The role of the African Union (AU) in preventing conflicts in African States

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The issue of regionalism is today present throughout the international system, and regional organisations are widely considered to play an important role in relation to regional and sub-regional security. With the sub-regional organisations increasingly overburdened, such regional organisations have emerged as one possible solution to problems associated with state fragility and violence perpetrated by non-state actors. Relative to other regional organisations, the AU has received little attention in the literature and it is not generally considered to have much impact on the prevention of conflicts in the African region like sub-regional organisations. This paper, however, argues that the AU does matter and that rules and norms do make a difference in peace and security more generally. The AU, despite its problems, has played important roles that have helped avert violent conflict in a number of cases in Africa.

Keywords: African Union (AU), Regionalism, Security, Regional Organisations, African Region

1. Introduction

With the end of the Cold War, the debate on regional and sub-regional organisations acquired new relevance in the context of the wider debate on peace and security studies. Regional organisations are seen by many scholars to fulfil an important role in guaranteeing stability, peace and security through conflict prevention and resolution, cooperation in non-offensive military fields and other areas related to the realm of security, such as development and building institutions for conflict management and resolution (Ikejiaku and Dauda 2011). The issue of regionalism is today present throughout the global system and in different arenas of interaction with diverse levels of institutionalisation. Both spatially and functionally it is a major part of peace and security studies. The management of sub-regional security is increasingly supposed to be generated at the regional level. The negotiation and settlement of borders and territorial disputes and intra-state conflicts and the creation of security regimes take place within regional organisations, and regional leaders play a major role in bearing the costs of these processes and shaping their outcomes. Since sub-regional organisations have been overburdened, regional organisations have emerged as one among a number of solutions to problems encountered in generating a measure of global governance in a scenario of new wars, collapsing or fragile states and growing proliferation of violence among non-state actors.

In this context the multiplication of functions performed by regional organisations can be observed, and a debate on the subject has developed in the peace and security literature. The African region has received more attention because the number of intra-state conflicts in the region since the end of the Cold War has been high, and because the African region has been strategically central to the debate on peace and security in the last twenty years. The literature relating to the African Union (AU) that has emerged in this period focuses mostly on its institutional structure and its role in fostering democratic institutions (International Colloquium Report 2012). The wider literature on African regionalism pays little attention to the AU, mainly because political and economic integration on a sub-regional basis has been more relevant in terms of the public debate and the social and political consequences (International Colloquium Report 2012).

This article examines the roles played by the AU in managing regional security among the African states, with particular emphasis on the changes that have been taking place since the end of the Cold War. The objective of the analysis is to show that the AU is still relevant in the management of intra- and inter-state conflicts in African region. The AU has been in existence since 1963; 54 sovereign states of African region are members of the AU. It is a multifunctional institution, but this analysis focuses on the role it has in one dimension – security.[1] In this context, this article puts forward the argument that the AU has played a relevant role in two crucial areas: peaceful settlement of disputes and conflict prevention – although the worst conflicts in the region have not been resolved by the AU. Throughout its history the AU has supported the peaceful settlement of disputes, and after the attempts to revive the organisation after the end of the Cold War, it has increasingly played a role in the area of conflict management, prevention and resolution. Article 4 of the AU Charter states that to 'guarantee the peace and security of the region is one of the mandates of the AU'.[2]

In terms of this widely defined aim one can state that AU is effective today in terms of the peaceful settlement of disputes and conflict prevention. In terms of the classical definition of collective security as a multilateral deterrent to aggression, AU is not effective, not having developed mechanisms for the collective use of force. Although some military

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approaches to preventive diplomacy are available, such as those aimed at restraining the use of force, others are not available to AU because they involve the deployment of forces or decisions that move beyond the threshold established within the organisational culture regarding the concept of sovereignty. The peaceful settlement of disputes and the mechanisms available are mentioned in Articles 3 to 4 of the Charter and prevention is referred to in Article 4 (OAU Charter 1963).

