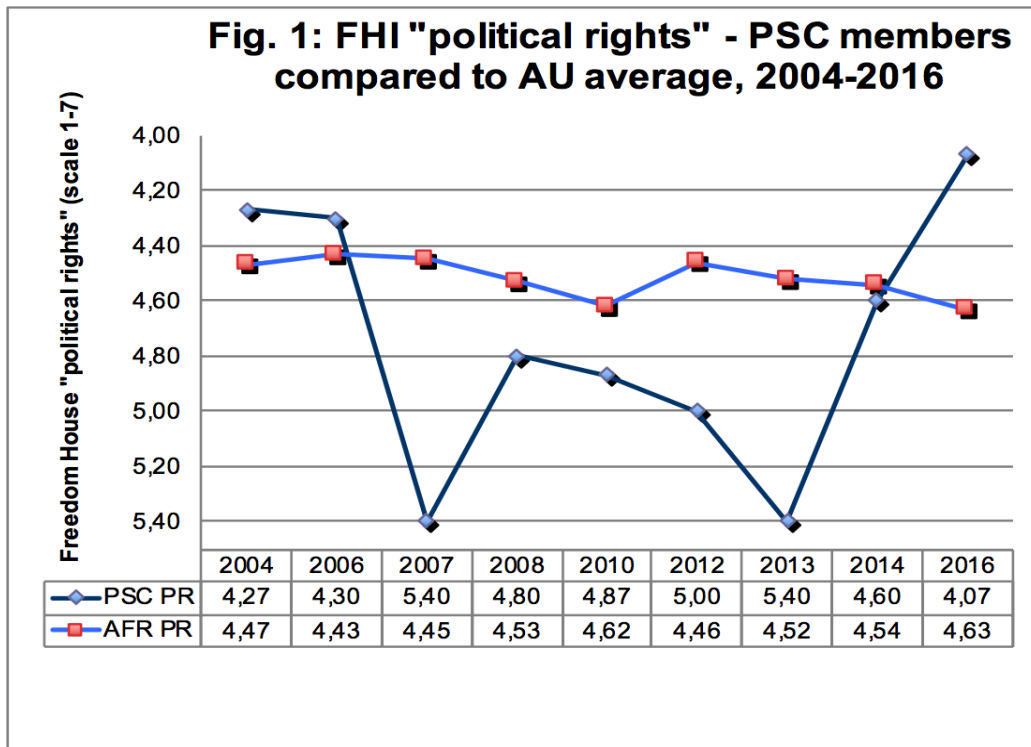
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[4] Note: UN financial years are 1 July to 30 June.

[5] Obviously apart from ratification, the domestication of AGA instruments is of key importance. Yet, as of July 2018 only Togo has followed the compliance mechanism and tabled a respective report.

