
Peace and security in 2020

Evaluating the EU approach to tackling the Sahel conflicts



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Evaluating the EU approach to tackling the Sahel conflicts

The Peace and Security series evaluates European Union (EU) performance in the field of peace and security in a specific geographical region each year. This, the third thematic study in the series, focuses on the EU's contribution to resolving the conflicts in the Sahel, restoring stability and building peace in the region.

The EU has adopted a comprehensive and integrated approach to tackling the numerous political, security and defence, humanitarian, development, and environmental challenges facing the five countries in the Sahel: Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, issuing a strategy specifically for the region in 2011. This evaluation first outlines the complex local and geopolitical dynamics framing the conflicts in the Sahel. It then assesses the various aspects of the EU's approach to supporting peace efforts in the region in an already crowded international landscape. The study also analyses the European Parliament's engagement with the Sahel region, considers the challenges that the EU (and other international actors) have faced in the Sahel, and presents options for improving the effectiveness of EU action.

A parallel study, published separately, provides an overview of current EU action on peace and security, while a third presents the 2020 Normandy Index. The studies have been drafted as a contribution to the Normandy World Peace Forum in October 2020.

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Executive summary

Since the 2012 rebellion in northern Mali and the coup d'état, the European Union (EU) has become heavily engaged in restoring stability, building security and promoting peace in the Sahel region – an area encompassing Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. This arid and partially desert-like landscape has seen a surge in conflict in Mali and the subsequent jihadist occupation of the central areas of Mali, spilling over to neighbouring countries, with violent regional dimensions. The EU has been active in the region, working with a number of EU Member States – with France taking the lead (notably present with its large Operation Barkhane) – and with the UN's stabilisation mission (MINUSMA). In 2015, in response to a succession of destabilising events, and at a time when Europe was being swept by what was perceived to be a major migration crisis, the EU stepped up its efforts in the Sahel region. The EU's commitment to the Sahel is also underpinned by the logic of the nexus between security, migration and development and its potential consequences for Europe. It is in the Sahel that some EU Member States believe that the future of the European project could be played out, viewing the stabilisation of the region – particularly through initiatives to curb migration and counter-terrorist threats – as a way to head off populist nationalism at home.

EU strategy in the Sahel

Against this background, the EU strategy for the Sahel was conceived in line with the EU's integrated approach that centres on the idea that security, development and governance are inherently intertwined. This study aims to assess the EU strategy for the Sahel and its implementation against the set objectives. The EU adopted its first strategy for the Sahel in 2011, later reinforcing it with its 2015-2020 regional action plan. These two documents outline the four key elements underpinning EU engagement in the region:

- 1 *Security and development in the Sahel are inter-linked. Achieving security will enable the economies of the Sahel countries to grow and poverty to be reduced.*
- 2 *Achieving security and development in the Sahel is only possible through closer regional cooperation, which is an area in which the EU has a potential role to play.*
- 3 *All the states of the region will benefit from capacity-building in the fields of governance, security and development cooperation.*
- 4 *The EU has an important role to play both in encouraging economic development for the people of the Sahel and helping them achieve security, while at the same time protecting the interests of EU citizens.*

In line with these guiding elements and the premises of the integrated approach, the EU has aimed to be reactive and adapt to changing situations on the ground; commit to long-term change; act at different levels of governance (local, national, regional, and global); and support comprehensive agreements rooted in broad, deep and durable regional and international partnerships.

EU action in the Sahel

In practice, the EU's integrated approach has meant the parallel use of an array of instruments to support political and diplomatic dialogue, security and stability, and development and humanitarian support. The political and diplomatic dialogue has taken place in the context of the EU-G5 Sahel political partnership, including ministerial meetings and the implementation of the EU Sahel strategy, the regional action plan and the Malian peace process, for which the EU acts as a guarantor. Regular meetings with the EU's G5 Sahel counterparts have centred, in particular, on strengthening regional cooperation and coordination on development, governance, and security. Dialogue is also carried out with other regional partners (for example, the African Union) and local actors (including civil society).

Development cooperation support from the EU and its Member States for the G5 Sahel countries totals €8 billion for the 2014-2020 period. The EU provides long-term assistance for the Sahel mainly

through the EU Trust Fund for Africa (with €930 million already mobilised), which has been criticised for focusing too much on the management of migratory flows. Generous funding has also been made through the European Development Fund (EDF), which for the 2014-2020 period has allocated €628 million for Burkina Faso, €542 million for Chad, €664 million for Mali, €160 million for Mauritania and €686 million for Niger. The EU is also a major humanitarian donor, with almost €300 million allocated to G5 Sahel populations over the past two years. The recently created Sahel Alliance and the Coalition for the Sahel are attempts to enhance regional coordination of previously disparate initiatives by the region's principal donors.

The EU has focused its efforts on security and restoring state control and the rule of law, initially in Mali but also, as of 2015, in Burkina Faso and Niger. EU action has centred on counter-terrorism, the control of frontiers and migration control, and also capacity-building in the security sector. To support the security and stability of the region, the EU has deployed three peace support operations, referred to as the common security and defence policy (CSDP) missions. A civilian mission (EUCAP Sahel Mali) and a military mission (EUTM Mali) and a second civilian mission (EUCAP Sahel Niger), have been bolstered by a reinforced regional approach. The missions include training, advising and offering direct support to security forces, with the ultimate objective of reinforcing national capacities. The two EU peace support operations in Mali have been temporarily suspended since the coup d'état, following limitations already put on the missions' work in recent months owing to the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, the EU and its Member States have supported the operationalisation of the regional African-led G5 Sahel Joint Force by contributing €147 million.

Persisting challenges in the Sahel

The coup d'état that is unfolding in Mali at the time of writing and the resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita are a clear sign of the limited sustainability of international and EU efforts in the Sahel region. Despite progress towards the regionalisation of international efforts in the region, security challenges have impeded tangible achievements in preventing radicalisation and fostering inclusive development. Efforts to stabilise the Sahel have been of limited and short-lived success; the EU's attempts to integrate security and development initiatives in the Sahel may prove costly, unsustainable and incomplete in the long term.

Some of the problems the EU has faced in the Sahel have been linked to the challenges of operating within severe security constraints. The EU's capacity-building programmes and its CSDP missions in the Sahel have been expanding into new territory, broadening their mandates and deploying an increasing number of personnel, but they still face a number of technical difficulties. These include continuing recruitment issues and reliance on francophone staff, a dependence on the will of local governments to cooperate, the inability of the Sahelian countries to shoulder the high administrative burden of EU programmes, and the ineffective monitoring and evaluation of programmes. On a more substantive level, observers have questioned EU motives, claiming that the shift to a pragmatic EU foreign policy may have prioritised EU interests (border control, migration and counter-terrorism) at the expense of the interests of local populations.

Moreover, the region's countries face serious governance problems, including lack of: access to state representatives and basic public services; a free and impartial judiciary; protection from the predatory behaviour of local officials; and national resources for true political decentralisation. This is compounded by the threats that civil defence groups bring to the complex puzzle of local dynamics in the Sahel region. After 2015, amid a worsening security crisis in central Mali and areas near the country's borders with Niger and Burkina Faso, it became increasingly clear that a failure of governance was a core driver of the violence. While the EU and international community recognise the governance challenges, questions are raised as to their understanding of the local context and their access to local communities (especially agro-rural communities).