One of the purposes of the AU is 'to prevent possible causes of difficulties and to ensure the pacific settlement of disputes that may arise among the Member States'.[3] Collective security is described as one the aims of AU, in Article 4. Although 'peace and security' can be understood widely, the reference to the peaceful settlement of regional and sub-regional disputes in Article 4, and the articles reaffirming the principle of sovereignty, could suggest that only regional conflicts are to be tackled within AU. This is a disputed point and one that has generated great internal controversy. Nevertheless, after the 1990s, following the establishment of the link between democracy and security, sub-regional as well as regional conflicts were tackled. This article discusses how the AU is relevant for both regional and sub-regional conflict. The analysis of the resources available, subjective environment and pattern of behaviour of AU will support this argument. It will also look both at the institutions created and at the results obtained by the action taken by the AU. The article will introduce the AU in a brief overview of the history of the organisation and its organisational structure, and then move on to concentrate on its role in the security arena. The security environment in the African region will be briefly analysed to expatiate the challenges the AU faces. Finally, it will also look at the role played by AU in preventing violent conflict and conflict resolution with emphasis on the post-Cold War era.

2. Historical, Structural and Transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to African Union (AU)

On May 25 1963 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the 32 African states that had achieved independence at that time agreed to establish the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (OAU 2012). A further 21 members joined gradually, reaching a total of 53 by the time of the AU's creation in 2002. On 9 July 2011, South Sudan became the 54th African Union (AU) member. The OAU's main objectives, as set out in the OAU Charter, were to promote the unity and solidarity of African states; coordinate and intensify their cooperation and efforts to achieve a better life for the peoples of Africa; safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States; rid the continent of colonisation and apartheid; promote regional and sub-regional cooperation within the sub-regional framework; and harmonise members' political, diplomatic, economic, educational, cultural, health, welfare, scientific, technical and defence policies (OAU 2012). The OAU operated on the basis of its Charter and the 1991 Treaty establishing the African Economic Community (known as the Abuja Treaty) (OAU 2012). Its major organs were the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, Council of Ministers and the General Secretariat as well as the Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration; Economic and Social Commission; Educational, Scientific, Cultural and Health Commission; and Defence Commission. The Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration was replaced by the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in 1993 (OAU 2012).

Through the 1990s, leaders debated the need to amend the OAU's structures to reflect the challenges of a changing world. In 1999, the OAU Heads of State and Government issued the Sirte Declaration calling for the establishment of a new African Union (OAU 2012). The vision for the Union was to build on the OAU's work by establishing a body that could accelerate the process of integration in Africa, support the empowerment of African states in the global economy and address the multifaceted social, economic and political problems facing the continent. In total, four summits were held in the lead-up to the official launching of the African Union, the Sirte Summit (1999), which adopted the Sirte Declaration calling for the establishment of the AU; the Lomé Summit (2000), which adopted the AU Constitutive Act; the Lusaka Summit (2001), which drew the road map for implementation of the AU; and the Durban Summit (2002), which launched the AU and convened its first Assembly of Heads of State and Government (African Union: 2002). A significant number of OAU structures were carried forward into the AU. Similarly, many of the OAU's core commitments, decisions and strategy frameworks continue to frame AU policies.

However, while the footprint of the OAU is still strong, the AU Constitutive Act and protocols established a significant number of new structures, both at the level of major organs and through a range of new technical and subsidiary committees. Many of these have evolved since 2002 and some are still under development. Under Article 11 of the Protocol to the AU Constitutive Act, the official languages of the AU and all its institutions are Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Kiswahili and any other African language (African Union 2002). The AU's working languages are Arabic, English, French and Portuguese. The AU emblem comprises four elements. The palm leaves shooting up on either side of the outer circle stand for peace. The gold circle symbolises Africa's wealth and bright future (African Union 2002). The plain map of Africa without boundaries in the inner circle signifies African unity. The small interlocking red rings at the

base of the emblem stand for African solidarity and the blood shed for the liberation of Africa. The current African Union flag was adopted in June 2010 at the Assembly of Heads of State and Government's 12th ordinary session. The design is a dark-green map of the African continent on a white sun, surrounded by a circle of 53 five-pointed gold (yellow) stars, on a dark-green field. The green background symbolises the hope of Africa, and the stars represent Member States (Pavšic 2013).

The decision-making process of the AU is based on a classical definition of sovereignty, where states have equal rights. The actual distribution of power is not expressed in the formal procedures and the sovereignty of each state is treated as equal since there is no power to veto or proportional distribution of voting power. The supreme organ of the AU is the Assembly of Heads of State and Government (OAU 1999). It is 'composed of the delegations accredited by the governments of the member states' (African Union 2002). It decides on the policies of the organisation, determines the functions and structure of different organs and approves the budget. The decision-making process is based on the one country/one vote system.

