

The EU and the Sahel: A Laboratory of Experimentation for the Security–Migration–Development Nexus

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ABSTRACT

The Sahel has become for the European Union an area of experimentation on the security–migration–development nexus. The EU has contributed to ushering the Sahel region into what we may consider to be the fourth phase of its recent history, after playing a key role in the previous three. Following the eras of colonization, post-colonialism and development-cooperation partnerships, the Sahel now finds itself in the securitization era. EU support in the Sahel region is part of an emerging European foreign policy that externalizes the bloc's security. This is the framework in which an analysis of Africa–EU relations in the security, development and migration domains should take place. However, while the security–migration–development nexus exists, for the EU to predicate its foreign policy on it is also controversial, especially in the Sahel.

*European Union | Sahel | Africa | Security | Migration | Economic aid |
Military missions*

keywords

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Introduction

The Sahel represents a litmus test for the new approach to Africa of the European Union. The region is the “transmission belt” between the Mediterranean basin and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), and it plays a central role in geographical terms and beyond. It is probably the area of Africa where the security–migration–development nexus – a complex scenario, in which geopolitics, principles and “lines on a map” are not enough to understand the reality on the ground – is at its most tangible. A deep understanding of local socio-economic and political dynamics is necessary in order to establish fruitful interactions between the EU and the Sahel.

This paper firstly analyses African Union–European Union (AU–EU) relations in the security, development and migration domains. It shows how the nexus is present, but also how working on it is controversial. Then, attention is specifically devoted to the security–migration–development nexus in the Sahel, an area where the EU is experimenting with new approaches and policies. Possible alternatives to and integrations with the current policies are presented, as well as recommendations to the EU.

1. AU–EU relations ten years after the Joint Africa–EU Strategy

The EU’s relations with its African partners are currently in a stimulating phase. The Union has intensified its bonds with the African continent, at least through official documents and declarations. For instance, the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) states that Union “will invest in African peace and development as an investment

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in our own security and prosperity”.¹

Are Africa–EU relations really at a crossroads? Certainly, some key events are in flux. After the 5th AU–EU Summit in late November 2017,² it is time to start the process of revising the Cotonou Agreement.³ Meanwhile, the EU will also draft its next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the “ceiling” and budgetary system that determines economic commitments for each policy area. The new MFF will have a significant impact on Africa–EU relations in the fields of development cooperation, peace and security, and economic investment.

The security–migration–development nexus is at the core of EU–African relations. In the past, these were mainly based on the economic and development dimension, but the issues of peace and security have progressively gained importance since the early/mid-1990s.⁴ In addition, all the current main EU documents on migration also refer to development- and security-related issues.⁵ In the 2014–2017 Roadmap, peace and security comprise the first priority out of the five listed, while “human development” and “sustainable and inclusive development [together with] growth and continental integration” occupy two other slots. The issue of migration is relegated among the “global and emerging issues”.⁶

In the field of peace and security, the EU is one of the AU’s most significant partners. In fact, it provides considerable funds to the AU⁷ – and in particular to the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which includes the African Peace Facility

¹ European External Action Service (EEAS), *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*, June 2016, p. 36, <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/node/339>.

² The summit is a high-level appointment taking place every three years (at least in theory) in the Joint Africa–EU Strategy framework. The Joint Strategy, launched by the African Union and the EU in 2007, defines the overall Africa–EU Strategic Partnership and strives to bring Africa and the EU closer together through the strengthening of economic cooperation and the promotion of sustainable development, democracy, peace and security. The 2017 summit took place formally first time between AU (and not Africa) and the EU after the return of Morocco to the AU.

³ The Cotonou Agreement represents a comprehensive partnership agreement covering the EU’s relations with 79 countries, including 48 countries from Sub-Saharan Africa. Its central objective is to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty and to contribute to the gradual integration of ACP countries into the world economy.

⁴ Fernanda Faria, “Crisis Management in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Role of the European Union”, in *EUISS Occasional Papers*, No. 51 (April 2004), <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/68>.

⁵ For instance, see the documents of the European Commission: *An European Agenda on Migration* (COM/2015/240), 13 May 2015, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52015DC0240>; *Global Approach to Migration and Mobility* (COM/2011/743), 18 November 2011, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52011DC0743>.

⁶ The 2014–2017 Roadmap is the main outcome of the 2014 fourth Africa–EU Brussels Summit. See Africa–EU Partnership, *Roadmap 2014–2017*, 4th Africa–EU Summit, Brussels, 3–4 April 2014, <http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/en/node/7911>.

