

# MISSIONS AND ROLE OF THE AFRICAN UNION IN AFRICA

July 2024 No:49



### MISSIONS AND ROLE OF THE AFRICAN UNION IN AFRICA

Human societies have tended to cooperate among themselves since their existence on earth. This cooperation has generally been realised for purposes such as protecting common interests, providing security, sharing resources or increasing cultural interaction. Throughout history, different civilisations and civilisations have formed various organisations. These organisations have ranged from tribal alliances to ancient empires, from medieval feudal structures to modern nation-states and international organisations. However, fundamentally, the effort of people to act together and achieve common goals has been the driving force behind these different organisations. These efforts can be seen as a sign of progress towards humanity coming together as a greater whole and building a common future. In this context, the African Union (AU) has emerged as an important driving force for Africa's integration, development and prosperity, building on the continent's rich cultural heritage and potential. Established in the early 21st century, this organisation aims to provide a common platform to address a range of challenges facing Africa. In this context, the main mission of the African Union, which has many roles and missions, is to maintain peace and security, promote democratic governance, ensure economic development, protect human rights and enhance social welfare on the continent. In line with these overarching objectives, the role of the AU is quite diverse. In this context, through its mediation and peacekeeping efforts, it seeks to reduce tensions in conflict zones while ensuring political stability by overseeing democratic elections and mediating political crises. Similarly, through economic integration projects and trade agreements, it promotes economic growth and development on the continent. It also plays an active role in social and environmental issues, such as protecting human rights, increasing access to health care, improving education and promoting environmental sustainability. In this way, the African Union helps the continent to become stronger and more influential at home and internationally. At this point, this study will provide a general analysis of the missions and roles adopted and played by the AU in the African geography and will examine its activities on the continent through various examples. In this context, before examining the effectiveness and position of the AU in the African continent in detail, it is important to examine the purpose of the Union and the dynamics that led to the establishment of such an organisation.

#### **The History of the African Union and the Dynamics of its Establishment**

It is possible to say that the developments in the African continent in the past played a key role in the process leading to the African Union. In particular, the reflections of the negative effects of the Second World War and its aftermath on Africa led to a search for integration in the continent. At this point, the search for unification in Africa arose from the need to deal with common problems as well as the historical,

cultural and geographical connections in the continent. The continent faces a number of challenges such as artificial borders, ethnic diversity, economic disparities, political instability and conflict, which are legacies of the past. To overcome these challenges and make the continent stronger, leaders and societies in Africa have come together to seek ways of acting together and regional integration. In particular, with the end of the Second World War, the world entered a period of radical change and a new era in

international relations. This period marked the decline of colonialism and imperialism and emphasised the importance of fundamental principles such as sovereignty and the right of peoples to self-determination in international relations (Dalar, 2013: 46). In the process of establishing the post-war international order, institutions such as the United Nations (UN) acted with the aim of maintaining international peace and security, guaranteeing human rights and law, and promoting international co-operation. This new order aimed to preserve the sovereignty of states and strengthen their authority to take independent decisions in their internal affairs. In fact, this situation is seen as an important dynamic that ignited the fuse of integration in the process that led first to the Organisation of African Unity and then to the African Union.

At this point, when the stage of the Organisation of African Unity is examined, starting with the independence of Ghana in 1957, with the independence of an increasing number of sub-Saharan African countries, African leaders and thinkers saw the establishment of an international organisation that would bring all the countries of the continent together as an important goal (Badejo, 2008: 12). This goal was perceived as a call for unity and solidarity beyond national borders in the continent. In this context, as a result of the efforts for the establishment of the OAU, the "Constitutive Treaty of the Organisation of African Unity" was prepared to be signed in Addis Ababa on 25 May 1963 and the said treaty was signed by 30 of the 32 African countries that were independent at that time (İpek, 2012: 112). While emphasising the continent's aim of integration and solidarity, this document is considered important in terms of

