The Effectiveness of African Organizations in Supporting Democratic Transitions after Crises

Foudhil Hissam[*] [1], Souad Hafdi [2]

[1] University of Tlemcen (Algeria), Haissamf@yahoo.com

[2] University of Tlemcen (Algeria), hafdi.souad@yahoo.fr

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Abstract:

The African Union plays a central role in supporting democratic transitions in Africa through a comprehensive legal and institutional framework defined by the Constitutive Act. It holds the authority to intervene in cases of unconstitutional changes of government, applying mechanisms such as suspension of membership, sanctions, and peacekeeping missions. Even so, practical effectiveness remains limited due to persistent challenges, including financial dependency on external partners, political divergence among member states, coordination gaps with subregional organizations, and logistical weaknesses affecting tools like the African Standby Force. Case studies from Mali, the Central African Republic, and Sudan illustrate both the Union's proactive interventions and its operational constraints. While the AU's legal instruments reflect clear normative ambitions, bridging the gap between law and practice requires reforms that strengthen financial autonomy, operational capacity, and consistent enforcement of legal provisions to ensure credible and effective democratic governance across the continent.

Keywords: Democratic Transitions, African Union, Constitutive Act, Peace and Security Council, Legal Framework

1. INTRODUCTION

The African continent continues to face complex political and security challenges, including recurrent constitutional crises, armed conflicts, and episodes of state collapse, all of which pose serious threats to democratic governance and regional stability. These realities have made it increasingly necessary for African regional organizations to adopt active roles in preserving democratic order and ensuring peace. In this context, the African Union (AU), as the successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU),

[*] ***Corresponding author***

represents a significant institutional and legal development. Through its Constitutive Act and various protocols, the AU has established itself as a supranational entity endowed with the authority to intervene in member states in cases involving unconstitutional changes of government, human rights violations, and threats to peace and security. Its mechanisms include political sanctions, peacekeeping missions, and legal instruments aimed at promoting democratic governance across the continent. But the mere existence of these legal and institutional frameworks does not automatically guarantee their effectiveness. In practice, the AU's interventions have often been marked by delays, financial dependency on external actors, inconsistent political will among member states, and logistical limitations that reduce its operational capacity. These challenges raise a central question: **despite possessing a comprehensive legal and institutional framework, to what extent can African organizations, particularly the African Union, effectively support democratic transitions after crises?** This study requires examining this question by analyzing the legal foundations and institutional mechanisms underpinning the AU's role, while also evaluating its actual performance in managing democratic transitions in post crisis contexts through selected case studies. The objective is to identify both the strengths and limitations of the current system and to suggest practical recommendations for enhancing its effectiveness in fostering sustainable democratic governance and long-term peace on the African continent

2. The Legal framework and mechanisms of the African Union in democratic transitions

Before evaluating the African Union's role in managing democratic transitions after political crises, it is essential to first examine the legal and institutional structures that define its mandate in this area. The AU's capacity to intervene, support governance reforms, and enforce democratic norms is grounded in its Constitutive Act and related protocols, which collectively provide both the legal basis and operational mechanisms for its actions. Understanding this framework is crucial to assessing the scope, limits, and practical implications of the Union's interventions in post crisis contexts

2.1 The African Union's legal foundations and evolution from the OAU

The creation of a unified continental body marked a decisive shift from the framework of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), reflecting an ambition for deeper integration and more effective governance. This transformation was formalized through the 1999 Sirte Declaration in Libya[1], which laid the groundwork for the establishment of a new entity with broader institutional competencies. By 2002, the African Union (AU) officially replaced the OAU during the Durban Summit,

[1] African Union, Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted in Lomé, Togo, 11 July 2000, entered into force 26 May 2001, Preamble and Articles 2–3; Sirte Declaration on the Establishment of the African Union, adopted on 9 September 1999, Sirte, Libya.

embodying both continuity and departure from past practices[1]. Unlike the coordination-centric model of its predecessor, the new organization was conceived as a supranational structure equipped with legislative, executive, and judicial organs capable of active engagement in member states' affairs under specific legal conditions and this shift signified a conscious move away from the rigid principle of non-interference that had defined the OAU era[2].

