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The European strategy for the Sahel

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Introduction

Following the increase of attacks against Westerners in 2010 and 2011 in the Sahel and the fall of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi in the autumn 2011, the European Union (EU) faced several challenges likely to generate political instability, insecurity and humanitarian issues in the Sahel-Saharan region. These challenges can have substantial impacts on its economic interests in the region but also within its borders (migratory pressure, risk of terrorist attacks...). This vast region where state authorities are struggling to establish and maintain their power, has to deal with armed groups, including Al-Qaeda In Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and all kinds of trafficking and is inhabited by extremely poor populations likely to succumb to Islamist rhetoric.

The EU published in late September 2011 its Strategy for development and security in the Sahel, which had been in preparation since the beginning of 2011. Recognizing the inextricable link between security and development, this strategy provides plans of action in various fields in order to act globally in support of the Sahel States' national policies. This

Strategy raises several questions: Does the Strategy take into account the consequences of the Arab Spring and the Libyan crisis, i.e. is it adapted to the challenges faced by the authorities in the region? Is this a new way to rethink the relationship between the EU and the Sahel or a mere reformulation of former cooperation policies? How can we go beyond words and make this strategy effective?

To answer these questions, this article first highlights factors which led to the elaboration of such a Strategy. It then focuses on its objectives, its strands of action, and its implementation. It puts forward the links between the Strategy and the national policies of the Sahel States, the projects under discussion and the difficulties faced by the EU. Finally, the article analyzes whether the strategy contains real improvements in comparison with former European policies.

I The origins of the strategy

1. Why a strategy for the Sahel?

Although international concerns about the Sahel arose in 2011 with the Libyan crisis, the Council of the European Union had already been preoccupied by this matter since October 2010. The Council wanted to tackle a combination of factors: the upsurge of AQIM actions against Westerners, the increase of drug trafficking toward Europe and also the migration issue¹. The European willingness to get involved in this region also translated the need for the European External Action Service (EEAS) to undertake a large scale action at a regional level to establish its legitimacy and its existence among the European institutions.

The Strategy was discussed at a Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in March 2011, before the beginning of the Libyan crisis. They acknowledged security and development as inseparable issues: “improving the security situation is integral to economic growth and the reduction of poverty in the region”². They put forward the need for enhanced cooperation at all levels³ and improved capacity building of state institutions. They also considered putting in place an action plan to fight against violent extremism, terrorism and organised crime.

Both the Arab Spring and the Libyan crisis urged for an update of the Strategy as they increased existing threats and created new ones. The easy access to the Libyan arsenals increased the proliferation and availability of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and weapons such as RPG, Manpads and explosives in the entire Sahel-Saharan region from the very West through to the Red Sea. The old problem of porous borders has reemerged as the security system and border controls established by Gaddafi collapsed. Moreover, the crisis generated a flow of pro-Gaddafi fighters, mercenaries and Tuareg from Mali and Niger who

1 Although the EU was addressing it for a long time.

2. Council Conclusions on a European Union strategy for security and development in the Sahel. 3076th Foreign affairs Council meeting. Brussels, 21 March 2011.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/120075.pdf

3 Bilateral, regional with the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) and multilateral levels.

returned to their countries with their weapons and equipment; adding to the fear of a renewed rebellion. Now that the Gaddafi regime has been defeated, there is an urgent need to tackle the issue of disarming all fighters – both pro-Gaddafi and the insurgents – and recovering the weapons in circulation.

Last but not least, crises in Northern Africa strengthened AQIM at various levels. Firstly, Westerners fear a boost in the arsenal of AQIM⁴. Secondly, Western Intelligence Services fear the creation of a terrorist arch in Africa with an alliance between AQIM – active in the Sahel –, Boko Haram – active in Nigeria – and the Shebab – present in Somalia and even in Kenya. Thirdly, experts observe an “*africanization*” of AQIM, meaning a financial independence of AQIM from Al Qaeda and consequently an independence of action. The “*Africanization*” also means an increased independence of the Katiba between them⁵. This trend adds to the difficulties to fight against the group. Fourthly, AQIM is gaining more and more popular support as it provides social services where the State is absent. This is possible through its extensive financial resources from hostage ransoming, arms trafficking and drug smuggling. Fifthly, the collapse of the Libyan regime left numerous pro-Gaddafi fighters aimless and prone to recruitment by AQIM. Lastly, AQIM seems to diversify its activities, which can contribute to a “*FARCisation*”⁶ of the terrorist group. Indeed, the diversification of activities can lead to its transformation into a criminal organization⁷.

