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The European Union's External Action in the Sahel and North Africa: Security, Defence and Development Cooperation

1 – Introduction

The institutional structure framework of crisis management of the European Union (EU) has been significantly reformed after the Lisbon treaty. Today, we have one more coherent external action after the creation of European External Action Service (EEAS). EEAS is the "EU diplomatic service", and it assists the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in carrying out the Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy and the EU Global Strategy.

Today, security challengers such as terrorism, hybrid threats, climate change, economic volatility and energy insecurity endanger our people and territory. An appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is important for Europe's ability to foster peace and safeguard security within and beyond its borders.

As Europeans we must be ready and able to deter, respond to, and protect ourselves against external threats and crises, and assist in developing our partners' security and defence capacities, carrying out these tasks in cooperation with others. Alongside external crisis management and capacity-building, the EU should also be able to assist the Sahel Region and North Africa, addressing the causes and helping mitigate the effects from:
  • Poverty, malnutrition and migratory flows.
  • Under-education, demographic boom and humanitarian crisis.
  • Climate and environmental changes.
  • Poor governance, structural corruption and widespread weakness of public administration capacity to provide essential services for local development.

The EU will foster human security through an integrated approach (security-defence-development nexus). In the Sahel and North Africa, the focus is: Political Partnership; Security and Defence; Development.

In spite of all efforts, the Sahel remains a region of instability. The spill-over of the conflicts from Libya, Mali and the Lake Chad, particular concern to the EU for their impact in the wider Sahel region, with regional leaders appealing to the EU for assistance.

The Libya and Sahel States institutions are practically absent in certain areas of their territories and therefore the governments experience enormous difficulties in exercising their authority, providing basic public goods and ensuring the respect of the Rule of Law.

In the Sahel, all EU instruments (from EEAS and European Commission) are being deployed:
- **Diplomatic**.
- **Development and humanitarian actions**.
- **Action within the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)**.

2. Security Challengers

a. Intercommunity violence

Intercommunity conflicts have originated for many centuries, they are ancestral rivalries, and have developed exponentially. Intercommunity conflicts also exist, to assure the access to water and land.

Self-defence groups or militias claim to protect their populations. Their power has grown in parallel to the decline of state authorities, especially in the region. Jihadist organisations and organised crime groups take advantage of these tensions and rivalries to set up a recruitment strategy.

b. Migrations, Traffics and Criminality

Sahel, in particular Niger and Mali, plays a central role in **migration**, due to the growing difficulties for migrants to reach Europe via Libya. The **migration flows** through Niger have decreased to focus now on the routes of the western Mediterranean, via Morocco (from Senegal and Mali via Mauritania,), and via Algeria (from Mali), resulting in an increasing influx of migrants seeking to reach Spain.

Cross-border traffic (migrants, arms, drugs), often based on traditional caravan routes, has increased dramatically in recent years, and traffickers continue to be powerful, influential and operate with impunity. Local authorities do not view trafficking as a security risk but as an alternative to difficult living conditions, and the current model is socially accepted. The **criminality has a special feature in the Sahel** linked, with traditional routes of cross-border trade and with corruption.

In most of the border areas in the Sahel, traffic is not seen as a security risk but rather as a resilience strategy against impoverishment and dire living conditions. Local authorities have little but no choice to let these activities running. Cross-border exchange has become increasingly connected with trade in illicit goods such as drugs and arms.

c. Terrorism
The terrorist activities growing, and the violent extremist groups exploit local conflicts to recruit. The development of terrorist groups is exacerbated by the porous borders and lack of counterterrorist and security coordination.

The potential spill-over of terrorist activity further south, where the creation of new areas under influence of jihadists will have a destabilising effect on the neighbouring countries. The lack of effective territorial control and the expertise in countering terrorism. The increasing of jihadist influence due to poverty and isolation could lead to the expansion of the terrorism.

Jihadists' ability to mobilise local support stems from deep, systemic social, political, historical and economic conditions.