Among the pivotal legal innovations introduced was the explicit recognition of the right to intervene in situations involving war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. Such provisions demonstrated a clear alignment with evolving international legal norms and a continental acknowledgment of collective responsibility in safeguarding fundamental rights and democratic order. The founding document further established commitments to promote democratic institutions, uphold human rights, and combat terrorist elements that were previously either underemphasized or absent within the OAU framework. This legal evolution reflects a nuanced attempt to reconcile respect for national sovereignty with the imperative of collective security and governance standards across Africa[3].

Institutionally, the new body significantly expanded its organizational complexity. From a modest structure of four primary organs under the OAU, the African Union introduced more than twenty seven distinct bodies, including key institutions such as the Pan-African Parliament and the Peace and Security Council[4]. This expansion was accompanied by a more adaptable decision process: rather than requiring unanimous consensus as was often the case before, resolutions could now be adopted by a two-thirds majority when necessary. In terms of financial governance, reforms were introduced to ensure greater operational flexibility. Where the OAU had depended strictly on member state contributions following a fixed quota system, the successor organization adopted a more pragmatic approach, allowing for external funding partnerships to support its activities. Linguistic inclusivity was also broadened; alongside English and French, Arabic and Portuguese were officially recognized as working languages, mirroring the continent's diverse cultural and linguistic realities[5].

Compliance mechanisms were likewise strengthened. Article 23 of the

[1] African Union, Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted 11 July 2000, Lomé, Togo, entered into force 26 May 2001, especially Articles 4(h) and 7; See also: Sirte Declaration on the Establishment of the African Union, Sirte, Libya, 9 September 1999.
[2] Olympio Francisco K. V., "Transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU): A New Vision for the 21st Century, or Political Rhetoric", Ph. D. (Berlin: University of Tier, 2004), pp.17-49
[3] African Union, Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted 11 July 2000, Lomé, Togo, entered into force 26 May 2001, Articles 4(h), 4(m), and 4(p)
[4] African Union, Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted 11 July 2000, Lomé, Togo, entered into force 26 May 2001, Articles 5–6; Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, adopted 9 July 2002; Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to the Pan-African Parliament, adopted 2 March 2001
[5] Ibidem

Constitutive Act[1], for instance, sets forth enforceable sanctions targeting member states that neglect financial obligations or fail to adhere to decisions collectively agreed upon. This provision was specifically designed to address inefficiencies that had hindered the effectiveness of the earlier organization. Another core component of the legal foundation was the articulation of a continental defense strategy. Peace and security were identified as shared responsibilities, shifting the focus from declarative solidarity to concrete, actionable frameworks for peacekeeping and crisis management. The new body thereby positioned itself as not just a diplomatic forum, but as a proactive institution prepared to address Africa's complex political and security realities through both preventive and responsive mechanisms[2].

The structural reforms introduced with the establishment of the African Union extended beyond merely increasing the number of organs and revising decision procedures. A deliberate redefinition of institutional roles and terminologies was undertaken to reflect the Union's broader mandate. For instance, what was formerly the Council of Ministers under the OAU became the Executive Council, now responsible for implementing decisions with a focus on efficiency and direct accountability to the Assembly rather than merely serving as a consultative body[3]. Also, certain financial and administrative responsibilities that once fell under the jurisdiction of the Council of Ministers were reassigned to the Assembly. This adjustment was made in recognition of the strategic importance of financial autonomy and efficiency, informed by the challenges faced during the OAU's final years. Ensuring a stable funding mechanism became essential to sustaining peacekeeping operations and development programs across the continent[4].

