

# OUT OF THE SECURITY DEADLOCK:

*By Bernardo Venturi and Nana Alassane Toure*

## CHALLENGES AND CHOICES IN THE SAHEL



FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN  
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# ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>AFISMA</b>	African-led International Support Mission to Mali
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>CBSD</b>	Capacity building in support of security and development
<b>CEN-SAD</b>	Community of Sahelo-Saharan States
<b>CMA</b>	Coordination of Azawad movements
<b>CNDDR</b>	National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
<b>CNI</b>	Commission for National Integration
<b>CNRSS</b>	National Commission for Security Sector Reform
<b>CSA</b>	Agreement Monitoring Committee
<b>CSDP</b>	Common Security and Defence Policy
<b>DDR</b>	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
<b>DEVCO</b>	Directorate General for Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid
<b>DDR</b>	Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>EEAS</b>	European External Action Service
<b>EPF</b>	European Peace Facility
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUGS</b>	EU Global Strategy
<b>EUSR</b>	EU Special Representative
<b>EUTM</b>	European Training Mission
<b>FDS</b>	Defence and Security Forces
<b>FEPS</b>	Foundation for European Progressive Studies
<b>GANE</b>	Non-state armed groups
<b>IAI</b>	Istituto Affari Internazionali
<b>ISSAT</b>	International Security Sector Advisory Team
<b>MINUSMA</b>	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
<b>NDI</b>	National Democratic Institute
<b>OCHA</b>	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>OECD DAC</b>	Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
<b>PSI</b>	Pan-Sahel Initiative
<b>RACC</b>	Regional Advisory and Coordinating Cell
<b>SSR</b>	Security Sector Reform
<b>UNHCR</b>	UN Refugee Agency
<b>UNODC</b>	UN Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>WAEMU</b>	West African Economic and Monetary Union



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
INTRODUCTION	9
1. SSR AND DDR IN BURKINA FASO, MALI AND NIGER	11
<i>1.1 Humanitarian and security crisis in the Sahel</i>	11
<i>1.2 SSR and DDR in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger</i>	12
2. THE ROLE OF THE EU AND OTHER MAIN INTERNATIONAL ACTORS	15
<i>2.1 The role of the EU in supporting SSR and DDR</i>	15
<i>2.2 The role of regional and other international actors on security</i>	22
3. CHALLENGES AND CHOICES	27
<i>3.1 SSR and DDR in the context of radicalisation</i>	27
<i>3.2 Role of non-state armed actors</i>	29
<i>3.3 SSR and stabilisation</i>	30
<i>3.4 SSR and militarisation</i>	30
<i>3.5 Inclusive and shared SSR</i>	32
RECOMMENDATIONS	33
REFERENCES	36

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research focuses on the governance of security sector reform (SSR) in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger and its links with other security processes. The report develops a comparative analysis of the security policies of the three countries, the impact on SSR in the European Union (EU), other European countries, regional organisations, and the United States, and, finally, considers the connections between SSR and stabilisation, SSR and militarisation, and the role of non-state armed actors.

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have put in place a number of security initiatives to deal with the current situation. In Burkina Faso and Niger there is no official SSR policy, in contrast to Mali. In Niger, the government has for some time resisted using the concept of reform, using instead the expression “governance of the security sector” in order to effect change. In Burkina Faso, the fall of President Compaoré has called the security sector into question. In spite of these differences in security initiatives, insecurity is rampant in all these regions of the Sahel to different degrees.

In these three countries, the SSR process has to be seen in the context of armed forces inherited from colonisation which are badly equipped to respond effectively to current security needs. Security is not only a military and technical issue. It has to systematically take into account all elements of society.

The lack of political will on the part of decision-makers to implement the various sub-regional and international commitments that they have signed and ratified with regard to the inclusion of all social strata in decision-making processes has also been identified as a major issue in the democratic governance of security embodied by SSR.

Overall, security uncertainties have reduced the mobility of populations and economic actors, which hinders economic exchanges and business potential. Moreover, the response of defence and security forces often leads to collateral damage which includes massive violations of the fundamental rights of the people they are supposed to protect. Structural measures to prevent such violations

should be a primary objective of SSR in order to avoid the serious risks of disrupting social cohesion and losing the confidence that is so crucial a condition for the success of SSR.

The EU has started to consider the Sahel as part of the EU's extended neighbourhood. Two dominant images highlight this analysis. First, EU officers in Bamako compared the EU's work on SSR in Mali to car break-down: the EU should move ahead, even if the tyre pressure warning or the oil pressure warning lights are on.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, although the EU takes an integrated approach in the region, despite all its declarations and good intentions it may find itself in a *securitarian tunnel*.

The EU has a solid legal framework, policies and strategies in support of SSR. This framework is the result of relatively recent reforms that addressed a number of gaps, such as strategic coordination, monitoring and risk assessment. The EU works widely on SSR in the Sahelian countries through its diplomatic network, three Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and the Regional Advisory and Coordinating Cell (RACC). SSR can be seen as the EU's main line of action in the region. In the EU's support for SSR in the Sahel local ownership does not significantly feature. Border control and curbing migration have gained space, at least on paper, and SSR risks being hampered by limited local ownership and a transforming political mandate. The emphasis on short-term results has pushed longer-term and structural objectives into the background.

In EU documentation, SSR is often presented through the lens of the development–security nexus. Indeed, the EU sets more value on this nexus than some other international actors and devotes significant resources to development. However, part of these resources is spent to support security actions, which creates a grey zone that attracts criticisms. Furthermore, the wide focus on terrorism and the regional approach can hamper other EU initiatives. Attention to transnational and “hard to catch” enemies offers more space for manoeuvre at the local level.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with EU staff, Bamako, November 2019.

Among African regional organisations, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) seems willing to invest and intervene directly in the region, as does the African Union (AU). Yet the AU's role in the Sahel is mainly a political mandate and not a substantial, operational one, though it's clear that that regional African organisations are willing to take the lead in peace and security development in the region. The G5 Sahel is recognised by many international powers for its ability to channel their resources and to partner with the Sahelian countries. It was opposed by Algeria from the very beginning and fails to include Nigeria, a key regional player. These two countries have a strong influence over Sahelian governments and their absence needs to be addressed.

Several EU member states are involved in security through multilateral or bilateral cooperation in the Sahel. Some support EU engagement in the region and offer bilateral cooperation with the Liptako-Gourma countries.

France is the European country that is most engaged in the Sahel and contributes to SSR through the EU's CSDP missions and other, bilateral activities. Opération Barkhane's counterterrorism mandate extends to the whole of the Sahel. The Operation is an ambitious and expensive military operation that France has conducted since the end of Algerian War, but few results have been achieved so far considering the scale of the operation. Paris is planning to scale up its presence with the new Coalition pour le Sahel, and this position appears to limit local ownership and the expectations of other international actors.

Italy's interest and engagement in the Sahel have been increasing since 2019. Rome is appreciated for not having a hidden agenda in its cooperation. Overall, it would seem that Italy is actively committed to the Sahel, but the skills and tools it has put in place are limited, and SSR remains marginal to its efforts. Focus on the multi-lateral dimension remains central and Italy will have to actively participate in common efforts, avoiding further multiplying its interventions without a path adequately

shared with local governments and coordinated with international partners.

Germany is heavily committed in the region through multilateral and bilateral relations and with significant and multi-layered support to SSR. Germany tries to combine some of its traditional cooperation related to peace-building, SSR and civilian instruments with more recent military support. Similarly, Denmark and Sweden, historically engaged in multilateral efforts, are increasing their military contributions. In summary, all the main European countries have been strengthening their military support in the region.

The United States provides training, support and intelligence-gathering capacity through the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative. Washington does not work on security sector reform and is reluctant to participate in peace and security efforts at the multilateral level. The Trump administration is considering curbing its involvement in the Sahel.

The approach of DDR (Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration) in relation to SSR varies according to the country. In Mali, the approach is embodied in the DDR programme, which is implemented in the northern and central regions of the country. Niger's reintegration programme, on the other hand, is focused mainly on ex-Boko Haram fighters. For DDR to succeed in a context of radicalisation, it's important to understand the many reasons that lead actors towards radical groups. Consequently, for DDR to be effective it must take into account the sometimes unique trajectories of the actors involved. Like SSR, DDR embraces complex and sensitive multidimensional processes that are carried out with various actors and stakeholders.

In the Liptako-Gourma region, the non-state armed groups (GANE), other than extremist groups, are mainly self-defence organisations present in Mali and Burkina Faso:<sup>2</sup> Dan Nan Ambassagou in Mali and Kolgweogo in Burkina Faso. These groups are accused of committing abuses among the communities. Moreover, a key problem in both

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2 In contrast to Burkina Faso and Mali, there is no self-defence group in Niger, to our knowledge.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

countries is the ambiguous role played by governments and their relationship with the groups. Overcoming these ambiguities is a crucial step in the SSR process.

The concept of stability includes the risk of being perceived by the local population as conservative. Overall, if the international community, in the name of stability, supports a full “return of the state” in control of all its territory, it should also wonder about what kind of state should return in order to avoid a situation with a more stable region, but full of other threats and troubles.

Militarisation raises many local concerns. First, and most significant, is the fact that military actions sometimes negatively impact on the civilian population. Second, where the situation worsens, local initiatives for peace and dialogue are marginalised and no longer able to carry out effective prevention work. Thirdly, the military presence of international forces is perceived by the opposition as support for the government in power, which can lead to the international force’s loss of credibility and obscure the reason for their presence. Fourth, France in particular openly uses its military presence to further its own interests, thus pushing certain communities towards supporting radical armed groups, or at least to tolerate them in silence.

Based on this analysis of SSR in the Sahel, we propose a number of recommendations for:

### ***The governments in the Sahel***

- ✘ Continue to implement SSR and related areas of state action.
- ✘ Combine SSR with strengthening public services.
- ✘ Strengthen the role of civil society in the overhaul of security reforms.
- ✘ Prioritise civil measures over military solutions.
- ✘ Include more women in the security sector.
- ✘ Respect the provisions of the peace agreement resulting from the Algiers process in Mali.
- ✘ Respect the fundamental rights of the civilian population.
- ✘ Manage the expectations of thousands of people through the national DDR process.
- ✘ Take into account the lot of former members of the armed groups declared unfit for integration.

### ***European Union***

- ✘ Continue to support comprehensive SSR.
- ✘ Focus on local ownership in all SSR actions and engage further with civil society at all levels.
- ✘ Improve monitoring and evaluation of SSR.
- ✘ Support military interventions as a last resort, and with a proportionate use of force.

### ***International community***

- ✘ Develop a broader and more detailed analysis of the situation in the Sahel.
- ✘ Fully adapt the SSR approach to the priority of human security.
- ✘ Prioritise civil measures.
- ✘ Gradually reduce military engagement.
- ✘ Ensure that military cooperation does not strengthen authoritarian or dictatorial regimes.
- ✘ Devote more attention to the role of ECOWAS and other regional and sub-regional organisations in the Sahel.
- ✘ Avoid a “no peace/no war setting in Mali”.



# INTRODUCTION

This publication is the result of the project “Out of the security deadlock: challenges and choices in the Sahel”, conducted by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) in Brussels and the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) in Rome, together with the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Washington, DC, with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and of the European Parliament.

This research focuses on the governance of security sector reform (SSR) in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger and on its interlinkages with other security processes. The research also takes stock of the actual involvement of local and non-governmental actors in SSR and how these actors operate transnationally in the Sahel. The national governments of the region, supported by international partners, are faced with complex challenges such as reintegrating former combatants – including former jihadists – but research in this specific area is still limited. The research also scrutinised the impact on SSR of the European Union (EU), other European countries, regional organisations, and the US. Finally, the project considers the connections between SSR and stabilisation, SSR and militarisation, and the role of non-state armed actors.

The analysis was guided by the following research questions:

- ❑ How to promote sustainable peace and security in the Sahel?
- ❑ How to implement an inclusive and shared SSR?
- ❑ What role should the EU and other international actors adopt as peace and security partners?

The research therefore seeks to contribute to “carry out an in-depth reflection on a new vision for national security, taking into account relevant local, regional, national and international factors” (Art. 25 of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, 2015).<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that, geographically, the Sahel region is usually defined as stretching from the Atlantic Ocean coasts of Mauritania and Senegal in the West to the Red Sea coast of Sudan and Eritrea in the East. This research focuses on the Sahel ‘core countries’, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, but also includes broader regional dynamics and their relations with neighbouring countries.

Over recent decades, the Sahel region has experienced a number of upheavals and crises: repeated periods of drought, forced displacement of populations due to climate change, epidemic outbreak and governance challenges. These upheavals have greatly affected the lives of populations throughout the region. In addition, the countries of the Sahel have insufficient operational and strategic capacities in terms of mastering security mapping and responding both internally and in border areas. As a result, attacks are increasing against the national and international armed forces and the civilian population.

