



1/2025: Djibouti's Diplomatic Coup - An Analysis of the AU Commission Elections

Sabine Odhiambo and Larissa Pflüger, German Africa Foundation

On Saturday, Djibouti's Foreign Minister **Mahmoud Ali Youssouf** was elected as the new Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission. At the 38th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, Youssouf received the required 33 votes in the seventh and final round of voting, defeating Raila Odinga, the former Prime Minister of Kenya. On 15 March, he will take over the leadership of the AU Commission for the next four years, succeeding Moussa Faki Mahamat (Chad), who led the Commission for two terms, totalling eight years. Algeria's **Selma Malika Haddadi**, who was also elected for a four-year term, will become the Commission's Vice-Chairperson. Meanwhile, Angola's President João Lourenço took over the AU's rotating chairmanship from Mauritania's President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani for the year 2025 and launched this year's AU priority theme of „Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations“.




The Election of the Commission Chair

In addition to **Youssouf** and **Odinga**, Madagascar's former Foreign Minister, **Richard Randriamandrato**, also entered the race for the Commission chairmanship. All three candidates come from East Africa, in line with the principle of regional rotation. The Chairperson of the Commission is elected by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the AU's 55 Member States. A two-thirds majority is required. Excluded from the vote were Burkina Faso, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Sudan, whose AU membership is currently suspended due to unconstitutional changes of government, reducing the number of voting states to 49.

The election remained tense until the very end, with a two-horse race quickly emerging between Djibouti's Mahmoud Ali Youssouf and Kenya's Raila Odinga. While the latter won the first two rounds by 20 votes to 18 and 22 votes to 19,

Youssouf won 23 votes in the third round, overtaking Odinga. The Madagascan Randriamandrato came last in all three rounds with ten, seven and five votes, respectively. He was therefore disqualified from the election in accordance with the electoral code, which states that if no candidate wins the required two-thirds majority after three rounds of voting, the weakest candidate is eliminated, and a run-off election is held.

Election of the Chairperson of the AU Commission 2025

	 Mahmoud Ali Youssouf (Djibuti)	 Raila Odinga (Kenya)	 Richard Randriamandrato (Madagascar)	Abstained
Round 1:	18	20	10	1
Round 2:	19	22	7	1
Round 3:	23	20	5	1
Round 4:	25	21		2 abstained 1 spoil
Round 5:	26	21		2
Round 6:	26	22		1
Round 7:	33			

Quelle: Dennis Rumbi, CBS on X, Picture 1: (c) Flickr.com, Picture 2: (c) wikimedia.org, Picture: (c) wikimedia.org

In the run-off, neither candidate was able to secure the required number of votes. After the sixth round of voting, in which Youssouf received 26 votes to Odinga's 22, the latter was eventually eliminated from the race. In the seventh and final round of voting, Youssouf was unopposed and received 33 votes, giving him a two-thirds majority. Had he fallen short of the required majority again, the election would have been postponed.

Over the next four years, Youssouf will have overall responsibility for the Commission's administration and finances, promoting and communicating the AU's objectives and improving its performance. Other responsibilities include consultation and coordination with Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and development

Afrikapost aktuell

Djibouti's Diplomatic Coup -

An Analysis of the AU Commission Elections



Deutsche Afrika Stiftung e.V.
Fondation Allemande pour l'Afrique
German Africa Foundation

partners; appointment and management of the Commission's staff; and being the custodian of all treaties and legal instruments of the African Union and its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

Other Leadership Positions

The Deputy Chairperson of the AU Commission

Also up for election was the Deputy Chairperson of the Commission, Dr Monique Nsanzabaganwa of Rwanda, the first woman to be elected to the post in 2021. As with the election of the Chair, the regions rotate, and the Chair and Deputy Chair cannot come from the same region. There were therefore six candidates from the North Africa region, with the male candidates disqualified following Youssouf's election in accordance with the principle of gender parity. In an equally hard-fought and tense election, which required several rounds of voting - a two-thirds majority was required here as well - Algerian **Selma Malika Haddadi** won the final round of the run-off, again unopposed. She was neck-and-neck with Moroccan **Latifah Akharbach** until the latter was eliminated in the sixth round by 22 votes to 26. **Hanan Morsy** of Egypt was eliminated in the second round, while the fourth candidate, **Najat Elhajaji** of Libya, withdrew before the election.

Haddadi is the current Ambassador of Algeria to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the AU and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). A 47-year-old career diplomat and legal expert, she has long experience of working with other African states, the AU and the UN. She was Director-General for Africa at the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2023 to 2024 and previously served as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Kenya and South Sudan from 2019 to 2023. Her candidature focuses on improving the administrative and financial management of the AU Commission, strengthening trust and synergies between the Commission and AU Member States, and optimising coordination within AU organs, structures and cooperation with partners. As Deputy Chairperson, she will assist Youssouf in the implementation of the policy agenda and the coordination of AU activities

and will deputise for him in his absence. In this capacity, she may take on various diplomatic or organisational roles to promote cooperation among Member States. She also oversees the financial and administrative functions of the AU to ensure that funds are managed efficiently and that operational processes are smooth and transparent.