To mention just two countries situated in opposite camps on the question of the ACDEG: Despite considered, in political science terms, to be a rather illiberal democracy Rwanda has deposited, whereas Botswana – the showpiece democracy in Southern Africa – has not even signed the Charter. Group 1 of countries also includes other illiberal democracies such as Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, and Mauretania; group 2 also is made up of Cape Verde, Seychelles and Tanzania who usually score rather well on democracy indices. Obviously a simple correlation with standard measurements of democracy and governance cannot explain member states' behaviour when it comes to signing and ratifying the Charter, or lack thereof. Using Freedom House (FH) scores on "political rights" and "civil liberties" on a 7-point scale, groups 1 and 2 differ on "political rights" by only 0.36 points and on "civil liberties" by only 0.41 points (Engel 2017b: 9f., based on Freedom House Index 2004-2016). So comparing FH index scores produces somewhat counter-intuitive results. Signing, ratification and depositing of the Charter does not seem to correlate directly with democracy/good governance FH index scores. Explanations can only be speculative as so far no qualitative research has been conducted on the question of national interests on the one hand and ratification behaviour of AU member states on the other. So some countries may have taken a pragmatic or opportunistic stance and ratified because they thought they were expected to do so by some of the donors or because pressure has been applied on them by regional hegemons, or any other reason.
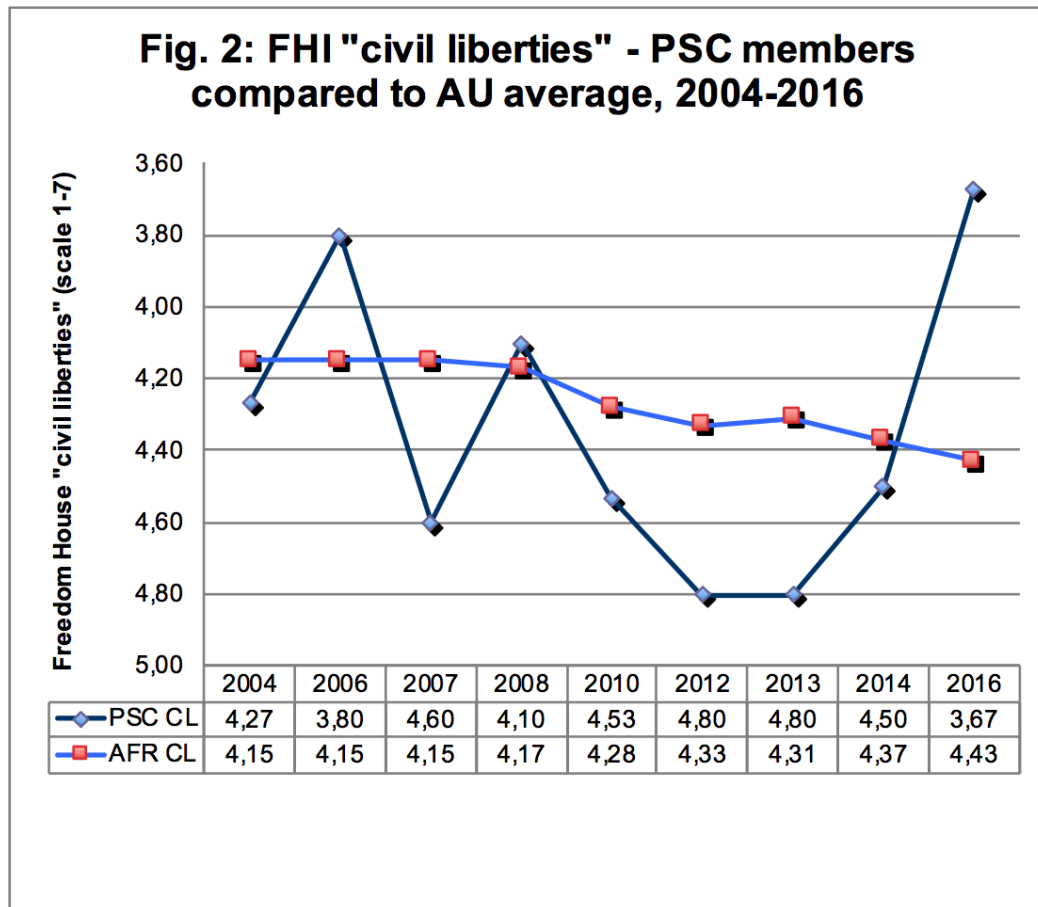
However, there is a strong inverse relationship between the lack of governance quality and membership on the AU Peace and Security Council. In the academic literature it is generally accepted that – apart from the AU Assembly which meets twice a year – the PSC has become the major decision-making body of the Union (Williams 2009; Sturman/ Hayatou 2010; Aning 2013; Dersso 2014). And the PSC is actually tasked with overseeing implementation of AGA compliance mechanisms and AGA implementation. When comparing Freedom House scores of all AU member states to those of PSC members, it is obvious that almost throughout all the years since 2004 Council members on average are more illiberal than the rest of African states (whereby the average of all member states is fairly non-democratic anyway, i.e. below 4.4; see figure 1). Apart from the 2004 and 2006 PSC composition, in all subsequent years the average Freedom House score on "political rights" for PSC members is below that of the AU membership at large, in some years

quite dramatically at levels of 5.4 (2007 and 2013). Obviously this is what is happening when regions nominate their peers, from the Central African Republic (Central region) to Guinea-Bissau (West) to Libya (North) to Sudan (East) to Zimbabwe (Southern), to name but a few.

