

There are no translations available.

An [interesting post](#) published on the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) analyses the role that the African Union is expected to play in 2024 and in the following years, in the light of the perduring weaknesses of this institution after more than 20 years since when, on July 9 2002, African Heads of State and Government met in Durban (South Africa), to welcome the birth of the continental organization.

The African Union (AU) is weak because member states keep avoiding to relegate powers to the AU Commission, the post comments, recalling a statement from the Chairperson of the AU Commission.

The strong reluctance of African states to transfer portions of sovereignty to continental and regional institutions, coupled with their low commitment to transfer the resources needed for these institutions to efficiently carry out their mandates, has produced so far two negative effects. First, this has impeded the construction of strong regional and continental institutions able to bear more weight in the international arena for African countries, so to overcome the fragmented nature of their national markets and the limited size of their economies (compared with other countries outside Africa).

Second, the lack of economic self-sufficiency of these institutions, has on one hand pushed them to increasingly rely on international aid, so accentuating the continent's dependence on external financing, at the point that most of them have today about 70% or more of their budgets funded by external developing partners. In this regard, it should be noted that most African nations are members of at least two Regional Economic Communities: a situation that makes particularly hard for them to honor their membership fees, which in some cases accumulate to reach astronomical sums that are impossible to pay. No wonder then if these external partners have a decisive influence in orienting the policies of such institutions. He who pays the piper calls the tune, says an old proverb. On the other hand, lack of adequate financial resources has obliged such institutions to keep their staff to a bare minimum. In the case of the AU Commission (AUC), according to the IIS article, this institution has 1,720 staff to service 55 countries. As a matter of comparison, the EU Commission has an army of 32,000 permanent employees (excluding consultants and short-term staff), which serve 27 countries (the author of the post forgets that the EU has also Delegations in almost each countries in the world, including representative offices in EU member States: according to the [2023 European Commission Human Resources key figures](#), the number of employees working in Brussels is 21,524, with additional 3,680 staff in Luxembourg, where other offices of the EU Commission are located). What is more surprising is that 61 percent of the AUC's staff are on short-term contracts because recruiting permanent

staff hasn't been possible.

This happened, the post notes, because African countries keep procrastinating on implementing decisions dealing with autonomous funding sources, which could have allowed the AUC to reduce donations from development partners. For instance, the 0.2 percent levy applicable on all eligible imported goods established by the [Assembly Decision AU/Dec.605 \(XXVII\)](#) , according to the latest available [report on the financing of the AU](#) (dated June 16, 2020) is paid currently only by 17 countries out of the 55 AU member states.

Yet, this is a problem that does not come as a surprise. Already in 2002, at the inaugural AU session of Durban, the former Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan [stated](#) that unlike the EU, Africa has *'a larger geographical space to cover with far fewer resources'* , pointing out already at that time the need for the AU to develop an efficient resources mobilization strategy with adequate financial mechanisms to fund its activities, similar to what in the EU system are called '[own resources](#)' .

The post goes ahead arguing that AU's weaknesses are evident in its failure to deal with recent crises, including conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan, northern Mozambique's insurgency and coups in Guinea, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. It also notes that for African countries, the choice between creating powerful continental or regional bodies and safeguarding sovereignty has in most cases resulted in a sacrifice of the former in favour of the latter. We note that this has not only happened with regard to the management of security crises, but even more so with regard to the management of their trade and customs policies. This is a substantial difference with the European Union integration process, which Africa has always sought to be inspired. Indeed, the EU integration process first started as a sectoral process aimed at promoting the integration of two core sectors where European States had accumulated a competitive advantage and with the highest potential for the development of a regional industry: the steel and coal industry. This culminated in the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) by a core group of States that gradually expanded, evolving into a Free Trade Area, a Customs Union, and lastly into a Common Market. While EU member states soon realized that in order to further increase their economic weight on the global stage they had to build strong institutions at supranational level to which to transfer key decisions regarding the governance of their economies so to be able to speak with a single voice, African states have shown so far a strong reluctance to renounce to limitations of their national sovereignty, still today stubbornly dominated by economic nationalism and state-centric ideologies that see national states as the main actors in international relations.

In order for the AU to avoid the weaknesses and failures of the OAU a more robust, proactive and efficient organisation of the AUC is needed, as the fulcrum of continental integration. This must happen by increasing its autonomy and powers, and reducing the role of the Assemblies of Heads of state and governments, which play a too heavy role in directing and controlling the operation of both the AU and the various RECs. Member states, the post notes, appoint the chairperson, deputy and commissioners, and influence directors' appointments, leaving the AUC chairperson powerless and unable to hold incompetent senior managers accountable. In its current state, the ISS concludes, how the AU will manage to achieve the ambitious goals of Agenda 2063?

If these problems are not urgently addressed, the AU risks the same fate of the OAU, and to become irrelevant. This, we add, would also impede to AU to play a significant role in the G20 group (or G21, as it should now more properly called), following its recent [admission](#), which would be not only a shame, but also a missed opportunity for influencing choices related to the governance of the global economy, and an embarrassment for the entire continent.