3. The role the AU plays in managing security in the African region: evaluation

In order to evaluate the role the AU plays in managing security in the African region, a brief look at the region's security landscape is required. Since the end of the Cold War, Africa has been the most un-peaceful among all the regions in the world. The political drafter and crafter must have informed the decisions of African leaders to establish the African Union (AU) from the ashes of the Organisation of African Union (OAU). Following the end of the Cold War, African leaders responded appropriately with a vision of building an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa (Bogland and Lagerstrom 2008). In Sirte, Libya, the dream was conceived but the birth of the AU was in Durban, South Africa. The birth of the AU was a significant landmark in the continent's quest for unity and development. The Union's vision explicitly states the intention to defend African common interests in regional and sub-regional context, accelerate Africa's development, and promote unity, solidarity and peace among African countries. At the same time, it was considered a bold attempt by African leaders to genuinely redraw the map of the continent's security architecture.

In a similar fashion, Murithi sees the transformation of the former Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the AU as visionary and timely, bearing in mind the inability of the former to overcome some of the crises of development and security (Murithi 2008). There is no gainsaying that three decades into independence, Africa's crisis of development appears endless, and to paraphrase Ayittey in "chaos" (Ayittey 1999). Indeed, the outbreaks of endless armed conflicts literally changed the continent to a theatre of war with complex humanitarian and developmental crises. The prevalence and complex nature of these conflicts was not without enormous security and developmental burdens which may have informed the decision of African leaders to chart a new roadmap for the continent's conflict management and resolution. This belief is, however, not without some debates, and while one can contend that the establishment of the AU was the result of the failure of the OAU, on the contrary, another position states that the OAU has justified its *raison d'être* on the decolonization agenda and dismantling of the apartheid regime in South Africa.

However, it failed to make meaningful progress in the areas of conflict resolution and conflict management. This is not unconnected with the sanctity of the clause of "state sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs of member states and territorial integrity" inserted into its Charter, under which many atrocities were committed (Akuffo 2010). These clauses were greatly seen as impediments in the interventionist role of the organization and largely contributed to its failure to provide a common platform or mechanism aimed at addressing the challenges of conflict. The idea and birth of the AU was largely informed by post-Cold War complex security crises, globalization waves [?] and the fundamental global change in the nature of conflict intervention which has embraced the principle of right to protect circumvented by the non-interference clause. Therefore, the continent's paradigmatic shift was not only to respond to the failure of the OAU, but to also conform to global conflict intervention mechanisms that would meet the challenges of the continent's contemporary complex emergencies, especially in the areas of new security crises (Murithi 2008). In other words, the AU was formed to respond to Africa's multiple crises of conflict and globals trend in conflict resolutions. The position therefore is: has the emergence of the AU changed the face of conflict interventions and resolution process in Africa? The question is central to the body of this paper. Though some would contend that the climate of new wars and insecurity appeared unabated despite the establishment of AU, this may be true especially when one considers the conflict reports in the continent. For example, it is reported that about seventy per cent of the world's armed conflicts are being fought in Africa, and in 2016, almost half of all high-intensity conflicts were in Africa.[4]

Additionally, according to ACLED-Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (2016), conflict is one of four 'traps' that keep the world's poorest countries poor and confine the world's 'bottom billion' people to a life of poverty. The report of ACLED-Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (2016) also supports this position; it reveals that of the 70 major armed conflicts in the world between 1997 and 2016, [number given?] were in Africa, the highest number for any region.[5] Also,

this figure does not include minor conflicts in which fewer than 1000 lives were lost.[6] To some extent, the report of the state of conflicts in Africa appeared frighteningly correct, but to conclude that the face of conflict intervention has not changed is nothing but an error of judgment. As this paper may prove later, there have been some significant changes in conflict intervention mechanisms since the emergence of AU.

In fact, Nikitin (2010) claims that the AU has demonstrated a new sense of purpose and direction aimed at the promotion of peace, security and development. However, there are conflicts in the Mano River region of West African countries Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Cote d'Ivoire; the Great Lake region of Central African countries of Congo-Kinshasa, Congo-Brazzaville, Central African Republic, Rwanda and the Horn of Africa countries Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda. Other minor conflicts resulting from (electoral) democratic process occurred in Burundi, the Central African Republic, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Madagascar and Nigeria; all have in a way challenged the development agenda of the continent, stretched to breaking point the capability and capacity of AU institutions and questioned the its management mechanism and response strategies.