The AU Commissioners

The posts of AU Commissioners were also up for election. However, the elections were already held on Wednesday (12 February) during the 46th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of Foreign Ministers and the results were then endorsed by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. The principles of regional distribution and gender parity apply to these elections as well. In addition, the regions that already hold the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Commission may not hold any Commissioner posts.

Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS)

The Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security remains the Nigerian **Bankole Adeoye** (West Africa). The 65-year-old, who took up the post in March 2021 following the merger of the two commissariats for political affairs and for peace and security, beat Jean-Jacques Defamouth from Central Africa with 37 votes. Bankole is regarded as an experienced diplomat who, during his tenure, has been particularly active in strengthening the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the African Governance Architecture (AGA). For his efforts in advancing the AU's peace and security agenda, and for his contributions to peace efforts in Somalia, the Nigerian was honoured by the Federal Republic of Somalia government ahead of the election. However, critics have accused the commissioner of failing to respond to unresolved conflicts, such as those in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and have questioned the speed with which peace and security measures are implemented. Prior to his election as AU Commissioner, Bankole served as Nigeria's Permanent Representative to the AU and UNECA, as well as Ambassador to Ethiopia and Djibouti. He was also the Chief of Staff of



the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD).

The Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development (HHS)

The new AU Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development will be **Amma Twum-Amoah** of Ghana, who won 45 votes in the election. A former Permanent Representative to the AU and Ghana's Ambassador to Ethiopia with accreditation to Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia and South Sudan, she replaces Minata Samate Cessouma of Burkina Faso (Western Region). She was previously Director of the Bureau of Economic Affairs, Trade and Investment at Ghana's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration. Twum-Amoah takes up the post of Commissioner at a critical time. Her portfolio includes improving health systems, responding to humanitarian crises and promoting social development initiatives. The US announcement that it will withdraw from the World Health Organisation and suspend all financial aid pending a review could have a significant impact on global health cooperation and support for African countries.

Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment (ARBE)

Moses Vilakati of Eswatini (Southern Region) was elected as the new AU Commissioner for Agriculture with 36 votes. He beat candidates from the Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe and Burundi to take over from Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko (Angola, Southern Region), who served two terms. Mr Vilakati was previously Minister of Tourism, Environmental Affairs and Agriculture in Eswatini. As AU Commissioner, he will now work on the development and implementation of the African Union's agricultural strategy. His responsibilities will

include promoting food security, improving agricultural productivity and coordinating programmes such as the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), an initiative under the AU's Agenda 2063.

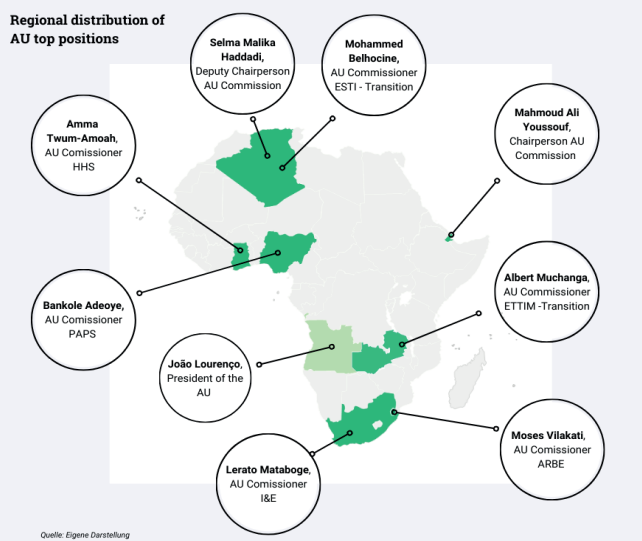
Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy (I&E)

South African **Lerato Mataboge** (Southern Region) will take up the post of Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy. An expert in global policy and trade and investment facilitation, she is currently Deputy Director-General at the South African Department of Trade, Industry and Competition. Mataboge won the election with 41 votes and succeeds Amani Abou-Zeid of Egypt (North Africa Region). In her new role, Mataboge will be responsible for overseeing and promoting strategic economic infrastructure projects that facilitate the processing of minerals as well as agricultural products and the expansion of power generation and distribution networks across the continent. These projects are critical to promoting Africa's economic integration and sustainable development in the energy and infrastructure sectors.