Islamist terrorism still has Mali and Tilabéry region in Niger at the epicentre of the threat. It is extending down to the South, in accordance with the strategy jihadists have been implementing, with the formation of **JNIM** (**Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam Wal Muslimin, support group for Islam and Muslims),** operates at regional level from the north (around Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal) and central Mali.

JNIM, composed of different subgroups affiliated to Al Qaeda (**Ansar Eddine -** operates in the far north of Mali; **Emirate of Timbuktu -** operates in the Centre of Mali and beyond; **Al Mourabitoun** - operates in the area of Gao/Mali; **Macina Katiba** - operates in the centre of Mali).

Not only the JNIM is active under its own banner but it is also a source of inspiration and/or support for Jihadi cells active both in central Mali and Burkina Faso. Also, there is now a level of coexistence and possibly cooperation between the JNIM and the former rival, the Islamic State in the Grand Sahara (ISGS). ISGS is based in the Mali-Niger border area and can operate deep into Niger, based on local operational cells.

There are links between the JNIM and the Libyan terrorist cells. And JNIM has benefited from the arrival of some Libyan jihadists since mid-2017. Also, the "**Emirate of Timbuktu**", reallocates funds to jihadist cells in Libya.

When claiming the attacks carried out on local security forces and foreign military contingents, the JNIM portrays itself as a force of resistance against the French 'colonialists' and their EU and international allies, as well as the defender of local populations.

In the Lake Chad region, **Boko Haram** and the **Islamic State's West Africa Province** are maintaining -if not increasing- their activity, putting pressure on the military forces of the region.

d. Land, resources and mobility

The Sahel has a potential of being one of the richest regions of the world in terms of **natural resources** including oil, natural gas, gold, phosphates, copper, iron ore, and precious woods, among many other assets. However, they are poorly exploited by the countries of the region as they lack the logistical means necessary for their extractive industries economic.

Faced with population growth and climate change, **water resources are a source of tensions in the region.** Surface water and groundwater resources are mostly cross-border, with one high level of water interdependence, to satisfy the population growth needs, the development progress and agricultural expansion.

Agriculture has increasingly encroached on the most fertile land, traditionally allocated to cattle, supported by authorities often motivated by economic interests. The area of land under cultivation has extended to the north, while available grazing land has decreased. Growing demographic pressure, in particular around arable areas, poor management of natural resources, and increasing variability and unpredictability in rainfall patterns have intensified competition between herders and farmers over access to water and land, often leading to violent confrontations.

Pastoral mobility is also facing an increase in financial costs, whether to access resources or to sell their animals on the market, and growing insecurity.

4 – Actors in the field of Security and Defence

a. Internal Security Forces (ISF)

The ISF have structural weaknesses, linked to the fact that historically, these countries have relied on armed forces, and governments have given the priority to military rather than civilian forces. They are less focused on preventing and promoting a judicial and more sustainable approach to counter-terrorism.

The region lacks means and coherent structures, in particular in the area of judiciary process and penal chain. This hampers their capacity to deliver solid and consistent investigations capacity.

The main challenges for the ISF, to consider, are:
- Develop their civilian and judicial intelligence capabilities and increase relationships with their own population in order to collect relevant information.
- Organise and sustain the deployment of their forces in the areas identified as critical.
- Develop a planning process in order to shift their decision-making process from reaction to anticipation.
- Develop and organise their judiciary and police counter-terrorism services.

b. Defence Forces

The armed forces enjoy the **strong support of the political authorities,** in that they often constitute one of the few administrations capable of exercising the authority of the state. But this situation can give rise to **abuses of power** against the population. They have great difficulty in managing their human resources and equipment properly.