defending Africa's right to self-determination and creating a basic framework for the unity of the continent. From this perspective, the Organisation of African Unity has had a significant impact on the realisation of the primary objectives of the newly independent countries of Africa. In order to ensure the unity and solidarity of the continent and to get rid of the effects of colonialism, the organisation provided cooperation and coordination in various fields and sought common solutions to deal with economic, political and social challenges. However, although it fought against the end of colonialism on the axis of its goal and took certain successful steps, it was not seen as a fully effective organisation due to reasons such as disagreements within the organisation, between members, non-payment of regular contributions and failure to make the necessary changes in the Treaty of Establishment in order to adapt the organisation to changing world conditions (İpek, 2012: 113). As a result of the inadequate image of the organisation in this period, armed conflicts increased in Africa, especially with the end of the Cold War, and growing economic difficulties made themselves felt to a great extent in this geography. In the picture in Africa that emerged on the axis of these problems, the idea that the Organisation of African Unity should have a more effective structure started to become widespread and the foundations of the African Union were laid in this way.

At this point, the idea of a new organisation among African countries was first put forward by Muammar Gaddafi, the leader of Libya at the time, at the OAU Summit Meeting held in Libya on 9 September 1999 (Cilliers, 2001: 105). With the work carried out in line with this proposal, the Constitutive Treaty of the African Union

was prepared in a short time and entered into force in 2001. However, in order to ensure a smooth transition to the African Union, the Constitutive Treaty of the Organisation of African Unity remained valid for about one more year after May 2001, and then the organisation was de facto terminated with the Organisation of African Unity Summit held in South Africa in 2002 and replaced by the African Union (Ipek, 2012: 113). In this context, since its establishment, the African Union has adopted many different tasks and missions specific to the African continent and continues to work for the development of the continent in various fields. In this respect, it is possible to examine the roles and missions undertaken by the organisation under three main sub-headings.

### Intergovernmental Cooperation and Diplomacy

The African Union (AU) plays an important role in intergovernmental co-operation and diplomacy to ensure regional peace and security in the continent. Intergovernmental co-operation is a process by which states come together to find common solutions to protect their national interests and achieve common goals. Diplomacy, on the other hand, involves the tools used to manage relations between states and resolve international disputes. In this respect, these concepts appear to play a fundamental role in the African Union's regional peace and security endeavours. Digging deeper, analysing the role of the African Union in the field of intergovernmental cooperation and diplomacy shows that the African Union uses a variety of instruments to ensure peace and security on the continent. These include peacekeeping operations,

mediation, crisis management and peacebuilding.

In this context, within the scope of peacekeeping operations, the African Union ensures regional security by organising peacekeeping operations in conflict zones in the continent. These operations are carried out with the aim of reducing instability in conflict zones, protecting human rights, ensuring the safety of civilians and supporting peace processes. The African Union's peacekeeping operations are usually conducted under the mandate of the UN Security Council and intervene in various types of conflicts in different parts of the continent. Moreover, the operations carried out by the Organisation may consist of different components such as military units, police forces, etc. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) can be given as an example of the actions of the Organisation within the scope of peacekeeping operations. Established in 2007, AMISOM aims to reduce instability in Somalia and support the Federal Government. The operation has contributed significantly to the loss of power of al-Shabaab militants and the improvement of security conditions in Somalia. Similarly, the African Union's operations to intervene in the conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan are also significant. The African Union has organised mediation and peacekeeping operations to resolve border disputes between Sudan and South Sudan. These operations aimed to build trust between the parties, protect civilians and promote peaceful solutions.