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are part of the Liptako-Gourma region and borders along hundreds of kilometres. They are also part of different regional organisations, among others the Liptako-Gourma Authority (LGA), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the G5 Sahel, and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU).

This Liptako-Gourma region is also characterised by the presence of numerous groups, such as Mossis, Bissas, Peuls, Sonrhais, Berbers, Touaregs, Foulés and Kouroumbas in Burkina Faso; Tuaregs, Arabs, Fulani pastors, Sonrhais, black Tamasheqs (often called Bella), Dogons, Bambaras, Markas, Bozos-Somonos and Bwas in Mali; Sonrhais, Peuls, Touaregs, Zarmas, Gourmantchés and Mossis in Niger. These groups also have different economic patterns, according to their production systems: agriculture, livestock farming, fishing, crafts and trade. The relationships among these groups and production systems have become more conflictual in recent years, partly due to the difficulties of adapting to the scarcity of natural resources caused by climate change. On the other hand, the non-state armed groups, in particular extremist groups, exploit or fuel frustrations stemming from the challenges in accessing these resources.

This situation has placed the three countries in an unprecedented security crisis which is characterised by violent attacks, transnational organised crime, kidnapping of individuals, theft of livestock and other robberies, and the collapse of social and economic infrastructures. In Burkina Faso, ACLED data shows that in 2019 there was an impressive increase (650 per cent) in deadly conflicts compared with 2018.<sup>4</sup> As for Mali, in 2019 armed groups in central Mali were responsible for the highest number

3 The Government of Mali and several armed rebel groups signed the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers Process under the aegis of the international community between May and June 2015. For an English translation see: [https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/EN-ML\\_150620\\_Accord-pour-la-paix-et-la-reconciliation-au-Mali\\_Issu-du-Processus-d'Alger.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/EN-ML_150620_Accord-pour-la-paix-et-la-reconciliation-au-Mali_Issu-du-Processus-d'Alger.pdf).

4 Data are extrapolated from The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), <https://acleddata.com>.

of civilian deaths since Mali's political and military crisis erupted in 2012.<sup>5</sup> In Niger, according to ACLED, attacks began to intensify in 2018 and became more lethal during 2019. In response to the insecurity, the countries' governments have adopted numerous initiatives with the support of diversified regional and international partners. However, despite these efforts, the security situation in the Sahel, particularly in the Liptako-Gourma region, remains indubitably alarming.

The methodology adopted for this research is based on both a literature review and field research. The authors conducted 31 interviews in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger among academics, national and foreign security agents, activists, journalists, and diplomatic staff. Some interviews were conducted by phone or internet calls due to lack of access to geographical areas or insecurity. Furthermore, a consolidation workshop was organised in Bamako in November 2019 to present the preliminary research findings and gather feedback and comments from some 30 key regional stakeholders from research centres, NGOs, international organisations and state institutions.

In conclusion, we would like to thank Ulrike Rodgers (NDI Program Director, Francophone West Africa), Nicoletta Pirozzi (IAI Head of Programmes - EU Politics and Institutions), Vassilis Ntousas and Susanne Pfeil (FEPS), Elisabetta Farroni (IAI Programme Assistant), and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for their valuable insights and essential support.

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5 Human Rights Watch, "How Much More Blood Must Be Spilled?". Atrocities Against Civilians in Central Mali, 2019, February 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/node/338506>.

# 1. SSR AND DDR IN BURKINA FASO, MALI AND NIGER

## 1.1 Humanitarian and security crisis in the Sahel

The Sahel region faces enormous security challenges. The region has become a hotbed of instability, with increasingly deadly conflicts. From Mali to Burkina Faso, via Niger and as into Chad, the security context is characterised by the emergence of violent extremist groups, local conflicts and trafficking of all sorts. These overlapping phenomena have deeply affected communities as well as governments through the social, economic and health repercussions. In all, this has led to humanitarian situations without parallel. These countries are witnessing threats such as terrorist attacks against the civilian population, attacks against local leaders, national authorities, gender-based violence, difficulty in accessing health centres, schools, markets, places of worship, and so on.

According to ECOWAS policy for the reform and governance of the security sector drawn up in 2016, the term “security” is defined, on the one hand, as being centred on the survival of the state and the state’s protection against external and internal aggression by military means; on the other hand, it extends to non-military aspects of human security, founded on political, economic, social and environmental policies, as well as on human rights.<sup>6</sup> In Mali, the presentation of the Education cluster in March 2020 brought to light the following facts: 1,129 schools were closed, 338,700 children and 6,774 teachers affected, with a total closure rate of 12 per cent.<sup>7</sup> This deterioration in the humanitarian situation has given rise to food shortages in many of areas affected by the conflicts. One consequence is the large-scale departure of large groups of the population towards areas considered more stable.

The number of internally displaced people grew to more than 218,500 in February 2020.<sup>8</sup>

The humanitarian situation in Burkina Faso is characterised by the presence of armed groups, the kidnapping or assassination of alleged informers and state agents, the destruction of schools and threats to teaching staff. Inter-community clashes have led also to the displacement of peoples. In total, the number of displaced persons reached 238,000 in August 2019, according to figures from UN OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), with only 83,000 in February of the same year.<sup>9</sup> The country also welcomes 25,000 Malian refugees, mostly from the Sahel region. Other official figures from the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) cite 500,000 internally displaced peoples due to attacks from violent extremist groups and local conflicts. It is important to note however that these conflicts have led to the external displacement of 16,000 people towards neighbouring countries.<sup>10</sup> In 2018, 790 schools were closed in Burkina Faso and this figure has significantly increased in 2019, to 2,024.<sup>11</sup> According to UNHCR figures, in September 2019 there were more than 25,700 externally displaced people in Burkina Faso and 56,500 in Niger.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, children of women living in areas of mounting insecurity in Burkina Faso have increasingly limited access to basic social services and are thus increasingly exposed.<sup>13</sup>

In Niger, the humanitarian situation has suffered major crises: food insecurity, malnutrition, displacement of populations, and so on. According to OCHA data, on 27

6 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), *ECOWAS Policy Framework for Security Sector Reform and Governance*, 4 June 2016, p. 7, <https://www.ecowas.int/?p=28178>.

7 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX) website: *Mali Displacement - [IDPs, Returnees] - Baseline Assessment [IOM DTM]*, <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/mali-baseline-assessment-data-iom-dtm>.

8 Ibid.

9 UN OCHA, *Burkina Faso. Plan d'urgence*, February 2019, p. 3, <https://reliefweb.int/node/2997049>.

10 AFP, “En trois mois, plus de 260 000 personnes ont fui leur foyer au Burkina Faso”, in *Le Temps*, 11 October 2019, <https://www.letemps.ch/monde/trois-mois-plus-260-000-personnes-ont-fui-foyer-burkina-faso>.

11 UN OCHA, *Burkina Faso, Mali & Niger: Humanitarian Snapshot (As of 11 June 2019)*, <https://reliefweb.int/node/3165374>.

12 UNHCR Operational Portal: *Mali Situation*, September 2019, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/malisituation>.

13 UN OCHA website, A propos d'OCHA Burkina Faso, <https://www.unocha.org/node/953879>.

# SSR AND DDR IN BURKINA FASO, MALI AND NIGER

February 2020 Niger was experiencing continuous population displacements because of activity by non-state armed groups in the regions of Tillabéry and Tahoua in the west and Diffa to the south-east. At the same time, food insecurity and malnutrition affected millions of people across the country. In terms of response, the Niger government, ONU and other humanitarian partners jointly launched a humanitarian response plan for 2020 along with a government support package.<sup>14</sup>

In summary, in the frontier zone of Burkina Faso, from Mali to Niger, the humanitarian situation – attacks against the civilian population, closure of schools, health centres, displacement of persons – is without precedent. If effect, the number of internally displaced peoples quadrupled in one year, reaching 1.1 million, with more than 110,000 refugees. About 3.7 million faced food insecurity during the lean season, or an increase of 11 per cent compared with the previous year. More than 3,600 schools and 241 health centres are no longer operating.<sup>15</sup>

## 1.2 SSR and DDR in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger

The states of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have put in place various initiatives to address the insecurity deficit there. In Burkina Faso and Niger, there has been no official process of security reform, in contrast to Mali. In Niger, the government has for long resisted using the term “reform”, preferring the expression “governance of the security sector” in order to bring about change. In Burkina, the fall of President Compaoré led to reconsideration of the security sector.<sup>16</sup>

In spite of these different approaches, insecurity is prevalent throughout these regions of the Sahel, to different degrees. No one can claim to be safe. That is why, an SSR is needed relevant to the current realities and that meets the needs of men and women in the region.<sup>17</sup> In general terms, the SSR should be inclusive and embrace all elements of society (both civil and military).<sup>18</sup> In this interpretation, the security sector covers “a wide range of institutions, organisations, bodies, groups and other

actors, from state security institutions to commercial and non-state security organisations and even civil society organisations”.<sup>19</sup>

The objective of SSR is the democratic governance of security which is “the provision, management and control of security sector based on democratic principles and values for the benefit of the people. It requires separation of powers, a participatory and inclusive approach involving citizens through their legally and regularly chosen representatives in decision-making processes, management and control of State activities and functions in the Security Sector”.<sup>20</sup> Gender equality is also an essential component of SSR, because it is an integral part of the principles of good governance that SSR aims to establish.<sup>21</sup> Good governance is not always present in these countries; for example, the constitution of Mali does not effectively allow for a separation of powers.

<sup>14</sup> UN OCHA, *Displacement and Humanitarian Needs Rise in the Sahel*, 27 February 2020, <https://www.unocha.org/node/955383>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with a SSR specialist, November 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Veerle Triquet and Lorraine Serrano (eds), *Gender and the Security Sector. A Survey of the National Police, Civil Protection, the Armed and Security Forces, Justice System and Penal Services in Mali*, Geneva, DCAF, 2015, <https://www.dcaf.ch/node/12906>.

<sup>18</sup> With SSR, security initiatives involve the National Police, the Armed Forces of Mali (FAMA), the judicial sector including, among others, the Supreme Court, the Constitutional Court, the High Court of Justice, the Prison Administration, civil society organisations, the directorate responsible for the advancement of women, children and the family, the High Council for National Defence, the National Human Rights Commission, the National Committee against Violence Committed with Regard to Women, the Committee on National Defence, Security and Civil Protection.

<sup>19</sup> Zeiny Moulaye (2005) cited by Ambroise Dakouo, Nene Konate and Elise Dufief, *Paix, sécurité, stabilité et développement. Quelle gouvernance de la sécurité? Termes de référence – Séance 7, Forum multi-acteurs sur la gouvernance au Mali*, Dakar, Alliance pour Refonder la Gouvernance en Afrique (ARGA), September 2011, p. 2, [http://www.afrique-gouvernance.net/bdf\\_document-878\\_en.html](http://www.afrique-gouvernance.net/bdf_document-878_en.html).

<sup>20</sup> ECOWAS, *ECOWAS Policy Framework for Security Sector Reform and Governance*, cit., p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> Veerle Triquet and Lorraine Serrano (eds), *Gender and the Security Sector*, cit., p. 5.

DDR processes are multidimensional and cover a number of social, economic, political, military and financial objectives, which form part of the global strategy for peace and recovery. These social and economic objectives can include initiatives for rapid recovery and equitable and sustainable development.<sup>22</sup>

In Mali and Niger, as in Burkina, SSR and DRR are important dimensions of various initiatives to resolve conflict. They are also important for the international community and the various bilateral and multilateral partners who support these states in the design and implementation of these initiatives. It emerged from the interviews carried out for this research that the three countries are in a process of reforming their systems of security, disarmament and demobilisation in order to make them more relevant and inclusive. In the case of Niger, the authorities speak of a “transformation of the security sector” which has the same aims as SSR. A Nigerien interviewee told us: “In Niger, we have begun to speak of the concept of the governance of the security sector or SSR through awareness-raising, training and civil-military activities. We do not have a national policy of structured SSR programme. These activities have been initiated thanks to the G5 Sahel, which tried to fast-track the process at the country level. I think that the Nigerien government does not yet wish to elaborate an SSR programme with a complete vision of its activities. Otherwise, it is developing a national policy to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism.”<sup>23</sup>

In the case of Burkina Faso, one interviewee noted: “A national seminar was convened to initiate reflection on the SSR process. Then, an academic committee was set up to create a national policy. The Head of State asked for the support of the UN to draw up the policy. While the document was being drawn up, other security measures were put in place.”<sup>24</sup>

A Malian interviewee observed: “To implement an inclusive and participatory SSR, it will be important to include

all actors who have proven to be essential in the resolution of security issues in Mali, whether civilian or military.”<sup>25</sup>

In all three countries, the SSR processes are being developed in a context of armed forces inherited from the colonisation which are ill-suited to effectively meet current security needs. Security is not merely a military or technical issue. It has to take into account all elements of society through a systematic approach. In this sense, one interviewee emphasised that “the implementation of any SSR process must take into account both state security components and the people, in the framework of strict respect for human rights.”<sup>26</sup>

In the Sahelian context, DDR is closely linked to SSR. The two are interdependent, mutually reinforcing and should roll out in a coordinated manner. It is crucially important to develop an approach and strategies that reduce the risks linked to the involvement of non-state actors in the national armies. Along the same lines, the interviews highlighted that “For the DDR, there is no one size fits all solution. For example, in Niger, after a military attack, specific dispositions are made, including the construction of wells for the population, abattoirs for animals, the rehabilitation of markets and so on. In the centre of Mali, there are ethnicised self-defence groups who are fighting on behalf of ethnic groups. To all this can be added the phenomenon of climate change, which is the root cause of resource scarcity and the increasing tensions between sedentary and pastoral communities.”<sup>27</sup>

### ***Challenges linked to SSR in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger***

There are several levels of challenge in respect of SSR according to data collected in the three countries. Among other factors, a practical approach to the appropriation and implementation of SSR is missing. The lack of political will on the part of decision-makers in implementing the various sub-regional and international commitments that they have signed and ratified in regard to the inclusion of

22 Cornelis Steenken, *Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR): A Practical Overview*, Williamsburg, Peace Operations Training Institute, 2017, p. 10, <https://www.peaceopstraining.org/courses/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-ddr-practical-overview>.

