



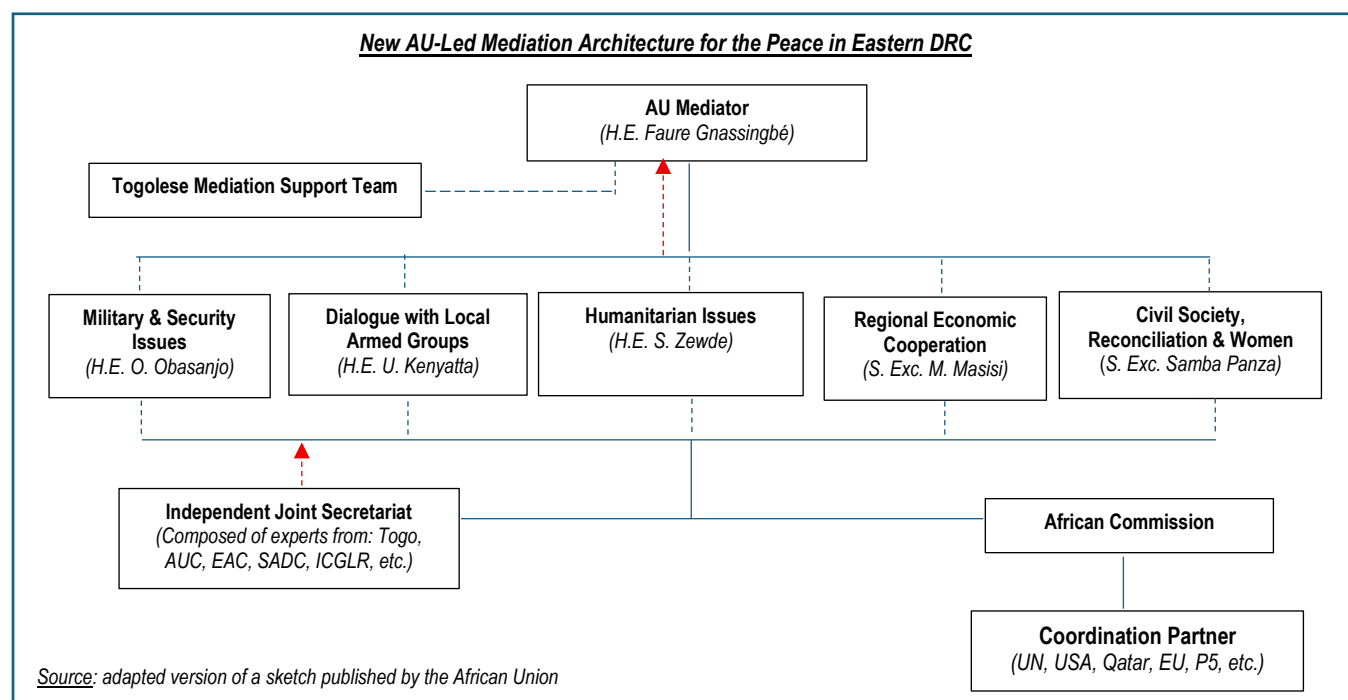
TOWARDS AN AFRICAN CONVERGENCE OF PEACE PROCESSES FOR THE EASTERN DRC: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE AFRICAN UNION'S NEW MEDIATION ARCHITECTURE

1. Background

In response to the persistent crisis in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the wider Great Lakes region, a high-level meeting was held in Lomé, Togo, on 16–17 January 2026, with a view to strengthening the coherence and consolidation of the ongoing peace processes addressing the crisis in the DRC, notably the Washington and Doha initiatives. This meeting resulted in a revision of the African Union (AU) mediation architecture, structured around the following key elements:

- **An AU Mediator**, President Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé (Togo), entrusted with overall political coordination of the peace process;
- **A Panel of five Facilitators**, each responsible for a specific thematic area, namely: former President Olusegun Obasanjo (Nigeria) for military et security issues; former President Uhuru Kenyatta (Kenya) for dialogue with local armed groups; former President Catherine Samba Panza (Central African Republic) for matters relating to civil society, reconciliation and women questions; former President Mokgweetsi Masisi (Botswana) for regional economic cooperation; and former President Sahle-Work Zewde (Ethiopia) for humanitarian actions; and
- **An Independent Joint Secretariat**, composed of experts, is mandated to provide technical and analytical support to the Panel of Facilitators.

In this context, the present reflection note aims to assess the operational capacity of this new AU mediation architecture in an environment characterized both by the urgency of the situation and by the delays observed in the implementation of concluded agreements, to identify the main functional challenges it is likely to face, and to propose priority courses of action to the attention of the AU Mediator.