Fig. 1: FHI "political rights" - PSC members compared to AU average, 2004-2016

	2004	2006	2007	2008	2010	2012	2013	2014	2016
PSC PR	4,27	4,30	5,40	4,80	4,87	5,00	5,40	4,60	4,07
AFR PR	4,47	4,43	4,45	4,53	4,62	4,46	4,52	4,54	4,63

Source: © Engel 2018, based on Freedom House Index (2004-2017, accessed: 31 October 2018).

A similar picture can be drawn with regard to Freedom House scores on "civil liberties" (see figure 2): In most years there is a considerable deviation of the score for PSC members from the AU average which leads to the second hypothesis: Most countries represented on the Council simply have no interest in furthering the democracy/good governance agenda encapsulated in AGA and driven by the AU Commission and an alliance of like-minded member states – hence, there was no push for implementing the compliance mechanisms of the African Charter.

Fig. 2: FHI "civil liberties" - PSC members compared to AU average, 2004-2016

	2004	2006	2007	2008	2010	2012	2013	2014	2016
PSC CL	4,27	3,80	4,60	4,10	4,53	4,80	4,80	4,50	3,67
AFR CL	4,15	4,15	4,15	4,17	4,28	4,33	4,31	4,37	4,43

Freedom House "civil liberties" (scale 1-7)

Source: © Engel 2018, based on Freedom House Index (2004-2017, accessed: 31 October 2018).

On a region-to-region basis, this picture is slightly changing (Engel 2017: 11f.): Between 2004 and 2016 AU PSC members have an average score for "political rights" of 4.85. In contrast Central Africa (average score of 6.31) and Northern Africa (average of 6.11) fare worse, and the remaining regions do slightly (Eastern Africa with an average of 4.54) or distinctly better (Western Africa with 3.80, and Southern Africa with 3.55). On "civil liberties" the same: Central Africa (average score of 5.54) and Northern Africa (5.33) are poor performers compared to the already not so great PSC average (4.42), while the others are fairly better (Western Africa at 3.99, Southern Africa at 3.28) – and Eastern Africa is almost on par with PSC members (4.55). The African Union illiberal democracies are concentrated in certain regions – Central, Northern and parts of Eastern Africa – while, on average, the better performing countries are mainly located in Western and Southern Africa. In the literature on democracy in Africa a number of institutionalist, path-dependent arguments have been developed to explain for this geographical variation, for instance, with reference to different modes of state-military

relations (Decalo 1998), institutional choice based on the dominant political economy (Boone 2003), or political culture (Diamond 2011), and the like.

In combination, observations on the unwillingness or incapacity of AU member states to provide continuous and reliable funding for AU activities in the field of peace/security and democracy/governance as well as the PSC's unpreparedness to implement the AGA compliance mechanism can be related to a bundle of explanations. To start with, there always has been a strong organizational culture, both within OAU and the African Union, of non-implementation. Nowadays, even well-performing governments (in terms of AGA) seem to have internalized a "don't rock the boat" mentality, at least in public appearance. Generally, there is very little visible opposition of like-minded African liberal democracies towards their fellow illiberal club members. In addition, there is a gap between the AU Commission's paramount capacity of drafting AU documents and faltering AU member states' acceptance of these drafts which reflects the lack of *de jure* leverage of the Commission over AU member states (see Hardt 2016 on current attempts by member states to regain control over AU Commission activities). In sum, the gap between liberal and illiberal AU member states has been widening over the years: In contrast to repeated rhetorical continental claims, the African Union may be less and less a community of countries bound together by "shared values", but rather a form of club governance by historic default and geography that is held together by anti-colonial/anti-interventionist needs.

2015-2018: Moving beyond donor dependence and member states' resistance

However, in the past four years the African Union has seen some very interesting dynamics that may constitute a critical juncture and enable the Union to move beyond donor dependency and member states' resistance. First, serious attempts are being undertaken to find "alternative sources of financing" for the Union and, second, the AU also decided to start substantial institutional reforms that may pave the way for implementing the AGA compliance mechanism.