23 Interview with a Nigerien expert, November 2019.

24 Interview with a participant in preliminary studies workshop, Bamako, December 2019.

25 Interview with a Malian journalist, November 2019.

26 Interview with a civil society actor, Burkina, November 2019.

27 Participant comments, Bamako workshop, December 2019.



## SSR AND DDR IN BURKINA FASO, MALI AND NIGER

all social levels in the process of decision making has also been identified as a major challenge in the democratic governance of security embodied by SSR. By way of example, there is only one woman in Mali's national DDR commission. It is also clear from interviews, that certain groups, especially women and young people, are marginalised and so have less influence over the SSR process which, however, claims to be inclusive.

As part of our research we have read and noted that women and young people have little capacity to make their views heard or accepted in regard to security matters and in all initiatives introduced for good governance. It's not just a question of involving marginalised demographic groups who make up a large part of the population of the three countries. It rather a question of considering them to be fully part of the security initiatives, because their involvement contributes to consolidating state security and human security. This is possible because on the one hand it meets the different needs of male and female victims of insecurity, perpetrators of violence and security sector personnel; and, on the other hand, it meets the different needs of boys and girls who are victims of insecurity or perpetrators of acts of violence.<sup>28</sup> As mentioned during one interview: "Young people and especially women are often categorised as belonging to an inferior class. The roles given them in our society generally go against their participation in the processes of decision-making. Their involvement in the life of the nation in general, in development initiatives in particular, is low-level and less effective even for peace and security issues [...]."<sup>29</sup>

Across the three countries, security challenges create major obstacles for development initiatives. So much so that one of the strongest arguments put forward in all the rebellions in Mali and Niger in addition to political demands was the lack of development, in particular insufficient access to basic social services (education, health, drinking water, infrastructure, etc.), as confirmed in an interview, in which the interviewee added: "the new form

of insecurity makes it very difficult to carry out major infrastructure projects, to take development actions or even to capitalise on and perpetuate the initiatives that have already taken place".<sup>30</sup> This creates a food crisis and a structural incapacity to support people's real needs. One consequence is migration towards other localities or other countries considered to be more stable, or to get involved in criminal economic activities.

Overall, security uncertainties have reduced the mobility of populations and economic actors, which hinders economic exchange and business potential. Moreover, the response of the defence and security forces often creates collateral damage which amount to widespread violations of the fundamental citizen rights that they are supposed to protect. Structural measures to prevent such violations should be a primary objective of SSR in order to avoid the serious risks of disrupting social cohesion and losing the confidence that is so crucial a condition of the success of SSR.

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28 Veerle Triquet and Lorraine Serrano (eds), *Gender and the Security Sector*, cit., p. 5.

29 Interview with a CAFO actor, Mali, November 2019.

30 Interview with a development agent, Burkina, November 2019.

## 2. THE ROLE OF THE EU AND OTHER MAIN INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

After taking stock of the current state of SSR in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, this section explores the specific role of the EU and other main regional and international actors. Firstly, the EU's approach to SSR is framed through analysis of the main official documents and practices. Against this backdrop, the role of the EU in supporting

SSR in the Sahel through its different institutions and bodies is considered. Beyond the EU, the actions of African regional organisations, individual EU member states and the United States are examined.

### 2.1 The role of the EU in supporting SSR and DDR

In political and strategic terms<sup>31</sup> – but not in budgetary sense<sup>32</sup> – the Sahel is generally considered as part of the EU's extended neighbourhood.<sup>33</sup> The Sahel will also continue to play a central role in the EU's foreign policy with the new EU Commission, nominated in 2019. This commitment is part of the Commission's larger endeavour to strengthen strategic relations with the African continent. For instance, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's first trip outside Europe was to Addis Ababa – a sign of the continent's importance for the EU.<sup>34</sup> The Commission also prioritised the launch of new EU–Africa paper “Toward a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa” published on 9 March 2020.<sup>35</sup>

Several EU civil servants and diplomats, both in Brussels and in the region, confirmed that the Sahel is a laboratory for the EU's integrated approach and that this “case study” will be reinforced by the new Sahel strategy, still in a draft version in April 2020 due to the COVID-19 emergency. In this framework, on 20 January 2020 at the Foreign Affairs Council, Josep Borrell, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, stated that “the Council decided that we would step up our strategic

cooperation with the Sahel countries. Clearly we have to do more [...]”<sup>36</sup>

Two dominant images highlight EU support for SSR in the Western Sahel. First, EU officers in Bamako compared the EU's work on SSR in Mali to a *broken-down car*: the EU should move ahead, even if the tyre pressure warning or the oil pressure warning lights are on.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, although the EU works with an integrated approach in the region, and despite all its declarations and good intentions, it may find itself in a *securitarian tunnel* due to overriding focus on security.

This section will consider these choices and compromises and analyse their significance and consequences.

#### *The EU's approach to SSR*

The EU has a solid legal framework, policies and strategies to support SSR. This framework is the result of relative recent reforms that addressed a number of gaps, such as strategic coordination, monitoring and risk assessment. The EU's key document is the Joint Communication enti-

31 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/ITr66qx>.

32 The Sahel and West Africa will continue to be considered as part of sub-Saharan Africa in the new Multiannual Financial Framework (2021–2027), the EU long-term ceiling budget.

33 As stated by the President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen, “During the last decade, Europeans learnt the importance of a stable neighbourhood. From Ukraine to the shores of the Mediterranean, from the Western Balkans to the Sahel.” European Commission, *Keynote Speech by President von der Leyen at the World Economic Forum*, Davos, 22 January 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH\\_20\\_102](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_102).

34 European Commission, *President von der Leyen in Addis Ababa for Her First Trip as President Outside the EU*, 6 December 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/luxembourg/node/6442>.

35 European Commission, *Toward a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa* (JOIN/2020/4), 9 March 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0004>.

36 Council of the EU, *Foreign Affairs Council*, 20 January 2020, <https://europa.eu/Inm66jM>.

37 Interview with EU staff, Bamako, November 2019.

# THE ROLE OF THE EU AND OTHER MAIN INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

tled Elements for an EU-wide Strategic Framework to Support Security Sector Reform,<sup>38</sup> adopted in July 2016 by the Commission and then endorsed by the European Council in November 2016.<sup>39</sup> Prior to 2016, SSR support was guided by two separate policy support documents, the first issued by the Council in November 2005 on common foreign and security policy (CFSP),<sup>40</sup> and the second by the Commission in May 2006,<sup>41</sup> the latter mainly focusing on development cooperation. The reform in 2016 was intended to address the gaps mentioned above and to adapt to the changing global environment. The new policy also includes a Joint Staff Working Document,<sup>42</sup> which encapsulates lessons drawn from past interventions over the last decade to facilitate the implementation process.

These EU policy documents define human security, good governance and local ownership as key principles. Among others, three elements are pivotal for the analysis on SSR in the Sahel: the assumption that “‘National ownership’ goes beyond a government’s acceptance of international actors’ interventions”,<sup>43</sup> the idea of a less state-focused and more people-centred approach, and, finally, the above-mentioned integrated approach.

Lack of ownership has emerged as a long-standing weakness in the SSR process. For instance, it has often considered ownership as a mechanical process and has failed to consider the full involvement of local stakeholders: “The EU has taken a technical approach towards SSR, a subject which is deeply political”.<sup>44</sup> The Joint Communication report links ownership and sustainability to the involvement of a wide range of state and non-state stakeholders. However, the implementation of a fully human-centred security approach remains incomplete to date. The EU’s integrated approach is a framework for ensuring coordination among European instruments

– diplomacy, crisis response, development and security policies – and better exchanges of information with other partners and donors (and especially with its member states) in order to avoid overlapping and duplication. The Sahel has emerged as a principal testing ground for this approach, as widely confirmed by analysts and EU institutions.

In terms of institutional actors, the European External Action Service (EEAS) is the key institution for the coordination of SSR, while the European Commission holds competence in SSR especially through the Directorate General for Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid (DEVCO). In the region, SSR is a core element of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, while EU delegations facilitate the exchange of information between the field and Brussels. They focus on political issues and on outreach to civil society. In addition, the EU Special Representative (EUSR) provides political guidance and advice to the Mission, adds visibility, coordination and information to the member states, and liaises with host governments and other international actors.

Overall, since 2016 the EU has made significant progress in overcoming three main obstacles to SSR support: inter-institutional coordination, limited flexibility of financial instruments and coordination of CSDP operations with EEAS and Commission programmes.<sup>45</sup> While “turf battles” between the Commission and the Council still occur, the EEAS has affirmed its lead in coordinating SSR efforts. On the ground, the delegations and, to a lesser extent, the EUSR, support coordination of policy implementation. Certain hurdles remain regarding the flexibility of financial instruments, but the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027 should offer more flexibility.<sup>46</sup>

38 European Commission, *Elements for an EU-wide Strategic Framework to Support Security Sector Reform*, (JOIN/2016/31), 5 July 2016, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016JC0031>.

39 Council of the EU, *Council Conclusions on EU-wide Strategic Framework to Support Security Sector Reform (SSR)*, 14 November 2016, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/24227/ssr-st13998em16.pdf>.

40 Council of the EU, *EU Concept for ESDP Support to Security Sector Reform (SSR)*, 13 October 2005, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12566-2005-REV-4/en/pdf>.

41 European Commission, *A Concept for European Community Support for Security Sector Reform* (COM/2006/253), 24 May 2006, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52006DC0253>.

42 European Commission, *Lessons Drawn from Past Interventions and Stakeholders’ Views* (SWD/2016/221), 5 July 2016, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016SC0221>.

43 European Commission, *Elements for an EU-wide Strategic Framework to Support Security Sector Reform*, cit., p. 7.

44 European Commission, *Lessons Drawn from Past Interventions and Stakeholders’ Views*, cit., p. 12.

45 Eva Gross, *Assessing the EU’s Approach to Security Sector Reform (SSR)*, Brussels, European Parliament, January 2013, <https://doi.org/10.2861/29913>.

46 For instance, flexibility could be possible through a contingency reserve to use unallocated margins, to reallocate resources between different priorities and budgetary years.

Challenges remain related to the implementation of four “action points” embedded in the Joint Communication. The first is the SSR Task Force within the EU institutions. The Task Force was created in 2019; in the coming months, it will be possible to assess its implementation and coordination efforts in the Sahel. The second action point is the coordination matrix, a tool supported by the EEAS to coordinate different actors in the field via the EU delegation, which is designed to “enable them [EU actors] to identify appropriate links and sequencing between political dialogue, cooperation activities/instruments and possible CSDP missions/operations”.<sup>47</sup> An internal evaluation of EU work to be conducted in Mali in 2020 will be non-binding. Nonetheless, it should contribute to implementing each action point within a strategic framework. Some limitations, however, could impede progress: firstly, there is no structured procedure for the evaluation. Secondly, the evaluation in Mali will be an internal exercise with member states only (in other evaluations UN agencies are occasionally involved), and it excludes local stakeholders who should be leading players in the assessment.<sup>48</sup>

A third action point is a vague “risk management methodology” adopted at the end of 2019 exclusively for military actions or capacity building in support of security and development (CBSD) strictly related to military operations, such as the safeguarding of military installations (airports and field hospitals).<sup>49</sup> At EEAS, the current challenge is to extend this to all EU actions on security and the plan is to complete this process in the first half of 2020.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, the EEAS is tasked with preparing, monitoring and evaluating guidelines for SSR.<sup>51</sup> The questionable current implementation plan in Brussels is to “put aside

monitoring” and to create the same set of questions for all contexts. More than an evaluation, it will take the form of a “strategic review”, but with “evaluation criteria and questions”.<sup>52</sup> The review will assess relevance (related to internal procedures and policies), but will not scrutinise effectiveness. It will, therefore, verify whether policies are in place, and not whether they are implemented. This choice represents a significant limitation to the exercise. This type of assessment will be complemented by an external evaluation. However, it appears that this approach is a significant step back from what was designed in the Joint Communication. There is an overwhelming need for the EU’s work in the Sahel to be monitored and evaluated, in particular in respect of its military components, as discussed in the next section.