A significant procedural innovation involved the introduction of majority-based voting rules. While consensus remained the ideal, the African Union's Constitutive Act explicitly allowed for qualified majority voting in cases where unanimity proved impractical. This mechanism was designed to prevent stalemates and ensure that urgent decisions, especially those concerning security or humanitarian intervention, could be made without procedural paralysis[5]. And to restructure governance and financial systems, the African Union emphasized functional specialization through the creation of various technical committees. These bodies cover sectors such as economic integration, rural development, trade, customs, health, social affairs, and cultural matters. Their role

[1] See Article 23 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted in Lomé on 11 July 2000, which provides for sanctions against member states that fail to comply with Union decisions or fulfill their financial obligations
[2] See Article 23 and Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted in Lomé on 11 July 2000, as well as the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, adopted in Durban on 9 July 2002, which collectively establish sanctions mechanisms and define the Union's right to intervene to maintain peace and security
[3] See Articles 5, 7, and 9 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted in Lomé on 11 July 2000; see also S. Adejumobi, The African Union and New Strategies for Development in Africa, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 45-46
[4] Idem, p 47
[5] Idem, p48

is not merely advisory; they possess defined mandates to draft proposals and oversee implementation, bringing expert knowledge directly into the Union's operational framework[1].

An essential administrative reform involved shifting the reporting lines of specialized committees. Under the OAU, such bodies were accountable to the Assembly. Under the African Union, technical committees report directly to the Executive Council. This adjustment was intended to streamline decisions, allowing for more agile responses in areas requiring technical expertise, while relieving heads of state and government from routine managerial tasks. The Union also formalized disciplinary mechanisms[2]. For example, sanctions related to non-payment of financial contributions or violations of collective decisions were codified with specific consequences, including suspension of membership rights. These provisions reflect a shift from voluntary cooperation toward a more structured and enforceable system of continental governance. Also language policy within the African Union further illustrates the inclusive philosophy guiding its formation. Beyond English and French, which were traditionally dominant, the adoption of Arabic and Portuguese as official languages symbolized both a cultural and political gesture towards member states whose populations predominantly speak these languages[3]. This move also acknowledged the financial contributions of certain member states, particularly those with significant oil revenues and economic influence.

The Union's foundational legal framework deliberately omitted certain outdated principles that had characterized the OAU Charter, such as a strict adherence to non-alignment in international politics or exclusive focus on decolonization. Instead, it emphasized principles aligned with contemporary global governance, such as sustainable development, human rights protection, and economic integration[4]. A further institutional innovation was the establishment of a continental security doctrine. The African Union's peace and security policy departed from the OAU's reliance on political declarations, introducing a formal right of intervention in cases deemed threatening to regional stability. This doctrine was operationalized through the creation of permanent security bodies, such as the Peace and Security Council, supported by a standby force ready for rapid deployment when necessary. Taken together, these reforms and innovations underline a comprehensive reconfiguration of continental governance. The African Union was not conceived as a simple rebranding of the OAU but as an entirely new institutional system, purposefully designed to meet the complex challenges of the twenty first century within both legal and operational frameworks[5].

2.2 Crisis management and democratic support tools

[1] Kurt B. Young, "Africa Must Unite Revisited: Continuity and Change in the Case for Continental Unification", Africa Today (Indiana: Indiana University Press, Vol. 57, No. 1, Fall 2010), pp. 42-43
[2] Idem, p44
[3] Idem, p45
[4] Idem, p46
[5] Ibidem

The African Union's Constitutive Act, as the organization's supreme legal reference, establishes a complex institutional and legal framework aimed at ensuring democratic stability and effective conflict management across member states. Beyond merely defining organizational bodies, the Act articulates specific competences and procedures that distinguish the AU's interventionist philosophy from its predecessor's non-interference stance[1].

