

An EU Integrated Approach in the Sahel: The Role for Governance

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ABSTRACT

The role that the EU plays in governance in the Sahel is multi-layered. Focussing specifically on the EU's approach and involvement across two components of governance performance, safety and the rule of law, and participation and human rights, it emerges how the EU has not a fully coherent long-term strategy. Brussels applies an integrated approach, and the Sahel is probably the region where its use is most evident. However, its application is at the experimental level and is significantly conditioned by short-term needs, such as curbing migration, that risk trumping reforms in local governance.

*European Union | Sahel | Africa | Security | Migration | Governance |
Military missions*

keywords

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Introduction

The Sahel has become synonymous with instability, and the governments of the five Sahelian countries – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger – struggle to control wide expanses of territory characterised by large, remote areas and historical routes connecting sub-Saharan Africa to the Maghreb.

Non-governmental stakeholders play a crucial role in the Sahel. For this reason, analysing the EU's commitment to governance can be even more important than focusing merely on state-building. Poor state governance fosters an environment suitable for extremist groups, and strengthens their recruitment, planning and operational capacities.¹

The EU has always claimed to project a normative power in the Sahel and other regions. Such power brings with it an array of liberal normative values: democracy; human rights; the rule of law; and, certainly, good governance. Since 2016 and the introduction of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS),² Brussels has tried to integrate its external projection through two approaches – firstly, by enhancing the integrated approach, including more spheres of intervention and improving field coordination and policy consistency; secondly, by applying the “principled-pragmatism” approach whereby European interests and values coexist with one another.

¹ Ibrahim Maïga and Nadia Adam, “What Exactly Are Foreign Troops Protecting in the Sahel?”, in *ISS Today*, 27 April 2018, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/what-exactly-are-foreign-troops-protecting-in-the-sahel>.

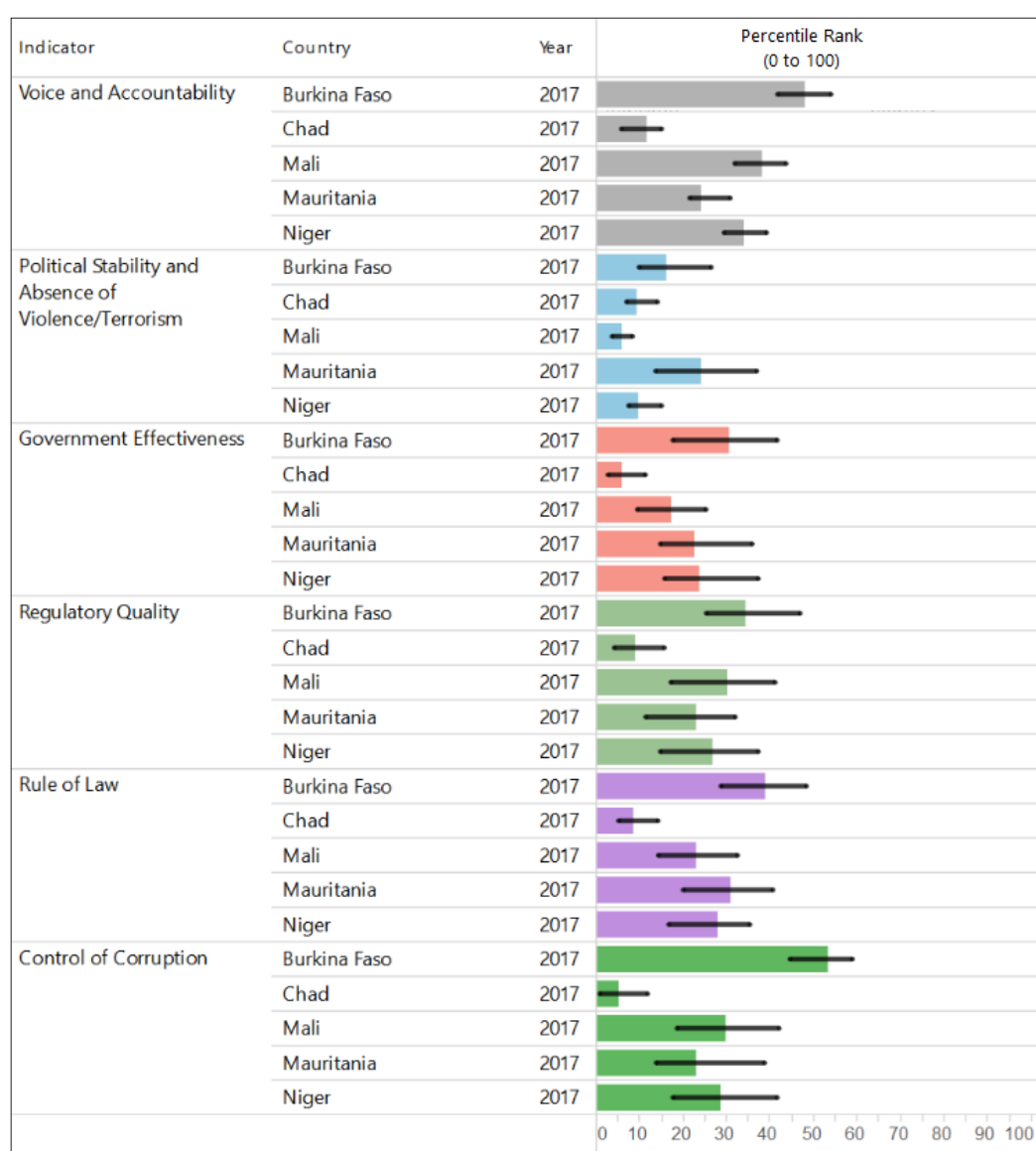
² European External Action Service (EEAS), *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, June 2016, <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/node/339>.