Elections Postponed

Meanwhile, the elections to fill the top posts of the **Commission for Economic Development, Trade, Tourism, Industry and Mining (ETTIM)** and the **Commission for Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (ESTI)** have been postponed. This was due to a lack of applications. For example, only South Africa's Molapo Qhobela applied for the position of ESTI commissioner, but he was disqualified because of the requirements for regional distribution of the top positions, after two people from the Southern Africa region, Mataboge and Vilakati, had already been elected. As a result,

Regional distribution of AU top positions



Quelle: Eigene Darstellung



the Southern Africa region, Mataboge and Vilakati, had already been elected. As a result, the current commissioner, the Algerian **Mohammed Belhocine**, who has held the post since 2021, will remain at the helm for the time being. **Albert Muchanga** (Zambia, Southern Region), ETTIM Commissioner, will also remain in office for the time being. According to the statement, there were no suitable candidates who fulfilled the required qualifications to apply for this position.

Who is the New Chairman of the AU Commission?

Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, known in his country by his initials MAY, is a veteran diplomat. Born and raised in Djibouti's capital, the 60-year-old studied translation (English<->French) in Liverpool and obtained a Master's degree in Business Management from Laval University in Canada in 1990.

In 1992, he began his career in the Djiboutian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which, among others, took him to Egypt as ambassador with simultaneous accreditation to Lebanon, Sudan, Syria and Turkey, culminating in his appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in 2005. He has held this post ever since and is considered a close confidant of President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh, who has been in power since 1999 and strongly supported Youssouf's candidacy. Over the past two decades, Youssouf has made significant contributions to Djibouti's geostrategic positioning. During his tenure, for example, Italian, Japanese and Chinese military bases were opened in Djibouti, complementing the French and US bases that had already been opened before he became foreign minister. Youssouf also successfully negotiated the opening of a new military base with Saudi Arabia.

On the regional front, he himself cites among his achievements the successful fight against piracy, for which he received an award from the EU, the organisation of mediation between Somalia and Somaliland and the drafting of a new IGAD Treaty in 2023, when he chaired

the IGAD Council of Ministers. Domestically, he restructured Djibouti's foreign ministry, increased Djibouti's embassies around the world to 26, and professionalised diplomatic training by creating the Institut des Études Diplomatiques - which also trains junior staff in English, French, Amharic and Chinese, with Russian as the next language to follow. Youssouf's own multilingualism - he speaks fluent English, French, Arabic, Afar and Somali - is certainly an advantage he had over the other candidates. Nevertheless, many analysts initially considered him to be the underdog in the race for the AU Commission chairmanship.

The Rival Candidates

Raila Amolo Odinga has long been seen as having the best chance of winning the election. The Kenyan political veteran, who was the AU's High Representative for Infrastructure Development from 2018 to 2023, is a prominent name on the African continent. He was the only candidate to cite references from African countries other than his own in his application, namely Nigeria's former president Olesegun Obasanjo and South Africa's and Mozambique's former First Lady Graca Machel. Raila, known by his first name in his home country to distinguish him from his father, served as Prime Minister for five years (2008-2013) during his long political career, but was also the best-known opposition figure, contesting presidential elections five times though never winning. While his contribution to the democratisation of Kenya in the 1990s is undisputed, opinions in Kenya are divided on his legacy for the country's political development thereafter. In particular, his alliance with current President William Ruto following the Gen-Z protests in June 2024 has strained relations even with his traditional supporters.

The third candidate was **Richard Randriamandrato**, who previously worked for the AU and for ten years for the regional organisation Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) before serving as Madagascar's Minister of Economy and Finance from 2019 to 2021. In 2022, he briefly took over as Madagascar's foreign minister for a few months. In October 2022, however, he was dismissed by President Andry Rajoelina after he defied Rajoelina's orders and supported



Resolution ES-11/4 at the UN General Assembly, which condemned Russia's annexation of four regions of Eastern Ukraine. Randriamandrato initially disappeared from Madagascar's political scene, which is why his nomination by Rajoelina as a candidate for the AUC presidency came as a surprise.

The Candidates' Visions

Randriamandrato's application, written in English and French, is much shorter than those of the other two candidates, who had submitted detailed applications in all six official languages of the AU. In terms of content, it stood out from the other two in that it addressed the issue of digitalisation in detail and was the only one to address the issues of AI, geostrategy and misinformation and disinformation.

The visions of Mahmoud Ali Youssouf and Raila Odinga, on the other hand, focused on the central themes of Agenda 2063, which are also at the heart of current development cooperation with Africa: the promotion of peace and security, economic transformation towards a green economy, the implementation of the African Free Trade Area, the fight against climate change, gender equality and the strengthening of the African voice in global fora. While Raila Odinga's vision also emphasised the transformation of agriculture and the financial independence of the AU, Youssouf placed special emphasis on Africa's youth and the diaspora. He also called - right at the beginning and as the only candidate - for democracy and good governance to be upheld. Slight differences also emerge on the question of how to achieve economic growth: Raila emphasises industrialisation, manufacturing and innovation, while MAY



AU Headquarters, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

focuses on infrastructure projects, electrification and the transport sector.

