

The GLOCEPS

Weekly Influential Brief

Research and Analysis in Governance and Ethics Pillar

Navigating Eastern Africa's Community (EAC) governance pitfalls amidst expansion in membership

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Abstract

The brief opines that the goal of achieving enhanced collaboration and mutual benefit among nations as envisaged in the EAC treaty, could be hampered by the threats of political tensions and infighting among member countries. The situation is exacerbated by pursuit of expansion without addressing internal issues, thereby, undermining lasting cohesion of the bloc. If these setbacks are not tackled early enough, the undercurrents portend the instability of the bloc and may weaken its dominant role in championing integration in

the African continent. Key mitigations include forestalling intra-EAC tensions; monitoring the geopolitics of the region; managing peace and security concerns; and regional leadership. The brief recommends that the Council of Ministers should establish a political mechanism to manage regional geostrategic interests, prioritize the management of peace and security as well as economic expansion interests; revitalize confidence in the regional leadership; and invigorate EAC Dispute Resolution Mechanisms.





Context

While the African Union (AU) unanimously adopted the right of the Eastern Africa region to produce next Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC), member states are not able to agree on a unified candidature. The stiff competition for the chairmanship position for the period 2025-2028 depicts the fragility of the region's unity. The entry of Somalia and Djibouti into the race illustrates the degree of misalignment of the region's unity and pursuit of common interests. In addition, Seychelles which has intentions of joining the regional bloc has joined the race, exacerbating the quest for an Eastern Africa's united front. Significantly, emerging dynamic in the bloc's elusive unity is the fragmentation of the region on the basis of faith orientation, with Muslim member countries charting their own path as evidenced by the Organization of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) rallying behind Somalia AUC chairmanship bid.

Simmering unity and political tensions in the Eastern bloc (EAC) impede attainment of the primary objective of strengthening socio-economic and political cohesion between member states. At least three-quarters of the existing member countries have direct or indirect ongoing tensions. This continues to happen amidst rush for increased membership in the economic bloc. During the 23rd ordinary summit of heads of state held in Arusha, Tanzania, Somalia became the 8th member in the EAC bloc. Similarly, discussions are at conclusive stages, to allow the admission of Ethiopia into the bloc, expanding the community membership to nine.

There are possible mitigations to navigate integration pitfalls of the region. Foremost is the forestalling of existential internal discontent within the bloc which is as old as its establishment in