2. Positioning of the AU in the Peace Processes: What Opportunities Does the New Architecture Offer?

The AU aspires to move from an observer role to that of a lead actor in the peace processes related to the crisis in the DRC, notably the Washington and Doha processes, to be fully involved in decision-making and to bring all initiatives under its overarching framework of reference. From this perspective, the new architecture could generate genuine added value by providing collective African political legitimacy, a capacity for sustained follow-up beyond diplomatic cycles, and an in-depth understanding of regional dynamics (EAC, SADC, ICGLR). The thematic division of responsibilities entrusted to the facilitators constitutes a relevant innovation that, if well-coordinated, could enhance the analytical quality of decision-making, integrate dimensions that are often marginalized (women, civil society, humanitarian action), and feed the process with field-based data. Finally, the independent Joint Secretariat could serve as the foundation for a credible African monitoring and evaluation mechanism, subject to the adoption of a standard technical instrument that ensures methodological coherence among the facilitators.



3. What Functional Challenges Should the AU's New Architecture Address?

Despite its innovative structural design and its potential to generate added value, the new architecture for managing the crisis in the DRC presents several weaknesses:

- **Reliance on the Washington and Doha peace processes.** The new architecture will have to build on the Washington and Doha processes, within which the AU played only an observer role (rather than that of a lead actor), and in which certain commitments were concluded directly between the belligerents under the auspices of external mediators, without the AU's substantive involvement in core negotiations.
- **Absence of a formal normative framework.** There is no formal normative framework defining the complementarity and non-exclusive commitments undertaken within the Washington and Doha processes, nor does it clearly delineate the AU's role as lead actor or coordinator. Without a normative document (such as a memorandum) clarifying these principles, parties may continue to engage in "forum shopping," favoring the process that appears most advantageous to them in the short term. This situation could reduce the AU Mediator's ability to arbitrate effectively and to provide a coherent reading of commitments undertaken in distinct yet interdependent frameworks. Consequently, the new architecture risks intervening mainly downstream of decisions, rather than upstream or in real time.
- **Risk of operational marginalization of the AU.** The Washington and Doha processes are primarily driven by the United States and Qatar, which possess significant diplomatic, financial, and security leverage. Despite the AU's stated intention to move beyond an observer role, institutional constraints remain. In the absence of an explicit mandate recognized by these actors that positions the AU as the overarching framework of reference, its mediation efforts may be limited to ex post coordination, with restricted influence over the substantive content of agreements.
- **Lack of a common methodological framework within the Panel of Facilitators.** The new architecture is based on a thematic division of labor among different facilitators, supported by an independent Joint Secretariat. While this structure constitutes a relevant innovation, it requires rigorous coordination and the establishment of a common technical instrument to ensure methodological and analytical coherence. In the absence of such a framework, there is a risk that facilitators will produce parallel assessments, despite the close interdependence of their thematic areas. This could result in reports submitted to the AU Mediator—intended to inform the development of a mediation framework document—containing contradictory conclusions.
- **Ambiguity regarding the timeline of facilitators' missions.** Uncertainty about the time each facilitator must conduct field missions, engage stakeholders, and collect thematic data is a significant challenge. Six months after the signing of the Washington Peace Agreement of 27 June 2025 between the DRC and Rwanda, progress in its implementation remains fragile, uneven, and marked by an apparent loss of momentum. In this context, shorter field missions—ideally not exceeding one month—appear more appropriate in the coming weeks. Such an approach would enable the AU Mediator to swiftly develop and adopt a mediation framework document based on the facilitators' assessments and analysis of peace process dynamics, thereby accelerating the implementation of commitments arising from the various peace processes.
- **Financial constraints affecting the Panel of Facilitators and the Independent Joint Secretariat.** Implementing the new architecture entails high costs, particularly for operating a panel of five facilitators and an independent Joint Secretariat. These bodies bring together experts from several sub-regions, thereby increasing financial requirements for remuneration, logistics, and administrative operations. In this context, it would be contradictory for the AU to aspire to a leading role while remaining dependent on external actors' financial support to sustain its own architecture.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The AU's new architecture undeniably represents a strategic opportunity to strengthen the coherence, legitimacy, and effectiveness of African-led efforts to promote peace in the DRC. However, in light of the challenges identified above, the following recommendations are proposed for the attention of the AU Mediator:

- **Swiftly adopt a normative document or memorandum** defining the complementarity and non-exclusivity of commitments arising from the Washington and Doha processes, as well as the AU's coordinating role;
- **Develop and adopt a common technical and methodological instrument** for the Panel of Facilitators (including a standardized framework for data collection and analysis, common monitoring and evaluation indicators, and a cross-cutting synthesis mechanism enabling the integration of thematic reports into a coherent and comprehensive overall vision);
- **Plan short but intensive field missions for each facilitator**, ideally not exceeding one month, to rapidly collect reliable data while considering the urgency of the situation; and
- **Advocate for the allocation of autonomous funding for the Panel of Facilitators and the Independent Joint Secretariat**, through the adoption of a dedicated budget within the African Union, ensuring the institutional and operational sustainability of the architecture, independently of external partners' contributions.