The strategy was finally published on 22 September after the difficulties to reach an agreement between all member States were overcome. Indeed, some States are jealous of their influence in the region and view the European will to play an important role in the region with a jaundiced eye. Furthermore, the word “*Strategy*” was problematic as it sounded too ambitious⁸ for some member States. As some of them were not enthusiastic about the idea of a Strategy on the Sahel, the EEAS is more inclined to say that the Strategy was “*welcomed*” and not “*adopted*” by the member States⁹.

2. The process of strategy conception

In order to elaborate this strategy, the EU organized 4 common fact finding missions which included nationals from EU Member States and from Sahel countries. These missions

4. In particular the fear of the use of surface to air missile against airliners, like the 2002 failed attack against an Israeli airliner in Kenya. Even though the group could be very well equipped, the director of the French Research center on intelligence, Eric Dénéché, casts doubt on its technical ability to maintain such equipment. *Le Matin*. « La bombe à retardement de Kadhafi au Sahel ». 7 of September 2011

5. ANTIL, Alain, « Introduction », *Politique étrangère*, 2010/4 Hiver, p. 800-804.

6. Intervention of the EU counter-terrorism coordinator, Gilles de Kerchove, on November 29th during the meeting of the “*security and defense*” European Parliament sub commission, on the topic « The EU strategy for the Sahel ».

7. We can already see that with the inclusion of two of its leaders on a list of traffickers sought by the countries of the Sahel or by its role in escorting drugs and arms convoys. « Les États du Sahel s’unissent contre le trafic d’armes : le Mali et ses partenaires aux trousseaux de 26 trafiquants ». *Dernières nouvelles d’Algérie*. 22 October 2011.

8. For example, an action plan for the Gulf of Guinea is currently discussed: the word “*Strategy*” was so polemic that it has been replaced by “*Initiative for the Gulf of Guinea*”.

9. Interview with members of the EEAS in charge of the Sahel. 21 December 2011, Brussels.

were held in Mali in July 2009, in Mauritania in November 2009, in Algeria in December 2009 and in Niger in June-July 2010¹⁰.

Though civil society organizations were not really invited to participate in the exploratory missions, they have been fully associated to the definition of the programs of the Strategy. Indeed, their involvement was deemed crucial to enhance local ownership of the activities undertaken under the Strategy. In many remote areas, especially in Northern Mali and Mauritania, actions needed the support of local actors to be completely embraced. Moreover, the expertise of NGOs is essential in certain areas. For example, the EU Delegation in Mauritania held a conference in the country to collect the stakeholders' views on the Strategy and their proposals on how to deal with radicalization, modernization, and dialogue. This type of event was important for the EEAS because it had no turnkey projects for Mauritania on these topics and, therefore, had to rely on the civil society to help on these issues¹¹. That was helpful for the EEAS to understand the stakes behind security – an issue that it had no real experience to tackle – and grasp how to prevent religious radicalization and violent extremism.

Other missions are planned to present the strategy to the members of Parliaments of the Sahel States and to the regional authorities. Communication and dialogue with these actors is an important element of the Strategy as it contributes to its local ownership.

II Objectives and implementation of the strategy

1. Objectives

The objectives set by the Strategy are clear: to “tackle the root causes of the extreme poverty and [...] create the grass-root conditions for economic opportunity and human development”. It adds that these issues cannot be dealt with without simultaneously tackling the security challenges in the region.

Moreover, in its conception, the strategy takes into account the mutual interests that Sahel countries and the EU have in developing actions together: to prevent attacks from AQIM in the Sahel and on the EU territory; to reduce and contain drug smuggling and other criminal activities from the Sahel toward Europe; to protect their economic interests and to secure lawful trade and communication links. Concerning the latter, we can note that “pipelines” are specifically named, which underlines the concern of the EU for its energy supply. Hence, we cannot ignore the fact that the “mutual interests” are clearly European interests.