However, of all the pockets of conflict in Africa, none has ever challenged the AU's capability more than the current conflict in the Horn of Africa. The region is undoubtedly the darkest spot in Africa's conflicts, especially the DR Congo and Somalia conflicts, which incidentally are the major concern in the African region. Nevertheless, one must remember that boundary disputes exist today and were sources of conflict in the past. The territorial disputes in Africa at present are: Ethiopia/Somalia, Malawi/Tanzania, Mali/Burkina Faso, Ghana/Upper Volta/Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea/Gabon, Ethiopia/Eritrea (Kornprobst 2002). Moreover, guerrilla warfare was present from the late 1980s onward, and the war in DR Congo is the most vivid example of this reality today. Intra-state wars occurred in twelve countries since the late 1990s and the present problem facing the African region today is the issue of insurgencies (ACLED-Armed Conflict Location and Event Data 2016).[7] Currently drug traffic and transnational criminal activities in general have become the most acute threat to states and individuals alike, and the social and economic problems that characterise the region could give rise to regional and sub-regional conflicts over resources and migration. The domestic political and social situation in many African countries could generate internal conflicts. The fragility of domestic mechanisms for conflict resolution and the state apparatus in general has generated political crises throughout the history of the part of Africa. Somalia, South Sudan, Burundi, and Uganda are countries where institutional or violent crisis is a possibility in the medium term (Cliffe 1999).

4. The AU and the management of security

From the argument presented above it is apparent that the institution that is mandated to manage security in the African region faces a number of tasks: the AU is geared towards the multidimensional problems. The AU (Peace and Security Council) is supposed to be the pillar of the African region's security system (Peace and Security Directorate 2008). However, AU/PSC has worked in providing a security framework. The AU/PSC makes decisions aimed at addressing security threats perceived by the member states (AU PSC 2009). Other sub-regional institutions are also part of the group of regional mechanisms for the management of regional security, although only the AU congregates all region sovereign countries: *ad hoc* regional arrangements, the Summit Meetings (PSC 2008). The relations between the AU and the Summit Meeting are the most relevant for the purposes of this article since the Summit process has provided guidance beyond the Charter for action in the sphere of security. Regarding the other forms of cooperation, the levels of coordination do not have any significant results. Initially the Summit process was to develop an autonomous agenda, but the AU has increasingly taken the Summit's orientation as a guide for action. In the context of the Summit of the AU held in Durban in 2003 (Summit in 2003 also acknowledged the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA) as creating a synergy between the various activities currently undertaken by the AU/PSC, which therefore should help to consolidate the work of the AU/PSC in the areas of peace, security, stability, development and co-operation), the AU was officially designated as the Secretariat of the Summit of the African security process (PSC 2010: African Union 2002). In addition, the Heads of State and Government was assigned mandates to the AU/PSC in several areas such as drugs, corruption, terrorism, African security, sustainable development and the environment. The AU/PSC incorporated these mandates into its agenda on a priority basis. The AU/PSC security structure was designed for collective security operations and for dispute settlement through diplomatic consultation through AU's Peace and Security Directorate (PSD) (Peace and Security Directorate 2008). Chapter III and IV of the Charter endorses the principle of collective security – an attack on one is considered an attack on all (Cilliers and Sturman 2004). Regarding intra- and inter-state conflict in the region, the emphasis lies on peaceful means for the settlement of disputes. Chapter IV outlines the procedures to promote this. The legalist tradition, profoundly rooted in African culture and also relevant in African relations more generally, is firmly associated with the norm of peaceful conflict resolution and reinforces it. When a security threat is detected, the Charter of the AU/PSC may be invoked. The representatives of

heads of state and government are engaged in preventive diplomacy and mediation in the region's trouble spots and/or appointed to head au electoral observation missions (AU 2003). The AU has had some success in reducing regional and sub-regional tensions and preventing conflicts from escalating (Ikejiaku and Dauda 2011). This was the case in the conflict between South Sudan and Sudan, and [Sudan and?] Mali. It has functioned as a forum for discussion of inter-state as well as intra-state conflict since its creation.