### ***The EU’s support of SSR in the Sahel***

The EU works widely on SSR in the Liptako-Gourma countries through its diplomatic network, three CSDP Missions and the Regional Advisory and Coordinating Cell (RACC) operating from Mauritania.<sup>53</sup> SSR is the EU’s main line of action in the region within the broader context of its integrated approach.

The EU Global Strategy (EUGS) refers to the Sahel with a strong emphasis on regional cooperation and support for regional partners (AU, ECOWAS, G5).<sup>54</sup> Most remarkably, in its yearly revisions, there is an emphasis on the Sahel as a showcase of the integrated approach.<sup>55</sup> However, the implementation is at an experimental stage and significantly conditioned by short-term needs.

Essentially, the EU’s integrated approach in the region is based on the idea that security, development and govern-

47 European Commission, *Elements for an EU-wide Strategic Framework to Support Security Sector Reform*, cit., p. 9.

48 Interview with EU staff, Brussels, October 2019.

49 “The EEAS/Commission services will prepare a dedicated risk management methodology for EU support. This will include mitigating measures drawing inter alia on the ‘risk management framework mechanism for budget support operations’”. European Commission, *Elements for an EU-wide Strategic Framework to Support Security Sector Reform*, cit., p. 12.

50 Interview with EU staff, Brussels, October 2019.

51 European Commission, *Elements for an EU-wide Strategic Framework to Support Security Sector Reform*, cit., p. 11.

52 Interview with EU staff, Brussels, October 2019.

53 While a separate entity, RACC is administratively part of EUCAP Sahel. At least a staff member of RACC is deployed in the EU delegation in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger.

54 EEAS, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*, cit., p. 35.

55 The Revision states that “best exemplifying the Integrated Approach in these years has been the Sahel. Here, our political/diplomatic, security, development, migration and humanitarian policies, instruments and initiatives have worked together and alongside all those international, state and non-state actors with a stake in sustainable peace in the region. In the Sahel, the EU deploys multiple development instruments, humanitarian aid, as well as military and civil CSDP missions. On the ground, these programs and actors serve the common objective of the Integrated Approach. The Sahel is an important test case to further build on and learn from. Looking ahead, it can become the norm in the way in which we address the crisis plaguing our surrounding regions, near and far.” EEAS, *The European Union’s Global Strategy. Three Years On, Looking Forward*, June 2019, p. 25, <https://europa.eu/1bF86jJ>.

# THE ROLE OF THE EU AND OTHER MAIN INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

ance are interconnected. The EU Strategy for the Sahel (2011), the Sahel Regional Action Plan (RAP) 2015–2020 – approved by the Union’s Foreign Affairs Council in April 2015<sup>56</sup> and updated at the beginning of June 2016<sup>57</sup> – constitutes the main regional strategy and highlights four key priorities: (1) preventing and countering radicalisation; (2) creating appropriate conditions for youth; (3) migration and mobility; and (4) improving border management and the fight against illicit trafficking and transnational organised crime. Therefore, the EU’s Sahel strategy focuses on four areas: development, security, political and military activity.

In terms of institutional actors, EU delegations in the Sahel operate in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad. Staffed with mid-level leadership, these delegations act as liaison offices between Brussels, CSDP missions and external local and international actors. Yet, compared with the importance conferred to the region in the policy documents, the leadership level of the EU delegations appears “variable”. Additionally, the delegations avoid exerting political pressure in order not to lose a privileged position with local governments:<sup>58</sup> usually, the delegations prefer to leave public political criticism to the embassies of the member states.<sup>59</sup>

The EUSR Ángel Losada Fernandez, with his long diplomatic experience, plays an important part in reaching out to governments in the region and leading EU action, with particular attention to the Malian peace process, where the EU is a member of the International Mediation Team supporting implementation.

The three CSDP missions in the region have changed across the years; in 2015 they adapted to the EU’s new

priorities:<sup>60</sup> while SSR remains at the heart of their work, these changes can be considered to be a turning point, both operationally and politically. EUCAP Sahel Niger, launched in 2012, provides advice and training to Nigerien security institutions to strengthen their capacities. In 2013, Brussels launched the first military mission in the region, the Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali). In 2015, a second civilian mission, EUCAP Sahel Mali, was established.

In the summer of 2015, the mandate of the missions changed significantly mainly due to what is commonly referred to as the “migration crisis”. The Sahel Regional Action Plan opened a new phase for EUCAP Sahel missions by introducing the objectives of strengthening the internal security forces’ capacity to fight against terrorism and organised crime and supporting the Malian and Nigerian governments in managing migration flows and border security. 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”.<sup>61</sup>

As a consequence, EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUCAP Sahel Mali became part of the overall plan of the EU Migration Partnership Framework in 2016. The Mission’s staff received a clear message to focus on short-term activities and to put aside long-term state reforms. There is a considerable risk that these new EU priorities, clearly in line with the EU’s and its member states’ interests, are far from the objectives related to SSR that the EU has defined for the region.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, EUTM clearly does not have capabilities in migration management and the two EUCAP missions are not focused on this area<sup>63</sup> (“we don’t talk too much about migration now”)<sup>64</sup>. The revised pri-

56 Council of the EU, *EU Sahel Strategy Regional Action Plan 2015-2020*, annex to the Council Conclusions on the Sahel Regional Action Plan 2015-2020, 20 April 2015, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21522/sto7823-en15.pdf>.

57 Of the EU, *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>.

58 Interview with EU staff, Bamako, November 2019.

59 Interview with a Malian researcher, Bamako, November 2019.

60 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>.

61 Ibid., p. 3.

62 Tobias Pietz and Judith Vorrath, “CSDP Compact: Reinventing EU Civilian Crisis Management?”, in *SWP Point of View*, 19 December 2018, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/point-of-view/2018/csdp-compact-reinventing-eu-civilian-crisis-management>.

63 Interview with EU staff, Bamako, November 2019.

64 Interview with EU staff, Rome, February 2020.



ority of the Civilian Compact can only push the missions further in this direction.<sup>65</sup>

Against this backdrop, it is useful to examine the EU's approach to SSR compared with the principles of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) in this domain:<sup>66</sup> *ownership*, the fundamental approach; *effectiveness and accountability*, the core objectives; and the three essential dynamics, namely *holistic, political and technical*.

Ownership is present, but not thoroughly documented in EU policy papers. In the 2015 Council Conclusions on the Sahel Regional Action Plan 2015-2020 it is mentioned only once, at the beginning of the document: "The implementation of the Action Plan will be carried out with the full ownership and under the primary responsibility of the countries concerned, and in coordination with key international and regional organisations and other partners".<sup>67</sup> In the two annual reports on the Action Plan, ownership is not directly considered, but it appears as a cross-cutting topic in some political lines of actions. In practical terms, the CSDP mission mandates are non-executive – meaning they are not authorised to conduct governmental or executive tasks in support of a government – and this status provides a basic condition for local ownership. Yet, according to some authors, it often seems unclear what *local* means (national/regional/African and governmental/non-governmental).<sup>68</sup> Additionally, there is an information gap concerning SSR and other EU actions in the region and this deficit risks being counterproductive in terms

of local ownership.<sup>69</sup> Finally, the lack of an exit strategy (i.e., EUTM handover on training) could be interpreted as a deficiency in developing ownership. This deficiency is partially balanced by the regionalisation of training that could support a handover to the G5 Sahel.<sup>70</sup>

In terms of effectiveness and accountability, local governments often struggle to provide effective security and justice services to the population. The EU works on both technical and political levels to support these areas. Yet lack of long-term planning and strategy remains a significant challenge and risks hampering other activities in the security sector. The first annual report on the Sahel Regional Action Plan highlighted this risk, along with three other shortcomings: insufficient institutional capacity within the EU institutions; lack of anchoring SSR-related actions into the wider governance and state-building framework; and, again, attention to the needs of the local population. EU commitments in the Sahel show an improved capacity for EU institutions to tackle SSR, but limited progress in both integrating this capacity into a wider governance and state-building framework and in basing their actions on the needs of the local population. The effectiveness and accountability of the EU's SSR work in the Sahel are also constrained by limited monitoring and evaluation, despite the strong emphasis on this component in the Joint Communication.<sup>71</sup> The implementation of the policy is moving slowly and the measures in the pipelines appear too limited. Monitoring and evaluation of SSR is weak or not in place. In particular, the level of oversight of military training is low.

65 "Those linked to irregular migration, hybrid threats, cyber security, terrorism and radicalisation, organised crime, border management and maritime security, as well as preventing and countering violent extremism, also taking into account the need to preserve and protect cultural heritage". Council of the EU, *Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, Meeting within the Council, on the Establishment of a Civilian CSDP Compact*, 19 November 2018, p. 4, <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14305-2018-INIT/en/pdf>.

66 According to the OECD, "Security sector reform" means "the transformation of the 'security system' – which includes all the actors, their roles, responsibilities and actions – working together to manage and operate the system in a manner that is more consistent with democratic norms and sound principles of good governance, and thus contributes to a well-functioning security framework." See OECD DAC, *Security System Reform and Governance*, Paris, OECD, 2005, p. 20, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264007888-en>. See also OECD DAC, *The OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform (SSR)*. Supporting Security and Justice, Paris, OECD, 2007, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264027862-en>.

67 Conseil de l'UE, *Conclusions du Conseil sur le plan d'action régional en faveur du Sahel pour la période 2015-2020*, 20 avril 2015, point 3, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/press/press-releases/2015/04/20/council-conclusions-sahel-regional-plan>.

68 Rabea Heinemann, "The European Union's Crisis Response in the Extended Neighbourhood. The EU's Output Effectiveness in the Case of Mali", in *EUNPACK Papers*, 21 August 2017, <http://www.eunpack.eu/node/113>.

69 Abdoul Wahab Cissé et al., "Perceptions about the EU Crisis Response in Mali. A Summary of Perception Studies", in *EUNPACK Policy Briefs*, September 2017, <http://www.eunpack.eu/node/88>.

70 Ingo Peters et al., "Lessons to be learned from the EU Crisis Response in the Extended Neighbourhood: EU Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali", in *EUNPACK Papers*, 29 October 2018, <http://www.eunpack.eu/node/121>.

71 European Commission, *Elements for an EU-wide Strategic Framework to Support Security Sector Reform*, cit.

# THE ROLE OF THE EU AND OTHER MAIN INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

Finally, the political and technical dynamics are approached differently by the EU in the region. The holistic dimension is addressed by the integrated approach, yet with predominant attention to security efforts and only limited political attention to other instruments and their complementarity. The political dynamics are considered by the Delegations and by the EUSR. However, the political dimension appears a residual resource and not a priority, even if there are different opinions about it. For instance, in Mali, the EU's work in the political sphere is perceived as either limited (because of the fear of losing its privileged position compared with other international actors in the region),<sup>72</sup> or as present but oriented towards the long-term objective of constitutional reform.<sup>73</sup> At the policy-making level, EUCAP Sahel staff is embedded in the government's offices at ministerial levels in Mali, while EUTM is not. This presence to support and advise Malian officers will be subject to evaluation and will possibly be increased in the future.<sup>74</sup>

The technical dynamics related to SSR are broadly addressed by EU institutions, and in particular by CSDP missions. For instance, EUTM Mali's work provides valuable support in military training for local police and the army, but they do not monitor the performance of units that have been trained,<sup>75</sup> nor do they have a system in place to evaluate their own work.<sup>76</sup> It is worth noting that EUTM is a non-executive mission, and so is not responsible for the deployment and assignment of troops after training. Furthermore, the EU should develop a monitoring system to track the effectiveness of its work and its impact. The low level of oversight of military training remains a significant limitation and can affect the overall work of the mission. For instance, human rights violations committed by the Mali army and reported by MINUSMA were attributed to soldiers trained and equipped by EUTM, but this was not mentioned in the reports.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, EUTM provides

only quantitative information (e.g., 13,000 Malian military trained<sup>78</sup>) but does not publish regular, detailed reports.

Overall, the four key priorities of the Sahel Regional Action Plan mentioned above and their implementation are overtly based on EU interests. Local ownership is a minor consideration. Border control and the curbing of migration have gained space, at least on paper, but SSR is likely to remain hampered by limited local ownership and a changing political mandate. The emphasis on short-term results has pushed longer-term and structural objectives into the background. It should be noted that typically the EU takes both short- and long-term perspectives in a complex array of policy areas. Yet political priorities matter and to reorient them risks affecting the results.