Options for the future

Given the dire security conditions in the Sahel, re-establishing stability throughout the Sahelian countries will remain a priority, and in that context, so will the fight against the Islamist armed groups. To enhance the effectiveness of the EU's contribution to restoring security, experts recommend reinforcing the CSDP missions by fully expanding their mandates to the entire G5 Sahel territory and strengthening the accompaniment of security and defence forces to enhance the EU's advisory capacity and its effectiveness. This, however, will not be enough without the commitment of the countries in the region directly concerned and, with that, of the G5 Sahel Joint Force that can be a catalyst for increased action. Others, have suggested – to the dismay of peacebuilding non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – using the new EU financing instrument, the European Peace Facility, to provide the armed forces of the countries in the Sahel with lethal weapons. The latest coup d'état in Mali should also be reason to reflect on whether this instrument is the right one for the region.

To respond to the challenges outlined above, it will also be important for the EU to engage more on fundamental reforms, especially in the field of good governance. In that context, in line with EU strategies and programmes in the Sahel emphasising good governance, more efforts should be exerted to pursue substantive security sector reform, especially access to justice, and to develop long-term national security strategies. Moreover, more should be done on disarming non-state armed groups/ militia and reintegrating them into society. Strengthening security sector reform is seen as a way of restoring the population's trust towards government institutions and recapturing control in local agro-rural communities.

Analysts and activists recommend that the EU support dialogue initiatives at all levels, in particular: (i) between communities, (ii) between national security forces and populations, and (iii) between armed groups, communities and authorities. Moreover, it is recommended that governments in the Sahel (in particular in Mali) allow civil society organisations (CSOs) to engage in dialogue with armed groups without repercussions from authorities, since a sustainable solution to the Sahelian conflicts cannot come about without engaging in dialogue with armed groups and their members. Dialogues should be inclusive and transparent, reaching out to elected local leaders, religious leaders, but also to 'ordinary citizens', such as young people and women. To support dialogue, encourage good governance reforms and have access to local communities, the EU will need to work closely with regional partners – ranging from the African Union, to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). For those states in the Sahel whose leaders profess to be following universal values but do not follow through on their commitments (instead using stalling tactics to avoid implementing agreed measures), more serious measures should be taken (including sanctions).

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List of acronyms

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific countries
AFET	Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament
AGIR	Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative
AQIM	al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AU	African Union
CAR	Central African Republic
CMA	Coordination of Movements of Azawad, Mali
CFSP	common foreign and security policy
CSDP	common security and defence policy
CSO	civil society organisation
DACP	Parliamentary Delegation to the EU-ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly, European Parliament
DDR	disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
DEVE	Committee for Development, European Parliament
DG DEVCO	Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development
DG ECHO	Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, European Commission
DG HOME	Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs
DMAG	Delegation for relations with Maghreb Countries, European Parliament
DPAP	Delegation for relations with the Pan-African Parliament, European Parliament
DROI	Sub-Committee on Human Rights, European Parliament
ECA	European Court of Auditors
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists Group, European Parliament
EDF	European Development Fund
EEAS	European External Action Service
ENF	European of Nations and Freedom Group (2015-2019), European Parliament
EPP	European People's Party, European Parliament
EPRS	European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament
EU	European Union
EUBAM	European Union Border Assistance Mission
EUCAP	European Union Capacity Building Mission
EUFOR	European Union Force
EUTF	European Union Trust Fund
EUTM	European Union Training Mission
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
GNA	Government of National Accord, Libya
Greens/EFA	Greens/European Free Alliance, European Parliament
GUE/NGL	Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left, European Parliament
ID	Identity and Democracy Group, European Parliament

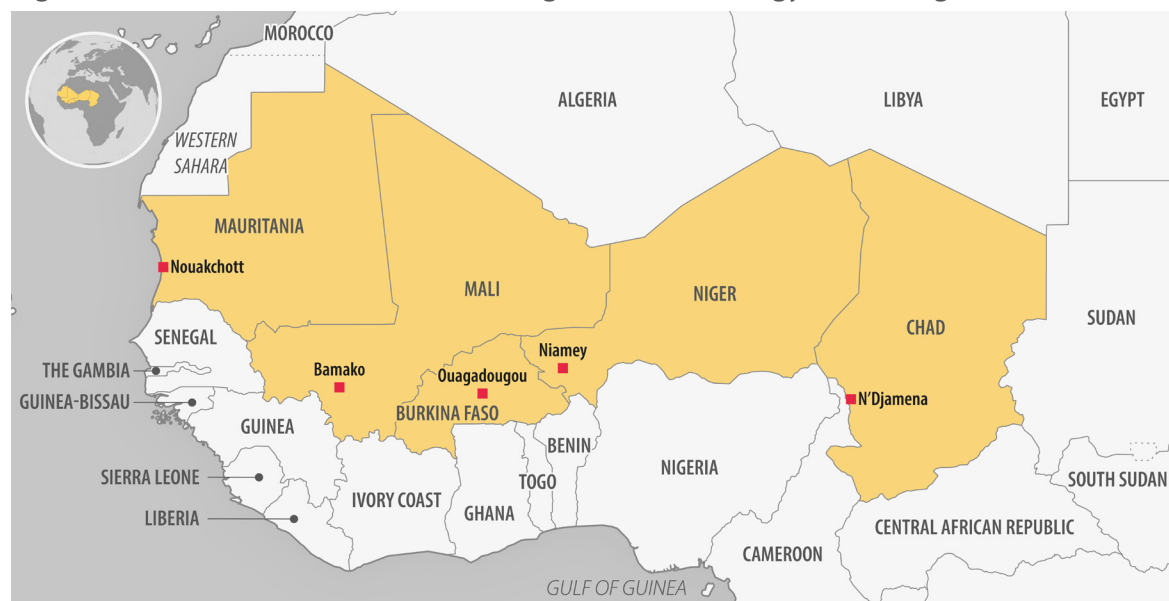
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISWAP	Islamic State in West Africa Province
JNIM	Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (known as Nusrat al-Islam)
LNA	Libyan National Army
MFF	multiannual financial framework
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali
MISIN	Italian Mission of Support to the Republic of Niger
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
MNLA	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, Mali
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MUJAO	Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NI	Non-attached Members (<i>non-inscrits</i>), European Parliament
ODA	official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RACC	Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell
RCC	EU Regional Coordination Cell
RE	Renew Europe Group, European Parliament
S&D	Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats, European Parliament
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SEDE	Sub-Committee on Security and Defence, European Parliament
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
VP/HR	Vice-President of the European Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
WAEMU	West African Economic and Monetary Union

1. Introduction

1.1. Complex local and geopolitical dynamics in the Sahel region

The Sahel region – stretching from Mauritania, through Mali and Burkina Faso, to Niger and Chad – can be seen as representing a litmus test for the European Union's approach in Africa.¹ This is especially the case today when the new European Commission has put Africa at the centre of EU external action interests.² From its mere geography (see Figure 1), the Sahel region is probably the area of Africa where the security-migration-development nexus is the most tangible. As one of the poorest regions in the world, with its partially desert-like landscape and porous borders, the Sahel is a cradle of instability and, in the last five years, has degenerated into one of overwhelming violence. Some sources speak of more than 12 000 violent events and 50 000 fatalities for the 2014-2019 period.³ The potential consequences that this fragility could have for Europe, in terms of exporting security threats and migrants, have given the 'corridor' between the Mediterranean basin and sub-Saharan Africa geopolitical meaning – in the image and promise made by Ursula von der Leyen's European Commission.