Investigative commissions were created in a number of cases to offer assessments and sometimes indicate solutions to situations of conflict or controversy. It has also been a major forum for the process of generating regional norms on security, regarding the peaceful solution of disputes, the association between democracy, stability, security and arms control and the mechanisms to fight transnational criminality (African Union 2002). The use of military capabilities is extremely common. During the Cold War, the containment of the ideological threat of communism was the main pillar of the concept of security in the African region and at the AU. The AU and the doctrines of national security developed in most African states reflected this logic. The 1980s can be characterised as the period when the AU was most clearly used as an instrument of US foreign policy, partly because many countries in the region accepted the bipolar ideological view of international relations sponsored by the US. During this period the AU mediation of the dispute in South Africa was the clearest expression of the organisation's capacity to be effective beyond the Cold War confrontation. South Africa has actively participated in the activities of the AU since its admission as a member, and was instrumental in initiating the African Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty (the Treaty of Pelindaba) and AU/PSC. It also played a significant role in placing the issue of non-proliferation of landmines and small arms on the agenda of the AU. At the 1998 Summit in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, South Africa was requested to act as the co-ordinator of the countries of the Indian Ocean Region for the AU's efforts to find a sustainable solution to the problems in the Comoros (Ndiho 2010). This was a clear case of preventive diplomacy, more specifically 'pre-emptive engagement', according to Michael Lund's terminology in his work on conflict management and resolution (Lund 2005). Violence had begun, with hundreds dead and thousands displaced, but it was not widespread and the AU acted successfully to create channels of communication, turning the norm of peaceful resolution of disputes into a reality while also using inducements and pressure. After only four days of fighting a ceasefire was reached.

Thereafter, the AU engaged in conflict management and resolution, allowing the disputes between the two countries to end peacefully. In other cases the AU was also able to avoid violence that faced the region during the period (Akude 2009). The AU/PSC functioned as a conflict prevention mechanism in the operational sense, supporting the return to stability or *status quo* in many instances, and as a forum for conflict resolution and social environment for the maintenance of the norm of peaceful conflict resolution. The following are the cases in which the Charter was invoked to deal with a security threat in the region, in the period up to recently.

5. The African Union (AU) after the Cold War

Since the end of the Cold War, an attempt to redefine the role played by the AU has been made, prompted by a wide sense of failure, the new consensus on democracy in the region, the admission of South Africa in 2001, different interests of sub-regional actors and the wider debate on the redefinition of the concept of security. The AU has become active in fostering confidence-building measures and land-mine clearing, and has continued its work on the dialogue on border and territorial disputes and attempts to manage and prevent conflict. The range of activities in which the organisation has been involved has grown notably and new capabilities have been generated. Several institutional changes took place and new agencies were created, such as the Peace and Security Council, Constitutive Act of the African Union, African Nuclear Weapons Free-Zone Treaty (The Treaty of Pelindaba) and the Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism. The Assembly of Heads of State and Government acquired new responsibilities. He or she is (as head of state [?]) now authorized to bring to the attention of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government matters which might threaten the peace, security or development of member states.

The effort to reshape the organisation should be understood also in the context of the generation of the idea that peace is a regional asset. The vision of a peaceful and stable region, in contrast to other parts of the world, is perceived by sub-regional elites of several countries as an advantage in the context of the current dispute over regional investment flows. At the same time, policy makers and academics undertook a debate on the new role of the AU as the literature quoted earlier testifies. In this new context, is the AU really relevant in the peace and security of African states? Two different paths are taken in the remaining part of this article to answer this question.

First, it has been pointed out that the AU has developed two new roles in norm generation: a leading role in supporting the confidence-building agenda in the African region; and a central role in generating the African democratic paradigm that associates security and democracy, allowing the organisation to have an active role in preventing sub-regional conflict and particularly intra-state conflicts. In addition, the AU remains an important pillar of the norm of

peaceful solution of disputes, which is an historical legacy of previous periods. Insofar as the states participate in norm construction and behaviour is changed, one can see these norms functioning as preventive diplomacy mechanisms.