At the core of this framework lies the Assembly of the Union, as defined in Articles 6 to 9 of the Constitutive Act[2]. The Assembly exercises ultimate authority to decide on interventions, interpret the Union's legal principles, and appoint judges to the African Court of Justice. What marks a legal innovation here is not just the establishment of a collective summit of heads of state but the explicit attribution of binding decision power, including the capacity to suspend membership in cases of unconstitutional changes of government, as stipulated in Article 30[3]. Complementing the Assembly is the Executive Council, regulated by Articles 10 to 13[4]. This body is entrusted with executing the Assembly's directives, yet the Constitutive Act redefines its role beyond a purely consultative organ, emphasizing legal accountability and functional oversight. The Council's authority encompasses various thematic committees, institutionalized through Articles 14 and 15[5], covering sectors such as trade, social affairs, and cultural development, all structured to ensure harmonization of member states' policies within a legal framework. A further pillar is the Peace and Security Council (PSC), established through a separate protocol under the Constitutive Act. While not detailed in full within the Act itself, its legal foundation is inseparable from the Union's collective security doctrine as outlined in Article 4(h) and (j)[6]. These provisions grant the AU the right to intervene militarily in a member state under conditions such as war crimes, genocide, or serious threats to legitimate democratic order.

The Constitutive Act also introduces enforcement mechanisms through Article 23, which provides for sanctions in the event of non-compliance with financial obligations or failure to adhere to collective decisions[7]. This legal clause reflects a deliberate effort to reinforce organizational discipline, ensuring that commitments made at the Union level are respected within national jurisdictions. Furthermore, financial institutions such as the African Central Bank, the African Investment Bank, and the African Monetary

[1] See Articles 3 and 4 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted in Lomé on 11 July 2000; see also Jeremy I. Levitt, The African Union: The First Ten Years, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 112–115
[2] According to Articles 6 to 9 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted on 11 July 2000, Lomé
[3] Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2000, Articles 7 and 30.
[4] Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2000, Articles 10–13.
[5] Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2000, Articles 14–15.
[6] See Articles 4(h), 4(j), and 14 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted in Lomé on 11 July 2000, as well as the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, adopted in Durban on 9 July 2002, which together establish the Union's collective security mechanisms and specialized technical committees
[7] Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2000, Article23

Fund, mentioned in Articles 19 and following[1], are not merely economic tools but form part of the Union's legal apparatus for continental governance. These bodies hold regulatory authority over financial integration processes, supporting both economic stability and the political objective of continental unity. The Pan-African Parliament, as established in Article 17[2], provides a unique legal dimension by institutionalizing citizen participation. Unlike its advisory predecessors under the OAU, the Parliament is conceived as an evolving organ that may eventually acquire full legislative powers, thus embedding democratic representation within the AU's normative structure. The judicial branch, embodied in the African Court of Justice and later expanded through the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, anchors the Union's commitment to the rule of law. The Constitutive Act mandates that all member states recognize the court's authority, aligning continental governance with broader international legal standards, especially in matters of human rights and democratic governance[3]. The Act's preamble and general principles establish a legally binding obligation on member states to respect democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law. These foundational norms are reinforced through practical mechanisms such as the African Standby Force, which operates not merely as a military unit but as a legally mandated instrument of continental peace enforcement under Articles 4 and 7[4].

The African Union's peace and security architecture is reinforced by concrete operational mechanisms that are inseparable from its legal mandate. The African Standby Force (ASF), established as part of the broader African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), serves as a core instrument for implementing the intervention rights enshrined in Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act[5]. This force is organized into regional brigades under the control of the AU, enabling swift deployment in situations involving unconstitutional changes of government or severe internal conflicts. The ASF is not a mere political declaration but a structured and trained entity with pre-established logistics, military personnel, and operational protocols. Its establishment responds to legal obligations derived from both the Constitutive Act and supplementary protocols, reflecting the Union's commitment to translate its collective security doctrine into enforceable practice. Another institutional pillar is the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), legally rooted in the Peace and Security Council Protocol. CEWS is designed to detect and analyze potential crises before they escalate. Its operation involves a network of observation and monitoring centers across the continent,