In addition, in the axis of peacekeeping operations, the African Union provides support to peace processes by mediating to prevent or resolve conflicts. These activities of the Union on the continent

play an important role in the resolution of regional conflicts and contribute to efforts to strengthen the stability of the continent. One of the main objectives of the African Union's mediation activities is to find peaceful and conciliatory solutions to prevent or end regional conflicts. As these conflicts often span across borders, they may not be resolved through the efforts of a single country alone. Therefore, the African Union tries to find solutions through dialogue by bringing the parties to conflicts together. For example, intervening in the protracted border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the African Union organised mediation missions and brought the parties together to help find a peaceful solution. Similarly, the African Union mediated the disputes between Sudan and South Sudan and an agreement was reached between the parties. Moreover, the effectiveness of the African Union's mediation activities is based on various factors. Among these, the African Union's broad continental legitimacy and effective diplomatic network play an important role. It is also important that it contributes to peace and stability at the regional level through cooperation with regional organisations. However, the African Union's mediation activities also face some challenges. These include factors such as lack of trust on the part of conflict parties, limited resources and national sovereignty concerns. Despite these challenges, the African Union's mediation efforts make an important contribution to peace and stability on the continent.

On the other hand, crisis management is also seen as one of the roles played by the African Union. In this context, the African Union carries out crisis management activities to deal with and stabilize the various crises facing the continent. These

activities aim to tackle various political, economic, social and security challenges. Moreover, the African Union's crisis management efforts often focus on areas such as conflict resolution, peacekeeping, providing humanitarian assistance, democratization and protecting human rights. These efforts are often coordinated by the African Union's Peace and Security Councils and carried out in cooperation with member states. For example, the African Union has engaged in crisis management efforts to deal with the conflict and instability in Libya. In the Libyan civil war that erupted in 2011, the African Union conducted crisis management mediation to reconcile the parties and find a peaceful solution. Similarly, the African Union's intervention in the crises in the Central African Republic is also noteworthy. At this point, the African Union sent peacekeeping forces to resolve the conflicts in the Central African Republic and supported the peace process.

Another role of the African Union within the scope of intergovernmental cooperation and diplomacy is in the field of peacebuilding. In this context, the African Union is engaged in a range of peacebuilding activities to ensure peace and stability on the continent. These activities cover areas such as maintaining peace in the post-conflict period, supporting social reconciliation processes, strengthening institutional capacity, ensuring justice and promoting sustainable development. Similarly, the African Union's peacebuilding activities focus on rebuilding trust between societies and sustaining peace processes in the post-conflict period. In this context, for instance, the African Union has organized various peacekeeping operations to restore peace and stability in the Darfur region in Sudan. These operations were carried out in cooperation



with civil society organizations and the Union made efforts to ensure the security of the local population, protect human rights and support the peace process. In addition, the African Union's peacebuilding efforts also focus on supporting democratization processes. For example, during the 2008 electoral crisis in Zimbabwe, the African Union contributed to the preservation of democratic norms by overseeing the electoral process. Similarly, in elections in countries such as Nigeria, Liberia and Gambia, the African Union ensured that democratic processes were conducted in a fair and transparent manner. In addition, the African Union plays an important role in strengthening institutional capacity and ensuring justice, particularly in the context of peacebuilding efforts. In this context, the Joint African Union and United Nations Peacekeeping Force (UNAMID) established by the African Union in Darfur, Sudan, has contributed to strengthening local justice systems by supporting civil society organizations. Similarly, the African Union's support for the establishment of special courts for war crimes in Sierra Leone can be seen as an important step. At this point, it is evident that the African Union is playing an important role in the field of intergovernmental cooperation and diplomacy and is effectively engaged in efforts to ensure peace and security on the continent.

### **Economic Integration and Trade**

Another scope of the roles and missions adopted by the African Union in the African continent can be seen in the field of economic integration and trade. Economic integration is the process of liberalizing trade and adopting common economic policies between different economies. This process aims to increase trade between

countries, promote economic growth and increase welfare. For the African continent, economic integration and trade are critical for development and sustainable growth. In this context, the African Union undertakes various missions and roles to promote economic integration and support trade development on the continent.