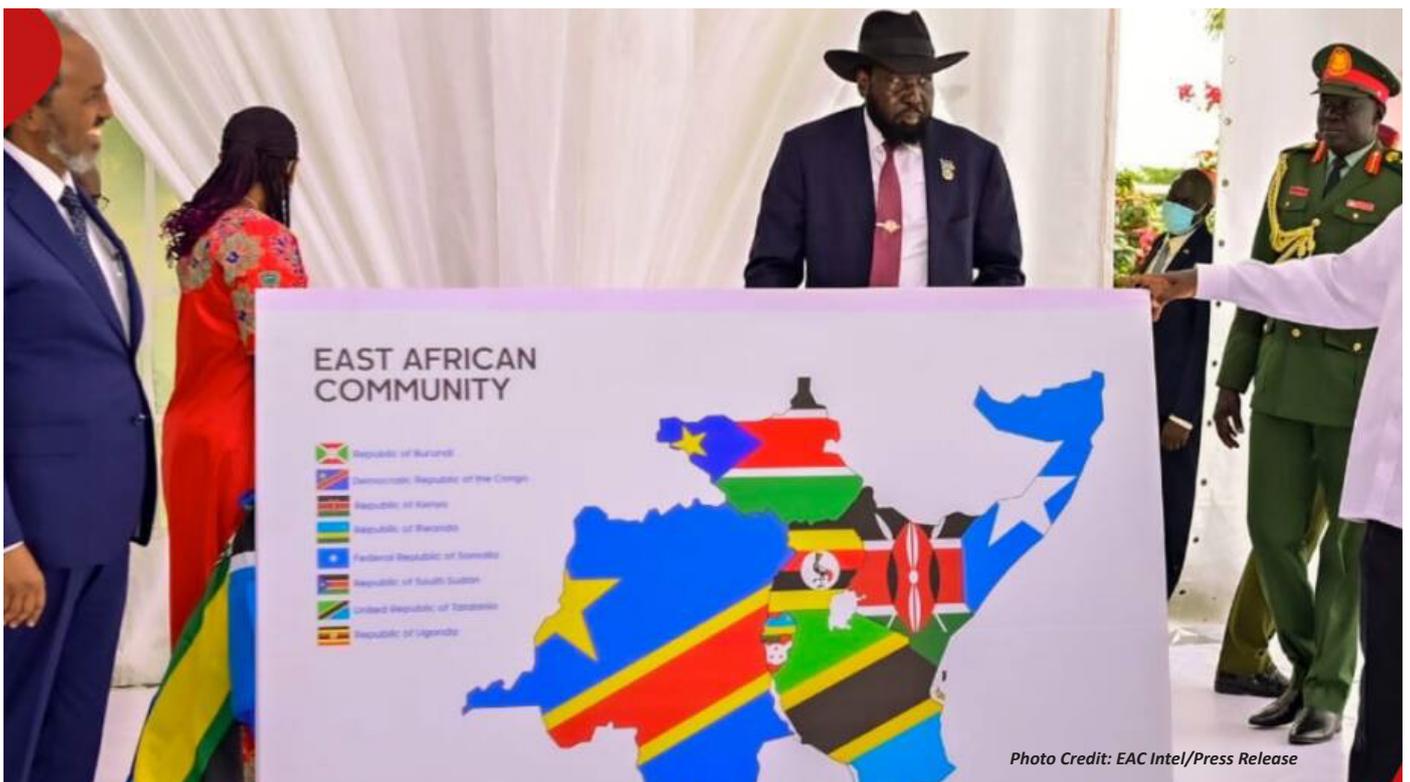
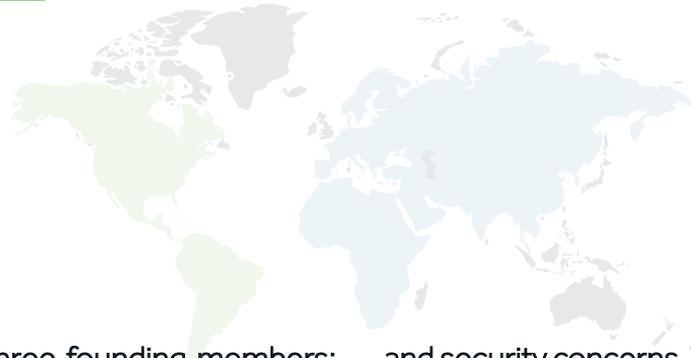


Photo Credit: EAC Intel/Press Release





1967 when it had only three founding members: Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The insurmountable wrangles led to the dissolution of the bloc in 1977 and later revived in 2002. Since then the community has undergone expansion, with internal disputes exacerbating as more members get on board. Failure to address the elusive unity will impede the EAC's primary objective of strengthening trade ties between member states. More membership could imply potential spillover effects of the challenges of individual countries into the bloc. If these setbacks are not tackled early enough, the undercurrents portend the stability of the region and weaken its dominant role in championing regional integration in the continent.

Secondly, closely monitoring the geopolitics of the region remains crucial in safeguarding the bloc's strategic interests including socio-economic, political

and security concerns. The increased membership in the community will intensify the region's geopolitics, influencing the degree of unity among the member states. These will be characterized by political dynamics, security challenges, economic obligations, and historical legacies within the member states, leading to antagonism in realizing the ideals of the treaty. Particularly nationalistic interests could pose a risk to the unity of the bloc. The current stiff competition among the member states for the AUC chairmanship position and the voice OIC member countries to support Somalia points to impending geopolitical resentment. Aggravating the complexity of geopolitical dynamics is existential historical alignments and occasional political tensions among various states due to differences in governance ethos, regional hegemony competition, border conflicts and territorial disputes.