[1] Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2000, Article 19
[2] Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2000, Article 17
[3] See Articles 5(1)(d) and 18 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted in Lomé on 11 July 2000, as well as the Protocol of the Court of Justice of the African Union, adopted in Maputo on 11 July 2003, and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, adopted in Ouagadougou on 10 June 1998
[4] Ibidem
[5] See Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted in Lomé on 11 July 2000, and Article 13 of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, adopted in Durban on 9 July 2002, which establish the African Standby Force as a key mechanism for peace and security operations

collecting data on political tensions, electoral disputes, and governance failures. From a legal perspective, CEWS functions as both a preventive tool and a mechanism for ensuring that the Union's intervention capacities are guided by verified information and objective risk assessments[1].

The AU's approach to crisis management also integrates soft-power instruments, such as mediation and diplomacy, coordinated by the Panel of the Wise. This body, although consultative, is formally recognized within the AU's legal system as an advisory organ to the Peace and Security Council. Its members are selected for their integrity, experience, and neutrality, playing a critical role in offering solutions to political impasses and electoral disputes through non coercive means. Sanction regimes form an additional legal mechanism reinforcing the Union's governance model[2]. Under Article 23 of the Constitutive Act[3], member states that fail to comply with AU decisions or obligations, whether financial or political, may face penalties including suspension of voting rights, restriction from participating in AU activities, or broader diplomatic isolation. Such provisions give the AU enforceable leverage over its members, moving beyond the purely moral authority that characterized the OAU[4].

Institutional reforms in budget management further support financial discipline. The African Union's shift from a rigid quota system to a more dynamic financial framework allows for both internal member contributions and external partnerships with international organizations. This hybrid funding model ensures that peacekeeping operations, judicial bodies, and governance support programs receive the necessary resources while maintaining accountability through auditing mechanisms defined in AU financial regulations[5]. It is also notable that under the AU's legal structure, specialized technical committees play a direct role in reinforcing democratic governance. These committees, covering areas such as public service, local governance, and human rights, not only provide expertise but also monitor state compliance with AU norms. Their work feeds into the Executive Council's deliberations, creating a multi-level system of legal oversight. The Pan-African Parliament, while not yet enjoying full legislative powers, serves as a foundational element for embedding democratic legitimacy within the AU's decision process. Its eventual evolution into a fully empowered legislative body is anticipated under the Union's legal development plans, signaling a commitment to integrating representative democracy at the continental level[6].

3. Assessing the role of African Organizations in post crisis democratic transitions

[1] See Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, op cit
[2] Corinne A. A. Packer, Donald Rukare, "the New African Union and it's Constitutive Act", the American Journal of International Law (Washington, D. c.: American Society of International Law, Vol. 96, No. 2, April 2002), pp. 372
[3] Idem, p373
[4] Idem, p374
[5] Ibidem
[6] Ibidem

While the African Union's legal and institutional framework outlines clear mechanisms for supporting democratic governance, its true effectiveness can only be measured through real-world practice. Examining specific post crisis contexts where the AU has intervened allows for a deeper understanding of both its achievements and limitations. Through selected case studies and critical analysis, this section seeks to assess how African organizations translate their normative commitments into concrete outcomes and what persistent challenges hinder their ability to ensure successful democratic transitions across the continent