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Analysing EU normative and functional instruments and their impacts in terms of governance in the Sahel, pragmatism emerges over principles and norms. This paper argues that while the EU appears a relevant partner on some components of the rule of law, safety and security dimensions, it seems less engaged and consistent on issues such as long-term planning, trust in local ownership and local power dynamics, inclusivity, and in applying good-governance principles to its own actions – for instance, through regular monitoring and evaluation of its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions.

Figure 1 | Elaboration from Worldwide Governance Indicators



Source: WGI website: <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#reports>.

Self-evidently, the Sahel is a complex area – and the EU does not possess a “magic wand”. One only has to think, for instance, of the rising discontent among young

people in Chad,³ or the growing instability in the north-central of Burkina Faso. In fact, the World Bank's governance indicators collocate all five countries of the West African Sahel in the lower third for government effectiveness (see Figure 1): a situation of fragility that should be carefully considered in terms of the internal differences and similarities that it covers.

Considering all the main EU strains of work in the Sahel, from CSDP missions to development funds, a picture emerges of how curbing migration and fighting terrorist groups has affected all the other spheres of activities – with corresponding repercussions on regional governance. Then, the analysis focuses specifically on the EU's approach and involvement in governance in the Sahel. It shows strengths and weaknesses across four key components of governance performance: safety and the rule of law, participation and human rights, sustainable economic opportunity, and human development. Finally, the paper provides some recommendations to improve and give consistency to the EU's approach to governance in the region.

1. The EU in the Sahel

Taking stock of the EU's presence in the Sahel is a necessary first step in order to understand the role of governance in the Union's integrated approach. The Sahel is a pivotal region, where the EU gives priority to the EUGS's "principled-pragmatism" doctrine.⁴ The Sahelian test of this approach already shows some contradictions, also related to governance. In fact, some analyses show that EU foreign policy has been more functional than normative-driven.⁵

In its relations with Africa, it seems that the Union has been overwhelmed by some of its member states that view curbing migration not only as a security priority and a means to support African governance but also as an instrument to protect the European (neo)liberal order. The EU's external projection of domestic fears (fuelled by populism) risks, however, foregrounding foreign-policy priorities and practices that have limited effectiveness or a distorted impact.

Recent studies⁶ have discussed how the Sahel has become for the EU an area of experimentation for the implementation of its integrated approach.⁷ The Union's

³ International Crisis Group (ICG), "Chad: Defusing Tensions in the Sahel", in *ICG Africa Reports*, No. 266 (5 December 2018), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/node/8903>.

⁴ The EU, as stated in the EUGS, is combining interests and values ("principled interests").

⁵ Shyamika Jayasundara-Smits, "Bracing the Wind and Riding the Norm Life Cycle: Inclusive Peacebuilding in the European Capacity Building Mission in Sahel–Mali (EUCAP Sahel–Mali)", in *Peacebuilding*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2018), p. 233-247, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2018.1491683>.

⁶ Bernardo Venturi (ed.), *The Security–Migration–Development Nexus Revised: A Perspective from the Sahel*, Brussels/Rome, FEPS and IAI, December 2017, <https://www.iai.it/en/node/8764>.

⁷ 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. 451-468. The comprehensive approach is considered an integrated and coordinated response to

integrated approach in the region is based on the idea that security, development and governance are essentially intertwined. Consequently, its Sahel Strategy includes four lines of action – development, security, political and military – under the aegis of the same framework. This section pays particular attention to coordination between EU bodies and the various local and international actors in the region.

EU documents on the Sahel are well articulated. In April 2015, the Union's Foreign Affairs Council adopted the Sahel Regional Action Plan (RAP) 2015–2020,⁸ which was reviewed and updated at the beginning of June 2016.⁹ RAP's four key priorities are: (1) preventing and countering radicalisation; (2) creating appropriate conditions for youth; (3) migration and mobility; and (4) border management, and the fight against illicit trafficking and transnational organised crime. RAP mentions governance a couple of times as a challenging area, and as part of an overall comprehensive approach for Lake Chad.¹⁰

Concretely, EU day-to-day work in the region is implemented by its delegations, the EU Special Representative (EUSR), the CSDP missions and the Regional Coordination Cell (RCC). This work is also channelled through the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP),¹¹ the "galaxy" of development funds and other ad hoc partnerships.

EU delegations in the Sahel are present in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad. Characterised by middle-ranking leadership, these delegations operate as liaison offices between Brussels, CSDP missions and external local and international actors. The EUSR, Ángel Losada, plays a part in reaching out to the region and guiding EU action there. He is also mandated with helping to coordinate the Union's overall approach to crises, using the EU Sahel Strategy as a basis. Additionally, to ensure coherent implementation, the EU has appointed a coordinator for its Sahel Strategy and a task force, based in Brussels, which meets informally every month and which is mandated with the evaluation and implementation of the Strategy.

address sustainable development, peace and security, especially in complex fragile situations.