The Strategy for the Sahel includes short term and long term objectives. Short term objectives are aimed at undertaking actions on various fronts whereas the second phase is aimed at consolidating them. The short term objectives – to be reached in 3 years – focus on improving the access to basic services (road infrastructure, education, health, water supply...), the relationship between local populations and the state authorities and reducing

10. Idem.

11. Idem.

terrorist attacks and kidnappings in the Sahel countries. In the long term, these activities will be consolidated to achieve political stability, security, good governance, access to economic and education opportunities and to limit the capacities of AQIM.

In light of recent developments and renewed economic opportunities in Libya, it is legitimate to ask whether the EU interest in the Sahel is not a response to the massive return of the United States in the region: Does the EU fear to be supplanted by the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative¹² or by the Africom¹³? We cannot ignore the words of the US counterterrorism coordinator, Daniel Benjamin, at the Congress in April 2011. He exposed the purposes of the State Department which are to identify regions vulnerable to terrorism including the Sahel; to prevent the recruitment and the radicalization of populations and to strengthen the capacities of these countries in the fight against terrorism. In other words, it covers all the strands of action of the EU Strategy for the Sahel. Nonetheless, the Strategy was not articulated as a response to the US presence in the region. On the contrary, according to the EEAS, “anything and anyone that can help reduce insecurity is welcome”¹⁴. Both the US and the EU have common interests, not only in the fight against terrorism, but also in the fight against drug and arms trafficking.

2. Strands of actions

In order to achieve these goals, the Strategy focuses on three countries: Niger, Mali and Mauritania. However, it was designed to extend to other countries in Western Africa, particularly Burkina Faso. In this logic, when the four Sahel ministers of Foreign Affairs¹⁵ came to Brussels in December 2011 and talked with the EEAS about the second conference of Alger¹⁶ which will be held in February 2012, they discussed opportunities to associate Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and Nigeria in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel. Chad was however not included, even if, within the EEAS, there is a closer cooperation with this country.

Four strands of action are considered: 1) development, good governance and internal conflict resolution; 2) political and diplomatic actions; 3) actions focused on security and the rule of law and 4) actions aimed at countering violent extremism and terrorism.

12. The Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative, launched in 2005, followed the Pan Sahel Initiative launched in 2002 aimed at training and equipping security forces in Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad. This civil-military initiative aims at helping eleven Sahel States (Algeria, Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Burkina-Faso, Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia) to better control their territory and to prevent the region from becoming a haven for terrorist groups.

13 The US command for Africa.

14. Interview with members of the EEAS in charge of the Sahel. 21 December 2011, Brussels.

15. Niger, Mali, Mauritania and Algeria. Indeed, given the leadership of Algeria in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel region, nothing can be undertaken without its consent and its involvement.

16. It is called Alger II in reference to the first international conference in Alger about a partnership on security and development issues between the Sahel States (Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) and their extra-regional partners (more than 30 delegations were present, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council included). Alger I was held in September 2011: the discussions were about the impacts of the Libyan crisis on the region, the actions to undertake to secure borders and control all kinds of traffickings. A strategy was finally adopted to fight against trans-border criminality and to promote development.

3. Implementation

a. A support Strategy

In this Strategy, there is one *mot d'ordre*: in the development field, the EU Strategy comes to support, with its financial instruments, the existing strategies, policies and actions already elaborated and in place at a national or regional level. Hence, the Strategy is not meant to create new policies but to support national strategies designed by the local states authorities.

Concerning the fight against terrorism, the actions are based on what has already been stated in various European documents such as the European Security Strategy, the EU Council Conclusions on Security and Development, the Internal Security Strategy, the Stockholm Program and the EU counterterrorism Strategy.

b. A coordinated policy

In order to be successful, the Strategy for the Sahel should be coordinated at different levels.

At the EEAS level, members of the *Task Force Sahel* meet two or three times a month. This task force is composed of relevant services of the EEAS, but also the EU Counterterrorism coordinator, Gilles de Kerchove, the Algerian Desk, militaries, and members of the Instrument of Stability. The purpose of this informal but important forum of discussion is to evaluate the improvements and difficulties in the implementation of the Strategy without entering the details¹⁷.

On the field, the Delegations are in charge of development actions coordination. The fight against terrorism will be coordinated at European level by the *Defense Attachés*¹⁸ and at international level *via* the Global Counterterrorism Forum which was created in New York in September 2011. This forum could also be useful for the coordination of major actions on the ground. For example, after the Libyan crisis, the international actors took up specific activities according to their “natural” skills: Americans are responsible for identifying and preventing the proliferation of weapons in the region, the United Nations are in charge of the Demobilization-Disarmament-Reintegration process and the EU will probably be in charge of borders management because of its experience in that field.