3.1 Selected cases of AU interventions

The true measure of the African Union's effectiveness in supporting democratic transitions following political crises is not determined by the existence of legal texts alone, but rather by its ability to translate these norms into concrete actions within member states facing turmoil. One illustrative case is Mali[1], where the military coup of March 2012 posed a direct challenge to constitutional order and regional stability. Consistent with Article 30 of the Constitutive Act[2], which prohibits any unconstitutional change of government, the African Union moved swiftly to suspend Mali's membership. This decision was coupled with efforts to mediate through ECOWAS, highlighting the Union's commitment to collective legal principles. But, despite these actions, the AU's actual capacity to manage the crisis remained secondary to other actors. Stabilization efforts on the ground were dominated by France's unilateral military intervention under Operation Serval, as well as by the United Nations' deployment of MINUSMA. This outcome revealed the Union's structural dependency on external partners, which limits its autonomous influence despite holding a formal legal mandate[3]. A comparable scenario unfolded in the Central African Republic, a country plagued by recurring cycles of violence and state collapse. In response to the 2013 political and security crisis, the AU authorized the deployment of the African led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic (MISCA), mandated by the Peace and Security Council. Legally, this operation reflected a direct application of the Union's intervention rights under Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act[4], signaling a proactive stance in protecting democratic governance and civilian populations. Yet, once again, structural weaknesses hindered the mission's ability to stabilize the situation fully. Funding shortfalls, logistical constraints, and the lack of a coherent long term strategy forced the AU to rely on the United Nations, which eventually took over responsibility through the establishment of MINUSCA. This handover illustrated both the ambition and the

[1] Victor Osaro Edo, Michael Abiodun Olanrewaju, " An Assessment of the Transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU), 1963-2002", Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria (Abuja: Historical Society of Nigeria, Vol. 21, 2012), pp. 59-61

[2] See Article 30 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted in Lomé on 11 July 2000; African Union Peace and Security Council, Communiqué PSC/PR/COMM.(CCCXV), on the situation in Mali, 23 March 2012; and African Union Commission, Report on the Situation in Mali and the AU's Response, Addis Ababa, 2013

[3] Ibidem

[4] Ibidem

limitations embedded within the Union's crisis management architecture[1].

Sudan's post Bashir transition further demonstrates the complex realities confronting African Union mechanisms. Following the ousting of President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 through a military led process, the AU reacted by suspending Sudan's participation in its activities, invoking once more the provisions of Article 30[2]. This legal sanction was complemented by political mediation efforts, with the Union dispatching a special envoy to facilitate negotiations between military authorities and civilian opposition groups. While these interventions contributed to shaping the path toward the formation of a transitional civilian government, the process was not solely driven by AU influence. Internal Sudanese dynamics, especially widespread popular protests and civil society mobilization, alongside external diplomatic pressures from major international actors, played decisive roles in determining the outcome[3].

Across these three cases, Mali, the Central African Republic, and Sudan, a recurring pattern emerges: the African Union consistently activates its legal mechanisms in response to unconstitutional changes of government, applying sanctions, suspending memberships, and deploying peace support missions where possible. But the Union's actual capacity to guarantee effective democratic transitions is repeatedly tempered by its limited financial resources, operational shortcomings, and the necessity of collaborating with more powerful international organizations. While its legal and institutional framework equips it with formal authority[4], the gap between normative ambition and practical execution remains substantial. These realities underscore the structural tensions inherent in the Union's role as both a normative guardian of democracy and a regional actor navigating complex political and security environments that often exceed its autonomous capacity to control[5]. This recurring pattern in the African Union's interventions highlights a fundamental structural contradiction embedded within its legal and institutional framework: while the AU is endowed with normative authority through clearly defined legal mechanisms such as Articles 4(h) and 30 of its Constitutive Act[6], its ability to enforce these norms consistently across different contexts remains constrained by a set of practical and political limitations. The Mali, Central African Republic, and Sudan cases all reveal that despite the Union's swift application of sanctions or deployment of missions, the decisive factors shaping

[1] Paul D. Williams, "the Peace and Security Council of the African Union: Evaluating an Embryonic International Institution", The Journal of Modern African Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Vol. 47, No. 4, December 2007), pp. 603-604