Figure 1 – The Sahel countries, according to the EU strategy for the region



Source: Map by Samy Chahri, EPRS.

The conflicts in the Sahel are largely the result of pressures from armed groups who crossed into the region owing to incomplete peace processes in neighbouring countries. In late 2011, following the fall of Libya, Tuareg al-Qaeda fighters armed with weapons from Gaddafi's arsenal, streamed home to Mali from Libya. Jointly with the independence-seeking Tuareg insurgents of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), who also had rear bases in Algeria, and with the

¹ B. Venturi, [The EU and the Sahel: A laboratory of experimentation for the security-migration-development nexus](#), IAI Working Paper 17/38, Istituto Affari Internazionali, December 2017.

² European Commission, [A Union that strives for more: My agenda for Europe by candidate for President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen](#), Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2019-2024.

³ OECD, [The Geography of Conflict in North and West Africa](#), West African Studies, OECD Publishing, 2020, p. 78.

Salafist Ansar Dine group, they led the 2012 insurrection in Mali. However, the military coup d'état in Mali in March 2012 left large parts of the country as 'ungoverned spaces'.⁴ The government has been unable to fully regain control in these areas, despite the 2013 French-led Operation Serval – supported by the European Union – to reconquer territories in the north of Mali, the organisation of elections, and the negotiation of the peace deal (Algiers Accord) in 2015. In parallel, the civil war in Libya also resulted in an ongoing spillover of Da'esh/Islamic State (ISIS) into Niger. This in itself would have been enough of a powder keg for the EU to tackle. However, as the [chronology](#) in the annex shows, the destabilisation of Mali has since resulted in the proliferation and complexification of armed groups in the country, also exported to its neighbours. The situation has been compounded by political instability in Nigeria, with the expansion of Boko Haram in 2013, and its spillover into neighbouring Niger and Chad.

Attacks in the Sahel escalated and became more sophisticated as of 2017, when several Islamist armed groups active in Mali, notably the Sahel's branch of al-Qaeda (AQIM) with the Malian/Burkinabe Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and two local Malian-led groups, merged under the banner of the Group for Support to Islam and Muslims (known as Nusrat al-Islam). Despite jihadist groups having formed a united front since March 2017, the Sahelian jihadism is 'glocal', as Mathieu Pellerin explains, pointing to the heterogeneity of these groups. They are the result of 'the agglomeration of local sources of insurgency built on social, political or economic fractures' that has been interacting with global-level Islamist groups.⁵ The 'local' aspect of jihadism is in itself very diverse, given the number of local languages spoken and ethnic communities present. Other groups operating in the wider region include al-Mourabitoun, Ansarul Islam, Plateforme, Ansar al-Din and Boko Haram. These local intricacies are met by infighting between two key jihadist groups active in the Sahel region, the Islamic State group and al-Qaeda's Sahel affiliate, Nusrat al Islam,⁶ further complicating the picture of armed groups (see Figure 3). Since May 2019, through its affiliates Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and ISWAP (Boko Haram split in 2016), ISIS has been active in the Lake Chad area of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.

It is the local militia and their more political, social or territorial claims that have been by far the most complex elements of the armed groups for international actors (including the EU) to grapple with. These civilian self-defence groups and community-based militias have established themselves to protect villages from attack. They have grown out of an increasing lack of trust towards national authorities, leading communities to choose to fold in on themselves and develop their own defence mechanisms.⁷ Communities also have their own system of local governance, based on the power of customary law administered by traditional chiefs, and the religious norms governed by imams, Koranic scholars and qadis (Muslim judges). These elements have come to play key roles in the administration of justice and the maintenance of social cohesion in an environment where national authorities no longer have control or indeed access.⁸

⁴ A. Tobie and B. Sangaré, [The impact of armed groups on the populations of central and northern Mali: Necessary adaptations of the strategies for re-establishing peace](#), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, October 2019.

⁵ M. Pellerin, [Les violences armées au Sahara : Du djihadisme aux insurrections](#), Études de l'IFRI, Institut Français des Relations Internationales, November 2019.

⁶ On the complexities of the nature of the Islamic State in the Sahel region, see: J. Campbell, [The Islamic State 'presence' in the Sahel is more complicated than affiliates suggest](#), Africa in Transition, Council on Foreign Relations, June 2018.

⁷ See, for example, D. M. Tull, 'Rebuilding Mali's army: The dissonant relationship between Mali and its international partners', *International Affairs*, Vol. 95(2), March 2019, pp. 405-422.

⁸ A. Tobie and B. Sangaré, [The impact of armed groups on the populations of central and northern Mali: Necessary adaptations of the strategies for re-establishing peace](#), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, October 2019.

The parastatal groups have in a sense provided populations living in the 'ungoverned spaces' in Mali with a response to their discontent with a state that is seen as predatory and whose imposition of taxes and duties is perceived as arbitrary. Some of these groups have proclaimed their allegiance to government forces. Indeed, the Malian government forces have also supported, or at least allowed the creation of, some parastatal militias (some are even signatories to the 2015 peace agreement). In Burkina Faso, in recent years, following the spillover of jihadist insurgencies from Mali, self-defence groups have gained the support of most local people by restoring security, sometimes through brutal punishments. State security forces and tacitly state-backed militia groups have been accused of severe human rights abuses during counter-terrorism operations, including torture and extrajudicial killings. The rising violence, some playing out along ethnic lines, has subsumed any optimism regarding the country's democratic transition.⁹

In addition, the low level of security renders the Sahel region a safe haven for criminal networks that often help jihadist and rebel groups finance themselves through illicit racketeering and organised crime activities (e.g. trafficking of gold, drugs, fuel, arms and human beings). To this can be added the growing threat posed by piracy in the Gulf of Guinea – in particular off Benin, Ghana and Togo.¹⁰ Security analysts have warned of the expansion of violent extremism through porous borders to the countries south of the Sahel region to the Gulf of Guinea, giving jihadists and militias opportunities to traffic drugs and arms with Latin America, especially Colombia.¹¹

As the [chronology](#) in the Annex shows, the country that has had the most stable government during the period being examined (2011-2020) is Mauritania. In contrast, Mali remains the epicentre of the conflict, as the August 2020 coup d'état has confirmed. Although the security situation in the northern part of the country has stabilised to an extent in recent years, the actions of transnational criminal organisations, terrorist groups and armed militia have led to a spike in violence against civilians, with over 85 000 having fled their homes in 2019.¹² Burkina Faso, a country previously less prone to jihadi attacks, has become a stark symbol of worsening security trends in West Africa's Sahel region. Islamist insurgents have asserted control over parts of the country and carried out several large attacks in the capital.¹³ The UN Refugee Agency has reported that in 2019, more than 700 000 people were forced to flee their homes in Burkina Faso. Tens of thousands of Malians and Nigeriens have also been displaced while thousands of schools have been shut.¹⁴

Niger recorded the second largest deterioration in the region, which has led to the country being ranked 16th highest for entrenched criminality in Africa in the 2019 Africa Organised Crime Index, a score considerably higher than the continental average. In recent years, gangs involved in cross-border armed robbery and cattle rustling have emerged in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Senegal and Mali. Moreover, there are also domestic criminal networks and foreign criminal actors involved in cross-border smuggling networks, particularly in Niger's vast Agadez region, which borders unstable states where law enforcement has weakened, particularly on the border with Libya. Chad,

⁹ [Burkina Faso](#), US Congressional Research Service, 23 October 2019.