Having examined the EU's approach to SSR measured against OECD DAC principles, there are some additional critical issues affecting the EU's work on SSR in the Sahel.

Firstly, a common perception among EU personnel is that some national authorities are not supportive of EU-assisted SSR, as many EU interviewees confirmed in Mali. The government in Bamako seemed to support the EU's policies during the first phase of negotiations, but its attitude changed during the implementation phase. For example, EUCAP Sahel Mali has been promoting a common database for the Malian army's human resources over the last couple of years. Yet, decision-makers in Bamako seem far from interested in having an integrated system.<sup>79</sup> This choice is perhaps due to the fact that the current asset leaves more space of manoeuvre to the Malian authorities, but there seems to be a lack of understanding among EU officials in Bamako of the reasons behind the Malian lack of enthusiasm. At EU headquarters in Brussels, as well as in other capitals, there is a tendency to explain all these dynamics with poor governance

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72 Interview with EU staff, Bamako, November 2019.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 Interview with an international NGO officer, Brussels, October 2019.

78 EUTM, *Press Kit: European Union Training Mission Mali (EUTM Mali)*, 6 January 2019, <http://www.eutmmali.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/190106-PressKit-vEn-website-approved-version.pdf>.

79 Interview with EU staff, Bamako, November 2019.

and corruption. Instead, a deeper understanding of the multi-layered galaxy of groups and security providers in Mali, their relations with each other and with national authorities, could help the EU to achieve more frank discussions and negotiations with national authorities.

The lack of in-depth understanding may be reinforced by the fact that the EU's top-down conflict analysis is not fully taking into consideration perceptions of (in)security of local populations. Consequently, the security needs and concerns of citizens are often missing in the EU's approach to security.<sup>80</sup>

A deeper understanding by the EU of Malian domestic power and conflict dynamics could also contribute to resolving some concrete problems related to funding. Evidently, there is an issue about funding Sahelian governments, as stated by an EU officer in Bamako: "50 per cent of the EU money for security evaporates";<sup>81</sup> echoed by another high-ranking EU official: "It is difficult to control money due to poor governance".<sup>82</sup> Evidently, this lack of accountability, especially in the security sector, could embarrass the EU. In addition, Brussels also opted for budget support to the Malian government and accountability should be a paramount part of this process. It seems that Josep Borrell, the current High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP), could channel financial support to the security sector through other ways to the G5 Joint Forces, for example through the European Peace Facility (EPF). Yet, some dynamics related to accountability risk remain critical.

In EU policy, SSR is often presented through the lens of the development-security nexus. And indeed, the EU is one of the international actors that pay more attention to this linkage and devote significant resources to development. However, part of the development resources is spent to support security actions, for instance infrastructure for security forces.<sup>83</sup> This practice creates a grey zone that attracts criticisms, also because political

attention is almost all devoted to security. In addition, not all costs of military components are fully transparent. For instance, secondments from EU member states are not reported and hard to fully track in the overall cost of EUTM missions.

Furthermore, the wide focus on terrorism and regional approach can hamper other EU efforts. Attention to transnational and "hard to catch" enemies offers more space for manoeuvre at the local level. Malian and Nigerien authorities, for example, can gain from the international focus on transnational terrorism (but also on irregular migration) because it directs donors' attention to the security sector and away from national governance.

Looking to the future, the EU is going to work in the Sahel through new strategic frameworks. In early March 2020, Brussels adopted a new paper, "Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa". This document constitutes the backdrop for internal reflections on EU interests in Africa, and with member states. The final EU–Africa Strategy will be approved with African partners at the end of October 2020 during the EU–AU Summit in Brussels. The proposed document appears more programmatic than strategic and it looks like a work plan. Moreover, in 2020, the new Sahel Strategy and Regional Action Plan could bring some changes on the ground. For instance, in early 2020, the EU also considered expanding EUTM Mali to Burkina Faso due to the deterioration of security in the country.<sup>84</sup> In any case, the EU contribution should be coordinated and harmonised with the *Coalition pour le Sahel* launched at the Summit in Pau (France) on 13 January 2020. France will coordinate this umbrella-platform, which may represent certain risks in terms of local ownership and diverging visions among EU members.<sup>85</sup> Moving back to the two dominant above-mentioned analogies, the EU could drive a broken-down car for a long time without fixing the main problems. Then, the new can push more the international community into the securitarian tunnel.

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80 Interview with an international NGO officer, Brussels, October 2019; interview with EU staff, Bamako, November 2019.

81 Interview with EU staff, Bamako, November 2019.

82 Interview with EU staff, Rome, February 2020.

83 Interview with EU staff, Bamako, November 2019.

84 Brooks Tigner, "EU Preparing to Expand Training to Burkina Faso as Security Deteriorates", in *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 24 January 2020.

85 French military chief General François Lecointre already criticised the EU for refusing to accompany Malian troops in the field. See Andrew Lebovich, "Insecurity in the Sahel: Europe's Next Fight against Jihadism", in *ECFR Commentaries*, 5 February 2020, [https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_insecurity\\_in\\_the\\_sahel\\_europes\\_next\\_fight\\_against\\_jihadism](https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_insecurity_in_the_sahel_europes_next_fight_against_jihadism).

## 2.2 The role of regional and other international actors on security

The EU is part of a crowded group of foreign powers active in the region. In recent years, foreign troops face growing discontent and protest in the region and the increased level of violence fuels hostile public criticism. “More coordination” is often a mantra of international analysts, but the core of the problem is the effectiveness of these military interventions. The question, therefore, is whether or not the Sahelian states benefit from the engagement of international powers, especially if these pursue their own agendas. For example, Italy and Germany are mainly focused on migration; the US on fighting terrorist groups; France defends its overall strategic and economic interests in the region. Are these actors supporting locally driven and sustainable SSR? Similarly, the role of regional organisations, namely the African Union and ECOWAS, deserves more attention.

This section analyses African regional organisations such as the AU and ECOWAS, followed by the EU’s principal member states involved in the region. A third section will look at the United States. The overall impression emerging from these missions is that they are too focused on counterterrorism and transnational threats. Human security is left to national government forces alone, or simply ignored.<sup>86</sup> This approach to security can be described in three concentric circles: the inner circles – largest cities and safe areas – are dominated by foreign troops; the middle ring – peripheries with some risks, are left to national forces; finally, the external circle is abandoned and often left to local self-defence groups. The international community does not seem to include human security in its strategy that takes into account the complex dimensions of insecurity, which can hamper overall SSR.

To the abovementioned actors should be added that the UN primarily supports the Malian SSR through its United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) peacekeeping force, which was estab-

lished in 2013. It is the UN mission with the highest casualty rate globally. MINUSMA has made little progress in ensuring the safe implementation of the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Accord for Mali. Local populations increasingly regard MINUSMA as failing to achieve its mandate to protect civilians and stabilise the country. In mid-2020, the 11,620 troops of the Mission are going to be strengthened by a 250-strong British unit to support long-range reconnaissance patrols of up to 30 days deep into jihadist territory.<sup>87</sup> Yet, it would be naive to assume that this contribution alone could represent a game-changer.

### *African regional organisations*

While the AU plays an important political and diplomatic role in the region, ECOWAS was instrumental in launching the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) during the Mali civil war (then transformed into MINUSMA with UN support). Today, ECOWAS seems willing to invest and intervene directly in the region, also *manu militari*. During the ECOWAS Summit in September 2019 in Ouagadougou, West African leaders (joined by Mauritania and Chad) announced a one billion dollar plan for security in the Sahel (2020–2024).<sup>88</sup> This decision, which is not clear in operational terms, appears as an attempt to reclaim African ownership of peace and security, based also on the concern that the crisis could spread further across West Africa.<sup>89</sup>

A similar decision was taken by the AU’s Peace and Security Commission in early 2020 announcing the temporary deployment of a 3,000-strong force. The idea is to work “together with the G5 Sahel and ECOWAS”,<sup>90</sup> but the relation among these regional organisations is not clear yet. In general, the AU supports the regional security efforts through the AU Nouakchott Process, which involves countries of the Sahelo-Saharan region and Coastal West Africa. It aims to enhance cooperation and

86 Peter Dörrie, “Europe Has Spent Years Trying to Prevent ‘Chaos’ in the Sahel. It Failed”, in *World Politics Review*, 25 June 2019, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/27977>.

87 Adrian Blomfield, “Battle for the Sahel: The New Frontline in the War on Terror”, in *The Telegraph*, 1 March 2020, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/03/01/battle-sahel-new-frontline-war-terror>.

88 ECOWAS, *ECOWAS Leaders Commit to Eradicate Terrorism in the Region*, 14 September 2019, <https://www.ecowas.int/?p=35650>.

89 International Crisis Group, “The Risk of Jihadist Contagion in West Africa”, in *ICG Africa Briefings*, No. 149, 20 December 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/node/12775>.

90 “African Union deploy 3,000 troops in restive Sahel region”, in *Al Jazeera*, 27 February 2020, <https://aje.io/7d4yx>.



coordination among various security stakeholders.<sup>91</sup> The AU Nouakchott Process was launched in 2013, one year before the AU Strategy for the Sahel Region. In this framework, the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL) and the AU efforts overall have achieved limited results.<sup>92</sup> The G5 Sahel was established after the plan of an AU force to combat terrorism in the region was cancelled, and as an easier and faster partner for international countries and the EU.

The G5 Sahel has had the formal support of the AU since July 2017 (and approved by UN Security Council Resolution 2359), a condition *sine qua non* also for EU support. The African Union Peace and Security Council decided that the G5 Sahel would assist MINUSMA to stabilise Mali and fulfil its mandate in collaboration with the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) in the Sahel and Sahara region.<sup>93</sup> The support of the AU in the Sahel is, therefore, mainly a political mandate and not a substantial, operational one. The G5 Sahel has been capable of attracting several donors worldwide (e.g., Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Rwanda). However, it has not integrated other African countries. For instance, besides the contrary position of Algeria, the G5 Sahel countries have also denied Senegal's repeated requests for inclusion.<sup>94</sup>

At sub-regional level, in 2017, Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali added to the mandate of the Liptako-Gourma Authority (formed in 1970) security in the border region and consolidated its focus on human security and development. The Accra Initiative, another sub-regional security arrangement was also launched in 2017 by Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo in response to growing insecurity linked to violent extremism in this part of the region. Mali and Niger were given observer status in 2019. The Initiative includes information and intelligence sharing, training of security and intelligence personnel

and conducting joint cross-border military operations to sustain border security. It is mainly military-oriented, but includes other elements, such as root cause analysis of violent extremism and building community resilience.<sup>95</sup> The members of both sub-regional initiatives are all also ECOWAS members that could better leverage their membership in the organisation.

It appears clearly that regional African organisations are willing to take the lead in peace and security development in the region. The G5 Sahel is appreciated by many international powers for the facility to channel their resources and to partner with the Sahelian countries. The G5 Sahel has been opposed by Algeria from the very beginning and leaves out a key regional leader such as Nigeria. These countries have a strong influence over Sahelian governments and their absence needs to be addressed.

### **Main EU member states**

Several EU member states are involved in security through multilateral or bilateral cooperation in the Sahel. Some combine support to the EU engagement in the region with bilateral cooperation with the Liptako-Gourma countries. In this section, we analyse the main relevant contributors and their approaches.

France is more engaged than any other European country in the Sahel, as discussed in different sections of this work. France contributes to SSR through the EU's CSDP Missions and other, bilateral activities. Opération Barkhane's counterterrorism mandate extends to the whole of the Sahel. Operation Barkhane was launched in August 2014 as the evolution of Operation Serval started in January 2013. The Operation has escalated significantly: at the beginning, it was composed by approximately 3,000 troops, while in April 2020 is composed by 5,100 militaries supported by, among other, 21 helicopters and

91 UNODC, *Conclusions and Recommendations of the Expert Meeting on the Operationalization of the G5 Sahel Security Cooperation Platform (PCMS)*, Nouakchott, 8-9 November 2016, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/westandcentralafrica/2016.11.23\\_Conclusions\\_and\\_recommendations\\_expert\\_meeting\\_PCMS\\_Nov\\_2016\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/westandcentralafrica/2016.11.23_Conclusions_and_recommendations_expert_meeting_PCMS_Nov_2016_FINAL.pdf).

92 PSC Report, "AU Summit 31: What is the African Union's Role in the Sahel?", in *ISS Today*, 25 June 2018, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/au-summit-31-what-is-the-african-unions-role-in-the-sahel>.

93 Zoë Gorman and Grégory Chauzal, "Establishing a Regional Security Architecture in the Sahel", in *SIPRI Backgrounders*, 25 June 2018, <https://www.sipri.org/node/4551>.