Finally, the coordination with regional actors (ECOWAS, AU) seems limited. Even though the Strategy was welcomed by the ECOWAS, the EEAS fears a lack of leadership from Western African actors and a lack of capabilities, not to mention a lack of political will. Therefore, the implementation of the Strategy in coordination with ECOWAS will be a complicated task to achieve. As for the African Union, an EU mission in Addis Ababa is planned for the first quarter 2012 to examine how to establish the coordination¹⁹.

c. A widely financed strategy

17. Interview with members of the EEAS in charge of the Sahel. 21 December 2011, Brussels.

18. Idem.

19. Idem.

650 million Euros on three years are dedicated to the activities in the 3 countries. 80 to 90% of these 650M are financed by the 10th European Development Fund (EDF) which runs until 2014. This amount has been calculated on the basis of National Indicative Programs for Mali, Mauritania and Niger, the Instrument of Stability and some other small budgetary lines (such as the migration budget line)²⁰.

In March 2011, the EU decided to grant an additional support of 150 millions of Euros for the three Sahel countries; an amount which also comes from the EDF: 9M for Mauritania, 50M for Mali and 91M for Niger. Until the 11th EDF is concluded, the conditionality of aid²¹ does not seem to apply to the three countries.

4. Country strategy

a. Mali

National Strategy

The Malian national strategy focuses on the insecurity issue in the Northern regions of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal. The President Amadou Toumani Touré is convinced that the security of the Malian territory against the assaults of AQIM cannot be dealt with without a struggle against poverty and without the development of the areas where the State is absent. In this logic, the President started a project at the beginning of August 2011: the Special Program for Peace, Security and Development (SPPSD) designed especially for the Northern Malian regions. The project already receives the financial support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the US, France, Algeria, Denmark, Belgium, Spain, the United Kingdom and Canada.

The first projects consisted in the creation, in eleven localities of the Malian desert, particularly in Kidal region, of security structures, health centers, schools, banks of cereals, infrastructures to meet the needs in water and to promote development of activities for women and the youth and their follow-up. The next projects will address Timbuktu and Gao regions.

European support

The Strategy for the Sahel supports economic development policies in Northern Mali and in the Niger Delta and tries to take into account environment and climate issues in order to avoid further burden on an already fragile environment. A specific support of 50 million Euros has been allocated to the SPPSD, an amount which can be divided as following: 8 million for security²², a short-term financing of 4 million²³ for the implementation of public

20. Idem.

21. Conditionality of aid is about "including more differentiation", it means not to grant aid indiscriminately. Interview with members of the EEAS in charge of the Sahel. 21 December 2011, Brussels.

22. 4 million come from the Instrument of Stability. 8 more million will be released for a 2nd phase from 2012 and other 8 million for a 3rd phase. Making in total 20 million for the security aspects of the SPPSD whose aim is, I recall, to strengthen the presence of the State in Northern Mali and to improve the functioning of the administration.

23. This amount has been granted in April 2011 and comes from the Instrument of Stability.

services, 6.5 million to prevent conflicts²⁴, 20 million to increase the resources of the judicial system²⁵, 15 millions for development and decentralization²⁶, and 0.5 million for political and diplomatic actions²⁷. Moreover, an agreement for 12.5 millions to strengthen the civil society was signed during the visit of the Development Commissioner, M. Pielbags, in November 2011. As noted before, local ownership and dialogue with local populations are key elements of the implementation of the Strategy.

b. Niger

National Strategy

The Nigerian national strategy against terrorism and insecurity and to promote development was published quite late, in October 2011. It addresses six of the eight regions of the country that are situated in the North. The environment is not really favourable to development because of endemic poverty, recurrent food insecurity, bad climate conditions and, currently, the return of the pro-Gaddafi Tuareg. The objectives of the Nigerien strategy are to promote, in a peaceful and secure context, the economic and social development of Niger, and more particularly of the six regions.

In order to achieve these goals, the strategy highlights five areas of intervention : the strengthening of security of goods and persons²⁸, the creation of economic opportunities for the population²⁹, the improvement of the access to basic services (water, education, health), the enforcement of local governance³⁰, the integration of returnees from Libya, Nigeria, Ivory Coast³¹.