¹⁰ N. Gros-Verheyde, '[Le risque d'enlèvement de marins augmente dans le Golfe de Guinée](#)', *B2-Bruxelles2*, 22 July 2020.

¹¹ E. L. Olson and N. Gordon, '[Shifting trafficking routes for illicit narcotics and the importance of Spain-US counter-narcotics cooperation](#)', ARI 79/2018, Elcano Royal Institute, Madrid, 25 June 2018. For the dynamics of arms and drugs trafficking in the ongoing Colombian conflict, see the study that EPRS prepared for the 2019 Normandy Peace Forum: I. Ioannides, '[Peace and Security in 2019: Evaluating EU efforts to support peace in Colombia](#)', EPRS, European Parliament, May 2019.

¹² Human Rights Watch, '[Mali: Events of 2019](#)', 2020.

¹³ [Burkina Faso](#), US Congressional Research Service, 23 October 2019.

¹⁴ UNHCR, '[In 12 months Sahel violence displaces more than 700,000 in Burkina Faso](#)', 21 February 2020.

Niger and Nigeria are facing a very high risk of food shortages from the coronavirus pandemic and all three are among the least peaceful countries on the Global Peace Index.¹⁵

Undeniably, conflict in the Sahel countries has disrupted the life of many fragile communities in the region, broken down social cohesion and frayed communal loyalties. People flee, leaving their belongings behind, including their fields and livestock, in search of safety. The areas affected by violent extremism keep extending and the number of internally displaced persons keeps growing, from 413 000 in 2018 to near to 1.2 billion persons in 2019 in the G5 Sahel countries.¹⁶ It is becoming increasingly difficult for them to access basic services and rivalries are further exacerbated because of a lack of access to subsistence. Protection needs are on the rise, with gender-based violence and child protection being among the main humanitarian concerns in this regard. The sudden arrival of masses of people because of the conflicts puts pressure on the limited natural resources of host communities, fuelling even more inter-communal tension.

While violent conflicts in the Sahel have caused a burgeoning humanitarian emergency, exacerbating longstanding development challenges, violence has also made it increasingly difficult for humanitarian workers to reach the people in need and has impeded the delivery of emergency assistance.¹⁷ Climate change and rapid demographic tensions, which also affect the Sahel countries, have further compounded these trends. While climate change may not be the single biggest factor affecting the evolving prospects of the region, it does and will continue to shape the entire region in profound and challenging ways. As such, climate change should be seen as a risk multiplier: it threatens to exacerbate existing conflicts and heighten situations of fragility.¹⁸

These transversal threats to security in the Sahel region and to the wellbeing of its population go some way to explain the EU's interest in this region. Threats to the EU's security – whereby the EU has primarily framed the Sahel region as a potential threat of terrorism and potential source of uncontrollable flows of migrants to the European Union – is another reason. The important presence of EU Member States in the Sahel region also explains why an evaluation of the EU's engagement in the Sahel conflicts is vital.

1.2. The EU approach to tackling the Sahel conflicts

Against this backdrop, the European Union has adopted an integrated approach to tackling the conflicts in the Sahel region, which is today considered one of the theatres where the European Union is pursuing this approach most actively. As explained in the 2016 EU Global Strategy, the integrated approach goes beyond the comprehensive approach that aimed to break down the silo approach to peacebuilding by mobilising civil-military cooperation and development, and humanitarian and diplomatic efforts in parallel.¹⁹ Taking a step further, the integrated approach adds four more levels of engagement to the way the EU tackles a conflict in a third country to ensure sustainable peace:

- a prompt reaction and adaptation to the situation on the ground;

¹⁵ Institute for Economics & Peace, [Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring peace in a complex world](#), June 2020, pp. 19, 23, 75.

¹⁶ E. Pichon with T. Fardel, [The G5 Sahel and the European Union: The challenges of security cooperation with a regional grouping](#), EPRS, European Parliament, September 2020.

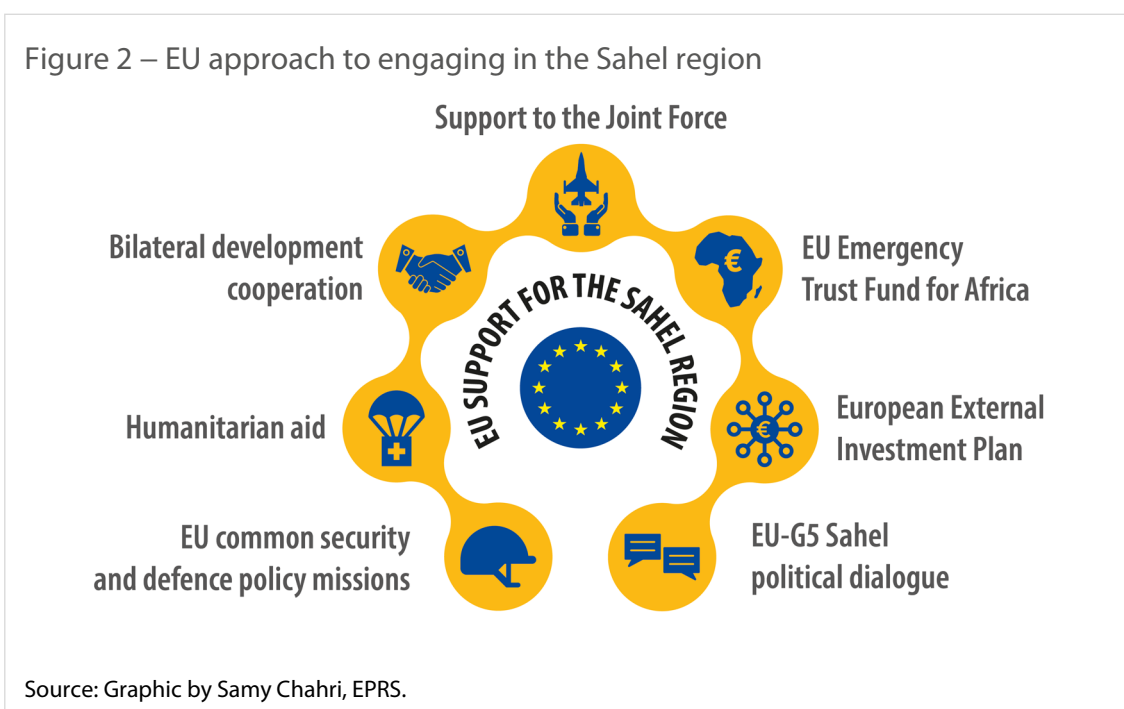
¹⁷ « [Au Sahel, je trouve l'Europe un peu longue à se mettre en branle](#) » (général Lecointre), B2 Pro, 22 January 2020.