94 Ibid.

95 Sampson Kwarkye, Ella Jeannine Abatan and Michaël Matongbada, "Can the Accra Initiative Prevent Terrorism in West African Coastal States?", in *ISS Today*, 30 September 2019, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-the-accra-initiative-prevent-terrorism-in-west-african-coastal-states>.



## THE ROLE OF THE EU AND OTHER MAIN INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

830 vehicles.<sup>96</sup> The former French Defence Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, declared in 2015 that “The aim of Barkhane is to prevent what I call the highway of all forms of traffics to become a place of permanent passage, where jihadist groups between Libya and the Atlantic Ocean can rebuild themselves, which would lead to serious consequences for our security.”<sup>97</sup> However, the mission have been re-focused on the Liptako-Gourma region in a “logic of permanent adaptation”.<sup>98</sup> The Operation represents the most ambitious and expensive military operation that France has conducted since the end of Algerian War, but little results have been achieved so far compared to the effort made. Notwithstanding significant local protests and ambiguity from the Sahelian governments, Paris is planning to scale up its presence with a *Coalition pour le Sahel*, as discussed in section 2.1. France wants the lead of the Coalition, and this position is a limitation of local ownership and for the expectations of other international actors.<sup>99</sup>

The interests and engagement of Italy in the Sahel have been increasing over the last year. According to some Italian officers at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Rome is appreciated in some African regions for not having a hidden agenda in its cooperation. This has been somewhat advantageous for Rome, although the absence of some embassies in sub-Saharan Africa has limited its action.<sup>100</sup> The opening of the embassies in Niger (2017) and Burkina Faso (2018) has helped to create more solid and regular bilateral relations. Mali remains Embassy-less for the time being (the idea of opening an Embassy is in the pipeline) and is still covered by two diplomats based in Dakar, which is too little for the role that Bamako has today in the region and beyond. However, a number of high-level Italian government representatives visited the Sahel in 2019: former Minister of Defence Elisabetta Trenta travelled to Niger and Deputy Minister Emanuela Del Re to Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso and Chad. Moreover, Rome also appointed Bruno Archi as Special Envoy for

the Sahel. The position could potentially fill some gaps in terms of bilateral relations and coordination and strengthen the regional approach.

In the defence sector, Italy contributes to multilateral security efforts through MINUSMA, the EU’s CSDP Missions (EUCAP Sahel Niger and Mali, EUTM Mali) and the Gar-SI Sahel project. Between 2017 and 2019, Italy also signed cooperation agreements with Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad, contributing to the work of the G5 Sahel. After months of stalemate due to a controversial opposition of some ministers of the Nigerien government, a bilateral assistance and support mission to Niger (MISIN) was launched in late 2018. In early 2020 it results composed of about 100 units (against up to 470 as planned in December 2017) with the aim of training the Nigerien armed forces in anti-terrorism interventions and border control (in early 2020, around 2,700 units result trained). The experience to date with MISIN has brought to the fore some challenges that should be taken into consideration prior to engaging in other endeavours in the Sahel to assert Italian leadership. Firstly, limited understanding of local political dynamics led to months of ambiguity in the Italian–Nigerien relations regarding Italy’s commitment. Secondly, a risk of limited coordination with other partners emerged during the process.

Overall, Italian commitment in the Sahel is evident, but the skills and tools put in place show certain limitations, and SSR remains marginal. Attention to the multilateral dimension remains central and Italy will have to actively participate in common efforts, avoiding further multiplying its interventions without a path adequately shared with local governments and coordinated with international partners.

Germany is heavily committed in the region through multilateral and bilateral relations, with significant and multi-layered support for SSR. At the multilateral level,

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96 French Ministry of Armed Forces, *Opération Barkhane*, updated 30 March 2020, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/operations/barkhane/dossier-de-reference/operation-barkhane>.

97 Matteo Latorraca, “Operation Barkhane: Goals and Reasons Why It Could Fail”, in *Geopolitica.info*, 16 January 2015, <https://www.geopolitica.info/?p=2637>.

98 French Ministry of Armed Forces, *Opération Barkhane*, cit.

99 French military chief General François Lecointre already criticised the EU for refusing to accompany Malian troops in the field. See Andrew Lebovich, “Insecurity in the Sahel: Europe’s Next Fight against Jihadism”, cit.

100 Italy has 22 embassies in Africa, compared to, for example, 44 French and 39 German embassies.

Germany has approximately 1,000 staff in Mali deployed through MINUSMA and the two EU CSDP missions.<sup>101</sup> At the bilateral level, Germany has deployed special forces units on training missions in Niger. Then German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen opened a camp in Niamey in November 2018.<sup>102</sup> This decision created some domestic debates, because the mission is not grounded in a multilateral commitment. Moreover, that overseas deployments require a mandate from the Bundestag, making the presence of German troops in Niger illegal. However, the government argued that it is not necessary because the special forces only train local troops and are not actively participating in operations.<sup>103</sup>

In Burkina Faso, Germany is training police and gendarmerie and supports all three countries with equipment and vehicles. Specifically, on SSR, Berlin has been conducting a programme in the three countries to support governance of the security sector through diversified policies and with the technical support of its Development Agency GIZ. Germany has also reinforced the Malian Ministry of National Reconciliation through the “Supporting the stabilisation and peace process in Mali 2016-2018” programme aimed at promoting the peace agreement and at enhancing dialogue in the regions. Overall, Germany tries to combine some of its traditional cooperation related to peacebuilding, SSR and civilian instruments with military support. The military component is strengthened by Berlin’s will to support the Coalition pour le Sahel with special forces. This extension of military operations abroad is an evident trend for Germany, and the Sahel makes no exception.

The Netherlands has paid particularly forward-looking attention to SSR in the Sahel. The Dutch Multi-Annual Strategic Plan 2014–2017 for Mali was already outlining a strategic focus and framework on security and Rule of Law with the specific objective of reinforcing the legitimacy and capacity of the government.<sup>104</sup> Besides its contribution to MINUSMA and the CSDP missions, Amsterdam funds the DCAF Mali Programme (Enhancing Security Sector Governance in Mali, 2017–2020) which addresses gaps in accountability, responsiveness and gender equality in the Malian security sector.<sup>105</sup> The Netherlands will continue support to Sahel region with 400 million euro over four years in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.<sup>106</sup>

Finally, Denmark and Sweden are engaged through MINUSMA and involved in several projects aimed at supporting peace and development in the region with particular attention to the role of women and civil society organisations. Copenhagen has had a strong national debate on its contribution to the UN and to Opération Barkhane. Eventually, in late 2019, it decided to strengthen its military support to both missions with one transport aircraft and 70 troops to the first one and two aircrafts and 65 troops to Barkhane.<sup>107</sup> The Danish Parliament provides close oversight over the engagement.<sup>108</sup> In line with its traditional approach, Sweden combines a complex development strategy with its contribution to MINUSMA and plans to play a role in the French-led Task Force Takuba, along with Germany, but also Estonia, already engaged with Barkhane.<sup>109</sup> A different position was expressed by Norway that rejected the French request to envoy special forces.<sup>110</sup>

101 Fergus Kelly, “German Parliament Extends Africa Military Missions”, in *The Defense Post*, 10 May 2019, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/?p=13005>.

102 “Germany Opens New Military Camp in Niger”, in *Deutsche Welle*, 11 November 2018, <https://p.dw.com/p/384Z9>.

103 Fergus Kelly, “German Parliament Extends Africa Military Missions”, cit.

104 Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Minister Kaag: Preventie prioriteit in beleidsnota BHOS*, 18 May 2018, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2018/05/18/minister-kaag-preventie-prioriteit-in-beleidsnota-bhos>.

105 International Security Sector Advisory Team (ISSAT), *Mali SSR Background Note*, last updated 11 February 2019, <https://issat.dcaf.ch/Learn/Resource-Library2/Country-Profiles/Mali-SSR-Background-Note>.

106 Stef Blok and Sigrid Kaag, *Nederlandse en bredere Europese inzet in de Sahel*, 17 March 2020, [https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven\\_regering/detail?id=2020Z05193&did=2020D10801](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2020Z05193&did=2020D10801).

107 Danish Ministry of Defence, *Danish Military Contributions to the Sahel Region*, 24 October 2019, <https://fmn.dk/jeng/news/Pages/Danish-military-contributions-to-the-Sahelregion.aspx>.

108 “Danmark sender militært bidrag til FN-mission i Mali”, in *DR*, 24 October 2019, <https://www.dr.dk/node/4183198>.

109 Fergus Kelly, “Estonia Special Forces to Join France-led Takuba Mission in Mali, Defense Ministry Says”, in *The Defense Post*, 13 November 2019, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/?p=15162>.

110 “Mali: La Norvège a rejeté une demande française d’envoyer des forces spéciales”, in *Sahel-Elite*, 24 March 2020, <https://wp.me/p9fNaQ-3Ob>.

# THE ROLE OF THE EU AND OTHER MAIN INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

Overall, it is possible to notice how all the main European countries have been strengthening their military support in the region. Some of them sends troops only through multilateral missions, like the Nordic countries, others, like Germany and Italy, are present also at bilateral level in Niger.

## **United States**

Although Africa has not been historically ranked at the top of the United States foreign policy, Washington has been engaged in the Sahel for at least four decades. For instance, Niger has benefited since 1980 from the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program, offering African civil and military officials military training programs from the United States.<sup>111</sup> With the “war to terrorism” it is increased the US engagement to provide training, support, and intelligence-gathering capacity through the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI). In 2015, PSI became the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative (later Partnership), which encompasses 15 countries. Currently, the main presence is in Niger with at least 800 soldiers and a large airbase in Agadez.<sup>112</sup> Overall, the US mainly focuses on progress in the management of human, material and financial resources related to security. Their support is, therefore, operational at the bilateral level, but they do not work on security sector reform. Washington is not only reluctant to participate in peace and security efforts at the multilateral level, but tried to block the inclusion of Chapter VII authorisation and financial contributions in the Security Council Resolution.<sup>113</sup> Eventually, also pressed by France, the US agreed to pledge USD 60 million in support.<sup>114</sup>

The Trump administration announced in late 2019 that it plans to reduce its presence in West Africa, amidst European criticism. Washington would like to see the European partners, and France in particular, take the

lead in fighting terrorist groups in the region. This reduction would also entail abandoning the new drone base in Niger, a recent massive and expensive infrastructure. It would mean the loss of an ally less for the new Coalition pour le Sahel and less support to French troops.<sup>115</sup> Yet, in March 2020, the State Department and Congress seem reluctant to curb US involvement in the Sahel, while the Pentagon is still looking at cutting African operations as part of a refocus against China and Russia. Meanwhile, the US is planning to appoint a special envoy for the Sahel. Perhaps this is a way to better understand not only politics in the region but also the American role in there.<sup>116</sup>

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111 ISSAT, *Note d'information de l'ISSAT sur La réforme du secteur de la sécurité au Niger*, last updated 5 October 2018, <https://issat.dcaf.ch/Learn/Resource-Library2/Country-Profiles/Note-d-information-de-l-issat-sur-La-reforme-du-secteur-de-la-securite-au-Niger>.

112 Eric Schmitt, “A Shadowy War’s Newest Front: A Drone Base Rising from Saharan Dust”, in *The New York Times*, 22 April 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/22/us/politics/drone-base-niger.html>.

113 Zoë Gorman and Grégory Chauzal, “Establishing a Regional Security Architecture in the Sahel”, cit.

114 Michael Shurkin, “What Is the Sahel G5 Force and Why Should the U.S. Support It?”, in *The RAND Blog*, 6 November 2017, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2017/11/what-is-the-sahel-g5-force-and-why-should-the-us-support.html>.

115 Helene Cooper, “Plan to Cut U.S. Troops in West Africa Draws Criticism from Europe”, in *The New York Times*, 14 January 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/14/world/africa/milley-troops-withdraw.html>.

116 Robbie Gramer, “U.S. Congress Moves to Restrain Pentagon Over Africa Drawdown Plans”, in *Foreign Policy*, 4 March 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/04/africa-military-trump-esper-pentagon-congress-africom-counterterrorism-sahel-great-power-competition>.

# 3. CHALLENGES AND CHOICES

This section starts by analysing SSR and DDR in the context of radicalisation. Then, it addresses the role of different non-state actors. Thirdly, the role of “stabilisation” is presented and analysed from a local and international

perspective. A fourth section is dedicated to militarisation, a growing trend in the region. Finally, trajectories for an inclusive SSR are examined.