However, observers agree that Youssouf's victory was not due to a difference in

vision, but to mistakes in the Kenyan election campaign, Kenya's foreign policy orientation and Djibouti's better understanding of how to conduct successful diplomacy within the AU. Even during the televised debate between the three candidates in December 2024, Youssouf delivered a better manifesto and performance than his opponent, who is twenty years his senior. Some media, such as Africa Confidential, therefore saw signs that the favourites had changed even before the election.

Reactions and Analysis

Celebrations in Djibouti

Djibouti's media are proudly reporting on the elections. But given that, according to Reporters Without Borders, press freedom has declined and government control has increased in recent years, it is not surprising that Youssouf's success is also seen as a success for President Guelleh and his standing among other African leaders. Furthermore, the election victory is seen as a strong signal from the AU that it is not about the size of a country, but its commitment to regional and continental politics. With a population of only around one million, Djibouti is, in terms of population, the smallest AU member state on the African mainland after Western Sahara. In this context, the election is seen as an endorsement of the country's political course and its geopolitical weight, which Youssouf, as foreign minister, has been instrumental in increasing over the past twenty years.

On Monday, President Guelleh and Mahmoud Ali Youssouf were welcomed and celebrated by thousands of people in front of the People's Palace in the capital, Djibouti. Meanwhile, a comment by Ambassador Moussa Mohamed Omar, director of communications at Djibouti's foreign ministry, responding to a post by Kenyan President Ruto on X, caused a stir when he said that Africa had refused to be held hostage by Kenya's domestic politics and deserved a better candidate than Raila Odinga.

Kenya's Electoral Blunder

This addresses one of the reasons that may have led AU member states not to vote for Kenya's candidate. It is no secret that President William



Ruto could have killed two birds with one stone by appointing Raila Odinga as Chairperson of the AU Commission. This would not only provide a Kenyan voice at the helm of the continental organisation but also remove the 'Raila factor' from Kenyan domestic politics, particularly regarding the 2027 elections. In the best-case scenario, it would also allow Ruto to score points with Odinga's electoral base as a supporter of his AUC candidacy. The extent to which Kenya's domestic political situation played a role in Odinga's candidacy was also evident in the run-up to the election on social media, where Kenyans' dissatisfaction with their own government culminated in a veritable campaign against their own candidate, with many calling on AU member states not to vote for Raila.

The Kenyan media, however, go much deeper in analysing the reasons for Raila's failure. In particular, the expensive campaign that attracted so much media attention is criticised. Raila travelled to a total of 27 countries to promote his candidacy. It was loudly proclaimed that Kenya had secured at least 26 votes in the run-up to the elections. Kenya is said to have wanted to make a spectacle of both the campaign and the election itself. There were rumours that 100 Kenyan MPs were planning to travel to Addis Ababa to watch Raila's election. While this did not happen, the delegation that did travel to Addis Ababa was still larger than average and is said to have celebrated prematurely. On the other hand, Mahmoud Ali Youssouf knew how to talk to the right people at the right time and that diplomacy within the AU is done quietly. Youssouf had even travelled to 30 African countries as part of his election campaign - but discreetly and without much fanfare. And without the same diplomatic substructure - Kenya has 22 embassies on the African continent, almost three times as many as Djibouti (eight). Moreover, Youssouf's campaign was perceived in AU circles as more substantive and value-driven than Raila's. Accordingly, Djibouti's approach is seen as a diplomatic coup that has been in the making for some time.

Kenya's Controversial Foreign Policy

The Kenyan media has also identified a number of foreign policy decisions and positions that are causing unease about Kenya on the continent.

While President Ruto celebrates his close relations with the US and Europe, as well as Kenya becoming the first sub-Saharan African state to be named a major non-NATO ally under US President Joe Biden, there is a risk that the continent could perceive Kenya as a puppet of the West, according to some news outlets. Djibouti would be less likely to flaunt its close ties with the US and Europe and more likely to maintain close relations with other partner countries, giving the impression that it could better balance the interests of non-African powers to its own benefit and, by extension, to the benefit of the continent. Kenya's support for Israel and its rhetoric on the Gaza war, which deviates from the AU consensus in favour of a two-state solution, is also seen as problematic. Moreover, Ruto made himself unpopular in Algeria and Western Sahara the day after his inauguration in 2022, when he recognised Morocco's claims to Western Sahara in a tweet that was deleted shortly afterwards.

However, Kenya's positions on the wars in Sudan and Eastern Congo are seen as the most serious obstacles to a Kenyan chairmanship. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, have long accused President Ruto of being biased in favour of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and too close to General Mohammed Hamdan Daglo, known as Hemedti, which is why al-Burhan has rejected Kenyan-led mediation in the past. The fact that Ruto is now hosting Hemedti and the RSF in Nairobi this week, where they will proclaim their parallel government, confirms the mistrust that existed in Kenya on this issue even before the AUC chairmanship election.