Cooperation with regional economic communities is one of the roles in which the African Union makes itself felt in the context of economic integration and trade. In this respect, the African Union supports the goals of development, economic integration and sustainable growth through cooperation with regional economic communities in the continent. This cooperation plays an important role in ensuring Africa's economic empowerment and regional prosperity. The African Union's cooperation with regional economic communities is an important tool to promote economic integration and support economic development in different parts of the continent. In this context, one of the most important regional economic communities of the African Union is the Economic Community of Economic Societies (ECOWAS). ECOWAS operates with the objectives of promoting economic integration in West Africa, increasing trade, facilitating free movement and maintaining regional peace. Through cooperation with ECOWAS and other regional economic communities, the African Union contributes to economic integration and development promotion at the regional level. In addition, the African Union's cooperation with regional economic communities also aims to enhance regional prosperity through trade facilitation and deepening economic integration. For example, the East African Community (EAC) is implementing various projects to increase trade, develop

infrastructure and promote economic growth at the regional level. The African Union cooperates with the EAC and other regional economic communities to develop and implement joint solutions to remove trade barriers, simplify customs procedures and facilitate cross-border trade.

Trade policy and agreements are seen as another mission of the African Union in the context of economic integration and trade. At this point, the African Union assumes an important role in guiding and coordinating trade policy and agreements on the continent. This role includes various missions such as promoting the continent's economic integration, increasing trade, enhancing competitiveness and supporting sustainable development. To go deeper, the African Union's trade policy is of strategic importance for the overall economic development and prosperity of the continent. In this context, one of the main objectives of the African Union is to increase the continent's internal trade and promote regional economic integration. For example, the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) is one of the most important trade agreements of the African Union. The AfCFTA aims to increase Africa's overall trade potential, facilitate cross-border trade and develop regional value chains. This agreement aims to strengthen the continent's internal trade and stimulate economic growth by reducing trade barriers. In addition, the African Union's trade policy also includes efforts to steer international trade relations and strengthen the continent's position on the global trade scene. In this context, regional and international trade agreements such as the AU's Cotonou Agreement with the European Union play an important role. The Cotonou Agreement addresses trade, development and

cooperation between the European Union and African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. It guides the African Union's external trade relations and contributes to the continent playing a more active role on the global trade scene. However, in the current conjuncture, the African Union's trade policy and agreements efforts face some challenges. These challenges include economic and political differences among member countries, lack of infrastructure, limited resources and external interference. In addition, uncertainties in the international trade environment and protectionist tendencies also complicate trade policy efforts.

### Peace and Security Operations

The African continent faces various security threats, posing a serious challenge to regional stability and peace. The African Union organizes various peace and security operations to counter these threats and ensure peace. Peace and security operations are a set of military and civilian activities organized to maintain peace in conflict zones, ensure the protection of civilians and coordinate humanitarian assistance. These operations are an important tool for ending conflicts and establishing peace, and contribute to regional stabilization.

The African Union has various strategies and mechanisms to manage and coordinate peace and security operations. These include important structures such as the African Peace and Security Council (AUPSC), the African Standby Force (ASF), the African Financial Mechanism for Missions (AMF) and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). These mechanisms provide a ready capacity to respond quickly and effectively to conflicts on the continent. In this context, the

African Union's African Peace and Security Council in particular is seen as an important institution established to maintain and promote peace and security on the continent. It fulfills a number of missions, including peacemaking in conflict zones, conflict prevention, peacekeeping and ensuring the safety of the civilian population. The African Peace and Security Council is tasked with defining, coordinating and implementing the peace and security-related policies of the African Union. In this context, the Council analyzes conflicts on the continent, manages peacekeeping operations, conducts mediation activities and supports peace processes. The African Peace and Security Council also plays an important role in conflict prevention and peace process support. The Council analyzes the root causes of conflicts, establishes early warning systems and mediates to resolve crises. For example, in 2008, the African Peace and Security Council coordinated mediation activities to stop post-election violence in Kenya and brokered reconciliation between the parties. The African Peace and Security Council also carries out humanitarian missions in crisis areas, such as providing humanitarian assistance and ensuring the safety of the civilian population. In this context, the Council is tasked with ensuring the creation of safe corridors to deliver humanitarian aid to conflict zones. However, in the current conjuncture, the African Peace and Security Council faces a number of challenges. These challenges include limited resources, lack of operational capacity, national sovereignty concerns and resistance from conflict parties. Moreover, despite the challenges facing the African Peace and Security Council, regional peace and security is threatened by factors such as the growing threats of terrorism and extremism, trafficking,