⁷ The partnership with the AU has three main dimensions: strengthening the political dialogue, making the African peace and security architecture fully operational and providing predictable funding for the AU’s peacekeeping operations.

(APF).⁸ The APF, with its three components – African Peace Support Operations (PSOs), operationalization of the APSA and initiatives under the Early Response Mechanism – is a pivotal element of AU–EU cooperation, and has increased the AU’s role as the continent’s leading organization responsible for peace. However, some shortfalls are apparent: the APF’s capacity-building element is still weak; funding procedures are too complex; and, chiefly, the mobilization of African resources is still limited.⁹

The EU is also conducting nine Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions in Africa (out of a total of 17) – three of them in the Sahel.¹⁰ All these missions have limited mandates and short timeframes, and usually have only a marginal impact on the conflicts in the region.¹¹ Typically, EU missions are deployed alongside, and to some extent in cooperation with, missions undertaken by African regional organizations, by the UN or by individual EU countries (especially France).¹²

The EU therefore remains a crucial partner for Africa in terms of both financial and technical support; however, in the future the AU will probably be offered more multilateral support¹³ and should be able to increase its own resources.¹⁴

⁸ The APF was created in 2003 and is funded through the EU’s European Development Fund (EDF). Since its creation, more than 2.1 billion euros have been allocated to the APF. The 11th and last EDF was created by an intergovernmental agreement signed in June 2013 – as it is not part of the EU budget – and entered into force on the 1st March 2015, after ratification by all member states.

⁹ Nicoletta Pirozzi, Nicolò Sartori and Bernardo Venturi, *The Joint Africa-EU Strategy*, Brussels, European Parliament, November 2017, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EXPO_STU\(2017\)603849](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EXPO_STU(2017)603849).

¹⁰ The current missions are: EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) in Libya; EUCAP Somalia, assisting host countries develop self-sustaining capacity for enhancement of maritime security; EUCAP Sahel Mali and EUCAP Sahel Niger supporting the internal security forces in those countries; EUNAVFOR Atalanta, countering piracy off the coast of Somalia; EUTM Mali, a training mission for Malian armed forces; EUTM RCA in the Central African Republic, to contribute to the country’s defence sector reform; EUTM Somalia, a military training mission in Somalia.

¹¹ For example, the stabilization of the security conditions or the improvement of the humanitarian situation.

¹² For instance, the French mission Barkhane in the Sahel.

¹³ For instance, China has left behind the country’s reluctance to engage in peacekeeping operations and is currently involved in peace and security initiatives on the continent, both in terms of financial assistance and of technical support on similar components of the EU. In 2015, China provided 100 million dollars to the AU to support the building and operation of the African Standby Force and the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC).

¹⁴ In 2016, the African governments decided to implement a 0.2 percent levy on eligible imports to finance the AU. This decision represents a relevant basis for relaunching the financial strategy of the APSA, but currently just a few countries have implemented the decision. Significantly, the World Trade Organization and the US are questioning the legality of the implementation of the new self-financing mechanism. For more information, see Philomena Apiko and Faten Aggad, “Analysis of the Implementation of the African Union’s 0.2% Levy. Progress and Challenges”, in *ECDPM Briefing Notes*, No. 98 (November 2017), <http://ecdpm.org/?p=29532>.

Lately, however, migration has become not just a priority¹⁵ but also something of an obsession for the EU.¹⁶ The Valletta Summit (11–12 November 2015)¹⁷ was dominated by the EU's migration agenda, with a strong focus on security aspects (this approach reinforced the perception of an unbalanced partnership, with European interests on one side and African challenges on the other). The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa,¹⁸ established during the high-level meeting, has confirmed the shift towards the securitization of migration and a focus on European short-term interests without paying close attention to local (African) needs, long-term challenges related to poverty eradication, human rights or political dialogue.¹⁹

The development domain between the EU and Africa is regulated by the Cotonou Agreement and by the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES). The EU has made great efforts to improve its aid impact, effectiveness and coordination among its member states within a global vision of development. However, three issues have compromised EU–SSA relations in this field: the EU Commission's privileging of trade liberalization over development, the risk of the securitization of EU development policy and conditionality on incentivizing democratic governance.²⁰ In particular, in recent EU documents and policies development cooperation has been firmly tied to issues of security and migration. The migration–development nexus, however, is affected by the narrow focus adopted in addressing the root causes of irregular migration. As a consequence, this phenomenon's deep and complex implications – from the role of the diaspora to the tangible effects of development policies on mobility – remain unexplored. The security–development nexus is consolidated but at the same time controversial – especially for non-governmental development actors. The EU is strengthening this connection, and the Sahel is a key arena for it, but with the risk of merging its operational instruments and reducing development resources instead of, for example, integrating them from

¹⁵ The framework document for the EU is: European Commission, *A European Agenda on Migration*, cit.