With regard to its finances, the African Union has mandated a commission led by former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo to look into "alternative source of financing". In 2015 the Obasanjo panel came up with three proposals: a "hospitality levy" of USD 2 per stay in a hotel in Africa to be paid

by tourists, a USD 10 levy on flight tickets to/from Africa as well as a USD 0.005 tax on text messages (AU Assembly 2015). However, the proposal didn't find enough support among member states because some feared that implementation would have negative effects on their tourist industries. Meanwhile the AU Assembly decided that, by 2020, member states should fund the operational budget at 100 percent, contribute 75 percent to the programme budget, and support AU-led peace support operations with 25 percent (AU Assembly 2015). In a parallel development the United Nations was reviewing UN peace operations; here again the African Union committed herself firmly to "assume responsibility for at least 25% of the cost of AU-led peace support operations" [AUC Chairperson 2015: §15(iii)a].

To finally sort out matters a special retreat was held just ahead of the July 2016 AU Assembly in Kigali, Rwanda. It was facilitated by the High Representative of the AU Peace Fund, former African Development Bank (AfBD) president Donald P. Kaberuka, and the then executive secretary of the UN Commission for Africa (UNECA), Carlos Lopes. African Heads of State and Government decided to introduce a Union levy of 0.2 percent on eligible imports (AU Assembly 2016b), thus somewhat following the example of the community levy already introduced by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1996/2000. Though not yet a consequence of this decision, but reflecting the increased awareness for the need to regain stronger control over the Union's finances, AU member states' contributions to the overall AU budget estimates have already increased (see graph 1, above): from 28.2 percent (2015) to a planned 67.6 percent (2018), and at the same time donor contributions decreased from 71.8 percent (2015) to roughly 30.9 percent (2018). A committee of ten Ministers of Finance (two from each of the five regions) has been appointed to follow implementation of the Union levy decision; in August 2016 draft guidelines for the utilization of the levy were published (African Union 2016).

The African Union also became more assertive on its democracy and governance agenda. At the 27th Ordinary Assembly, held on 17-18 July 2016 in Kigali, Rwanda, it made a strong plea to break with its past culture of non-implementation of decisions in this field by calling upon the AUC "to put in place measures and modalities to support Member States to establish the required capacities and processes for monitoring and review of the domestication efforts" of the African Charter. The AUC and other AU Organs with a human rights mandate were "encouraged (…) to putting in place all

the necessary measures so that success is documented and challenges noted to ensure that there is on-going review of progress in the implementation of adopted human rights instruments". The Kigali summit also requested the Commission "to report regularly on the implementation of this Declaration" (AU Assembly 2016c, Rev.1, §3 & 11).

In a "Decision on the Institutional Reform of the African Union" the Assembly also mandated Rwandan president Paul Kagame to submit a report "on the proposed reforms and thus put in place a system of governance capable of addressing the challenges facing the Union" to the next Assembly (AU Assembly 2016d). The proposed reforms were introduced at the 28th AU Assembly held on 29-30 January in Addis Ababa (here and in the following Kagame 2017a). The Rwandan president and his Reform Advisory Team (among others including fellow countryman Kaberuka, but also Lopes and former South African Reserve Bank governor Tito Mboweni) came up with a short, but highly critical assessment of the Union's state of affairs: "(…) the unfortunate truth is that Africa today is ill-prepared to adequately respond to current events, because the African Union still has to be made fit for purpose" (ibid. 3f). Building on previous critical assessments of the African Union project (a 2007 audit and a 2016 report), the Kagame Report forthrightly highlights (ibid. 5):

- *The chronic failure to see through African Union decisions has resulted in a crisis of implementation*
- *A perception of limited relevance to African citizens*
- *A fragmented organisation with a multitude of focus areas*
- *Overdependence on partner funding*
- *Underperformance of some organs and institutions due to unclear mandates or chronic underfunding*
- *Limited managerial capacity*
- *Lack of accountability for performance, at all levels*
- *Unclear division of labour between the African Union Commission, the regional economic communities (RECs), other regional mechanisms (RMs), and member states*
- *Inefficient working methods in both the Commission and the Assembly.*

In order to redress this situation, the report suggests to concentrate on four areas (ibid. 6):