European support

The European strategy for Niger addresses the legal system with training of judges and the development of investigation capacities. The EU is also considering creating a wider training to fight against the SALW: currently, there is cooperation with the Red Cross in the Northern Niger because the NGO already implements two programs in this region, one aimed at demobilizing former fighters and another one aimed at recovering light weapons. These projects began in mid-November. If they are successful, they might be extended to Mali³².

24. It deals with attempts to bring back communities together, analysis and monitoring of the causes of tensions, identification of movements with Islamic tendencies. Actions are not already identified but they will be implemented by a NGO. Interview with members of the EEAS in charge of the Sahel. 21 December 2011, Brussels.

25. To fight against terrorism and organised crime, to promote human rights and to contribute to the training of security forces.

26. To revitalize the economy in Northern zones, to create job opportunities for the youth.

27. Support to national or regional high level political meetings.

28. Border management, legal system and security forces capacities.

29. Improvement of production and commercialization capacity of breeding products, diversification of agricultural products, preservation of the environment, better access to the job market for women and the youth...

30. Support to local development, Demobilization-Disarmament-Reintegration, promotion of the traditional chiefs leadership capacity.

31. Promotion of opportunities at a social and economic levels.

32. Interview with members of the EEAS in charge of the Sahel. 21 December 2011, Brussels.

In terms of financing, out of 91M, 12 millions have been released in fall 2011³³ in order to address the food crisis.

c. Mauritania

National Strategy

Since Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz came to power, Mauritania has adopted a strategy to fight against terrorism which addresses several fronts: religion, culture, education, communication, politics, justice, defense and security. Nouakchott has been focusing, for more than one year, on a strategy of constant harassment of AQIM. This has led to operations in the Malian territory, with or without the cooperation of regional and international allies such as France³⁴. Let us underline that bilateral cooperation between EU member States and the Sahel countries is included in the Strategy and comes in support of the European activities. For example, France has a strong cooperation with Mauritania in terms of intelligence information sharing, training of pilot officers in Mérignac, or in equipment furniture.

European support

The European support will contribute to secure the land borders via training of agents and the equipment of 54 points of entry and exit which have already been identified. 1 Million Euros has been granted for the borders management in the framework of the Strategy for the Sahel in Mauritania. Nine other million will be released in January 2012³⁵ (an amount which might increase) for short term measures such as reintegration of former fighters in mine-clearing missions or municipal police missions.

5. Regional projects under discussion

The EEAS is currently considering putting in place several projects. The first concerns the Sahelo-Saharan College. This College is not supposed to be a physical structure but a virtual and an itinerant one. It is conceived as a set of custom-made training modules (borders management, securitization) which would be provided to different actors from the region, with a priority for those belonging to Mali, Mauritania and Niger. 4M from the Instrument of Stability will be allocated to this project. The EEAS relies on the EU member states' skills to create these modules. It could also be a regional forum for experience sharing and dialogue that the EU could support³⁶.

A second project is about a possible Common and Security Defence Policy (CSDP) mission in the form of a light civilian mission aimed at providing training support, technical support, and equipments. No troops would be sent. It has been discussed at the

33. This amount is not part of the 150M of the 10th EDF but comes from a budget reserve of the 10th EDF.

34. These operations on the Malian territory were lead with French cooperation in July 2010 to attempt the hostage Michel Germaneau liberation, and in September 2010 against an AQIM position, in June 2011 against an AQIM basis and in July 2011 an operation on the Mauritanian territory.

35. These 9 million come from the 150 M of the 10th EDF.

36. Interview with members of the EEAS in charge of the Sahel. 21 December 2011, Brussels.

Political and Security Committee (PSC) on December 20th and, surprisingly, was warmly welcomed by the EU member states³⁷.

The EEAS points out the difficulties for the EU to understand the structure of the fight against terrorism of the Sahel States. This fight is articulated around two bodies: the regional command for joint counter terrorism operations (CEMOC)³⁸ and the Fusion and Liaison Unit (ULF)³⁹. In spite of a presentation made in Alger on the ULF, there are still difficulties to understand what it is: whether it is an intelligence information sharing structure or a mere communication structure. Nevertheless, the understanding of the functioning of the ULF can be useful for the EU as it can help reach the regional command for joint counter terrorism operations (CEMOC)⁴⁰. When the four Sahel ministers of Foreign Affairs came to Brussels in December 2011, they emphasized “their openness and availability”⁴¹ about the idea of a future collaboration between the EU and the Fusion and Liaison Unit in the framework of a CSDP mission. The project is now in the hands of the CMC (Center of crisis management) in order to operationalize this CSDP mission and to examine the member states participation⁴². In addition, an EU mission is to be organized during the first quarter of 2012 to understand the role of the Fusion and Liaison Unit and examine how the EU can support it. Moreover, this EU mission would be the opportunity to shed light on the European body which could be in charge of the cooperation with the ULF (Europol, SITCEN –intelligence unit...).