Ruto's closeness to Rwandan President Paul Kagame has also given the impression of partisanship in the conflict in Eastern Congo and angered Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi. At the end of January, Ruto also made public a conversation with French President Emmanuel Macron about the situation in the DRC - a move that may have cost Kenya more votes from francophone countries.

All in all, Kenya's foreign policy is described as being driven by the president's personal interests rather than regional and continental ones, which



is why a Kenyan chairmanship was not an option for many African states.

Open questions

On social media, Kenyans are not only criticising the government for the mistakes listed above, but also for the cost of Raila's candidacy to Kenyan taxpayers. There is also speculation about what Raila's defeat means for the future policies of Ruto, whose calculations have now failed. Will 'Baba' (Kiswahili for father), as he is respectfully called by his supporters, continue to work with President Ruto? Or will he return to the opposition and remind the government, which has been under fire for hundreds of alleged abductions of supporters of the Gen Z protests, of its accountability and respect for human rights? Is he even considering running for president again in 2027? The possibilities are many - but no one here seems to believe that Raila Odinga could retire.

Madagascar Settles Scores with its Own Government

In Madagascar, the media is also harshly criticising its own government, in particular President Andry Rajoelina and Foreign Minister Rasata Rafaravavitaika. The campaign lacked substance, lobbying and influence. While Randriamandrato's poor performance surprised some international observers after the Southern African Development Community (SADC) sent a letter to its 16 member states last week urging them to support the Madagascan candidate, the country's media have labelled Randriamandrato's bid a long shot from the start. The candidacy was submitted at the last minute in August 2024 and then competed for SADC votes with the candidacy of Mauritian candidate Anil Kumarsingh Gayan. The fact that Mauritius, a 'sister island' and SADC member, then withdrew its candidacy and supported Raila Odinga was a sign of Madagascar's limited influence, according to some media outlets. SADC's call to support the Madagascan candidate came too late, as did a roadshow through seven African countries that Foreign Minister Rafaravavitaika undertook with Randriamandrato in the week before the election.

Neither Randriamandrato nor Rafaravavitaika had a sufficient network or recognition on the

African continent to attract votes. The media also calls it a mistake by President Rajoelina to nominate a candidate he had personally sacked during his brief times as minister. This mistake would be part of Rajoelina's political incompetence, as he could not arbitrarily buy votes and rig elections on a continental scale as he could in his own country. Media reports continue that Madagascar's diplomatic 'setback' also does not bode well for its upcoming SADC chairmanship this year - without the diplomatic clout, the country runs the risk of letting other countries take the helm, while its own chairmanship could remain purely symbolic.

Challenges and Priorities

Peace and Security

Youssouf takes over the AU Commission at a difficult time. Conflicts are escalating in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan, which could lead to a regional spillover. In the past, the AU, and in particular Youssouf's predecessor Faki, has been accused of being too hesitant and sometimes uncoordinated in its response to the civil war in Sudan, thereby failing to de-escalate the situation. In addition, the support of the various parties to the conflict by external actors such as the United Arab Emirates has complicated mediation efforts.

In the case of the DRC, the AU faces the challenge of acting as a neutral actor and contributing to a common regional position on the conflict. This is no easy task, as there are some AU member states and regional organisations that support the DRC and others that support Rwanda. Although the joint EAC-SADC Summit on the situation in Eastern Congo marked an initial rapprochement between the different regional approaches, the fronts between Kinshasa and Kigali, as well as between their respective supporters, appear to have narrowed. In addition, there are other conflicts that have long been neglected, such as the crisis in the Anglophone region of Cameroon. Moreover, the Islamist threat persists in Somalia, and the new African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission to Somalia (AUSSOM), deployed in January this year, faces a serious funding gap.

Afrikapost aktuell

Djibouti's Diplomatic Coup -
An Analysis of the AU Commission Elections



Deutsche Afrika Stiftung e.V.
Fondation Allemande pour l'Afrique
German Africa Foundation