- *Focus on key priorities with continental scope*
- *Realign African Union institutions to deliver against those priorities*
- *Manage the African Union efficiently at both political and operational levels*
- *Finance the African Union ourselves and sustainably*

There is not space enough here to detail the proposals made in the report, but suffice to say that the report represents a clear break with past of pussy-footing about Union affairs and member states' policy preferences. A first progress report on implementation has been tabled at the 29th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly held on 3-4 July 2017 in Addis Ababa (Kagame 2017b). Much of the activities called for relate to the auditing of bureaucratic bottlenecks, the need for reviewing the mandate of AU institutions, connecting the AU to the African citizens, managing the AU's business more efficiently and effectively, and implementing the Kigali decisions on finance "fully and quickly".

This reform package heavily reflects the Rwandan approach to development and its specific version of new public management (NPM) practices that have been introduced to re-engineering the public sector. NPM originated in the Thatcherist UK, has since been adopted by many Commonwealth countries, hybridized in places such as Singapore or Malaysia – and from there imported in the late 1990s and early 2000s by a number of African countries. In many countries NPM is usually done through decentralisation, civil service reform and state transformation, as Kempe R. Hope, the former Chief Policy Advisor in the Cabinet Office of the UNECA Executive Secretary, has observed (Hope 2001). Since 2011 this institution has strongly advocated the introduction of a developmentalist state approach in Africa (UNECA 2011). In Rwanda, NPM approaches have been firmly introduced in 2006. There they go by the name *Imihigo* which basically is a performance based and accountability mechanism (MPSL/MFEP 2015). *Imihigo* is the plural Kinyarwanda word of *Umuhigo*, "which means to vow to deliver"; it is narrated by the Rwanda Governance Board as a pre-colonial cultural practice of which a set of "Home Grown Solutions" was derived from (RGB 2017). In any case, the Rwandan way of NPM seems to gain some relevance now in the African Union – and this may be a game changer.

Conclusions

By way of conclusion, it is too early now to assess impact and future direction of the reform project at the level of finances, politics and management introduced in 2015-2018. But it can be clearly stated that the way the Union is looking at its financial dependence on donors and the way it is running its business has changed in recent years. An interesting alliance between the AU Commission and some member states has arisen that could indeed make a difference. The question, of course, is why in the end the African Union, the AU Commission and some member states got more serious about their project in the past years. A sign of the renewed sense of responsibility and ownership is that the Union has called for an extra-ordinary Assembly of the Heads of State and Government on the Union's institutional reform to be held on 17-18 November 2018 in Addis Ababa.

Two points can be made here, both calling for further empirical testing. First and foremost, the international environment of Union politics has changed fundamentally in the years after the so-called Arab Spring. Elements of this change include the Union's powerlessness vis-à-vis the NATO intervention in Libya in 2011 that was a humiliating experience (for a number of internal and external reasons that cannot be discussed here, but see AUC Chairperson 2011); the rise of terrorism and violent extremism in transnationally connected conflict complexes across the Sahelo-Saharan region, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region that poses a threat to member states' sovereignty irrespective of their regime quality (AUC Chairperson 2014); and a general re-reading of "the West" in the wake of increasingly controversial debates about, for instance, the role of the International Criminal Court, the rise of alternative donors such as the Peoples Republic of China and, at the same time, the continuation of the West's patronizing behaviour, not only, but most visible in the field of development assistance. In addition, the African Union is seriously concerned about what is calls the increasing militarization of parts of the continent, in particular the Sahel and the Horn of Africa/Red Sea regions and the increase in uncoordinated external interventions which undermine the efficacy of African-led solutions to violent conflicts on the continent (AU Panel of the Wise 2018).

Second, in this situation of global change and pressure the Union's precarious financial situation had to be reassessed. The experience of, for instance, the EU freezing transfers to the Union because of accounting problems (Engel 2015), signalled levels of vulnerability that were not tolerable any longer to

the Union and most of its members – especially after the Obasanjo panel's proposals were not accepted and the Union in early 2016 almost faced bankruptcy. In combination this created a situation in which only far-reaching reforms seem to offer a way out. In combination, these trends may open a new chapter in the history of continental politics and Pan-African unity.

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