Secondly, it shows that the AU prevented a number of intra- and inter-state disputes from turning into violent conflict and was essential in diffusing several crises. In the sphere of security, in particular, a collective desire to redefine the role of the organisation can be observed. Several resolutions on cooperation in this arena were passed, two important conventions were signed, a debate on the redefinition of the concept of African security was launched and the AU Commission's Peace and Security Council was created in December 26, 2003 (Pavšic 2013). The AU/PSC has a mandate to review the African security system. Among the several issues under scrutiny we should mention the juridical and institutional link between the AU and the Peace and Security Council, the drive towards greater transparency in managing military capabilities, the special needs of small states and the debate on the concept of security itself; notably absent from debate is the current situation in Burundi and Nigeria.

The AU Committee's working groups completed their work during the last decade on the Bamako Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within Africa, on recommendations on natural disaster reduction to the AU and its subsidiaries, on the modernisation needed to provide the AU with technical, advisory, and educational expertise on defence and security issues, on a draft cyber-security strategy and on the juridical and institutional links. The redefinition of the concept of security involved the incorporation of an expanded concept and the shift from collective security to co-operative security. The expanded concept of security allows for the perception of the interdependence between economic, social, political and environment issues and threats and use of violence. The perception that so-called new threats to security such as drug traffic, illegal traffic of arms, intra-state violence and institutional failure of states could be tackled by the organisation became acceptable. At the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA), adopted by the AU Assembly in Durban in July 2002, member states defined security in multidimensional terms (African Union 2002). Thus efforts to deal with drug traffic, democratic stability, insurgence and mine clearing acquired new legitimacy.

A new normative framework was generated and institutional mechanisms were produced. Some of the norms and mechanisms in question are part of the preventive diplomacy practice discussed at the beginning of this article. The emphasis on confidence- and security-building measures, which guarantee transparency of security procedures and the availability of information, replaced the stress on deterrence in the concept of collective security or collective defence (i.e. the idea that aggressors would have to face the combined force of a coalition). The idea of arms control is not explicitly present in the Charter, but slowly entered the African Nuclear Weapons Free-Zone Treaty (The Treaty of Pelindaba) security environment in 1998 (African Union 2002). In 1998, all the member states affirmed their support for the idea of arms control, and the African Nuclear Weapons Free-Zone Treaty was signed on this subject. The African Nuclear Weapons Free-Zone Treaty against the Illicit Production and Traffic of Arms, Ammunition, Explosives and related Materials of 1998 expresses the link between the arms control agenda and the new prominence of the concept of cooperative security.

In addition, the concern with the nature of civil-military relations in Africa, given the region's history of military intervention in public administration, and the search for new roles and identities for the military led local elites to acquire greater interest in the subject. In the 1990s the states in Africa turned to the AU as a catalyst for confidence building. The AU has organised and sponsored conferences on confidence- and security building measures, designed to strengthen military-to-military relations at regional and sub-regional level, deal with historic rivalries and tensions and create an environment that permits the governments of the region to modernise their defence forces without triggering suspicions from neighbours or leading to an arms race. Many meeting of governmental specialists on confidence-building measures and other security-related issues had been was held. This initiative provides a framework for the advance notification of acquisitions of weapon systems covered by the UN Register. The participation of African states in different aspects of the confidence and security agenda attest to the wide involvement of countries in the region. Moreover, bilateral arrangements complement this trend, such as the joint operations and training between Nigeria and Sierra Leone forces in particular. The experience of AU Standby Force in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, DR Congo, Central African Republic, etc. can also be viewed as a confidence-building experience (Derso 2010). As part of the transformation process, the AU Standby Force has acquired new and different roles. Its current programmes include mine clearing in Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region, reporting on confidence- and security-building measures, and developing educational programmes on regional security.

The analysis of the military security- and confidence-building measures was initiated at the headquarters of the AU. Thus it is clear that a long process involving African states, and more particularly the military establishments in the region, has generated a norm regarding knowledge sharing and the diffusion of rules regarding military activities and arms

procurements. This is a change in social interaction that prevents conflict by generating confidence. The second norm that the AU had a central role in generating was the association between democracy and security, allowing for a role of the regional multilateral institutions in protecting democratic institutions where they were fragile or collapsing thus avoiding conflict. The new weight given by the AU to the defence of democracy marked the international landscape in the region in the 1990s.