ethnic conflicts and political instability, especially in recent years. This leaves the Council in need of more resources and operational capacity. Moreover, political differences and national sovereignty concerns among some member states can undermine the Council's effectiveness. Despite these challenges, the African Peace and Security Council, with the determination and support of African Union member states, is committed to continuing its efforts to maintain peace and security in conflict zones.

### Conclusion

Broadly speaking, the African Union's missions and role in Africa are a reflection of the dynamics of its founding. The history of the African Union emphasizes the importance of solidarity and cooperation among member states, starting with the struggles for independence on the continent. In this context, the history of the African Union and the dynamics of its founding have provided an important platform for safeguarding the common interests of the continent and achieving its development goals by emphasizing the importance of cooperation and solidarity among the states of the continent. On this basis, the African Union's missions and role in Africa have become a key component of peace, security and development processes on the continent. Accordingly, the missions and mandates of the African Union play a comprehensive role in areas such as peace, security, economic development, human rights and social welfare on the continent. Looking to the future, the African Union is expected to further strengthen and increase its effectiveness. This is an important step towards achieving internal peace and stability, accelerating economic development and enhancing social welfare



on the continent. However, some assumptions for future achievements should also be taken into account. First, the African Union needs to build a strong culture of solidarity and cooperation among its member states. It also needs to develop more effective diplomacy and mediation processes to resolve political, ethnic and religious conflicts in various parts of the continent. In addition, strengthening the economic and military capacities of countries in leadership positions in the African Union could help to more effectively counter security threats on the continent. Finally, the African Union needs to maintain its commitment to democratic values and human rights and undertake the necessary reforms to protect these values. If these are realized, it is envisaged that the African Union will continue to be a strong advocate for peace, stability and prosperity on the continent in the future.

## REFERENCES

Dalar, Müge, (2013), *"Afrika Birliđi Örgütü'nden Afrika Birliđi'ne: Afrika'da Bütünleşme Çabaları"*, Ankara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, s. 46-149.

Badejo, Diedre L., (2008) *"The African Union"*, Chelsea Publishers, New York, s.12

İpek, Cemil D., (2012), *"Afrika Birliđi Örgütü ve Kıtada İş birliđi Arayışları"*, 21. Yüzyılda Eğitim ve Toplum, Vol,1, No:3, s.111-130.

Cilliers, Jakkie, (2001), *"Towards The African Union"*, African Security Review, Cilt:10, No:2, s.105

Daban, Cihan, (2022), *"A Brief Evaluation of The Peace and Security Council of the African Union"*, Erciyes Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi, s.31-37.



DİPLOMATİK İLİŞKİLER ve POLİTİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ  
CENTER for DIPLOMATIC AFFAIRS and POLITICAL STUDIES

+90 216 310 30 40 info@dipam.org

+90 216 310 30 50 www.dipam.org

Merdivenköy Mah. Nur Sok. Business İstanbul  
A Blok Kat:12 No:115, Kadıköy/İstanbul

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Murat Özay TAŞKIN**, graduated from TED University, Department of Political Science and International Relations in 2021. In 2023, he completed his master's degree in International Relations-Global Studies at the University of Wrocław with his thesis titled "Analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian War within the scope of International Relations Theories: Realist and Liberal Approach". Since October 2023, Taşkın has been continuing his academic studies as a PhD student in Political Science at the University of Wrocław. His main research interests include African Studies, Security and Turkish Foreign Policy. Taşkın continues his internship in the field of African Studies at DİPAM.