## 3.1 SSR and DDR in the context of radicalisation

In the Sahel, insecurity has led to the fracturing of society and made it difficult for communities to live together. It has also reinforced a sense of incomprehension, mistrust and even hatred between civilians and Defence and Security Forces (FDS). In order to alleviate these tensions and allow a lasting return to peace and social cohesion, many measures have been undertaken by the state, sometimes with regional, national and international partners. Among these measures is the social reintegration programme for those involved voluntarily or involuntarily in acts of violence.<sup>117</sup> In Mali, this approach is embodied by the DDR programme which is being implemented in the north and centre of the country, in particular in Kidal, Taoudéni, Ménaka, Gao, Timbuktu and Mopti. To ensure proper functionality, the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (CNDDR) was established, made up principally of all the signatories of the peace agreement resulting from the Algiers process, that is the government of Mali, the two major Tuareg coalition groups (the CMA, the coordination of Azawad movements and the Platform of armed groups).<sup>118</sup> It has a political component, technical subcommittees as well as operational branches. In order to guarantee success, the DDR, CNDDR and CSA (the Agreement Monitoring Committee) are called to work together. The beneficiaries of the programme, according to CNDDR, can be divided into four categories:

Ex-combatants affiliated to signatory movements: approximately 10,000-12,000 people;

Other armed groups who are not signatories to the Agreement: includes Malian citizens in possession of illegal arms and under order to disarm on the same conditions as combatant members of the signatory movements;

Communities who have formed their own militias or self-defence groups to ensure their own security;

The Malian state has also opened the door to a fourth category to give those included a chance to renounce violence voluntarily: perpetrators of organised crime and terrorism.<sup>119</sup>

Niger also has a reintegration programme focused primarily on ex-Boko Haram activists. This programme was put in place via a socio-economic reintegration centre in the Goudoumaria department in the Diffa region, situated in the extreme east of Niger, bordering Nigeria and Chad. Since 2017 this centre has welcomed former combatants, but also women and children.<sup>120</sup> In December 2019, a first wave of rehabilitated Boko Haram combatants emerged having benefitted from intense professional training and a deradicalisation programme.

Moreover, according to certain actors interviewed in the field, the Nigerien authorities used other techniques for community reintegration, which extended to prevention. These are community development programmes offering an alternative to the temptation to join jihadist groups. “In Niger, to combat the influence of Boko Haram, the authorities have established community development programmes such as the construction of wells.”<sup>121</sup>

In interviews, DDR emerged as means to bring peace and an alternative to insecurity in the three countries of the Liptako-Gourma region. Nevertheless, it must be emphasised that implementation has led to much debate, particularly in the context of radicalisation and violent extremism. In effect, the aim of DDR is to remove actors from hostile activities and to redirect them to a dynamic of co-construction and peace.

<sup>117</sup> In Liptako-Gourma, to date Burkina Faso has not undertaken reintegration programmes such as those in Mali and Niger.

<sup>118</sup> The CMA is an alliance of rebel groups created in Mali in 2014 during the civil war there.

<sup>119</sup> “Mali – Interview: le programme national de désarmement, démobilisation et réinsertion”, in *Sahel-Elite*, 22 January 2018, <https://wp.me/p9fNaQ-125>.

<sup>120</sup> “Au Niger, début d’une nouvelle vie pour une centaine de repentis de Boko Haram”, in *Le Monde*, 18 December 2019, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/12/18/au-niger-debut-d-une-nouvelle-vie-pour-une-centaine-de-repentis-de-boko-haram\\_6023285\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/12/18/au-niger-debut-d-une-nouvelle-vie-pour-une-centaine-de-repentis-de-boko-haram_6023285_3212.html).

<sup>121</sup> Interview with a development agent working in Niger and Mali, December 2019.

## CHALLENGES AND CHOICES

Such efforts are based on the premise that some people (men, women and children), for a number of reasons, have ended up with armies ready to fight. Our interviewees emphasised the need to go step by step, methodically, for the DDR process to succeed. “For me, the DDR can work, but not anyhow if you want it to be useful. For me, the way it can work best is to engage with combatants in a process of disengagement before talking about their reintegration. When I say disengagement, it’s about working more on their minds rather than their equipment (arms in particular). That can be done through a citizenship re-education programme. This is what’s lacking in the process in some of our countries.”<sup>122</sup>

This statement testifies to the fact that actors on the ground believe it’s possible to involve former jihadists, people from separatist and other armed groups in the DDR process. Other interviewees highlighted the establishment of a monitoring mechanism for armed groups in DDR situations, in particular those who have to integrate with the FDS. As one respondent noted: “It’s essential to follow up on the armed groups that integrate with the national armed forces and to plan their development within these bodies. They should not have the same career paths as those who have joined via the usual route since these are people who have a history that one can legitimately suspect. That’s why there must be a mechanism monitoring their process of integration. You really have to be careful about these sensitivities. But unfortunately, the way DDR is carried out, none of this is taken into consideration.”<sup>123</sup>

For DDR to succeed in a context of radicalisation, it’s important to understand the many reasons that lead actors towards radical groups. Consequently, for DDR to be effective, it must take into account the sometimes unique trajectories of those involved. Like SSR, DDR embraces complex and sensitive multidimensional processes that are carried out with various actors and stakeholders. The actors are, among others, the state, parliament, non-state armed groups, media organisations, civil society organisations, the private sector, technical and financial partners.

Our interviewees also underlined other obstacles:

- The lack of political will among armed groups who signed the Agreement. “They think that disarming up front is to lose everything. L’EIGS [the Islamic State in grand Sahara], too, tries to dissuade them from engaging with the DDR process.”<sup>124</sup>
- Lack of information about and awareness of DDR processes.
- The lack of relevant information about the views and concerns of FDS personnel concerning DDR.
- The ineffectiveness of multi-stakeholder dialogue spaces for CNDDR, CNI (Commission for National Integration), the CNRSS (National Commission for Security Sector Reform), the DDR section of the MINUSMA and various elements of civil society.

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<sup>122</sup> Interview with a teacher-researcher, Mali, December 2019.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with a consultant-researcher and specialist in security questions, Mali.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.



### 3.2 Role of non-state armed actors

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In the Liptako-Gourma region, the non-state armed groups (GANE), other than extremist groups, are principally self-defence organisations (militia), present in Mali and Burkina Faso.<sup>125</sup> Dan Nan Ambassagou in Mali and Kolgweogo in Burkina Faso.<sup>126</sup> Both groups have been accused of committing abuses in their communities. In Mali, there are also armed groups that include members who signed the peace agreement, notably the main movements of the CMA and the Platform of armed groups.

In Burkina Faso, there are numerous local security committees which are under the responsibility of the Minister of Security. Indeed, a decree of May 2005 instituted such a committee in each village and commune of Burkina Faso.<sup>127</sup> These committees are advisory bodies and provide a framework for consultation between the security services and the local population. They are placed under the authority of the prefect or mayor. Their authority is limited to the village or commune and their remit is to give advice likely to guide the activities of the security services ; identify the expectations and needs of the local population in terms of security ; to create a communication channel between the security services and the local population; to organise measures between the security services and the local population for the prevention of insecurity.

It is within the framework of the local security committees that the Koglweogo have found an institutional anchor and benefit from the tacit support of the Burkinabe government because the local security committees were created by the state itself, according to certain interviewees.

Indeed, faced with the deteriorating security context, those Burkinabe wishing for a response, in order to protect their property and livestock, have organised and armed in order to defend themselves, particularly in rural and semi-rural areas, and call themselves “Koglweogo”, “guardians of the bush” in the More language.<sup>128</sup> While they rely on a certain popularity among the population, others demand their removal because many Koglweogo actions place them outside the legal framework. It remains to determine at what level the Ouagadougou will be able to supervise the actions of these actors which currently escape their control.<sup>129</sup> As noted in one interview, “Everyone in Burkina Faso knows that it’s the state itself that supports the Koglweogo. Some say the state is doing this because the Koglweogo are helping to combat insecurity. But for others they themselves are actually the source of insecurity.”<sup>130</sup>

In Mali, there are also initiatives that call for state support for certain armed groups as part of the drive to combat jihadist groups.<sup>131</sup> It is clear that in some of these initiatives it is the authorities themselves that encourage the creation of these groups. Moreover, our interviews revealed that there are links between national and international armed forces and non-state armed groups in the context of counter-terrorist operations. According to the interviewees, this is largely evident in the border regions between Mali and Niger: “With the support of international forces and our own soldiers, armed groups such as MSA and GATIA are killing the Fulani, whom they describe as jihadists.”<sup>132</sup>

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125 In contrast to Burkina Faso and Mali, we are not aware of self-defence groups in Niger.

126 Dan Na Ambassagou (in Dogon, hunters who trust in God) is a self-defence group of Dogon hunters founded in Mali in 2016. They represent a loose coalition of largely Dogon militia under the authority of Youssouf Toloba, and allegedly committed a series of massacres against the Fulani populations. Kolgweog is a militia group in Burkina Faso established in 2015. It claims to re-establish order in areas threatened by banditism where security forces are lacking. The movement is known for the severe punishments it inflicts on alleged offenders. For more information see Romane Da Cunha Dupuy and Tanguy Quidelleur, “Self-Defence Movements in Burkina Faso. Diffusion and Structuration of Koglweogo Groups”, in Noria, 15 November 2018, <https://www.noria-research.com/?p=15528>.

127 Decree No. 2005-245/PRES/PM/SECU/DEF/MATD/MJ/MFB/MPDH of 12 May 2005 regarding the creation, composition, powers and functioning of the local security committees.

128 The language of the Mossi ethnic group.

129 ISSAT, *Burkina Faso Country Background Note*, last updated 4 February 2020, <https://issat.dcaf.ch/Learn/Resource-Library2/Country-Profiles/Burkina-Faso-Note-d-information-RSS>.

130 Interview with researcher about security questions, Mali, November 2019.

131 Adam Thiam, *Centre du Mali: enjeux et dangers d’une crise négligée*, Geneva, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, March 2017, <https://www.hdcentre.org/updates/nouvelle-publication-centre-du-mali-enjeux-et-dangers-dune-crise-negligee>.

132 Interview with a journalist, Niger, November 2019.

# CHALLENGES AND CHOICES

## 3.3 SSR and stabilisation

The Liptako-Gourma region represents a crisis area with a high level of complexity in conflict dynamics, security challenges and different perceptions, especially among international and domestic stakeholders. For example, the concept of “stability” is problematic, especially in connection with SSR. Yet several international actors frequently described stability as one of the main goals of their support for Mali.

MINUSMA's mandate and its changes since its initial deployment in 2013 illustrate this. The focus on stability has increased since then, as well as the number of security-related stabilisation tasks. Overall, it has gradually shifted from supporting political processes to stabilising Mali. However, it seems that the more the UN stabilise, the less the Malian government appears motivated to seek a political solution. There is, therefore, a risk of maintaining the status quo without fully implementing the Peace Agreement, which would require a new political equilibrium and more power-sharing. A “no peace-no war” situation has also the advantage, as previously discussed, that national governments can blame irregular groups, and even more so if operating transnationally, for local troubles, all the while continuing to receive international economic and political support. According to

some observers, a stabilisation mission also represents a departure from UN doctrine.<sup>133</sup>

A key point for stability, at least in Mali, is the presumption of legitimate state authority. However, a number of stakeholders in Mali consider that the current political leadership is an elite that does not share any level of power, which is justified by the Constitution and which does not stipulate a real balance of powers.<sup>134</sup> In addition, they contend, international powers have strengthened the current elite, by, for example, the EU's statement that the last national elections were fair.

The concept of stability also includes the risk of being perceived by the local population as conservative, and the EU is already perceived as supporting a conservative group.<sup>135</sup> Overall, if the international community, in the name of stability, supports a full “return of the state” in control of all its territory (but have some Sahelian states like Mali or Burkina Faso ever full control over all their territory?), it should also wonder about “what kind of state should return” in order to avoid a situation with a more stable region, but full of other threats and troubles.<sup>136</sup>

## 3.4 SSR and militarisation

The previous sections have discussed how the widespread presence of several international actors prioritises military responses to diversified threats. However, despite the current heavy international military presence in the region, several jihadist groups continue to operate effectively and cruelly. The road from Bamako to Gao, for instance, is the most dangerous despite the presence of

all foreign military forces. In addition, abuses by security forces in the three countries have been documented as one factor behind young people's decision to join violent extremist groups.<sup>137</sup>

Against this backdrop, two questions arise. Firstly, does excessive militarisation have counterproductive effects?

<sup>133</sup> Cedric de Coning, Chiyuki Aoi and John Karlsrud (eds), *UN Peacekeeping Doctrine in a New Era. Adapting to Stabilisation, Protection and New Threats*, London/New York, Routledge, 2017.

<sup>134</sup> Interview with Malian academic, Bamako, November 2019.

<sup>135</sup> Interview with EU staff member, Rome, February 2020.

<sup>136</sup> Andrew Lebovich, “Insecurity in the Sahel: Europe's Next Fight against Jihadism”, cit.