In this case one should also notice the presence of sub-regional institutions playing an important role. They were always present in declaratory terms in the AU's agenda, having been associated with the Cold War dispute. Some attempts to foster formal democratic institutions can be understood both as part of the US Cold War strategy and as the movement towards a regional autocratic regimes for the protection of human rights and democracy. The Declaration of Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights issued by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in 9 July 1996, explicitly mentions the importance of free elections, freedom of the press, respect for human rights and effective judicial procedures. During that meeting the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights was created. Nevertheless only in 1998 did the AU begin its course towards a legitimising and supporting role in the consolidation and improvement of democracy in the African region. At that moment a resolution condemning the human rights record of the military regime was passed.

The 1998 Protocol states the commitment to the promotion and the strengthening of representative democracy. The 1998 Declaration on the Collective Defence of Democracy, often referred to as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, called for prompt reaction of the region's democracies in the event of a threat to democracy in a member state. The protocol also strengthens representative democracy by giving the AU the right to suspend a member state whose democratically elected government is overthrown by force. A new collective identity was fostered, led by the US, and made possible by the transition of most African countries to democracy in the 1990s. In fact, the AU relaxed its commitment to the principle of non-intervention in the process of constructing a regime for the preservation of democracy (Souaré 2009).

Finally, in 2000 the AU sought to end unconstitutional changes of government by establishing the Peace and Security Council (PSC), further institutionalising the democratic paradigm (Witt 2012a). The PSC creates procedures for cases of formal disruption to democracy and for situations when democracy is at risk. It was first formally applied when a coup d'etat was attempted against President Kumba Ialá in September 14, 2003 in Guinea-Bissau (Kufuor 2002). In this context, the AU Commission's Peace and Security Department was established in December 26, 2003 (Witt 2012b). It provided assistance for the development of democratic institutions and for conflict management and resolution. During the first years of its activities, the PSC concentrated on the area of electoral observations (Kufuor 2002). Following the First Summit of the AU Commission's Peace and Security Council in 2003, it got involved in programmes for the support of peace processes on the continent. The PSC took part in several electoral observation missions on national and municipal levels, supporting training, educational, research and information programmes (Kane 2008). Since 2003 the AU/PSC has set up more than 40 electoral observation missions in 20 different countries (Ikome 2007). The AU's Peace and Security Directorate (PSD) on Political Parties fosters debate and research on issues pertaining to the political system of states, such as campaign financing and confidence in the political system (Engel 2010). The AU/PSC has also promoted dialogue in African countries where political institutions may be facing a crisis – such as Zimbabwe, Kenya, DR Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Algeria, Angola, Rwanda, and Burundi, etc. – and generated training and educational programmes geared towards the generation of a democratic culture (AU 2010). These activities are part of the conflict-prevention toolbox and the extent, and importance, of the activities allows us to assert that the AU/PSC plays a major part in guaranteeing democratic stability in the region (AU 2011). These activities can be categorised in different manners, but from the point of view of conflict prevention, in a region where intrastate and inter-state violence has often been generated by domestic ethnic and political instability, this is a fundamental contribution for the prevention of violent escalations of disputes. After the end of the Cold War it can also be verified that the AU played an important role in conflict prevention, dealing with situations that could have escalated into violent conflict. In the following instances the, AU/PSC Resolution1069 (XLIV) was invoked.

The AU has also been involved in conflict resolution and national reconciliation since the 1990s. It took part in post-conflict reconstruction in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Algeria, Angola, Rwanda and Burundi. The AU mission helped collect and destroy weapons from armed groups that had operated throughout the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region (Sturman and Hayatou 2010). In the 1990s, the AU monitored compliance with the peace accords and assisted in the removal of land mines. When a coup d'etat took place in Burkina Faso in September 17, 2015 and Burundi on May 13-15, 2015, the AU was the first organisation to react, issuing a resolution condemning the coup, and demanding respect for the democratically elected government.[8] A meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council of the

54-member pan-African bloc was called in Addis Ababa, pursuant to the mechanism established under Resolution 1069 (XLIV). The meeting called for full restoration of the rule of law, ordered all member states to impose a "travel ban and asset freeze on all members of the so-called National Committee for Democracy", which declared the coup, and for a list of its leaders to be compiled and circulated so they could be officially condemned as "terrorist elements" and announced the suspension of Burkina Faso (AU 2007). After the signing of the Peace Accords in Addis Ababa, the AU provided support for legislative and electoral reforms and promoted the peaceful resolution of conflicts (AU Commission 2010). The AU/PSC continues to fulfil a role in conflict resolution between states. In 2008 Cameroon and Nigeria signed an agreement at the AU establishing a framework for negotiations and confidence-building measures, to help maintain good bilateral relations while they seek a permanent solution to their longstanding territorial dispute over Bakassi Penisula. The AU is supporting that effort through its Fund for Peace. In 1994, Libya and Chad reached an agreement regarding their common border; the AU has played an important role in support of negotiations.