¹⁶ Mahamadou Danda, "The Security-Migration-Development Triangle in the Sahel, Seen from a Nigerien Standpoint", in Bernardo Venturi (ed.), *The Security-Migration-Development Nexus Revised: A Perspective from the Sahel*, Brussels, Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and Rome, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), December 2017 (forthcoming).

¹⁷ The Valletta Summit produced a Political Declaration and an Action Plan, including the establishment of an Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa, made up of 1.8 billion euros from the EU budget and European Development Fund, combined with contributions from EU member states and other donors. See the Africa-EU Partnership website: *2015 Valletta Summit on Migration*, 18 November 2015, <http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/en/node/8325>.

¹⁸ European Commission, *A European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa*, 12 November 2015, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-6056_en.htm.

¹⁹ James Mackie, Matthias Deneckere and Greta Galeazzi, "Matching Means to Priorities", in *ECDPM Challenges Papers*, No. 8 (January 2017), p. 2, <http://ecdpm.org/?p=25611>; Elise Kervyn and Raphael Shilhav, "An Emergency for Whom? The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa – Migratory Routes and Development Aid in Africa", in *Oxfam Briefing Notes*, November 2017, <http://hdl.handle.net/10546/620380>.

²⁰ Maurizio Carbone, "EU-Africa Relations in the Twenty-First Century: Evolution and Explanations", in Maurizio Carbone (ed.), *The European Union in Africa. Incoherent Policies, Asymmetrical Partnership, Declining Relevance?*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2013, p. 5.

currently separate budgets.

In conclusion, is the EU actually investing in African peace and development as an investment in the EU's own security and prosperity, as indicated by the EUGS? If this means that the EU is investing in security and prosperity in Africa because this is a European interest, then that is certainly true. The EU, as stated in the EUGS, is combining interests and values, but on the African continent the former category (security) seems to be leading the latter (development). However, the idea that African security and development *per se* are a priority for the EU seems to be farther from the truth, or at least to be jeopardized by the securitization process in Africa, the externalization of border control and fragmented approaches to mobility and migration – policies that often clash with realities and needs “on the ground”.

2. The EU approach to the Sahel

Some commentators have argued that the EU “Strategy for security and development in the Sahel has been used as a ‘laboratory of experimentation’ for the implementation of the Comprehensive Approach”.²¹ The Sahel has recently been in the global spotlight due to famines, terrorism, anti-state rebellions, and arms, drugs and human trafficking. Due to this scenario and its potential consequences for Europe, the region seems to be the first area, at least in Africa, where the EU is following the EUGS's interest-driven doctrine. Consequently, its Sahel strategy includes four lines of action – development, security, political and military – under the same framework. Indeed, “the EU Sahel strategy [has been] the comprehensive approach ‘*avant la lettre*’”.²²

The EU has contributed to the ushering of the Sahel region into what we may consider the fourth phase of its recent history, after playing a key role in the previous three. Following the eras of colonization, post-colonialism and development-cooperation partnerships, the Sahel now finds itself in the securitization era. Clearly, EU support in the Sahel region is part of an emerging European foreign policy that externalizes the bloc's security. As Ángel Losada, the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the Sahel, has commented, “the security in the Sahel is the security for Europe”.²³

²¹ Elisa Lopez Lucia, “Performing EU Agency by Experimenting the ‘Comprehensive Approach’: The European Union Sahel Strategy”, in *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (2017), p. 451. The comprehensive approach is considered an integrated and coordinated response to address sustainable development, peace and security, especially in complex fragile situations. See Fernanda Faria, “What EU Comprehensive Approach? Challenges for the EU Action Plan and Beyond”, in *ECDPM Briefing Notes*, No. 71 (October 2014), p. 1, <http://ecdpm.org/?p=14625>.

²² Damien Helly and Greta Galeazzi, “*Avant la lettre*? The EU's Comprehensive Approach (to Crises) in the Sahel”, in *ECDPM Briefing Notes*, No. 75 (February 2015), p. 3, <http://ecdpm.org/?p=16419>.

²³ Annemarie van de Vijssel, “Security at Home and Abroad: European Support for the G5 Sahel Force”, in *The Broker*, 19 July 2017, <http://www.thebrokeronline.eu/Blogs/Sahel-Watch-a-living-analysis-of-the-conflict-in-Mali/Security-at-home-and-abroad-European-support-for-the-G5-Sahel-force>.