6. Difficulties

The Strategy for the Sahel faces some implementation issues. The strands of actions raise the question of the skills of the Delegations. Indeed, these delegations are used to dealing with development issues, not with security issues. Moreover, they are asked to work in a short period of time –more precisely during an EFD time, i.e. six years –, to identify, elaborate and implement programs. In addition to the time issue there is the question of human resources: the first difficulty will be to find people with technical skills and some knowledge of the country culture⁴³. The second difficulty is the reluctance of workers to operate in regions with a high level of insecurity.

Another issue is to have theory and practice matching, particularly in such unsecure areas. The EEAS mentioned the case of the construction of an office building in Mali: the site was not secured and was looted.

In March 2012, an evaluation of the progresses of the Strategy accomplished in one year will be held. The EEAS does not hesitate to say that, so far, no big improvements can be noted:

37. Idem.

38. The CEMOC (Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) was created in April 2010 to address the terrorism threat in the Sahel. Its purposes are to strengthen security and military cooperation between the Sahel States without any foreign interference. The CEMOC will ultimately rely on 75 000 men.

39. The UFL is a permanent consultation body between the Sahel states armies and Intelligence services.

40. As the CEMOC does not want any foreign interference, it remains a very close structure. Cooperation between the EU and the UFL could help the EU to become closer to the CEMOC and to consider a cooperation with it.

41. Idem.

42. Idem.

43. For example, we know that Malian authorities prefer to receive turnkey projects whereas the Mauritanian authorities don't. Interview with members of the EEAS in charge of the Sahel. 21 December 2011, Brussels.

indeed, we should not forget that each project must have the approval from the EDF and all the EU member States. The evaluation could take the shape of a roadmap divided into three columns: what has been done, what remains to be done, and what is yet to be planned. It will be progressively completed and distributed to the EU member states to keep them informed and updated on the Strategy. Basically, more than an assessment, this process would be a monitoring process.

III The European strategy for the Sahel: rupture or continuity?

1. Security more than development?

If we look at the persons in charge of the implementation of the Strategy, we find Manuel Lopez Blanco, the EEAS coordinator for the Strategy in charge of the diplomatic action and the communication aspects of the Strategy in the Sahel countries; the supervisor of the Strategy working from Brussels and coordinating the work of the different relevant desk within the EEAS; a « Mr. Security »⁴⁴ who will arrive at the beginning of 2012; one desk for Niger, another dealing with Mauritania and Mali and a third desk to be created for Burkina Faso.

With one person dedicated to the security dimension and none to the development dimension of the Strategy, the European support to the Sahel countries clearly focuses on the security dimension: can we consider this as some sort of confession on the real purpose of the Strategy – a security-oriented one? If we can initially favour this hypothesis, we should not forget that the EU, as a *soft power*, is more inclined and equipped to address development issues than security ones. Hence, the relevance of having a coordination person within the EEAS focussing on security dimension is understandable; especially when we consider that the development dimension in the Strategy only means to invest “more money”⁴⁵ in already existing policies. As for the security dimension, the EEAS openly encourages member States to join the security projects in order to support “Mr. Security”.

As the European policies already exist and deal with development, such as the Cotonou Agreement⁴⁶, we could be inclined to think that the main reason for the European Strategy for the Sahel is to deal with security issue. In order to support this argument, it is written in the Strategy itself that “improving security and development in Sahel has an obvious and direct impact on protecting European citizens and interests and on the EU internal security situation”.