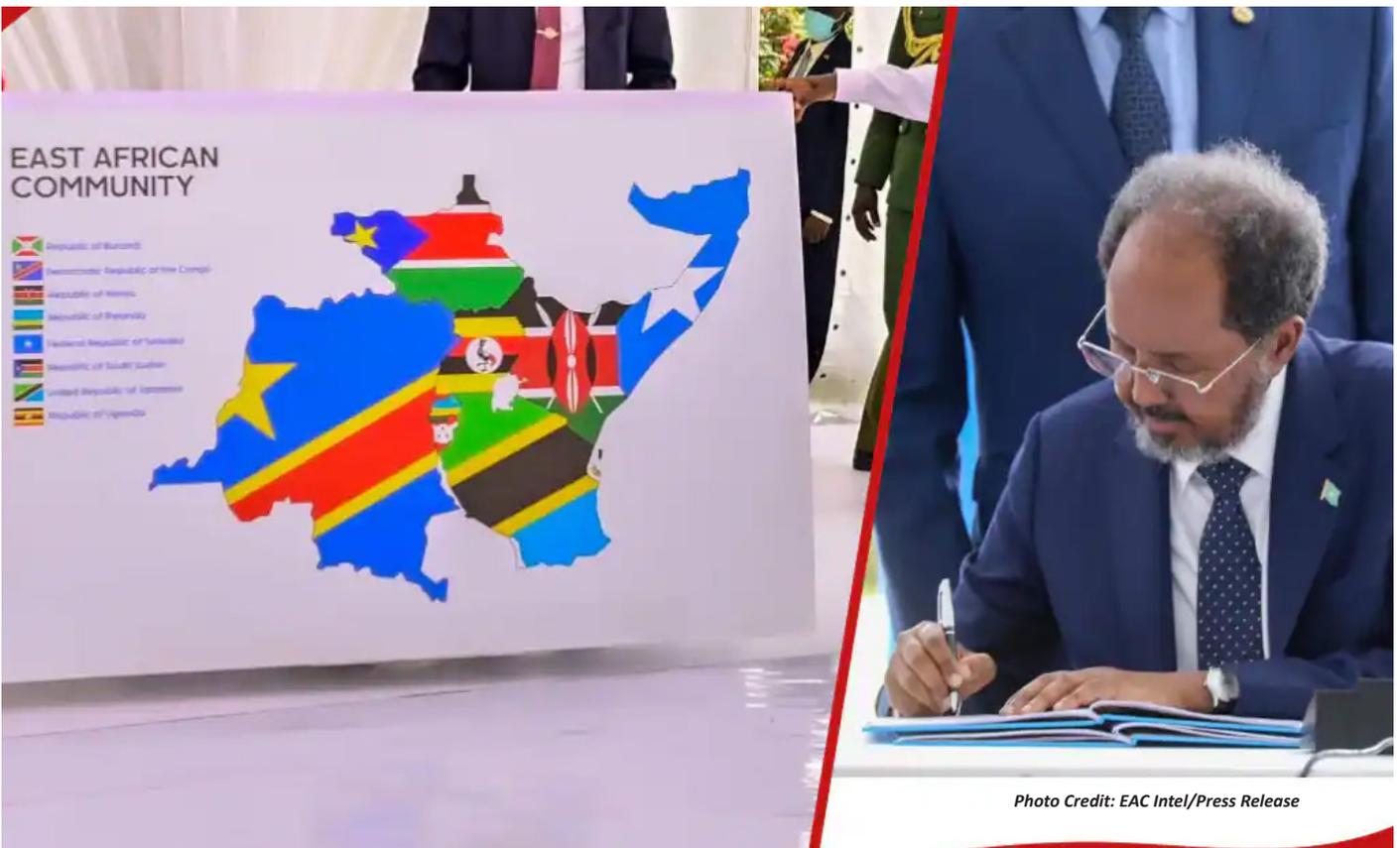


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Thirdly, prioritization of the management of peace and security as opposed to economic expansion offers prospects to building lasting stability within the bloc and among the member states. There have been no considerable efforts to address security issues, yet the EAC treaty takes cognizant of the vibrant role of peace and security in nurturing collaboration among member states. While the bloc is the oldest in the continent, it has the weakest and least developed peace and security architecture compared to the other regional economic communities. Whereas the increased memberships offer prospects for increased trade volumes and value for the region, the trade-offs for intensified instability remain real. Most of the incoming members such as Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and potentially Ethiopia are characterized by domestic conflicts that may spillover within the bloc leading to rise in security concerns. The pursuit of economic opportunities

could further be hampered by piracy activities off the Somalia coast due to existence of un-governed spaces. Deepening the existential tensions is the inability of the East African Court of Justice to effectively resolve insecurity caused by hostility within the members as its mandate is restricted to settlement of disputes related to customs union and common market protocols. These connotations continue to obstruct the looming consolidation of the bloc, creating an insecure atmosphere for regional investments. The Western Africa bloc's (ECOWAS) judicial council play vital role in resolving intra-conflicts among member states in the region.