In March 2011, the EU adopted the two-page *Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel* for Mali, Mauritania and Niger.²⁴ Three years later, it extended the strategy's scope to Burkina Faso and Chad. The strategy foresees four strands of action: (1) development, good governance and internal-conflict resolution; (2) politics and diplomacy; (3) security and the rule of law; and 4) countering violent extremism.²⁵

In April 2015, the EU's Foreign Affairs Council adopted the Sahel Regional Action Plan (RAP) 2015–2020, which was reviewed and updated at the beginning of June 2016.²⁶ RAP's four key priorities are: (1) preventing and countering radicalization; (2) creating appropriate conditions for youth; (3) migration and mobility; and (4) border management, and the fight against illicit trafficking and transnational organized crime. While the security–development nexus was incorporated into the Strategy, migration was not mentioned – and it was only included in the RAP alongside border control. However, migration played a crucial role already in the Sahel–Council conclusions of June 2016. The Sahel Strategy of 2011 is still the framework document for EU action in the area. Yet, after reading the current priorities and lines of action, it appears to be out of date.

The CSDP missions in the area have adapted to the EU's new priorities.²⁷ The EU launched three CSDP missions, known as EUCAP Sahel Niger, EUCAP Sahel Mali and the EU training mission in Mali (EUTM). The decision to deploy a CSDP mission in the Sahel was actively promoted by France, Italy and Spain, while Germany, Poland and the Nordic countries were more reluctant.²⁸

The EU launched the civilian mission EUCAP Sahel Niger in 2012 with the objective of helping that country to fight terrorism and organized crime. The mission provides advice and training in order to support Nigerien security institutions in strengthening their capacities, in line with the EU Strategy for Security and Development. In January 2015, the EU Council launched a second civilian mission: EUCAP Sahel Mali. Its task is to support the Malian internal security forces in ensuring constitutional and democratic order. Finally, the Union launched

²⁴ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on a European Union Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel*, 3076th Foreign Affairs Council Meeting, Brussels, 21 March 2011, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/120075.pdf.

²⁵ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Implementation of the EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel*, 3304th Foreign Affairs Council Meeting, Brussels, 17 March 2014, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/28735/141577.pdf>.

²⁶ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on the Sahel*, 3477th Foreign Affairs Council Meeting, Luxembourg, 20 June 2016, <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10393-2016-INIT/en/pdf>.

²⁷ European Commission and EEAS, *Annual Report on the Sahel Regional Action Plan* (SWD/2016/482), 23 December 2016, <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5009-2017-INIT/en/pdf>.

²⁸ Nicoletta Pirozzi, *The EU's Comprehensive Approach to Crisis Management*, Geneva, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), June 2013, p. 15, <https://www.dcaf.ch/node/12780>.

an EU (military) Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) in 2013.²⁹ Then, as the EU Commission declared, “the three CSDP missions in the Sahel have been adapted to the political priorities of the EU, notably following the EU mobilization against irregular migration and related trafficking”.³⁰

Additionally, in the context of the Africa–EU partnership, following the donor conference organized by the AU Commission in early February 2016, the European Commission adopted in April 2016 a financing decision setting aside 50 million euros from the APF in support of the Lake Chad Basin Commission Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in its fight against Boko Haram, the Islamist separatist movement in northern Nigeria, as mandated by the AU Peace and Security Council.³¹

Besides these measures, the EU supports specific projects through the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP).³² In 2015, over 40 million euros was mobilized under the IcSP for crisis-response measures in the Sahel.³³ The programme includes grassroots projects related to peace-building and local capacity building, and others related to border control and security.³⁴

As indicated above, the EU has also established an EUSR in the Sahel. The incumbent, Ángel Losada, was appointed in December 2015. The EUSR plays a part in reaching out to the region and guiding EU action there. He is also mandated with helping coordinate the EU’s overall approach to the crisis, using the EU Sahel strategy as a basis. In addition, to ensure coherent implementation, the EU has appointed a coordinator for its Sahel strategy and a task force, based in Brussels which meet informally every month, mandated with the evaluation and the implementation of the strategy.

With regard to development, the EU already enjoys close and substantial cooperation with each of the five Sahel countries.³⁵ Since 2016, the Union has also supported countries in the Sahel mainly via the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa

²⁹ On the lessons learned from CSDP missions in the Sahel, see Nicoletta Pirozzi, *EU Crisis Management after Lisbon. A New Model to Address Security Challenges in the 21st Century?*, Cambridge, Intersentia, 2015, p. 111-115.

³⁰ European Commission and EEAS, *Annual Report on the Sahel Regional Action Plan*, cit., p. 3.