¹⁸ O. Brown, [Climate-fragility risk brief: North Africa & Sahel](#), adelphi research gGmbH, April 2020, p. 14.

¹⁹ Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, [The EU's comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises](#), reference no.: JOIN/2013/030 final, 11 December 2013.

- commitment to long-term engagement, if necessary, therefore 'avoiding premature disengagement';
- action at different levels of governance, encompassing support at local, national, regional and global dimensions, and;
- support for comprehensive agreements rooted in broad, deep and durable regional and international partnerships, which the EU will foster and support.²⁰

Given the interconnectedness of threats and challenges facing the Sahel countries, the first EU all-inclusive strategy for the region, adopted in March 2011, aimed at converging various external policy programmes and instruments towards common objectives. The chosen approach was in line with and even preceded the EU comprehensive approach (adopted in 2013). Following the adoption of the EU Global Strategy, the EU adapted its strategy in June 2016 to support an integrated approach to tackling the conflicts in the Sahel. This also coincided with the signature of the 2015 Algiers Accord in Mali.



When translating the theory into practice, the EU's integrated approach for the Sahel region has identified seven tools at the EU's disposal, which are summarised above in Figure 2. These EU tools can be clustered into three areas of intervention, which will be examined in this study. They are:

- 1 *EU strategic thinking* on tackling conflicts in the Sahel and the diplomatic dialogue among international actors on the ground and/or local partners (governments in the Sahel countries) or other regional partners (e.g. G5 Sahel, ECOWAS, African Union);
- 2 *EU financial aid* to the Sahel, including humanitarian support (through, for example, the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa) and support for sustainable development (e.g. the European External Investment Plan, launched in the context of a more egalitarian relationship between the EU and Africa); and

²⁰ European External Action Service, [Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe, A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy](#), 2016, pp. 9-10.

- 3 *EU security support* in the Sahel region, including EU peace support operations and support for the G5 Joint Force, in a busy international security landscape.

1.3. Objectives and structure

Using the 2011 EU strategy for the Sahel and its 2015-2020 Action Plan as a starting point, this study aims to evaluate the EU approach to tackling the conflicts in the region. To do so, it will examine whether the four levels of engagement of the EU integrated approach, as identified above, have been achieved and use them as benchmarks against which to measure the effectiveness of EU action.

On that basis, the study is organised in seven chapters. The introduction has aimed to disentangle and summarise the multifaceted challenges that the Sahel region faces and the complex interplay between numerous armed groups. Understanding the terrain for EU intervention is also key to understanding the choices the EU has made and the limits of EU action. Those seeking more detail will find a [chronology](#) in the Annex, contextualising the Sahelian conflicts regionally (including external stimuli from Algeria, Libya and Nigeria) as of 2005. The introduction has also sketched out the broad lines of the EU's comprehensive/integrated approach, that is, the EU's chosen way to tackle the intricate conflicts of the Sahel.

The three chapters that follow this introduction (Chapter 1) examine the evolution of EU policy in the three areas of intervention outlined above, identified in the EU's comprehensive approach as key to building peace. Accordingly, in the context of EU diplomacy and dialogue, Chapter 2 examines the EU discourse and outlines the promises made to the region and the proclaimed approach the Union has adopted to tackle the multifaceted threats. Chapter 3 analyses in which areas and how the EU and key Member States have mobilised financial aid in the Sahel region to respond to humanitarian needs and dire poverty, and to meet development ambitions. Chapter 4 discusses why the EU military and civilian tools have been launched and how they respond to the security challenges, therefore examining the conduct of EU peace support operations – two in Mali and one in Niger. It also considers the EU contribution to other international and regional initiatives and the role of key Member States.

As a study within a study, Chapter 5 examines the European Parliament's engagement with the conflicts in the Sahel to understand the influence Parliament has had on EU policy in the Sahel. The two concluding chapters build on the conclusions drawn from the previous chapters of the study. In doing so, Chapter 6 endeavours to assess the performance of the EU in the Sahel, to identify pending problems with the implementation of EU action and persisting challenges in the Sahel region. Lastly, Chapter 7 considers opportunities for bridging the gaps in the current EU approach with the aim of helping to address the difficulties on the ground more effectively.

The scope of the evaluation has been limited as follows. The study has chosen 2011 as its starting point because it is part of a project assessing the EU's contribution to peacebuilding. It fully acknowledges, however, that the EU has been active in the region since the 1960s, primarily through its development aid and the Lomé Convention (1975), later replaced by the Cotonou Agreement (2020). Given the growing regionalisation of the conflict, the fact that the EU has increasingly dealt with the Sahel conflicts at that level, and the lack of space, this study does not address in detail the specificities of each of the five countries of the region. In addition, the scope of the study limits itself to examining the action of the EU and its Member States, analysing also their contributions to international partners' efforts. Consequently, the role of other global powers in the region (e.g. the United States) is not included in the scope of this study.

1.4. Methodology

The study uses a mixed methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. Secondary literature consulted for the qualitative analysis included publications by European and African academics and think tanks analysing the socio-economic and political underpinnings of the Sahelian conflicts, as well as the ambitions, successes and challenges in EU/Western strategies, programmes and operations in the Sahel region. Official documents prepared by the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) on the implementation of their programmes and missions were also consulted. Relevant documents, reports and opinions produced by the European Parliament and the EU advisory bodies, namely the European Court of Auditors, and assessments of the developments in the region prepared by other regional and international organisations (United Nations and its agencies) have also been reviewed.

To analyse more recent developments in the Sahel countries, the research was based on press reviews and reports prepared by think tanks in the region. These were also complemented by the accounts of think tanks, the EU, the AU and NGO workers in the field, collected either through email exchanges or at (virtual) events organised on the issue at hand.

Available quantitative data, provided by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), was used to quantify civilian fatalities in the Sahel region. Other data (e.g. the OECD) and the use of peace and conflict indexes (notably the International Peace Index) have also been used. The study also produced its own quantitative analysis, aiming to illustrate the extent to which the European Parliament has been engaged with Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and the Sahel region. These countries were chosen based on the EU's definition of the Sahel region as identified in the EU Strategy for the Sahel region.²¹

The data collection was carried out using Parliament's Public Register of Documents/Legislative Observatory to identify all relevant Parliament resolutions on the Sahel region and each of the five countries. The study's timeframe covers the two last legislative cycles (2009-2014 and 2014-2019) and the current one until April 2020. It therefore covers the period when the conflict in Mali exploded and the implementation of the EU Sahel strategy and the action plan for the region.