Multilateralism and Financing

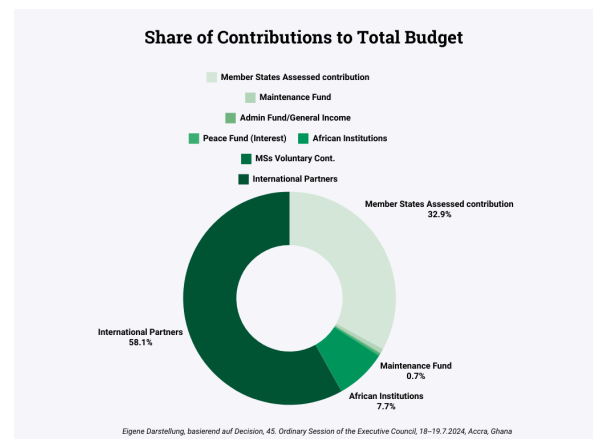
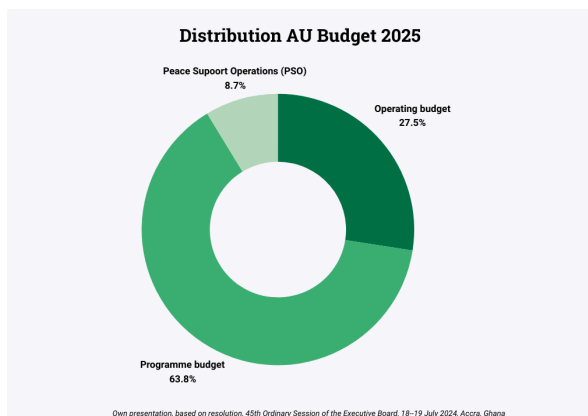
In the midst of these challenges, US disinterest in multilateral cooperation is growing. Many African countries are under financial pressure as a result of President Donald Trump's dismantling of USAID and his announced withdrawal from international fora such as the World Health Organisation or the Paris Climate Change Agreement, which could jeopardise the development goals of the AU's Agenda 2063.

Europe, too, is feeling the effects of Trump's 'America First' policy, and against this backdrop is even more preoccupied with itself and its own peace and security architecture than it already was because of the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, which are demanding a great deal of attention and financial resources from European states. It is to be hoped, however, that despite the multiple crises on its doorstep, the European Union (EU) will continue to prioritise its partnership with Africa and not lose sight of the Joint Vision for 2030 adopted jointly with the AU in 2022. The next AU-EU summit, scheduled for later this year, and the 25th anniversary of the Africa-EU partnership, which will also be celebrated this year, provide a good opportunity for Youssouf to remind Europe of the importance of African-European cooperation and to underline the demands and interests of the African continent.

The same applies to other international platforms such as the G20. Here, too, Youssouf must succeed in pushing through African states' demands for fairer representation in international forums and for a reform of the international financial architecture in an international

environment characterised by dwindling financial resources and increasing regionalisation of interests.

The independent financing of the AU also remains a challenge for the institution and thus for the new Chairperson of the Commission. The self-imposed targets of covering 100% of the operational budget, 75% of the programme budget and 25% of peace support operations from its own resources by 2020 have not yet been met. Although AU member states provide 100% of the operational budget, member states' contributions to the programme budget will be only 9% in 2025, as planned, and contributions to peacekeeping operations will be nil this year. These figures are repeatedly cited as reasons for the AU's dependence and ineffectiveness. Youssouf will have to address this issue if he is to achieve his own goals of a more effective AU. These figures are repeatedly cited as reasons for the AU's dependence and ineffectiveness. Youssouf will have to address this issue if he is to achieve his own goals of a more effective AU.



Democracy and Good Governance

Six states are currently suspended from the AU because of unconstitutional changes of government. According to critics, the number should be seven. However, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) refrained from sanctioning and suspending Chad, the home country of outgoing chairman Faki, following the military coup in 2021. Critics therefore accuse the AU, and Faki in particular, of not consistently enforcing the Lomé principles and thus not taking a clear stance against



unconstitutional changes of government. But it is not only the increasing number of coups that poses problems for the AU. The lack of interest in normalising relations with the AU is also a major challenge. The withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) underlines that the pressure of sanctions and suspensions has lost its effectiveness. Instead of bowing to sanctions, the three military-led states have formed their own alliance, the so-called Alliance of Sahel States (AES). What began as a defence alliance has gradually evolved into a confederation, with plans for a joint army and coordinated communication platforms. Before his election, however, Youssouf called for tougher sanctions against coups. It remains to be seen whether he will follow through on this and whether it will really prevent unconstitutional changes of government in the future. But the new commission will also have to grapple with how to maintain channels of communication with military governments to avoid a complete rupture with the AU.

Decisive Action Needed

In view of the many challenges, several observers would like to see a Commission Chair who takes decisive action. Youssouf's surprisingly strong pre-election criticism of African leaders for their lack of action on peace and security issues was therefore welcomed. During the election campaign, he also advocated the creation of a regional intervention force and new mechanisms for resolving regional conflicts. From the outset, therefore, he wanted to focus on making the AU's structures capable of acting in this area and working towards a sustainable solution to the current conflicts. Youssouf has thus set the bar very high for himself and will have to prove himself quickly.