³¹ Joint Communiqué by Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission; Neven Mimica, EU Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development; and Smail Chergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, 1 August 2016, <http://europa.eu/!NF97Fz>.

³² A map and description of the projects is regularly updated by Peace Direct: *EU IcSP Map*, <https://icspmap.eu>.

³³ European Commission and EEAS, *Annual Report on the Sahel Regional Action Plan*, cit.

³⁴ For instance, in the Diffa region (Niger) a specific peacebuilding project (*Peacebuilding and Stability Project Support in the Diffa Region*, https://icspmap.eu/pdf/?format=single&contract_number=367852) is implemented as well as a border management project (*Reinforcing Border Security in the Diffa Region, Sedini IBM*, https://icspmap.eu/pdf/?format=single&contract_number=367859).

³⁵ Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.

(EUTF).³⁶ Before the Valletta Summit, the EU had already established a process of cooperation with western Central African countries through the so-called Rabat Process (2006) and with countries in the Horn of Africa through the Khartoum Process (2014), with the aim of reducing irregular migration while fostering opportunities for local development. However, the EUTF represents a leap forward in terms of cooperation in the security–migration–development nexus.

The EU's approach to development and migration has the merit both of connecting the two fields and of recognizing that the migration challenge can be managed only through cooperation with African countries. However, aid flow seems to be largely allocated in favour of areas with enhanced border controls and other security measures.³⁷ As Stefan Lehne explains,

political pressures arising from the strong anti-immigration feelings in many EU countries have resulted in an overly narrow focus on discouraging migration and increasing returns of irregular migrants. Apart from the initiative's rather modest offer of financial assistance, the EU takes neither the interests of its African partners nor the protection needs of vulnerable migrants and refugees adequately into account.³⁸

The attempt to create more flexible instruments in order to respond to emergencies and crises through the trust fund has therefore raised concerns about the diversion of aid for wider foreign-policy objectives and the lack of transparency in the fund's governance structure.³⁹ The EUTF risks becoming disconnected from other development programmes, while the Migration and Mobility Dialogue (mentioned in the JAES Roadmap) seems disconnected and lacking in influence when compared with the other programmes. The International Crisis Group has criticized these compacts as "legally, morally and practically" problematic, arguing that their impact will be limited if they fail to focus on the drivers of migration.⁴⁰

³⁶ European Commission, *A European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa*, cit. The EU Trust Funds are ad hoc pool funds covering unexpected or emergency situations, managed by the European Commission. Two types of trust funds have been established in the 11th EDF Financial Regulation (Article 42): Emergency and Post-Emergency Trust Funds and Thematic Trust Funds. The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (running until 31 December 2020) is the largest trust fund in place. The EUTF for Africa pools together funding from the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), other financial instruments such as the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) as well as EU Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (DG ECHO) and DG Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME).

³⁷ Luca Raineri and Alessandro Rossi, "The Security-Migration-Development Nexus in the Sahel: A Reality Check", in *IAI Working Papers*, No. 17|26 (September 2017), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/8197>.

³⁸ Stefan Lehne, "Upgrading the EU's Migration Partnership", in *Carnegie Articles*, 21 November 2016, <http://ceip.org/2g8QDdU>.

³⁹ European Parliament resolution of 5 April 2017 on addressing refugee and migrant movements: the role of EU External Action (2015/2342(INI)), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2017-0124&language=EN>; James Mackie, Matthias Deneckere and Greta Galeazzi, "Matching Means to Priorities", cit.

⁴⁰ International Crisis Group (ICG), "Time to Reset African Union-European Union Relations", in *ICG Africa Reports*, No. 255 (17 October 2017), p. 8, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/node/5677>.

Overall, the EU's migratory policies with respect to the Sahel seem mainly intended to serve the Union's internal objective of curbing migration flows: the EU is taking a "whatever works approach" to stopping the flow of migrants from Africa. This factor could weak its relations with African partners because the latter feel that money has been spent on securing borders rather than, as promised, on migration's root causes.⁴¹

Within this framework, the EU's support for the G5 Sahel grouping deserves special attention. Established in February 2014 and originally presented as a vehicle for strengthening the bond between economic development and security, the G5 soon became heavily focused on security concerns. The initiative – involving Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Mauritania – sees a 5,000-strong battalion of troops operating in the region. Some analysts regard the G5 as mainly following a Western-led agenda. However, others consider that prioritizing security is a necessity since governments are under pressure from citizens to tackle insecurity.⁴² Crucially, the G5 is not made up of Europeans but a multinational force "owned" by Africans themselves.⁴³ The EU favours *ad hoc* initiatives like the G5 because AU member states commit their own resources to them, and because this approach also generates greater local ownership.