The main challenges for the Defence Forces, to consider, are:

- Sustainability of developed capacities, better management of asymmetric threats, capacity to provide security conditions for State deployment in fragile areas.
- Organisation, education and training of armed forces in a context of new threats and sustainable deployment, and in the respect the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (IHL).
- Sustainability of all border-related efforts and improve the cross-border cooperation.

c. G5 Sahel Joint Force (JF) - Regional cooperation example

The G5 Sahel JF is to be considered as a catalyst for security regional cooperation and a transformation vector of the **G5 Sahel defence and internal security forces**, including through the **police component**. <u>Immediate priorities, to consider, are</u>:
- Establish joint counter-insurgency procedures.
- Develop intelligence-led operations and a decentralised command and control culture to deal with asymmetric threats.
- Improve the planning of joint operations, including with the police component.
- Improve the delivery and local management of inter-operable equipment.
- Fully operationalise the Human Rights and IHL compliance framework.

d. Other actors: Russia - there is a growing presence in the region.

5. EU cooperation efforts and objectives in the fields of security, defence and development

The Sahel countries and Libya, with the support of the EU, need to put into effect a number of efforts and objectives. But it's essential the level of ownership and imperative political commitment/support provided by the Sahelian countries.

Strengthened coordination among all actors involved in the response to the different elements of crisis and in the stabilisation of the region, like a key factor to will help the EU to be more efficient and to avoid dispersing resources. <u>It's essential to promote the civil-military coordination</u>.

Political:
1) Support the national governments in its inter-ministerial efforts to stabilise the countries and the region through **Integrated Security Plans**, with immediate and parallel **focus on its 4 components: governance, security, development and a strategic / public information**.
2) Facilitate <u>intercommunity dialogue to reduce</u> as much as possible <u>the inter-ethnic violence</u>, support mediation and reconciliation.
3) <u>Promote cross-border cooperation between affected countries</u>, focus on situational awareness and a state presence that would reflect territorial control.
4) <u>Support the government's commitment to credible justice initiatives and the protection of civilians and support/promote its efforts' to fight organised crime, illicit trafficking,</u> and promote resilience and policies/strategies to <u>preventing or countering violent extremism</u>.

<u>Security and Defence:</u>
1) <u>Support the most relevant defence and security actors to restore security</u>, protect the population and then support their deployment. Support the complementary operations by G5 Sahel JF and increase partners' awareness of the complexity of the asymmetric threats.
2) <u>Continue to support the Security Sector Reform (SSR) process</u>: strengthen the ISF capacities in the fight against terrorism and organised crime; support ISF capacity building; reform the security and justice sectors.
3) <u>Support the counter terrorist units</u>, with the focus: coordinated response to the terrorist threat; immediate needs in reconnaissance assets, intelligence sharing, land mobility and counter-insurgency doctrine.
4) Support the ISF to increase: <u>the mobility and surveillance/intelligence gathering capabilities;</u> <u>preventing and countering violent extremism, and radicalisation; t</u>he capacity of border surveillance and territorial control and improve and facilitate cross-border exchange of information and cooperation.

<u>Development:</u>
1) **Provide or improve access of populations, to basic services**, in order to respond to the most urgent needs: vaccination, medical care, nutrition, access to clean water.
2) **Support the development of vocational education programmes**.
3) **Support a gradual return of the State and basic services** via political dialogue and budget support programmes, quick impact projects (roads, livelihoods, education, health, sanitation, social services).
4) **Set-up micro-projects in favour of the economic development of local communities** in order to create jobs, especially for women and the youth.
5) **Reinforce local authorities**, to decentralise the administration and to expand access to basic services.

6. Opportunities for the EU External Action

- The EU can help to improve: articulation and coordination on of the security, defence, development and humanitarian aspects to reinforce the integrated approach to Sahel Region and North Africa.

- The capacity on counterterrorism, information sharing and intelligence cooperation with others country's on violent extremism, terrorist networks and irregular migration and organised crime, especially with the south border, on North Africa and Sahel.

- The cooperation with these countries to reduce the level of inter-ethnic violence and its effects on the population through the return of security, governance, justice and basic social services. Also, they need the EU support to contain the growing pressure of jihadists and terrorist groups.

- Cooperation on border control and management to mitigate and reduce migration flows and their effects in the region and on the EU borders.