A second aspect of the analysis entailed examining the activity of individual Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) using the most relevant written questions that Members had sent to the European Commission during the same timeframe.²² In order to reflect Parliament's strong interest in the Sahel region, when written questions were posed by more than one Member the number of Members asking the question were counted. All questions were sorted by legislative cycle, nationality and political party of the Member, and Sahelian country (or as Sahel if the question dealt with a given problem regionally). Members' written questions were also categorised into one of the following six themes:

- 1 Development and humanitarian aid – written questions on EU development, financial and humanitarian aid to each of the region's countries or to the wider Sahel region.
- 2 International trade and economic activities – written questions addressing bilateral trade with a country of the Sahel or the region itself (e.g. implementation of the

²¹ European External Action Service, [Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel](#), March 2011.

²² The keyword search came back with thousands of entries on the six themes that were identified (see further in the text) on the Sahel conflicts. In order to limit the search to a manageable number of entries, the analysis was restricted to questions where the Sahel or one of the region's countries appeared in the title of the question.

Cotonou Agreement in the Sahel) and written questions linked to agriculture and fisheries issues in one or more of the recipient countries under examination.

- 3 Human rights – written questions making explicit references to human rights violations in the Sahel region or the countries, such as limitations on the freedom of speech and obstruction to the protection from prosecution, the violation of political freedoms, and slavery. Written questions addressing women's rights, gender issues, the rights of the child and abuse of children (e.g. the use of child soldiers by rebel groups across the Sahel region) were also included in this category.
- 4 Political instability – Members' questions on overall political instability in the countries and the Sahel region, and wider (military) operations aimed at restoring political stability. This category also includes questions on bilateral foreign policy actions taken by an individual EU Member States.
- 5 Security, terrorism and crime – written questions explicitly on the common security and defence policy (CSDP)/ common foreign and security policy (CFSP), EU peace support operations, EU support/funding to regional initiatives (e.g. the G5 Sahel Joint Force), terrorist activities by armed groups, counter-terrorism operations undertaken by the EU, its Member States or third states, (cross-border) organised crime, looting and other illicit activities (drugs, arms and human trafficking).
- 6 Migration – written questions on the performance of migration centres, the management of migratory flows (in and from the countries of the Sahel region to the EU), readmission procedures, and references to EU migration policy action in the individual countries or the Sahel region.

2. EU strategy in the Sahel region

In the past, EU-African relations centred primarily on economic and development dimensions. However, since the early/mid-1990s, issues of peace and security have progressively become prominent.²³ The EU has further intensified its bonds with the African continent in recent years. Concerns for the Sahel region were first put on the EU's foreign policy agenda during the French Presidency of the Council in 2008. More emphatically, already in 2009 the Malian government requested military assistance from the EU to retain control over its northern territories.²⁴ Under the 2009 Swedish and 2010 Spanish Presidencies, the European Commission and the Council Secretariat dispatched a number of fact-finding missions to Mali, Niger, Mauritania and Algeria. Their findings were put together in a report finalised in October 2010. That is when the newly established, at the time, European External Action Service was tasked with drafting a strategy for the Sahel.²⁵

2.1. Operationalising the EU integrated approach in the Sahel

In March 2011, the EU adopted a 'Strategy for security and development in the Sahel' that called for a comprehensive approach to tackling the challenges in the region, therefore aiming to synchronise the EU's various policy instruments.²⁶ Initially targeting Mauritania, Niger and Mali, it was extended in 2014 to also cover Burkina Faso and Chad, therefore covering all of the countries of the G5 Sahel group, a regional cooperation framework that had been launched the month before.²⁷ The EU strategy for the Sahel identified four strategic lines of action: development, good governance and internal conflict resolution; political and diplomatic action; security and rule of law; and the fight against violent extremism and radicalisation (that included engagement with civil society).

At this point, the EU set long-term goals for the region and the Sahel strategy constituted an ambitious attempt at operationalising the EU's comprehensive approach, bridging security and development policies. Studies, however, lamented the absence of a clear regional dimension and especially the insufficient integration of regional powers (Algeria and Nigeria) into the political framework – since already then it was clear that the challenges the Sahel was facing were of a wider regional nature. (See [annexed chronology](#) for the impact that these two countries have had on the conflict in Mali.)

As violence continued to spiral in the Sahel, EU policy-makers increasingly perceived the Sahel region as an intervention space where territorial border control had a direct effect on EU border control. As a result, EU action in Mali became increasingly framed in the context of the country's proximity to Europe. In April 2015, the Sahel strategy was reinforced with the adoption of the EU's Sahel Regional Action Plan 2015-2020.²⁸ The action plan strengthened the security dimension, in response to the potential consequences of the fall of the Libyan regime, the rebellions in northern Mali, and the rise of Da'esh/Islamic State. It therefore focused EU action on four areas: the prevention

²³ F. Faria, [Crisis management in sub-Saharan Africa. The role of the European Union](#), EUISS Occasional Paper No 51, EU Institute for Security Studies, April 2004.

²⁴ Please refer to the [annexed chronology](#) for more details on the conflict in Mali.

²⁵ S. Gstohl and E. Lannon (eds), *The neighbours of the European Union's neighbours: Diplomatic and geopolitical dimensions beyond the European Neighbourhood Policy*, Routledge, 2014, p. 50.

²⁶ Council of the European Union, [Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel](#), Annex to the Council conclusions on a European Union Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, 21 March 2011.

²⁷ Council of the European Union, [3304th Council meeting, Foreign Affairs](#), press release, 17 March 2014.

²⁸ Council of the European Union, [Council conclusions on the Sahel Regional Action Plan 2015-2020](#), Reference No: 7823/15, 20 April 2015.

of and fight against terrorism; actions in favour of young people and against radicalisation; migration, mobility and border management; and the fight against trafficking and transnational organised crime.

Therefore, the overall guiding premises for EU action in the Sahel region are:

1. *Security and development in the Sahel are inter-linked.* Achieving security will enable the economies of the Sahel countries grow and poverty to be reduced.
2. Achieving security and development in the Sahel is only possible through *closer regional cooperation*, which is an area in which the EU has a potential role to play.
3. All the states of the region will benefit from considerable *capacity-building in the fields of governance, security and development cooperation*.
4. The EU has an important role to play both in encouraging *economic development for the people of the Sahel* and helping them to achieve security, while at the same time protecting the interests of EU citizens.²⁹

It must be remembered that the action plan for the Sahel was agreed when the EU was facing its own perceived threats from the so-called migration crisis of 2015. The EU political and strategic debate was dominated by migration and related security and humanitarian concerns in Europe. This preoccupation accelerated the EU's inward-looking turn in foreign policy, which translated into EU internal security objectives being pursued through actions abroad. In particular, the European Council, commenting on the 2015 action plan, stated that 'the problems of the Sahel not only affect local populations but increasingly impact directly on the interests and security of European citizens [...] thus, bringing security and development to the Sahel leads to a strengthening of the EU's own internal security'.³⁰ As a result of the refugee crisis, an action plan was agreed at the Valletta Summit on migration of 11-12 November 2015, including the creation of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa, in particular from the Sahel.³¹ Less than a year later, in June 2016, the EU Global Strategy stated that the EU would 'invest in African peace and development as an investment in our own security and prosperity'.³² Border security had thus become a major political concern for the EU rendering the lines between external and internal security increasingly blurred.