Lastly, revitalizing confidence in the regional leadership inspires buoyancy of the chairperson to impose leadership on the much stronger states in resolving the existential tensions. Nurturing of political goodwill will prevent political infighting and strengthen maintaining peace and stability





in the region. Currently most of the member states are at logger-heads to the inability of the regional leadership to resolve the unending tensions. The first-generation leaders of the bloc including Kenya's first Prime Minister, Mzee Jomo Kenya, Tanzania's first President Julius Nyerere, and Dr. Milton Obote, 2nd Prime Minister of Uganda exercised moral authority to make interventions to resolve member state's wrangles during their tenure, embedding the founding principles of strengthening unity in the bloc.

In conclusion, while the EAC has made significant progress toward economic expansion, intra-conflicts among the member states dent its long-term goal of having enhanced collaboration and mutual benefits. There is need for multidimensional mechanisms that encompass institutional strengthening, political diplomacy, and cooperation to foster unity among all member states and protect regional interests.



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Recommendations

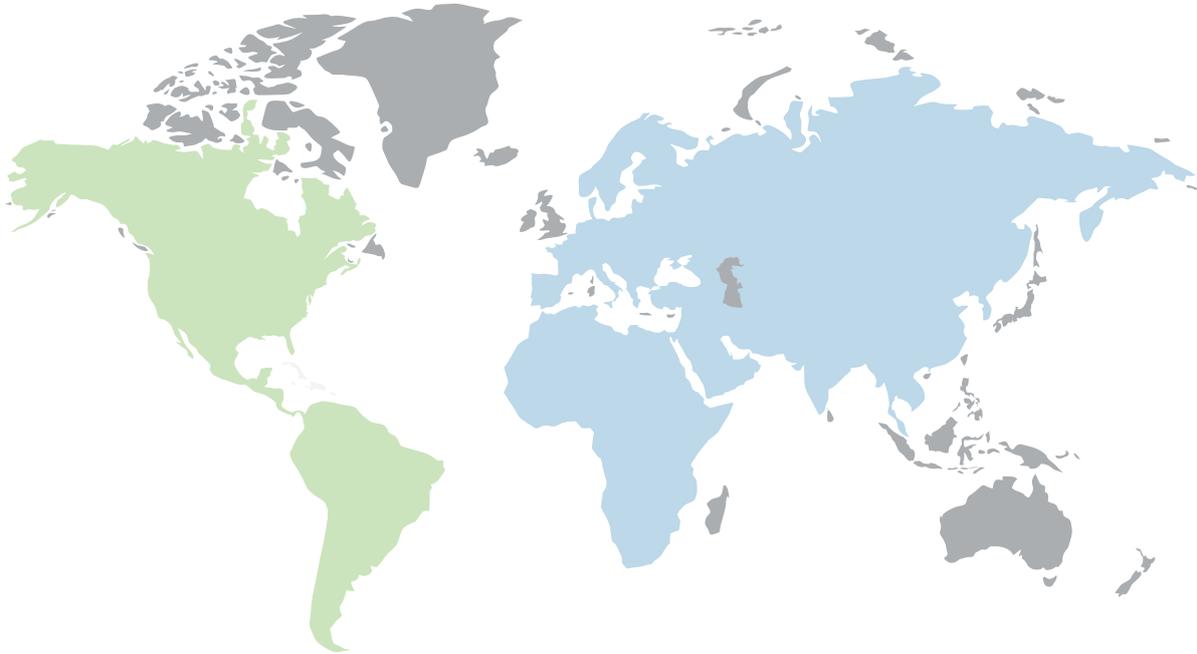
The Council of Ministers should;

- a) lobby the East African Legislative Assembly to amend the EAC protocols to provide for dispute settlement mechanisms for insecurity caused by infighting within the region.
- b) prioritize the management of peace and security alongside economic expansion interests;
- c) intensify monitoring of eastern Africa geopolitics;
- d) revitalize confidence in the regional leadership to inspire confidence to forestall or even quell intra-EAC conflicts; and
- e) invigorate EAC Dispute Resolution Mechanism to have robust dispute resolution mechanisms to help members resolve internal disputes amicably.





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