6. Conclusions

The article argued that the AU has followed the orientation of its mandate, particularly after the 1990s, in a limited but important area: preventive diplomacy. The organisation matters because it plays a role in preventing the escalation of both intra-state and inter-state disputes into violent conflicts. This article has pointed out that in different instances the AU played a relevant role in preventing the escalation of disputes into violent, or more violent, conflict. The capacity of the AU to generate communication channels through mediation and institution building is its greatest contribution. Three norms developed partly within the AU are part of the preventive diplomacy mechanisms in place: the drive towards the peaceful resolution of conflict; the norm of information sharing built into the confidence-building agenda; and the norm that stresses democratic institutional stability, associating democracy and security and allowing a more active multilateral interference in domestic political affairs. The pattern of behaviour observed above permits us to point out that institutions have been built, are functioning and have changed matters on the ground in several African countries, preventing violence. There is a need to stress the technical assistance given by the AU in several arenas to countries where the state apparatus or the institutions for conflict resolution are still fragile. The examples mentioned in this article pertain to information gathering, electoral assistance and other matters regarding political and judicial institutions. This assistance favours acquiescence to international norms and accords. On the other hand, looking at the data produced by the ACLED-Armed Conflict Location and Event Data, it is clear that between 1997 and 2016 the AU had an insignificant impact in cases when war and insurgency broke out. The most striking case for the present discussion is the war in DR Congo and South Sudan. DR Congo and Somalia represent the main security crisis in the region. The AU has been mostly silent about this conflict, although the Mission to Support the Peace Process in DR Congo and Somalia could become relevant in future peace negotiations. The AU has not developed a military capacity in spite of the experience in peace operations in Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region; and the decision-making process based on consensus building in a context in which there is wide division in the region on security matters does not permit further activism. This article has aimed to show how the AU matters in the arena of security; but some words on the limits of its engagement should close this discussion. Nevertheless, the AU/PSC has assumed new responsibilities, particularly preventing sub-regional insurgencies from escalating into violence, and the principle of non-intervention has been challenged. Although the tension will remain between non-interventionism and greater activism on the part of the AU, the front lines have definitely been redrawn. The AU is an important forum for the diffusion of regional tensions, having generated a social space for negotiations and the production of legitimate norms. Although the African countries are more volatile than other regions of the world, a war has been taking place in DR Congo for the last 40 years, social tensions are high and many states are fragile, transregional and transnational insurgencies are not only intense and widespread but penetrate most state apparatuses, tension on several borders can be observed due to migration and the presence of refugees and territorial contentions still exist. Thus, although the AU, like other regional organisations, cannot tackle all the problems today treated as security issues, and in fact in my view should not, it remains an important institution for the management of security and cooperation. It needs much improvement, but as in all inter-governmental organisations this will depend on decisions made by sub-regional governments, social pressure and the learning process that takes place within the organisation itself. The debate on critical conceptual issues has yet to reach a point where the consensus agenda permits effective impact on the most pressing security problems of the region.

NOTES
1. OAU Charter, 1963, Articles III (1c) and Article IV (3).
2. OAU Charter, 1963, Articles III (1c) and Article IV (3).
3. OAU Charter, 1963, Articles III (1c) and Article IV (3).

4. ACLED includes data from 1997 to 2016, with real-time conflict data updated monthly for all of Africa and weekly for 30 high-risk states. Raleigh, Clionadh, Andrew Linke, Havard Hegre and Joakim Karlsen. 2010. Introducing ACLED-Armed Conflict Location and Event Data. *Journal of Peace Research* 47(5), 1-10.

5. ACLED-Armed Conflict Location and Event Data, 2016

6. ACLED-Armed Conflict Location and Event Data, 2016

7. ACLED-Armed Conflict Location and Event Data, 2016

8. ACLED-Armed Conflict Location and Event Data, 2016

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