In parallel, the spiralling of the conflict justified the important regional dimension of the EU strategy in the Sahel. As the [annexed chronology](#) shows, at no point in the last 15 years has an international actor or national government (in central or north Africa) been able to control the violence in the region acting alone. However, for a regional initiative to work, it is necessary to be able not only to coordinate international and regional efforts effectively, but also to buy in the support of all the relevant stakeholders for development in their region, to ensure a sustainable and definite way out of the Sahel conflicts.

This shift in the EU approach to Africa began under European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, who in his 2018 State of the Union speech, called for a 'new alliance' to create 10 million

²⁹ European External Action Service, [Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel](#), 21 June 2016.

³⁰ S. M. Cold-Ravnkilde, and C. Nissen, 'Schizophrenic agendas in the EU's external actions in Mali', *International Affairs*, Vol. 96(4), July 2020, pp. 935-953.

³¹ See V. Lilyanova, [Implementation of the EU trust funds and the Facility for Refugees in Turkey: Overview](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2020.

³² European External Action Service (EEAS), [Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy](#), June 2016, p. 36.

jobs in Africa over five years.³³ This stance, which suggested that Africa would be treated in a more egalitarian manner, also entailed that primary responsibility for Africa would lie with Africans – in the case of the Sahel region, primarily the G5 Sahel. Along the same lines, in her 2019 political priorities, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated that 'Europe must support Africa in designing and implementing its own solutions to challenges, such as instability, cross-border terrorism and organised crime'.³⁴ That set the tone for increasing regionalisation in the EU's approach to the conflicts in the Sahel, but it also created an expectation that those directly affected (the G5 Sahel countries) would be increasingly engaged and take more responsibility in counter-terrorism. In that light, von der Leyen mentioned the importance of 'supporting the efforts of [EU] partners, for instance in Africa', in her assessment of her first 100 days in office.³⁵

The EU is working on a new strategic approach to Africa, on the basis of the joint communication 'Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa' released by the European Commission and the High Representative on 9 March 2020. While the Sahel region does not feature prominently, this communication highlights the EU's commitment to organising summits and high-level diplomacy, focusing on developing strategies and concrete steps to help solve crises, including the one in the Sahel. It also talks of mobilising relevant new tools (e.g. the European Peace Facility and its peace support operations/CSDP missions) to support African capacity in defence and security, as well as continuing with international cooperation (particularly with the African Union and the United Nations), in line with international law and EU values.³⁶ While Africa is a continent with emerging markets and more effective governments, analysts remind the EU not to forget the size and diversity of the countries that are part of it. The Sahel countries are the fragile states of Africa, characterised by weak governments, little state capacity, low levels of institutional autonomy and embroiled in violent conflicts and insurgencies. Observers point that the approach to such a region should be specific to its needs and not get lost in broader more general strategies.³⁷

A number of defining topics remain in limbo. Firstly, following the fifth AU-EU summit in late November 2017, the process of revising the Cotonou Agreement, which is due to expire in 2020, was launched. Negotiations for a new partnership between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries to replace the Cotonou Agreement, are ongoing. Secondly, the next multiannual financial framework (MFF) will have a significant impact on EU action in the Sahel region in the fields of development cooperation, peace and security, and economic investment. Thirdly, the sixth EU-African Union summit, due to take place in October 2020, will be key for defining strategic priorities and providing overarching political guidance for future relations between the two continents in a troubled global scene. Fourthly, the coronavirus pandemic is a new alarming issue that will certainly substantially affect the EU, Africa and potentially their inter-continental relationship. If the virus finds its roots in poor and fragile states, such as those of the Sahel region, states with weak health systems, Covid-19 could eventually return to locations that had effectively stopped its spread. Thus, the coronavirus pandemic could become a new element in the EU's internal-external security nexus.

³³ European Commission, [State of the Union 2018: Towards a new 'Africa – Europe Alliance' to deepen economic relations and boost investment and jobs](#), press release, 12 September 2018.

³⁴ European Commission, [A Union that strives for more: My agenda for Europe by candidate for President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen](#), Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2019-2024, p. 19.

³⁵ European Commission, [A Union that strives for more: the first 100 days](#), press release, 6 March 2020.

³⁶ European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, [Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa](#), JOIN(2020) 4 final, 9 March 2020, pp. 11-12.

³⁷ M. Bøås, [The Comprehensive EU Strategy for Africa](#), PE 603.506, Policy Department for External Relations, Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, European Parliament, June 2020.

2.2. EU diplomatic efforts

EU-Africa political relations are governed by Article 8 of the Cotonou ACP-EU Partnership Agreement, which sets out the basis for regular political dialogue. This political dialogue addresses diverse aspects of development, including policies on peacebuilding, security, conflict prevention and resolution, regional cooperation, and respect for human rights and democratic principles based on the rule of law. Since 2009, this dialogue has taken place twice a year in Burkina Faso, and has brought together the government of Burkina Faso and the EU's diplomatic heads of mission. In this context, the EU has sought to strengthen relations between the EU and the Sahel countries, and regionally with the west African area, the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It has also enabled the EU to play an active role in international and regional political action, such as the GISAT-BF (International Follow-up and Support Group for the Transition in Burkina Faso).³⁸

The EU has also strongly supported the peace process in Mali and the implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, signed in 2015, of which it is a guarantor. The EU's ambitious programmatic statements on its intermediate objectives (grand strategies) of democratisation, dialogue and partnership as well as the EU's normative premises of good governance with the Sahel region were operationalised in a modest but focused way. They included the keywords that foreign policy experts regularly find in EU operational strategies in third countries – 'dialogue and partnership', 'ownership' and 'capacity building'.³⁹ This topic featured on the agenda not only of the EU-G5 dialogues, but also on that of the EU Special Representative for the Sahel, who represents the EU in international mediation. The EU also actively supports the Security Council resolution for targeted sanctions against those threatening the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. As a more concrete sign of its commitment to the Malian peace process, the EU contributed €500 000 in June 2017 to fund the monitoring body of the peace agreement.⁴⁰

In Brussels, a 'Sahel Task Force' has been set up in the European External Action Service (EEAS) to coordinate the action of the various relevant geographical and thematic departments on the side of the EU executive arm. Relevant departments of the EEAS, and the European Commission Directorates General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO), and Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) also sit around the table. The EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator and EU Special Representative for the Sahel (responsible for coordinating the EU's comprehensive action in the Sahel, in liaison with the EU delegations, missions and the regional initiatives) are also members of this task force.⁴¹

The EU delegations in the Sahel countries (the EU has a delegation in Burkina Faso) monitor the implementation of the programmes, keep contacts with the main state and non-state actors, and consult local authorities. They also aim to help mainstream migration issues into development cooperation, reaching out to host countries to ensure coordinated action, and reporting on major migratory related developments in the host countries. In the context of the European Agenda on Migration, partnerships with countries of origin and transit are considered crucial and have led to

³⁸ See: [Delegation of the European Union to Burkina Faso](#), August 2020.

³⁹ I. 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](#), Freie Universität Berlin, 5 October 2018, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁰ European Commission, [The European Union's partnership with the G5 Sahel countries](#), July 2019.