<sup>137</sup> Human Rights Watch, “We Found Their Bodies Later That Day”. *Atrocities by Armed Islamists and Security Forces in Burkina Faso's Sahel Region*, 22 March 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/node/328380>; Luca Raineri, If Victims Become Perpetrators. Factors contributing to vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in the central Sahel, London, International Alert, June 2018, <https://www.international-alert.org/node/14504>.

Secondly, what are the effects of this militarisation of the region on SSR?

Excessive militarisation and use of force can be ineffective due to an asymmetry with the terrorist threats. Is an asymmetric war, people are central,<sup>138</sup> but in the current situation, national authorities are not able to manage conflicts. Some traditional authorities were able to do so, but have almost disappeared and there is a lack of research to understand how to address this situation.<sup>139</sup>

The threats require a multi-layered approach and a strong emphasis on prevention. However, very little resources are dedicated to it. Ute Kollies, Head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Mali, does not believe that more military would help, but “What we need is more engagement on the political front.”<sup>140</sup> Similarly, Maureen Magee of the Norwegian Refugee Council declared that “the military response in the Sahel is part of the problem. Last year [2019], military operations in Mali have pushed more than 80,000 people to flee. Engagement in the Sahel must put the protection of the populations at the heart of the response.”<sup>141</sup> Perhaps the point made is not that of an alternative, but of priorities.

The Sahelian governments are clearly prioritising security and a massive part of their national budgets – up to 20 per cent – is devoted to military spending.<sup>142</sup> This trend implies SSR disproportionate economic resources or a securitisation of all social and political areas. Conversely, good governance of the military, and not the lack of resources, is the major challenge affecting the armed forces in most Sahelian countries.<sup>143</sup> The priority should be good governance and transparency, for instance clar-

ifying the relation of Malian and Burkinabe government with non-state armed actors, as discussed in the previous chapter. EUTM has made a significant contribution to SSR: in 2012, the Malian army was destroyed, while currently some steps forward have been done.<sup>144</sup> Yet, this technical effort should be connected to the political level. In addition, a sense of belonging in the Malian Army is weak and foreign powers cannot build it.<sup>145</sup> There are several reasons that favour the status quo: nepotism, work on the ground with irregular groups, corruption, fear of conspiracy and of a *coup d'état* by the armed forces, as already happened in Mali's recent past. These challenges need to be better understood and addressed by the international actors active in the Sahel.

In sum, the principal local concerns about militarisation include: first, military actions sometimes negatively impact the civilian population. Second, where the situation worsens, local initiatives for peace and dialogue are marginalised and no longer able to carry out effective prevention work; thirdly, the military presence of international forces is perceived by the opposition as support for the government in place, which can lead to a loss of credibility of the international forces and obscure the reasons for the presence; fourth, France in particular openly uses its military presence to further its own interests, thus pushing certain communities towards supporting radical armed groups, or at least to tolerate them in silence.<sup>146</sup>

In this framework, the “all-military” response calls for a shift in paradigm: the Malian Special Programme for Peace, Security and Development of Northern Mali, launched in 2010 to tackle both security and development issues through strengthening the military presence in northern

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Malian academic, Bamako, November 2019.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Emma Farge, “More Soldiers Won't Help Mali, Talks with Jihadists Might: U.N.”, in *Reuters*, 3 February 2020, <https://reut.rs/2v5h1t>.

<sup>141</sup> AFP, “Macron, Sahel Leaders Meet to Boost Anti-Jihadist Campaign”, in *France24*, 13 January 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200113-macron-sahel-leaders-meet-to-boost-anti-jihadist-campaign>.

<sup>142</sup> Zoë Gorman and Grégory Chauzal, “Establishing a Regional Security Architecture in the Sahel”, cit.

<sup>143</sup> Hassane Koné, “Sahel Militaries Need Better Governance to Face the Terror Threat”, in *ISS Today*, 26 February 2020, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/sahel-militaries-need-better-governance-to-face-the-terror-threat>.

<sup>144</sup> Interview with Malian researcher, Bamako, November 2019.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with Malian academic, Bamako, November 2019.

<sup>146</sup> Olaf Bernau, *Comment sortir de la violence?*, Berlin, Fokus Sahel, July 2019, <https://afrique-europe-interact.net/1834-2-Brochure-francais.html>.

## CHALLENGES AND CHOICES

Mali, shows that excessive military actions may lead to further destabilisation of the region.<sup>147</sup> Civilian measures are therefore to be preferred over military solutions in recognition of the fact that terrorist or armed groups are not at the origin of the crisis in the Sahel. Their existence is much more a symptom than a cause of the situation, even if these have now developed their own dynamics, which requires a serious examination of the root causes behind this complex crisis.<sup>148</sup>

Nevertheless, France seems to push in another direction and there is a risk that other governments and international organisations could follow Paris. The Sahel Coalition proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron in Pau in January 2020 heavily focuses on

security, prioritising countering the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara in the tri-border Liptako-Gourma region shared by Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.<sup>149</sup> The concept does not address the governance challenge, abuses by security forces, and the lack of transparency.<sup>150</sup> It seems that the EU, historically devoted mainly to civilian means, is also turning toward prioritising military means, as illustrated by Josep Borrell's call for the reinforcement of the EU's CSDP and other missions in the Sahel in early 2020.<sup>151</sup> If the international community engages in earnest in this direction, it might miss the opportunity to address the root causes of conflicts that fuel instability and insecurity, and to prioritise the Mali Peace Agreement and a long-term vision for the region.

### 3.5 Inclusive and shared SSR

State institutions in the Sahel countries are largely inherited from the colonial era. This legacy complicates the creation of positive and constructive relations between citizens and representatives of the state administration. On the one hand, the people often feel that they are not involved in affairs of state. On the other hand, government behaviour has deepened this fissure (limited access to basic social services, insufficient recourse to justice, etc.). These ingrained antagonisms also apply to security issues, which are traditionally held to be a state prerogative.

In this context, the inclusiveness of SSR, a guarantee of stability in the Sahel, constitutes a major challenge for states. The interviewees cited several such challenges which, if not resolved, will prevent SSR from achieving the expected results. Some interviewees spoke of "the structural fragility of the state and the existence of a gap between political discourse and political behaviour in relation to the implementation of SSR".<sup>152</sup>

Another challenge is linked to the question of justice in implementing SSR. Although the fight against impunity is an essential pillar of SSR, neither in the PSIRC (Integrated Security Plan for the Central Regions) in Mali nor in the PUS (Emergency Programme for the Sahel) in Burkina Faso is the question of justice as a key instrument in the fight against impunity put forward. In fact, it is significantly relegated to the background. As one interviewee observed: "The question of justice, access to justice and delivery of justice are major problems yet crucial in understanding insecurity in the Sahel, specifically in the so-called three-frontier area."<sup>153</sup>

In addition, we noted that only a small number of women and young people were represented in security initiatives: the agreement's monitoring committee has only one female representative. The same is true of the national commission for DDR, with one woman representative. The National Guard has between 4 and 5 per cent wom-

<sup>147</sup> Annelies Hickendorff, *Civil Society White Book on Peace and Security in Mali (2019). English Summary*, Stockholm, SIPRI, July 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/node/4880>.

<sup>148</sup> Olaf Bernau, *Comment sortir de la violence?*, cit.

<sup>149</sup> Olivier-Rémy Bel, "America Shouldn't Abandon Its Allies in the Sahel", in *War on the Rocks*, 24 January 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/?p=21851>.

<sup>150</sup> Andrew Lebovich, "Insecurity in the Sahel: Europe's Next Fight against Jihadism", cit.

<sup>151</sup> David M. Herszenhorn, Jacopo Barigazzi and Simon Marks, "To Be Top Gun on Foreign Affairs, Borrell Says EU Must Buy Weapons", in *Politico*, 28 February 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/pacifist-eu-wont-stop-terrorism-in-africa-says-foreign-affairs-chief>.

<sup>152</sup> Interview with national coordinator of a Malian research centre.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with specialist in security questions in the Sahel.

en, the Gendarmerie around 8 per cent, the Police 26 per cent in 2018, and the army 10 per cent. Among the factors leading to the higher figure (26 per cent) in the police was the implementation of a national gender policy (PNG) through the official appointment of a gender focal point which functioned as an interface between international and national partners and the national police within the framework of the implementation of the PNG. In terms of justice, if one takes into account all the judges and chief clerks, the percentage of women is 10.77 and 16.18 per cent respectively. By contrast, there are more women in

positions of low responsibility such as administrative roles where women represent 90.73 per cent of the total.<sup>154</sup>

Finally, consideration must be given to citizens and civil society organisations appropriating SSR as an essential ingredient of its success. In the three countries, such appropriation is far from being complete.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this analysis of SSR in the Sahel, we put forth a number of recommendations to:

### **Governments in the Sahel**

- ▶ *Continue to implement SSR and related areas of state action* based on: full implementation of human and civil rights; a real separation of powers; systematic criminal prosecution of corruption, embezzlement and patronage; guarantee of physical protection of the population through the presence of state armed forces throughout the territory.
- ▶ *Combine SSR with the strengthening of public services* such as education and health in order to address local needs and to improve social cohesion.
- ▶ *Strengthen the role of civil society in the overhaul of security reforms* to improve effectiveness and sustainability through inclusive consultations.
- ▶ *Prioritise civil measures over military solutions.* Terrorist and armed groups are not at the origin of the crisis in the Sahel. They are a symptom of the situation,

even if now they have developed their own dynamics. It is therefore necessary to seriously examine all the factors truly responsible for this plural crisis.

- ▶ *Include more women in the security sector.* Women are still a minority in all security branches, even if there have been some improvements. Women recruitment and responsibilities should be prioritised as well as gender mainstreaming.
- ▶ *Respect the provisions of the peace agreement resulting from the Algiers process in Mali* because it constitutes a milestone for SRR and DDR in the region.
- ▶ *Respect the fundamental rights of the civilian population* while avoiding recourse to child soldiers, voluntary attacks on the civilian population, rape and other forms of sexual violence in respect of women and young girls, hostage-taking, ill-treatment of persons, destruction of means of subsistence for the civilian populations, school closures, etc.
- ▶ *Manage the expectations of thousands of people* from the north, centre and south of Mali who are offi-

<sup>154</sup> Miranda Gaanderse and Kristin Valasek (eds), *The Security Sector and Gender in West Africa: A Survey of Police, Defence, Justice and Penal Services in ECOWAS States*, Geneva, DCAF, 2011, p. 166, <https://www.dcaf.ch/node/12709>.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

cially registered in the national DDR process.

- **Take into account the lot of former members of armed groups declared unfit** for integration into the army, as part of the DDR implementation process, because of illness, age, etc. Most of them refuse socio-economic integration, preferring integration into the army. As DDR is also perceived as a job provider, especially in Mali, it would be necessary to organise meetings to explain the various options for professional integration linked to DDR.

### European Union

- **Continue to support comprehensive SSR** by insisting on significant improvements in the accountability and functioning of governance, in particular of the national armed forces. This means to avoid a merely technical approach and consider all its political implications and fully applying a human-centred approach.
- **Focus on local ownership in all SSR actions.** In particular, *engage further with civil society at all levels*, including through its delegations (EUDs) and consider a strategy to handover on security trainings.
- **Improve monitoring and evaluation of SSR.** The current EEAS M&E guidelines for SSR have taken the form of a “strategic review”, which could limit accountability and learning from past experience. In this framework, address the low level of oversight of military trainings.
- **Support military interventions as a last resort, and with a proportionate use of force.** Establish a regular exchange with the governments of France and the US, and monitor the consequences of military interventions.

### International community

- **Develop a broader and more detailed analysis of the situation in the Sahel** region, taking into account historical contexts and geographic particularities. Such an analysis is essential to be able to carry out an action adapted to the situation in the region.
- **Fully adapt the SSR approach to the priority of human security** prioritising the protection of populations in the fight against terrorism and consider how the various dimensions of insecurity can hamper the SSR.
- **Give clear priority to civil measures** in particular by significantly increasing the financial resources allocated

to political dialogue, mediation, peacebuilding and civil development cooperation. Civil society actors should be promoted in a targeted manner as a complement to the planned reform of state institutions. Particular attention should be paid here to local activities for dialogue and empowerment in order to guarantee the active participation of the population in future peace and reconciliation processes.

- **Gradually reduce military engagement and increase the focus on training and equipping police forces and armies** of the different countries of the Sahel under the supervision of international partners. The new *Coalition pour the Sahel* should consider this approach and needs to address governance challenges, human rights abuses by armed forces, and the lack of transparency.
- **Military cooperation must not strengthen authoritarian or dictatorial regimes (such as Chad).** The fight against jihadist or armed groups must not serve as a legitimisation for human rights abuses or preserve non-democratic conditions.
- Devote more *attention to the role that ECOWAS and other regional and sub-regional organisations can play in the Sahel*. The collaboration with regional organisation should be more inclusive.
- **Avoid a “no peace/no war setting in Mali”.** Political solutions and the implementation of the peace process should remain the core priority of the security work in the country.

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