France and Germany have pledged funds to the G5 and asked the international community for its contribution. France – in synergy with its Operation Barkhane against Islamist militant groups in Mali – was behind an EU decision in June 2017 to award 50 million euros to the G5 Sahel group with resources taken from the APF.⁴⁴

The G5 Sahel also represents a possibility to garner international support on peace and security in Africa. Since June 2017, the force has been supported by the the UN Security Council, which unanimously welcomed it.⁴⁵ Following the EU's funding, China has expressed an interest in contributing and the US Government has pledged 60 million dollars.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 22-23.

⁴² Paul Melly, "Sahel: Breeding Insecurity", in *The Africa Report*, No. 94 (October 2017), p. 22-27, <https://issuu.com/theafricareport/docs/tar94>.

⁴³ The military aspect is coordinated by the respective countries' Chiefs of Staff.

⁴⁴ There has been discussion with the AU about it because the G5 Sahel falls outside the normal AU-REC APSA (Africa P&S Architecture) because the five countries have taken their own initiative and there is no REC corresponding to this region. The support to the G5 could therefore undermined the political agency of the AU and of regional organization as ECOWAS.

⁴⁵ UN Security Council resolution 2359 (2017) on Peace and security in Africa (S/RES/2359/2017), 21 June 2017, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2359\(2017\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2359(2017)).

⁴⁶ US Department of State, *United States Pledging up to \$60 Million in New Support for Security Assistance in the Sahel Region*, 30 October 2017, <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2017/10/275175.htm>.

Some analysts have criticized the move to propose a military solution for a region hit hard by poverty and unemployment, arguing that around 12,000 UN troops, along with 4,000 French, at least 800 American and 5,000 G5 forces conducting “asymmetrical” attacks on 500–1,000 terrorists could jeopardize the situation instead of improving it.⁴⁷ The EU and its member states have increased their military presence in the region not only to counter the terrorist threat but also in an effort to seal its southern border. The risk with this approach is that “the terrorist recruits start believing [their own] ideology, the ranks grow, and thus the nature of combat and the threat change”.⁴⁸

More specifically, it is not clear how the G5 itself contributes to the development listed among its four objectives.⁴⁹ The EUSR for the Sahel stated that “they will provide security to the NGOs and the programmes and projects from the EU and the member states working there. EU projects and programmes”.⁵⁰ However, in the pincer movement between security and migration management, the space for bottom-up development is shrinking. Nonetheless, the link between development and security appears clear and shared by all the European institutions and by the majority of the stakeholders. Without defining clear priorities, giving priority to military solutions could jeopardize other efforts. For instance, in 2014, France spent 543 million euros in security in the Sahel, compared with 202 million euros in bilateral development assistance.⁵¹ As Rojan Bolling and colleagues have explained, “initial goals of combining security and development issues in a synergistic manner could be supplanted by a more ‘pragmatic’ approach that seeks to consolidate (top-down) security gains, leaving behind development and reform.” But they conclude, “However, it is exactly this bottom-up development-focused approach that will ultimately provide more sustainable people-centred security.”⁵²

Intra-institutional dynamics in Brussels plays an important role behind the development–security tension. The DG DEVCO⁵³ feels itself marginalized, and sees its vision of the EU as a development actor in Africa being constrained, while the European External Action Service (EEAS) tries to lead the whole process in a way

⁴⁷ Azad Essa, “G5 Sahel Counterterrorism Force Explained”, in *Al Jazeera*, 3 November 2017, <http://aje.io/4zw59>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ The mandate comprises four objectives: (1) fight against terrorism, illegal drug trafficking and human trafficking; (2) contribute to the reinstallation of the state authorities where they are absent; (3) contribute to humanitarian aid, and (4) contribute to development actions taking place in the region.

⁵⁰ Annemarie van de Vijzel, “Security at Home and Abroad: European Support for the G5 Sahel Force”, cit.

⁵¹ Camille Laville, “Les dépenses militaires et l’aide au développement au Sahel: quel équilibre?”, in *FERDI Working Papers*, No. 174 (November 2016), <http://www.ferdi.fr/fr/node/3370>.

⁵² Rojan Bolling, Karlijn Muiderman and Annemarie van de Vijzel, “Will Development Be Short Changed in Europe’s Externalized Foreign Policy?”, in *The Broker*, 31 July 2017, <http://www.thebrokeronline.eu/Blogs/Sahel-Watch-a-living-analysis-of-the-conflict-in-Mali/Will-development-be-short-changed-in-Europe-s-externalized-foreign-policy>.