⁸ Previously, in March 2011, the EU adopted the two-page Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel for Mali, Mauritania and Niger. 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. 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.

⁹ 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>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ A map and description of the projects is regularly updated by Peace Direct: *EU IcSP Map*, <https://icspmap.eu>.

The three CSDP missions in the area have adapted to the EU's new priorities,¹² and have done so in the framework of a broader transformation of such missions.¹³ The EU launched the civilian mission EUCAP Sahel Niger in 2012 with the objective of helping that country to fight terrorism and organised 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 early 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. The Union also launched an EU (military) Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) in 2013. 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 mobilisation against irregular migration and related trafficking".¹⁴ They have also led to the establishment of a strategic sub-office in Agadez, in central Niger.

The new phase of EUCAP Sahel missions has already introduced the objectives of strengthening the internal security forces' capacity to fight against terrorism and organised crime and supporting the Malian and Nigerien governments in managing migration flows and border security. These new activities reveal a prominent focus on pragmatism and a functional approach, with their normative commitments related to human rights, good governance, inclusiveness and gender equality relegated to the background.¹⁵

Notably, the budgets for the missions (managed by the Commission) have increased. For instance, EUCAP Sahel Niger's budget has grown from 18.4 million euro to 26.3 million euro since it began.¹⁶ Also, it is likely that the EU will establish new CSDP missions in the Sahel in the medium term.

The report on CSDP missions in the Sahel released by the European Court of Auditors in September 2018 assesses some relevant aspects of the missions.¹⁷ They should contribute to strengthening the capacity of the security forces in Niger and Mali, and also in supporting other activities by the EU and its member states. However, some shortfalls have limited the impact of the missions. Firstly, recruitment procedures were said to be time-consuming and often unsuccessful. At the same

¹² 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>.

¹³ Tobias Pietz, "The Civilian CSDP Compact: Strengthening or Repurposing EU Civilian Crisis Management?", in *IAI Commentaries*, No. 18|47 (October 2018), <https://www.iai.it/en/node/9588>.

¹⁴ European Commission and EEAS, *Annual Report on the Sahel Regional Action Plan*, cit., p. 3.

¹⁵ Sven Biscop, "The EU Global Strategy: Realpolitik with European Characteristics", in *Egmont Security Policy Briefs*, No. 75 (June 2016), <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/?p=19958>.

¹⁶ Council of the European Union, *EUCAP Sahel Niger: Council Extends the Mission for Two Years*, 18 September 2018, <http://europa.eu/!dR44XN>.

¹⁷ European Court of Auditors, "Strengthening the Capacity of the Internal Security Forces in Niger and Mali: Only Limited and Slow Progress", in *ECA Special Reports*, No. 15/2018 (14 June 2018), <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/DocItem.aspx?did=46030>.

time, the mission staff did not receive adequate practical guidance or, in the case of EUCAP Sahel Niger, pre-deployment training. Concerning sustainability, the Sahel missions had limited medium- or long-term planning because they received two-year mandates and annual budgets. Finally, the missions had weak performance indicators and, during the period audited, they did not adequately monitor and evaluate the achievement of tasks.¹⁸ These shortfalls, in particular short-term planning and monitoring, do not provide an adequate backdrop for long-term actions on governance.

The EU's promotion of regionalisation is oriented towards coordinating the main international actors in the region. To facilitate this task, on 20 June 2017, the European Council established the RCC within EUCAP Sahel Mali. This cell coordinates the EU's operational efforts, and identifies needs and gaps within those efforts – in particular, the CSDP missions. It also facilitates the organisation of training courses by the EU CSDP missions in the Sahel for G5 Sahel countries' security and defence trainees¹⁹ (the G5 is the Group of Five Sahel nations: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger).

The RCC is the agency that really embodies the EU idea of an integrated approach and regionalisation. It consists of 15 experts embedded in the mission or attached to EU delegations in the region. Its headquarters is in Bamako, Mali's capital, at the same premises as those of Sahel Mali, and it defers to the European External Action Service (EEAS) civilian chain of command in Brussels. The RCC's work mirrors the G5 Sahel's work, it is strictly focused on security and defence, and it does not include governance or development within its remit. Migration is part of RCC work, but only in relation to fighting traffickings.²⁰

The first part of the RCC's mandate ended in early 2019. During the final phase of this mandate, a "gaps and needs" analysis on the regional implementation plan was redacted. From that analysis, a concept of operations (CONOPS) was produced that will become operational in March 2019. The CONOPS is based on two operational strains – firstly, an internal governance system for the G5 coordinated by the RCC; secondly, a process of coordination on different levels: within the missions, among EU bodies on security and defence, and with other international actors and member states. The RCC will additionally work on a database on all the projects in the region, which will also be made available to other organisations. The RCC will change its name to Regional Advising and Coordination Cell, and will have seven additional experts (up from 15 to a total of 22),²¹ some of them working on legal issues.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ EUTM Mali, *Regional Coordination Cell (RCC) of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) to the Missions in the Sahel Region Visits EUTM Mali*, 9 August 2017, <http://eutmmali.eu/en/?p=18100>.

²⁰ Interview with RCC member, 11 January 2019.

²¹ Ibid.