2. A break in continuity?

As development issues are dealt with in more specific policies, we can wonder whether the Sahel Strategy constitutes a mere continuity of the Cotonou Agreement or a concrete evolution. On one hand, the Cotonou Agreement and the Strategy share some common grounds. For example, the idea of local ownership, the prevention and

44. An expert in counter-terrorism and in security issues.

45. Interview with members of the EEAS in charge of the Sahel. 21 December 2011, Brussels.

46. For instance, the Cotonou agreements have been signed in 2000, revised in 2005 and in 2010. They address development issues in 78 countries from the Africa, Caribs and Pacific regions.

management of crisis, transparency and governance, the strengthening of institutional capacity, activities in favour of the youth, access to education are all present in both policies...

On the other hand, their scope seems to differ. Indeed, the Cotonou Agreement can be placed within the frame of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG)⁴⁷. This Agreement addresses development issues in developing countries or in the least developed countries. Moreover, it only considers security as a part/element/dimension of development activities and restricts the meaning of security to the fight against weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and illicit trafficking. Cotonou is and will always be a project to promote the development in favour of poor countries.

On the contrary, the Sahel Strategy is a project less extensive in two ways. First, it focuses on a limited number of countries. Second, as it addresses the specific needs of each partner, it focuses on certain aspects of the MDG. In addition, as already mentioned, the notion of “mutual interests” stated in the Strategy seemed more prone to answer the European priorities, the Sahel Strategy looks like a project by the EU, for the EU, for its security, without, nonetheless, leaving aside development issues.

3. Some reservations

After analyzing the Strategy, one can have some doubts about its content. First of all, there is no clear definition about what the Sahel is. The EU tends to consider the Sahel issue in a horizontal way – from West to East – while it should be also considered as an issue with a vertical orientation from North to South. Indeed, one can stretch the region from Northern Niger to Nigeria with the threat of Boko Haram and toward Chad with the Darfour conflict and with AQIM’s presence in the North of Chad. In this context, it is a pity Chad is not included in the Strategy⁴⁸ because, among Sahel States, this country is equipped with the most capacities to fight against terrorism⁴⁹. Moreover, the EU can benefit from and cooperate with the military alliance between Chad, Cameroun, Niger and Nigeria in the region of the Chad Lake to fight against Boko Haram, in place from September 2011.

47. Adopted in 2000, the UN Millennium Goals are a set of objectives for development which are supposed to be reached in 2015. These are to put an end to poverty and hunger, to promote universal education, to reach gender equality, to improve child health, to improve maternal health, to fight against HIV/AIDS, to act in favour of environmental sustainability, to create a global partnership.

48. Even though it is mentioned at the beginning of the Strategy, I had confirmation by EEAS members that Chad is not part of the Sahel cluster; of course there is a more and more close cooperation with the person in charge of Chad in the EEAS.

49. Informal discussion with high level former UN official in Africa



Secondly, the EEAS should address the deep causes of the situation in the Sahel. We mentioned the post-Libyan crisis, the proliferation of SALW, the presence of armed groups, arms trafficking and drug smuggling but these are actually the consequences of deeper causes. Identifying them would allow for a better understanding of the dynamics in the Sahel. For instance, we should reflect on the living conditions of the people in this region in 20 years time when the population will double and increase the pressure on natural resources to a point of no return. We can provide two examples. First, because of the desertification process, agriculture has been abandoned in favor of breeding. But even with breeding, people face difficulties to find pastures, which will create condition for land disputes: breeders from Mali and Niger who are going to Chad to find pastures, now begin to go as far as the Central African Republic or even the DRC in order to do so. Second, the raise of armed criminality is a consequence of pauperization of the populations in the region and, for a lot of them, has become a way of life. To survive, people have the choice between migrating toward urban centers and participating in attacks against all kinds of convoys in the region.

Thirdly, if the Strategy mentions the absence of the State in remote regions of Niger, Mali and Mauritania and the “insufficiently decentralized decision making”, it does not address the core reasons of the failure of the decentralization process: these countries do not rely enough on the local authorities which can, in some case, be religious authorities. We must acknowledge that the local administration can play an important role in resolving local conflicts and can, in the future, act as an intermediary between local population and the State authorities in their implementation of national policies.

Conclusion

In spite of these reservations, we can conclude that the added value of the Strategy for development and security in the Sahel is the realization of the fact that the EU cannot

address development issues without addressing security issues and *vice-versa*. Another improvement is that, for the first time, the EU is not acting as a pro-active entity which proposes turnkey projects but promotes activities which support national policies and encourage local ownership. This Strategy for Mali, Mauritania and Niger appears to be a test for its possible future extension to the whole Western Africa region.