⁵³ DG DEVCO is the department dealing with development at the European Commission.

similar to a national ministry of foreign affairs. Officials in DG DEVCO want to plan the European Development Funds (EDF) jointly in order to avoid being relegated to the position of an implementing agency. However, the terms of this joint programming were so vague that EEAS officials were able to seize the opportunity provided by the Sahel strategy to take the lead and define the priorities of the strategy without really consulting DG DEVCO. As a result, the Comprehensive Approach often appears as little more than a justification for the EEAS to push for the prioritization of security imperatives.⁵⁴

Overall, the European Union has, in the Sahel, been testing options for regional approaches – among them, the project Counter Terrorism Sahel and programmes on food security.⁵⁵ The EU has committed significant resources, with a total of more than 5 billion euros to the Sahel coming from the EDF for 2014–20 as well as other instruments and sources (regional, thematic, European Investment Bank, etc). The Union's differentiated commitment has also produced information sharing between EU staff, Operation Barkhane by France, MINUSMA and other EU member states engaged in the region such as Denmark or the Netherlands. However, doubts remain on the EU's overall strategy, which appears too determined by a short-term focus on migration and lacking in a deep understanding of local social and economic dynamics, such as regional mobility.

3. A comprehensive approach beyond shortcuts

How can the EU fine-tune its approach to the Sahel? If a shortfall can be identified about the EU activities in the region, it is about real local-driven and long-term approaches. Some improvements are possible through scenarios that the EU has not prioritized or has not fully explored. If the Sahel is a "laboratory of experimentation" for the implementation of the integrated approach, then the EU could consider some analyses and options in more depth.

Firstly, the migration–development nexus seems to be more mentioned than explored in EU documents and by the Sahel strategy. Similarly, the projects financed in the area through the Africa Trust Fund are not based on in-depth analysis. Although it might seem counter-intuitive, supporting development and growth does not on its own amount to tackling migration – at least, in the short run. A recent study in low-income countries has confirmed that the "evidence that aid can greatly and sustainably deter emigration from poor countries is weak at best".⁵⁶ Additionally, "Aid flows may have a positive effect on economic growth – though this remains controversial – but more importantly, economic growth has

⁵⁴ Elisa Lopez Lucia, "Performing EU Agency by Experimenting the 'Comprehensive Approach'", cit.

⁵⁵ Damien Helly and Greta Galeazzi, "Avant la lettre?", cit.

⁵⁶ Michael A. Clemens and Hannah M. Postel, "Deterring Emigration with Foreign Aid: An Overview of Evidence from Low-Income Countries", in *GLM|LIC Synthesis Papers*, No. 8 (November 2017), p. 15, <https://glm-lic.iza.org/publications/sp/sp8>.

historically raised emigration in almost all developing countries.”⁵⁷ Has the EU considered these analyses, accordingly adapting its approach to the migration–development nexus? Deep and systematic reflection and evaluation appear to be missing from its main documents, policies and project implementation. For instance, the same study highlights the facts that high youth unemployment is a cause of migration and that an improvement in this field could help reduce migration. However, the report also shows that “most donor projects have had little success creating youth employment at large scale”.⁵⁸ The Africa Trust Fund could follow the same trend, at the very least checking the scale of the projects funded.

As previously discussed, the *military engagement* in the region is heavy and could downgrade efforts in the development field. In addition, it is also probably not well enough coordinated between France, the US, the UN and the G5. The point, however, is not just coordination but the fact that foreign military interventions rarely succeed. The opposite can, in fact, be true: a heavy foreign (at the moment basically *Western*) presence can have distorting effects (e.g. the use of armed drones). Security measures are essential, but will only ever be a temporary fix. The EU, through its leverage and its integrated approach, could be more vocal on how the military dimension is dealing only with the symptoms rather than root causes of problems.

Support for local processes of peace, mediation, facilitation and reconciliation in the Sahel could represent further “added value” for the EU. For instance, in early September 2017 Mahmoud Dicko, the leader of the High Islamic Council of Mali (*Haut Conseil Islamique*), along with other Malian religious leaders, travelled for talks to troubled northern and central areas of the country in order to explore options for restoring social stability and bringing an end to violence.⁵⁹ Another example is the NGO named AHAROG in Niger, which supports dialogue between the local populations and the defence and security forces. The project is financed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).⁶⁰ These examples represent genuine locally led innovation that deserves support.