The EU also supports two key regional initiatives: the G5 Sahel itself and the Alliance for the Sahel. The support for the G5 Sahel is strictly in the fields of security and defence, and is tied to the work of the RCC. 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 G5 initiative – involving all five Sahel nations – sees a 5,000-strong battalion of troops operating in the region. Additionally, in the context of the Africa–EU partnership, the European Commission adopted in April 2016 a financing decision setting aside 50 million euro from the African Peace Facility (APF) in support of the Lake Chad Basin Commission’s Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in its fight against Boko Haram, the Islamist separatist movement in northern Nigeria, as mandated by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU).²²

Some analysts regard the G5 as mainly following a Western-led agenda with other global players, such as China, also involved. Crucially, the G5 is not made up of Europeans but is a multinational force “owned” by Africans themselves.²³ The EU supports ad hoc initiatives like the G5 because AU member states commit their own resources and because this approach also generates greater local ownership.

Another relevant regional framework is the Alliance for the Sahel, launched in July 2017 by the EU, France (the main donor) and Germany, as well as the United Nations Development Programme, the African Development Bank and the World Bank. The Alliance, which could be considered a counterpart to the security focus of the G5 Sahel will finance nearly 500 projects in five key sectors from its budget of 10.9 billion euro (2018–22):²⁴ youth education, training and employment; food security and agriculture in rural areas; climate and energy; the provision of basic services; and decentralisation and governance. By February 2018, the Alliance had enlarged to the UK, Italy and Spain²⁵ – and in April 2018, Saudi Arabia joined the programme with a contribution of 200 million euro.²⁶ The broad support received by the Alliance for the Sahel constitutes a valuable platform for discussion between international actors and for the coordination and targeting of different initiatives.

²² 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, Brussels, 1 August 2016, <http://europa.eu/!NF97Fx>.

²³ The military aspect is coordinated by the respective countries’ Chiefs of Staff.

²⁴ Sahel Alliance website: *The Sahel Alliance*, <https://www.alliance-sahel.org/en/?p=193>.

²⁵ World Bank, *The Sahel Alliance Officially Announces the Implementation of Over 500 Projects for a Total Amount of EUR 6bn to be Disbursed Between 2018 and 2022*, 23 February 2018, <https://goo.gl/LGVrf3>.

²⁶ Ecofin Agency, *AFD and Saudi Fund to Invest €200 Million to Develop Projects in Sahel*, 12 April 2018, <https://www.ecofinagency.com/public-management/1204-38335-afd-and-saudi-fund-to-invest-200-million-to-develop-projects-in-sahel>.

Concerning humanitarian aid and development cooperation, as part of its work in western and central Sahel, the EU already enjoys close and substantial cooperation with each of the five regional countries. EU cooperation is mainly financed through the European Development Fund, the EU Trust Fund for Africa and other humanitarian-aid vehicles. The IcSP can be considered a “bridge” between peace and development programmes. More specifically, ad hoc economic agreements such as the EU–Mauritania Fisheries Protocol and investments through the African Investment Facility are also in place.

In addition to the above, since 2016 the 86 programmes in the Sahel/Lake Chad region received 1,549 million euro from the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF),²⁷ while the resources allocated amount to 4.2 billion euro, including 3.7 billion euro from the European Development Fund (EDF) and other EU financial instruments.²⁸ Direct EU member-state contributions are still rather limited (492 million euro).²⁹ The most recent programmes, approved in late 2018, are aimed at increasing people’s access to social services in border areas and contributing to integrating youth organisations into the processes of designing and implementing development and social policies. The programmes are designed under the Alliance for the Sahel,³⁰ based on the needs presented by the G5 Sahel countries under the Priority Investment Programme.³¹ Since 2016, the EUTF has been analysed critically by non-governmental organisations (NGOs)³² and some research centres because the programme had the potential to divert development aid towards migration and border control. The resources devoted to these last policies show that these criticalities are in place in the Sahel. Fortunately, the EUTF has built a regular system of monitoring and evaluation that will be helpful in analysing the overall relevance and impact of the programme.

²⁷ European Commission, *A European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa*, 12 November 2015, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-6056_en.htm. 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).

²⁸ European Commission website: *EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa - State of Play and Financial Resources*, https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/content/trust-fund-financials_en.

²⁹ Ibid. Data refer to 5 February 2019.

³⁰ EEAS, *Alliance for the Sahel Will Reinforce EU Work for Stability and Development of Key Region*, 14 July 2017, <https://europa.eu/!qu78gM>.

³¹ European Commission, *International High-level Conference on the Sahel - Communiqué by the co-chairs*, Brussels, 23 February 2018, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-18-1166_en.htm.

³² See, for instance, Olivia De Guerry et al., *Partnership or Conditionality? Monitoring the Migration Compacts and EU Trust Fund for Africa*, Brussels, CONCORD Europe, 2018, <https://library.concordeurope.org/record/1914/files>.