Image sources:

Raila Odinga, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/61/Raila_Amolo_Odinga_%288410952357%29.jpg

Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/foreignoffice/8718291546>

Richard Randriamandrato, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/44/Richard_Randriamandrato_%282022%29.jpg

AU-Headquarters, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/44/Richard_Randriamandrato_%282022%29.jpg, (c)Andrew Moore

Sources used:

[16th European Union - African Union Summit: A Joint Vision for 2030 We, the Heads of State and Government of the Member States \(consilium.europa.eu, 21.2.2025\)](#)

[EXECUTIVE COUNCIL Forty Fifth Ordinary Session 18-19 July 2024 Accra, GHANA DECISIONS \(au.int, 21.2.2025\)](#)

[Address by Her Excellency the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission to the Pan-African Parliament \(pap.au.int, 21.2.2025\)](#)

[Mahmoud Ali Youssouf élu président de la CUA : Des réactions qui témoignent de l'ampleur d'une victoire historique pour la nation djiboutienne \(lanation.dj, 18.2.2025\)](#)

[Retour au pays du nouveau président de la commission de l'UA : Un magnifique accueil à MAY \(lanation.dj, 18.2.2025\)](#)

[New leadership of African Union Commission elected \(theafricancourier.de, 18.2.2025\)](#)

[44299-file-Kenya-R.T.Hon._Raila_amolo_Odinga-English_Vision.pdf \(au.int, 17.2.2025\)](#)

[44299-file-Djibouti-Mahmoud_Ali_Youssouf-Vision-2_Page-English.pdf \(au.int, 17.2.2025\)](#)

Published by:

German Africa Foundation

Ziegelstrasse 30

10117 Berlin

Phone +49 30 28094727

E-mail: info@deutsche-afrika-stiftung.de

www.deutsche-afrika-stiftung.de

21 February 2025

Afrikapost aktuell

Djibouti's Diplomatic Coup - An Analysis of the AU Commission Elections



Deutsche Afrika Stiftung e.V.
Fondation Allemande pour l'Afrique
German Africa Foundation

[44299-file-Madagascar-Richard_james_Randriamandrato-English-_CV.pdf \(au.int, 17.2.2025\)](#)

[African Union Commission Elections 2025 Candidates' Curriculum vitae and Vision Statement. \(au.int, 17.2.2025\)](#)

[African Union Commission Elections 2025 \(au.int, 17.2.2025\)](#)

[Djibouti's Mahmoud Ali Youssouf wins AU top job \(newvision.co.ug, 17.2.2025\)](#)

[Raila Odinga's Endless Odyssey: Loses AUC chairmanship, but far from done \(addisstandard.com, 17.2.2025\)](#)

[38th African Union Summit focuses on reparations, leadership elections \(chinadailyhk.com, 17.2.2025\)](#)

[Foreign Minister wins African Union Commission Chair \(alqarn.dj, 17.2.2025\)](#)

[Fédération des Journalistes Africains : Message de Félicitations à Son Excellence Mahmoud Ali Youssouf Président de la Commission de l'Union Africaine \(lanation.dj, 17.2.2025\)](#)

[Djibouti's Foreign Minister elected African Union Commission Chairperson \(ghanabusiness.com, 17.2.2025\)](#)

[Djibouti to Kenya: Africa deserved better than Raila Odinga \(theexchange.africa, 17.2.2025\)](#)

[Une victoire pour Djibouti, une victoire pour l'Afrique \(lanation.dj, 17.2.2025\)](#)

[Succédant au Tchadien Moussa Faki : Le Djiboutien Mahamoud Ali Youssouf élu à la présidence de la Commission de l'Union africaine - Laprosperite \(laprosperiteonline.net, 17.2.2025\)](#)

[Diplomatie malgache : Quid de la situation après le revers à Addis-Abeba ? \(midi-madagasikara.mg, 17.2.2025\)](#)

[COMMISSION DE L'UNION AFRICAINE - Revers de la diplomatie \(lexpress.mg, 17.2.2025\)](#)

[UA : échec du candidat des Rajoelina \(madagascar-tribune.com, 17.2.2025\)](#)

[Le Président Guelleh se réjouit de l'élection de son candidat à la tête de la Commission de l'Union africaine \(lanation.dj, 16.2.2025\)](#)

[Africa: New African Union Leader Elected As Two Major Crises Rage \(allafrica.com, 16.2.2025\)](#)

[Africa: What the New African Union Leaders Should Prioritise in 2025 \(allafrica.com, 16.2.2025\)](#)

[Djibouti à la tête de l'Union Africaine : Quelle fierté ! \(Fédération des Journalistes Africains : Message de Félicitations à Son Excellence Mahmoud Ali Youssouf Président de la Commission de l'Union Africaine \(lanation.dj, 16.2.2025\)](#)

[Djibouti's Quiet Diplomatic Coup Over Kenya \(kenyanforeignpolicy.com, 16.2.2025\)](#)

[Angolan president takes over AU chairmanship \(chinadailyhk.com, 16.2.2025\)](#)

[Mohammed Doyo: Kenya's diplomatic missteps that cost Raila AU Commission chair \(eastleighvoice.co.ke, 16.2.2025\)](#)