[2] See Article 30 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted in Lomé on 11 July 2000; African Union Peace and Security Council, Communiqué PSC/PR/COMM.(DCCCXLVII), on the situation in Sudan, 6 June 2019; and African Union Commission, Report on the African Union's Engagement in Sudan's Political Transition, Addis Ababa, 2020

[3] Ibidem

[4] International Crisis Group, "Darfur: Failure to Protect," Africa Report No. 89, Excel: International Crisis Group, (Pro 2005), pp. 19

[5] Idem, p20

[6] Idem,p 22

political outcomes often lie beyond its direct control. Financial dependency on external donors systematically undermines the AU's operational autonomy, leaving it reliant on international partners like the United Nations or former colonial powers to implement peacekeeping or stabilization missions[1]. This reliance not only exposes the Union to shifting geopolitical interests but also creates delays and compromises in the application of its legal instruments. Besides that, the uneven political will among member states weakens collective action; certain governments prioritize national or regional strategic interests over upholding AU principles, leading to selective enforcement of sanctions and inconsistent political engagement. Logistical shortcomings, such as the incomplete operationalization of the African Standby Force and persistent administrative inefficiencies within the AU Commission, further reduce the organization's capacity to act decisively. To that, overlapping mandates with subregional organizations like ECOWAS introduce coordination challenges that dilute the clarity and effectiveness of AU interventions[2]. These structural factors collectively result in a persistent gap between the Union's normative commitments and its actual influence on the ground, positioning it as a legal authority whose impact is frequently moderated by external actors, domestic political dynamics within member states, and broader international strategic considerations. The AU thus operates in a delicate balance between its role as a guardian of democratic legitimacy and its practical limitations as a regional organization constrained by resources, political fragmentation, and institutional inertia[3].

3.2 Key challenges to organizational effectiveness

Despite being equipped with a solid legal and institutional structure, African organizations, most prominently the African Union, face persistent structural and political obstacles that significantly undermine their capacity to fully enforce democratic transitions following political crises, despite the binding nature of the legal provisions outlined in the Constitutive Act[4]. Among these challenges, financial dependency holds a central place; although Article 23 of the Constitutive Act explicitly[5] provides for sanctions against member states failing to meet their financial obligations, in practice, the Union's budget remains heavily reliant on external funding, particularly from the European Union and the United Nations, which compromises the organization's ability to autonomously implement decisions taken under its legal authority[6]. This dependency directly affects the operationalization of key mechanisms such as the African Standby Force, whose deployment is anticipated under Article 13 of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council[7] but is

[1] Alexis Arieff, "Crisis in Mali", Paper Published by Congressional Research Service (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, January 2013), pp. 1-3
[2] Henry Kam Kah, "Anti-Balaka/SELEKA Regionalization and Separatism in the History of Central Africa Republic", Conflict Studies Quarterly (Napoca, Romania: Babes-Bolyai University, Issue 9, October 2014), pp. 30
[3] Idem,p 31
[4] Idem, p32
[5] Idem, p33
[6] Ibidem
[7] Ibidem

rarely realized due to logistical constraints, insufficient funding, and inconsistent political commitment from member states. Political fragmentation within the AU's membership exacerbates this problem, as divergent national interests frequently prevent the uniform application of collective decisions, undermining the enforcement capacity provided under Article 7 of the Constitutive Act, which grants the Assembly and the Executive Council powers to adopt binding decisions. This is especially evident in cases where powerful states prioritize regional or national agendas over collective democratic norms, a dynamic that also affects the uniform implementation of Article 30, which mandates the suspension of member states where unconstitutional changes of government occur. Further complicating matters is the institutional overlap between the AU and subregional organizations such as ECOWAS and SADC; while these bodies are empowered under Article 16 of the Peace and Security Council Protocol to work in coordination with the AU, in practice their actions often diverge from continental policies, resulting in fragmented and sometimes contradictory responses to crises[1]. The AU's legal enforcement mechanisms, including sanctions provided under Articles 23 and 30, also suffer from selective application, frequently influenced by political considerations rather than being applied systematically according to legal criteria, which diminishes the Union's credibility and undermines the binding nature of its legal instruments. Beyond these internal structural limitations, the AU must also navigate complex external geopolitical pressures: interventions by non-African powers often reshape political outcomes in ways that bypass or marginalize AU frameworks, despite the Union's legal mandate under Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act to intervene in grave circumstances such as war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. These combined challenges illustrate the considerable gap between the Union's legally defined competencies and its operational reality, highlighting the urgent need to reinforce the implementation of binding provisions contained within the Constitutive Act and its related protocols to enhance the Union's capacity to promote democratic governance and maintain peace and security across the continent effectively[2].