Overall, different stakeholders in Niger and Mali highlighted the fact that, despite some initial difficulties, both EUCAP Sahel missions improved coordination with national authorities and donors – for instance, through donor mapping, including proposed, planned and in-place projects.³³ The EU's coordination effort is also projected towards the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) trading bloc, and the Sahel is often discussed at the ECOWAS–EU Political Dialogue Meeting. The integrated approach seems to be applied in the fields of defence and security, with a significant effort from the RCC that is punctually monitored. However, the integrated approach is not applied with the same resources and political willingness to other sectors – including that of governance. The limitation of this regionalisation process can be also related to the EU tendency to adopt ad hoc solutions³⁴ and short-term planning,³⁵ and the difficulties encountered in adopting an integrated approach. Members of the EU and UN missions in Mali, as well as senior EEAS officials responsible for West Africa, have indicated that they rarely coordinate with the EUCAP mission in the country concerned.³⁶

2. Diagnosis of EU involvement on governance in the Sahel

For the EU, as well as for some other foreign powers, governance is a crucial component in order to address peace and development in the Sahel, as shown by the “governance” component in the main Sahel strategies, from CSDP missions to development-cooperation initiatives.³⁷

The EU's approach to and involvement in governance in the Sahel, however, is not always clear in all respects, and a diagnosis is necessary in order to highlight its strengths and weaknesses. The criteria and categories of the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) are particularly helpful to this effort.³⁸ In the IIAG, country performance in delivering governance is measured across four key components that effectively provide indicators of overall governance performance: safety and the rule of law, participation and human rights, sustainable economic opportunity, and human development. This section focusses on the first two components only (safety and the rule of law, and participation and human rights) because they are

³³ European Court of Auditors, “Strengthening the Capacity of the Internal Security Forces...”, cit., p. 37-38.

³⁴ Andrew Lebovich, “Halting Ambition: EU Migration and Security Policy in the Sahel”, in *ECFR Policy Briefs*, September 2018, https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/halting_ambition_eu_migration_and_security_policy_in_the_sahel.

³⁵ European Court of Auditors, “Strengthening the Capacity of the Internal Security Forces...”, cit., p. 39.

³⁶ Andrew Lebovich, “Halting Ambition”, cit., p. 10.

³⁷ Laurent Bossard, “Building Peace in the Sahel: A Regional Perspective”, in *GREAT Insights*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (December 2014-January 2015), p. 44-47, <https://ecdpm.org/?p=14912>.

³⁸ IIAG, redacted by the African foundation Mo Ibrahim, provides a reliable source of information based on a wide range of indicators to measures and monitors governance performance in African countries. See Mo Ibrahim Foundation, *2018 Ibrahim Index of African Governance: Index Report*, October 2018, <http://mif.media/2018-iiag-report>.

the most relevant for this research.

An overall IIAG analysis of the five Sahelian countries shows mixed results (see Figure 2). Over the last ten years (2008–17), Mali leads concerning governance improvements followed by Burkina Faso and Chad. In an opposite trend, Mali shows a significant deterioration related to the 2012 conflict, with slow improvements over the last four years. Burkina Faso shows the most significant improvements in a five-year perspective, while Mauritania had a small deterioration.

Figure 2 | Elaboration from IIAG analysis of the five Sahelian countries

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	AT '08-'17
Burkina Faso	52.3	53.1	53.1	52.4	53.4	53.5	52.9	53.0	55.5	57.1	+4.8
Chad	30.8	30.8	32.7	33.7	34.0	33.7	34.5	35.0	34.6	35.4	+4.6
Mali	54.1	54.5	54.8	55.7	51.2	49.8	50.3	50.9	51.1	50.1	-4.0
Mauritania	42.2	43.0	44.1	44.3	45.6	44.1	43.8	43.9	43.8	43.4	+1.2
Niger	45.6	45.0	47.0	50.7	50.4	50.3	50.8	51.1	50.8	51.2	+5.6

Source: IIAG data, <http://iiag.online>.

Within this framework, Table 1 (below) outlines, in a nutshell, the relevance of EU contributions to the first two governance components and their subcategories³⁹ in the Sahel according to qualitative analysis. Relevance is assessed through the qualitative analysis presented below and via the framework of the EU commitment in the Sahel, provided in the previous part.

Table 1 | Relevance of EU contributions to governance components

Governance components	Relevance of EU contribution
<i>1. Safety and rule of law</i>	<i>Relevant</i>
Rule of law	Relevant
Transparency and accountability	Not much relevant
Personal safety (including absence of human trafficking)	Relevant
National security (including absence of IDP refugees)	Relevant
<i>2. Participation and human rights</i>	<i>Not much relevant</i>
Participation	Not much relevant
Rights	Somewhat
Gender	Somewhat

³⁹ The details on indicators and sources are available in the Mo Ibrahim Foundation website: *Methodology*, <http://mo.ibrahim.foundation/?p=222>.

Looking in more detail at the first governance component – Safety and rule of law – one of the main focuses of governance support has been decentralisation, which has been included in the EU cooperation programme since the introduction of EDF funds in the late 1990s.⁴⁰ This choice is probably due to the necessity to control remote areas, an extremely complex objective without the close collaboration of local actors. EU interventions on governance related to indicators in the first governance component include some specific programmes: administrative reform, the Decentralisation and Regional Economic Development Support Programme (PARADDER), the State Building Contract (SBC) and the Support Programme for Civil Society Organisations (PAOSC) I and II. PARADDER and its predecessor, the Administrative Reform and Decentralisation Support Programme (PARAD), were financed within the EDF framework and were usually implemented by international consultancy companies based in Europe.⁴¹ The main focus of these programmes was support for the effective implementation of state-reform policies; the rule of law; decentralisation; service sectors; and more isolated projects, including conflict resolution and reconciliation.⁴² PARADDER works on decentralisation and is mainly based on specific technical assistance; overall, it seems to be based on interests pre-identified by the EU.⁴³ The SBC in Mali has thus far comprised general budgetary support rather than sectoral support. Governance and basic social services are part of the SBC's objectives – as is the implementation of the Route Map for the Transition since 2013. The main significant shortfalls of this programme remain related to the role of civil society organisations (CSOs), assistance for which is perceived as a “support to the State”.⁴⁴