In addition, policymakers and analysts have often perceived the Maghreb and the Sahel as two discrete entities. Since the 2000s, this distinction has seemed increasingly obsolete; security threats, concerns and perceptions have pushed the two regions closer together.⁶¹ However, mobility between them is nothing new. The EU, which is already working in synergy with the countries of western

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 15-16.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵⁹ “Koulouba: Mahmoud Dicko rend compte de sa mission de Kidal”, in *Maliweb.net*, 13 September 2017, <http://www.maliweb.net/?p=2527812>.

⁶⁰ Mahamadou Danda, “The Security-Migration-Development Triangle in the Sahel, Seen from a Nigerien Standpoint”, cit.

⁶¹ For instance, the Danish institute for International Studies (DIIS) has launched *The Sahel-Maghreb Research Platform*. See DIIS website: <https://www.diis.dk/en/node/7059>.

Africa, still misses the chance to support a greater regional integration between North Africa and the Sahel. One positive result of such a move could be to limit the appeal of operating in the informal sector while providing opportunities for legal work in the Sahel.⁶² It is critical to establish dialogue with all elements of border communities (including local leaders, ethnic groups, religious leaders and nomads) and representatives of civil society.⁶³ This approach could also avoid damaging border communities – often economically and politically marginalized – and their economies, tied as they are to interregional mobility.

Finally, the issue of raw materials is not addressed in the Sahel strategy, but it is pivotal for the area as well as for other African regions. Raw materials and energy products represent 51.6 per cent of EU imports of goods from Africa. This gives an idea of how economic relations are still grounded on extractivism in the South–North direction. In particular, some Sahelian countries have trade agreements with France that are not advantageous for them. The EU could involve France in a discussion in order to establish a consistent local-development policy in the Sahel. In addition, over the last decade, the EU's request to Africa to eliminate export restrictions has raised increasing concerns in many African countries.⁶⁴ EU policy coherence appears crucial if the Union's Sahel strategy is to be a successful "laboratory".

Recommendations

On the basis of the analysis conducted above on EU–SSA relations in the fields of peace and security, migration and development, it is possible to set out some recommendations for the EU:

- *Restore the link between the allocation of development funds and long-term development goals.* EU internal priorities and migration-flow management should not divert development aid from the pivotal objectives of eradicating poverty and should respect the principle of joint planning with local partners. With this in mind, DG DEVCO should maintain a key role in development programmes.
- *Prioritize the human rights of migrants.* The EU and its member states should pay constant attention to the human rights of migrants, including human-rights frameworks and monitoring mechanisms, in all its agreements with single countries

⁶² Andrew Lebovich, "Bringing the Desert Together: How to Advance Sahel Maghreb Integration", in *ECFR Policy Briefs*, July 2017, http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/bringing_the_desert_together_how_to_advance_sahelo_maghreb_integration_7215.

⁶³ US Department of State, Unclassified document. See Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), *Good Practices in the Area of Border Security and Management in the Context of Counterterrorism and Stemming the Flow of "Foreign Terrorist Fighters"*, New York, September 2016, p. 11, <https://www.thegctf.org/Cross-Cutting-Initiatives/Border-Security-Initiative>.

⁶⁴ Isabelle Ramdoo, "Shopping for Raw Materials. Should Africa Be Worried about EU Raw Materials Initiative?", in *ECDPM Discussion Papers*, No. 105 (February 2011), <http://ecdpm.org/?p=5116>.

or regional organizations.

- *Make efforts to integrate economic and development initiatives into border-security programming* in order to help address the underlying causes of vulnerability, illicit trafficking and cross-border crime. It is particularly challenging to discern licit from illicit trafficking in many parts of the region given historically significant, traditional caravan trading routes and networks on which communities rely for survival, and to which there are seldom viable alternatives.
- *Increase the number of regular migrants.* Enhancing regular migration is a way of offering opportunities to African citizens and decreasing irregular migration. The mobility of students and scholars should be boosted. In addition, the option of using offices and embassies outside the EU to process applications for asylum and refugee status before migrants reach Europe should be considered.
- *Improve intra-Sahel and Sahel–Maghreb integration.* Focus on migration, economic reform, security coordination and regional institutional frameworks. The EU should assist these countries to regularize and legalize population flows.
- *Support local processes of mediation and dialogue.* The EU has improved its capacities on mediation and peace-building in the Sahel – for instance, through training for its personnel. Now it is time to fully support local efforts, applying a context-sensitive approach.
- *Explore the migration–development nexus* and its dynamics in the Sahel, and fine-tune existing projects. To this end, the impact of the Africa Trust Fund should be monitored and future projects should adapt consequently.
- *Keep support for military intervention as a last resort, and with a proportionate use of force.* Establish a regular exchange with France and the US, and monitor the consequences of military interventions (e.g. the use of armed drones).

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