Addressing the structural and operational challenges that limit the African Union's effectiveness in supporting democratic transitions after political crises requires a multi-dimensional reform strategy that targets both legal implementation gaps and institutional capacity weaknesses[3]. Foremost among these solutions is reinforcing the Union's financial autonomy, which remains essential given the direct link between financial independence and the capacity to enforce decisions outlined in Articles 7 and 23 of the Constitutive Act. Member states must collectively commit to increasing their contributions, establishing binding financial obligation mechanisms under Article 23

[1] Annette Weber, Markus Kaim, "Central African Republic in Crisis: African Union Mission Needs United Nations Support", Paper Published by German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Berlin: German Institute for International and Security Affairs, March 2014), pp. 1-2
[2] Idem, p 3
[3] Ibidem

that are applied uniformly and not subject to political discretion. This could be operationalized through continental levies or regional taxation systems managed by the AU Commission under Article 19 of the Constitutive Act[1], which envisages the creation of specialized financial institutions. Parallel to financial reform, there is an urgent need to enhance the operational readiness of the African Standby Force under Article 13 of the Peace and Security Council Protocol[2] by investing in permanent training facilities, standardized equipment procurement, and joint command structures capable of rapid deployment without awaiting external support. In terms of political cohesion, the AU must institutionalize stronger monitoring and enforcement tools to ensure member state compliance with key principles such as the prohibition of unconstitutional changes of government under Article 30[3], moving beyond suspension measures toward more structured sanctions regimes that could include economic or diplomatic restrictions. This necessitates revising internal procedures within the AU Commission to reduce bureaucratic inertia and ensure faster execution of Assembly and Executive Council decisions under Articles 7 and 9[4].

4- Conclusion

The African Union stands today as a central pillar in the continent's efforts to promote democratic governance and maintain peace and security, representing a notable evolution from the limitations that characterized its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity. Through its Constitutive Act and related protocols, the AU has established a solid legal and institutional framework that enables it to intervene in cases of unconstitutional changes of government, mediate political disputes, and deploy peace support missions. But, despite these advancements, persistent challenges continue to restrict the full realization of its objectives. Financial dependency on external partners, divergent political interests among member states, operational and logistical shortcomings, and the complex dynamics of external geopolitical influences collectively undermine the Union's capacity to act effectively and autonomously. These structural limitations reveal a gap between the AU's normative ambitions and its practical achievements on the ground. Strengthening the African Union's effectiveness in supporting democratic transitions requires a renewed collective political will among member states, consistent application of its legal provisions, enhancement of its financial autonomy, and the development of fully operational crisis management tools such as the African Standby Force. As well, clearer coordination mechanisms with subregional organizations and more assertive engagement with international actors would reinforce the Union's capacity to serve as a credible and independent actor in managing post-crisis democratic transitions. In the end, while the African Union has laid down the legal and institutional foundations necessary for continental governance,

[1] Paul D. Williams, "the Peace and Security Council of the African Union: Evaluating an Embryonic International Institution, op cit , p 610
[2] Idem, p611
[3] Idem, p612
[4] Ibidem

realizing its full potential depends on translating these frameworks into concrete and consistent action across all member states.

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