Another challenging issue is the degree to which decentralisation is shared by national governments and local authorities. This aspect remains unclear and deserves more investigation in all of the five countries. Traditional chiefs in the region are the representatives of their communities and mediate between them and the national authorities. At the local level, they also are key actors for the implementation of customary laws or reconciliation processes. Despite their crucial role in society, traditional chiefs do not have an official status that organises and protects their position.⁴⁵ In Mali, some of them involve themselves in local

⁴⁰ Moussa Djiré et al., “Assessing the EU’s Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Interventions in Mali”, in *WOSCAP Deliverables*, No. 3.3 (24 March 2017), <https://www.woscap.eu/documents/131298403/131299900/Mali+-+USJPB.pdf/Mali%20-%20USJPB/index.pdf>.

⁴¹ See, for instance, PROMAN website: *Projects: Technical Assistance to the Decentralisation within the framework of the “Support Programme for Administrative Reform and Decentralisation (PARAD)”*..., <http://proman.lu/project/technical-assistance-to-the-decentralisation-within-the-framework-of-the-support-programme-for-administrative-reform-and-decentralisation-parad-technical-assistance-to-the-support-programme-in-the-northern-region-of-mali-adere-nord>.

⁴² A list of the projects implemented in Mali is available here: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/presentation_projets_site_web.pdf.

⁴³ Moussa Djiré et al., “Assessing the EU’s Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Interventions in Mali”, cit., p. 48.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 53.

⁴⁵ Ibrahim Yahaya Ibrahim and Mollie Zapata, “Regions at Risk. Preventing Mass Atrocities in Mali”, in *Early Warning Country Reports*, April 2018, p. 30, <https://www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide/>

politics in order to secure their position. This “politicisation of chieftaincy” carries risks – in some cases, undermining their legitimacy.⁴⁶ Such a system deserves more attention, however, and should be connected to the decentralisation process. Traditional approaches – such as, for instance, the Diina system of governance established in the nineteenth century to manage the use of natural resources in Mali’s Inner Delta between communities of herders, farmers, and fishers⁴⁷ – can be very useful to local governance.

A key challenge in the rule-of-law framework is related to impartial judicial services and equal access to justice. However, the gulf between the “laboratory of experimentations”⁴⁸ and their actual capacity to improve judicial services remains as wide as ever. Additionally, the disconnection between technical capacity and expertise in local politics is significant – as is that between short-term actions and long-term plans. Tied to this factor, EU approaches sometimes fail to adapt to conditions on the ground, with local consequences regarding conflict sensitivity and good governance. Overall, EU interventions risk creating rigid and unsustainable bureaucracies that can slow down the establishment of good-governance principles.⁴⁹

A paramount test for the EU is represented by the relationship between security and good governance. As the World Bank governance indicators show (Figure 1), political stability and the absence of violence is the critical governance component in the Sahel. In particular, as discussed previously, the EU has been criticised for using the EUTF to control borders and halt migration.⁵⁰

The strong attention to border control and to fighting irregular migration has not been balanced by support from local populations, who depend on migration for their livelihoods – especially in Niger.⁵¹ This approach has created discontent at the local level and posed risks to efforts related to good governance, such as decentralisation or the strengthening of local authorities.

A “securitarian” approach creates significant constraints on regional movements, limiting labour opportunities, fuelling local conflicts and various kinds of trafficking, and threatening the future of the same EU regional programmes.⁵² The

cases/mali.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁸ Elisa Lopez Lucia, “Performing EU Agency by Experimenting the ‘Comprehensive Approach’...”, cit., p. 451.

⁴⁹ Andrew Lebovich, “Halting Ambition”, cit., p. 2.

⁵⁰ Bernardo Venturi (ed.), *The Security–Migration–Development Nexus Revised*, cit.

⁵¹ Luca Raineri and Alessandro Rossi, “The Security–Migration–Development Nexus in the Sahel: A Reality Check”, in Bernardo Venturi (ed.), *The Security–Migration–Development Nexus Revised: A Perspective from the Sahel*, Brussels/Rome, FEPS and IAI, December 2017, p. 21, <https://www.iai.it/en/node/8764>.

⁵² Ibid., p. 27-28.

fact that the largest proportion of migrants and refugees remains in the Sahel and western Africa⁵³ does not seem to inform the EU's analysis. Mobile societies call for mobile solutions to overcome mobile threats: mobility and operating modes and the expertise of nomads should be part of the strategy rather than being addressed only as a challenge. The Saharan area is connected, and the historical heritage of the trans-Saharan route should be preserved and encouraged despite its challenging nature.⁵⁴ Overall, securitisation seems to fuel bad governance instead of supporting reforms and healthy relations between citizens and political institutions.