[Algerien - Algerische Diplomatin übernimmt Vizepräsidentenschaft der AU-Kommission \(maghreb-post.de, 16.2.2025\)](#)

[9 Foreign Military Bases That Delivered AUC Victory to Mahmoud Ali Youssouf \(msn.com, 16.2.2025\)](#)

[Djibouti's Mahamoud Ali Youssouf criticises African leaders for inaction on conflicts \(mg.co.za, 16.2.2025\)](#)

[Key moments in the African Union Commission elections \(sudantribune.com, 16.2.2025\)](#)

[Mahmoud Ali Youssouf wird neuer Vorsitzender der Afrikanischen Union \(zeit.de, 15.2.2025\)](#)

[Djibouti's Mahmoud Ali Youssouf elected as AU commission chairman \(rfi.fr, 15.2.2025\)](#)

[Africa: Djibouti's Youssouf Beats Raila Odinga to AU Commission Chair \(allafrica.com, 15.2.2025\)](#)

[Africa: DRC's President Won't Attend the AU Summit, As M23 Advances in South Kivu \(allafrica.com, 15.2.2025\)](#)

[African leaders urge end to fighting in Sudan, humanitarian aid \(sudantribune.com, 15.2.2025\)](#)

[Qui est Mahmoud Ali Youssouf ? \(adi.dj, 15.2.2025\)](#)

Afrikapost aktuell

Djibouti's Diplomatic Coup - An Analysis of the AU Commission Elections



Deutsche Afrika Stiftung e.V.
Fondation Allemande pour l'Afrique
German Africa Foundation

[Discours de remerciement du Président de la République\(Son Excellence Ismail Omar Guelleh\)\(A l'occasion de l'élection de M. Mahamoud Ali Youssouf au poste de Président de la Commission de l'UA \(lanation.dj, 15.2.2025\)](#)

[Djibouti's Foreign Minister Youssouf elected to head African Union \(france24.com, 15.2.2025\)](#)

[African leaders elect Djibouti's foreign minister as new leader of the African Union Commission \(apnews.com, 15.2.2025\)](#)

[AUC chairmanship poll results so far \(the-star.co.ke, 15.2.2025\)](#)

[New African Union leader elected as two major crises rage \(voanews.com, 15.2.2025\)](#)

[Race for AUC leadership: A Look at 2025 election process for chairperson and deputy \(eastleighvoice.co.ke, 15.2.2025\)](#)

[Djibouti's Youssouf emerges as AU Commission chair in a nail-biting vote \(theafricareport.com, 15.2.2025\)](#)

[Le djiboutien Mahamoud Ali Youssouf succède au Tchadien Moussa Faki à la présidence de la Commission de l'Union Africaine \(actualite.cd, 15.2.2025\)](#)

[S/Africa's Mataboge elected AU commissioner for infrastructure \(apanews.net, 14.2.2025\)](#)

[Madagascar mise sur la candidature de Richard Randriamandrato \(madagascar-tribune.com, 14.2.2025\)](#)

[Ghana celebrates victory as Ambassador Amma A. Twum-Amoah elected AU Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs, and Social Development \(techreviewafrica.com, 13.2.2025\)](#)

[African Union: Electoral tension as Chairperson Faki steps down \(theafricareport.com, 13.2.2025\)](#)

[East Africa : AU Commissioner Bankole Adeoye faces re-election challenge \(africaintelligence.com, 12.2.2025\)](#)

[Press Release: Commissioner Bankole Adeoye Recognised for Contributions to Peace and Stability in Somalia \(peaceau.org, 12.2.2025\)](#)

[H.E. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, H.E. Ambassador Selma Malika Haddadi, and 4 Commissioners elected to leadership positions in the African Union Commission elections \(au.int, 12.2.2025\)](#)

[Durchschlagskraft oder Lethargie – Wer wird das neue Gesicht der Afrikanischen Union? \(kas.de, 11.2.2025\)](#)

[Eight Priorities for the African Union in 2025 \(crisisgroup.com, 6.2.2025\)](#)

[Race for AU Chair: Djibouti's Ali Youssouf makes strong impression \(theafricareport.com, 19.12.2024\)](#)

[Mahamoud Ali Youssouf: Profile of Djibouti Candidate Who Beat Raila in AUC Race \(msn.com, 7.11.2024\)](#)

[Will Bankole Adeoye Be Able to Keep His Position? \(thisdaylive.com, 25.8.2024\)](#)

[AU balancing act on Chad's coup sets a disturbing precedent \(issafrika.org, 2.6.2021\)](#)

[How Djibouti Surrounded Itself by Military Bases \(politicstoday.org, 17.3.2021\)](#)

[Ghana's Amma Adomaa Twum-Amoah Elected African Union Commissioner \(sankofaonline.com, n.d.\)](#)