The EU should not forget that it is acting on peace and security in the framework of foreign military interventions in the Sahel, and this dimension has an impact on how the Union's actions are perceived by the local population. Foreign military interventions encounter increasingly hostile popular dissatisfaction – mainly due to their ineffectiveness, short-term planning and lack of well-defined objectives. The G5 Sahel Joint Force does not even have a clear idea of what its enemy is in the Sahel, or which of the militias it opposes.⁵⁵ While the G5 was formerly fully committed to promoting democracy and good governance, the G5 Sahel Joint Force focuses extensively on military strategies – and this security approach fails to address the root causes of the issue.

Security measures are necessary, but to have any political impact they should be part of a long-term plan and not simply based on crisis response; otherwise, they risk being counterproductive. As Ibrahim Maïga and other prominent analysts⁵⁶ have pointed out, "This can only be done through a new social contract between communities and the state. Governments must restore their relevance by providing basic services adapted to the diversity of this region, which is populated by both nomads and pastoralists".⁵⁷

Overall, the EU has progressively included governance components in the CSDP missions, especially after 2015 and the Mali crisis. However, this recognition of the importance of governance reform to peace and stabilisation is still in its early stages. Meanwhile, the missions have been equipped with a strong security component. EUCAP Sahel Mali, for instance, supports the government's security-sector reform (SSR) – despite the fact that Mali has yet to undertake comprehensive SSR – by offering training to judicial police and in intelligence gathering and counterterrorism.⁵⁸ Interestingly, in August 2017 the EU launched a specific

⁵³ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (S/2017/563)*, 30 June 2017, p. 6, <https://undocs.org/S/2017/563>.

⁵⁴ Laurent Bossard, "Building Peace in the Sahel: A Regional Perspective", cit., p. 45.

⁵⁵ Mohammed Ahmed Gain, paper presented at the Carnegie conference on "Governance and Security in North Africa and the Sahel", Washington, 8 March 2018.

⁵⁶ International Crisis Group (ICG), "The Sahel: Promoting Political alongside Military Action", in *ICG Commentaries*, 31 January 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/node/5959>.

⁵⁷ Ibrahim Maïga, "The G5 Sahel Must Do More Than Fight Terror", in *ISS Today*, 5 July 2017, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/the-g5-sahel-must-do-more-than-fight-terror>.

⁵⁸ Andrew Lebovich, "Halting Ambition", cit.

programme aimed at supporting the Malian government to implement its Plan de Sécurisation Intégrée des Régions du Centre (PSIRC),⁵⁹ an initiative that also focused on governance reform in the region. The plan is based on a concrete analysis of local problems related to weak institutions but, once again, it is widely centred on security actions.⁶⁰

The second key component of governance includes human rights – a topic not without challenges for the EU in the Sahel. Human rights are prioritised in EU documents, but some national armies continue to commit violations – for instance, Malian troops and EUTM participants have both failed to avoid infringements.⁶¹ As assessed in Niger and Mali, “These deficiencies stem from the fact that the EUTM focused on questions of technical support and capacity building rather than real reform, governance, and strategic planning.”⁶²

Additionally, conditions of women in the Sahel had been deteriorating for decades even before the rise of violent extremist groups, and neither religious authorities nor secular state institutions have protected women sufficiently. In the Lake Chad region, women are directly targeted by Boko Haram, which uses them as negotiating chips.⁶³ The EU has some projects with specific attention to women,⁶⁴ but their level of ambition should be increased. As a cross-cutting issue, the Union applies gender sensitivity to different actions – for instance, supporting the recruitment of men and women for police training and recruitment. Yet, difficulties emerge in work on cultural, social or familial barriers,⁶⁵ and a broader approach lies well outside the scope of CSDP capabilities.

Finally, social and political activism and participation as a topic receives limited attention from the EU. It is included in some small-scale projects (especially in the IcSP framework), but is not connected to security concerns.

As a cross-cutting issue tied to governance, a lack of monitoring and evaluation characterises CSDP missions. Monitoring and evaluation forms an essential component not only in identifying how to improve the actions of such missions

⁵⁹ Council of the European Union, *Council Decision (CFSP) 2017/1425 of 4 August 2017 on a European Union Stabilisation Action in Mopti and Segou*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2017/1425/oj>.

⁶⁰ Andrew Lebovich, “Halting Ambition”, cit., p. 21.

⁶¹ On Malian troops, see: Amnesty International, *Report 2017/18: The State of the World’s Human Rights*, February 2018, p. 252, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/6700/2018/en>.

⁶² Andrew Lebovich, “Halting Ambition”, cit., p. 13.

⁶³ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Conference on “Governance and Security in North Africa and the Sahel”*, Washington, 8 March 2018, <https://www.ssrc.org/events/view/conference-on-governance-and-security-in-north-africa-and-the-sahel>.

⁶⁴ See, for instance, the European Commission website: *Socio-economic Integration Project for Youth and Women in the Sahel*, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/projects/socio-economic-integration-project-youth-and-women-sahel_en.

⁶⁵ Interview with RCC member, 11 January 2019.

but also in delivering good governance.⁶⁶

Climate change is another indicator spanning across different components. It is closely related to food security because drought or other large-scale natural disasters can cause multidimensional crises. Climate change itself does not automatically lead to conflicts, but if not addressed with a long-term outlook and good governance it can contribute to terrorism and to supporting recruitment efforts by violent extremists.⁶⁷ Furthermore, in Burkina Faso a study conducted by PRISE (Pathways to resilience in semi-arid economies) stated that a lack of access to water for irrigation was rated as a “very important” reason for migration by 98 per cent of persons interviewed, alongside poor/degraded soils at 90 per cent and drought and irregular rainfall at 85 and 83 per cent respectively.⁶⁸ Another major factor influencing decisions to emigrate was noted as being the lack of work opportunities in the villages (97 per cent) – for example, in agriculture. Regarding the lack of water for irrigation, in six villages (out of the eight villages surveyed) all the respondents said that this was a “very important” factor influencing departures, with poor and degraded soils “very important” for all the respondents in five villages (out of the eight).⁶⁹

Conclusion

The EU’s contribution to good governance in the Sahel emerges as multi-layered, but without a coherent long-term strategy. Brussels applies an integrated approach, and the Sahel is probably the region where its use is most evident. However, its application is at the experimental level and is significantly conditioned by short-term needs, such as curbing migration, that risk trumping reforms in local governance. The Alliance for the Sahel could provide a useful platform for the EU to interact with other international actors and to frame its short-term concerns in a long-term shared vision beyond the Union’s self-portrayal as “generously selfish”.⁷⁰

A paramount challenge remains the relationship between security and good governance. The EU has contributed to ushering the Sahel region into what might

⁶⁶ European Court of Auditors, “Strengthening the Capacity of the Internal Security Forces in Niger and Mali”, cit.

⁶⁷ Katharina Nett and Lukas Rüttinger, *Insurgency, Terrorism and Organised Crime in a Warming Climate. Analysing the Links Between Climate Change and Non-State Armed Groups*, Berlin, Adelphi, October 2016, <https://www.adelphi.de/en/node/50363>.

⁶⁸ Peter Newborne and Noël R. Gansaonré, *Agriculture, Water, Climate and Migration in Semi-arid Lands in Burkina Faso*, London, PRISE, November 2017, p. 25, <http://prise.odi.org/?p=2159>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Mark Leonard, “Shaping Europe’s Present and Future. An Interview with Federica Mogherini”, in *ECFR Commentaries*, 11 January 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_shaping_europes_present_and_future; EEAS, *Innovation in Development: The Future of EU International Cooperation*, Speech by HR/VP Mogherini at the public debate with Bill Gates in the European Parliament, Brussels, 17 October 2018, <https://europa.eu/!GB98bf>.

be considered the fourth phase of its recent history, the “securitisation era”, after playing a key role in the previous three (colonisation, post-colonialism and the era of development-cooperation partnerships).⁷¹ Within this framework, governance has been overwhelmed by security pragmatism – and the EU needs to get out of the corner into which it has boxed itself on this issue.

Partnering on governance also means avoiding imposing EU models that can jeopardise the situation on the ground, as in the case of decentralisation. The Sahel governments need to rule their territories and to involve local stakeholders and authorities in the process, but this can be done in different ways – for instance, ignoring or involving traditional chiefs in the region. Tied to this, impartial judicial services and equal access to justice could be considered priorities to support good governance in the G5 countries.

Overall, alternative strategies that leverage the resilience capacities of local communities in the region remain understudied and undervalued.⁷² Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General and Head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), adds that “the more we listen to local communities, the better we become at shaping targeted solutions and shaping partnerships, rather than imposing externally defined solutions”.⁷³

Recommendations

On the basis of the analysis conducted above on EU influence on governance in the Sahel, it is possible to set out some recommendations for the Union:

- *EU programmes should emphasise good governance.* The EU cannot achieve its long-term objectives on stability, security and migration without prioritising good governance in all its components – from inclusivity to social services, from access to justice to gender equality.
- *Avoid top-down approaches to governance.* Governance can be considered “good” if it incorporates local capabilities and good traditional practices. The EU should interact with these dynamics, avoiding proposing tout court its models of decentralisation or other policies.

⁷¹ Bernardo Venturi, “The EU and the Sahel: A Laboratory of Experimentation for the Security–Migration–Development Nexus”, in Bernardo Venturi (ed.), *The Security–Migration–Development Nexus Revised: A Perspective from the Sahel*, Brussels/Rome, FEPS and IAI, December 2017, p. 115, <https://www.iai.it/en/node/8764>.

⁷² International Peace Institute (IPI), *Investing in Peace and the Prevention of Violence in the Sahel-Sahara: Voices from Africa*, 28 September 2018, <https://www.ipinst.org/?p=20100>.

⁷³ Ibid.

- *Maintain security controls but ensure that they do not curtail people's freedom of movement.* Security is a governance component, and it should be harmonised with other components – from human rights to freedom of movement.
- *Support alternative strategies that leverage the resilience capacities of local communities.* Local groups in the region have capabilities that remain understudied and undervalued; they deserve more attention, from assessments to institution building.
- *Design long-term visions based on local ownership.* Short-term programming and emergency approaches should be avoided in order to build sustainable and locally grounded plans.
- *Encourage bottom-up reconciliation and local processes of mediation and dialogue.* The EU has improved its capacities on mediation and peacebuilding in the Sahel, and should support the full implementation of the Mali Peace Agreement as well as local and historical capabilities for reconciliation, mediation and dialogue.
- *Improve long-term planning and internal management of CSDP missions.* CSDP efficiency and effectiveness should be improved through regular monitoring and evaluation, the application of long-term vision and budgeting, and attention to local ownership and related sustainability.

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