⁴¹ E. Pichon, [Understanding the EU Strategy for the Sahel](#), EPRS, European Parliament, August 2020.

the establishment of bilateral and regional cooperation frameworks on migration. The EU-Africa Migration and Mobility Dialogue has also been set up.⁴²

In December 2019, within her first 100 days in office, incoming European Commission President von der Leyen organised her first official visit to a country outside the EU, to Addis Ababa, in Ethiopia. In a symbolic move meant to show Europe's increased focus on Africa, she was accompanied by 21 European Commissioners, the biggest ever College delegation to a third country. During her visit, she met with the African Union Commission, which has also been active in the Sahel region. In an effort to raise the status of the African partners but also to transfer the burden of responsibility, von der Leyen spoke of 'a partnership of equals, where both sides have something to win and both sides have a lot of responsibilities'.⁴³ This was also echoed in the security field, on which she explained: 'it is of utmost importance to enable and empower the African Union and the African Member States to defend their home countries and their regions against terror, to put them in the situation that this is possible, so to empower here'.⁴⁴

This visit was quickly followed up with the visit of European Council President Charles Michel to Addis Ababa to attend the annual African Union (AU) Summit on 9 February 2020, when he emphasised that a fresh start in the partnership between Europe and Africa would be a priority of his mandate.⁴⁵ Shortly later, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) Josep Borrell went to Sudan and Ethiopia (his first official mission to Africa) to participate in the 10th AU-EU Commission-to-Commission meeting.⁴⁶ a clear sign of the strategic importance of Africa for the EU's foreign policy.

In addition, the EU has supported dialogue with the Sahelian countries through EU-G5 Sahel cooperation. The EU has supported the G5 Sahel since its creation in 2014 and promotes close collaboration with the G5 Sahel countries. When the Sahel Alliance was launched (see Box 1) in July 2017, former HR/VP Federica Mogherini emphasised that, 'we need to respond together [with the countries of the Sahel] to the challenges of fighting terrorism, trafficking and climate change'. The regular 'EU-G5 dialogues', which took the form of annual meetings between the EU's HR/VP with G5 Sahel foreign ministers, concentrated on strengthening cooperation in areas of shared interest such as development, governance in fragile areas, improved security, including the fight against terrorism and illicit trafficking. This has also been in line with the Council conclusions of June 2017, which through targeted political dialogue and counter-terrorism partnerships have enabled the EU to strengthen its cooperation with priority partners in the Sahel region. Equally, the Council stressed the importance for the EU to improve its ability to build security and defence capacities in Africa and where appropriate include counter-terrorism in CSDP missions and operations.⁴⁷

⁴² European Commission, [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, A European Agenda on Migration](#), COM(2015) 240 final, 13 May 2015, p. 8.

⁴³ European Commission, [Opening statement by President von der Leyen at the 10th EU-AU Commission-to-Commission meeting plenary session](#), in Addis Ababa, 27 February 2020.

⁴⁴ European Commission, [Remarks by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with Moussa Faki, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, following the 10th EU-AU Commission-to-Commission meeting plenary session](#), in Addis Ababa, 27 February 2020.

⁴⁵ European Council, [Speech by President Charles Michel at the official dinner of the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa](#), 9 February 2020.

⁴⁶ European External Action Service, [High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell visits Ethiopia and Sudan as first visit to Africa](#), 25 February 2020.

⁴⁷ Council of the European Union, [Council conclusions on EU external action on counter-terrorism](#), Reference No: 10384/17, 19 June 2017, p. 6.

Box 1 – The Sahel Alliance

The Alliance for the Sahel is a joint initiative of the EU, France and Germany, launched in Paris, in July 2017, to improve the coordination of development cooperation. With the support of the EU, it has adopted an integrated approach to address the development and security challenges of the Sahel region. The alliance is open to all Member States and currently includes Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Spain, the United Kingdom, the European Commission's Directorate general for Development Cooperation, the European Investment Bank, the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme.

The initiative focuses on rural development, agriculture and food security; job creation for youth; improving energy infrastructure, climate (especially energy access, green energy and water); support for the return of basic services throughout the region (including through decentralisation); and strengthening good governance and security.

To further strengthen the Sahel Alliance, in 2019, France and Germany launched the Partnership for Security and Stability in the Sahel (P3S) at the G7 Summit in Biarritz. The P3S aims to identify security needs and increase the effectiveness of domestic defence and internal security efforts. One of the main objectives of the Sahel Alliance is to accelerate and strengthen the flexibility of methods of intervention in order to act more quickly and effectively, especially in fragile areas that require emergency intervention.

Source: European External Action Service, [Alliance for the Sahel will reinforce EU work for stability and development of key region](#), News stories, 14 July 2017; Sahel Alliance, [Biarritz G7 summit: Strengthening commitments in the Sahel](#), press release, 10 September 2019.

Another example of EU diplomatic efforts to build partnership with the region was the issuing of a joint communiqué, adopted at the International High Level Conference on the Sahel that took place in Brussels in February 2018, reaffirming support to assist the G5 countries in bringing greater stability to the region. Major support was given to the Mali peace process: those threatening the process can face sanctions. The international community committed to supporting the G5 Sahel countries in their political efforts to achieve sustainable stability in the region, with a focus on counter-terrorism, action against the trafficking of drugs, humans and arms, and the promotion of sustainable development. At the same time, it called for the reinforcement of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. In the international and EU narrative, the Sahel crisis is often linked to regional insecurity, particularly in view of the persisting crisis in Libya and the violent acts of Boko Haram.

The importance of the security-development nexus was confirmed at the summit in Pau, on 13 January 2020, which led to the development of the fourth pillar of the Coalition for the Sahel, envisaging greater collaboration with the Sahel Alliance (see Box 2).⁴⁸ This added yet another regional initiative to the table, adding to the confusion both in terms of how all these initiatives interact, whether they are truly complementary, and who is leading the initiatives (the EU, France or the G5 Sahel).⁴⁹ The EU Member States pointed to the absolute urgency in the Sahel, where the situation has strongly deteriorated. They agreed to strengthen strategic cooperation with the countries in the Sahel region, where jihadism is expanding. The objective is to broaden the

⁴⁸ G. Faleg and C. Palleschi, [African Strategies: European and global approaches towards sub-Saharan Africa](#), Chaillot Paper 158, EU Institute for Security Studies, June 2020, p. 37.

⁴⁹ N. Gros-Verheyde, [Le Sahel, une plaie ouverte entre Français et Allemands. Le sommet de Pau en travers de la gorge de Berlin](#), B2Pro, 20 January 2020.

geographic and functional span of CSDP missions in the region towards Burkina Faso and Niger. In addition, a call was made for greater concentration on internal security issues.⁵⁰

Box 2 – The Coalition for the Sahel

The Coalition for the Sahel was announced at the Pau Summit, on 13 January 2020, by the Heads of State of France, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, in the presence of the United Nations Secretary-General, the President of the European Council, the European Union High Representative, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary General of La Francophonie. A new step forward was taken at the EU-G5 Sahel Summit on 28 April 2020, where the members of the European Council agreed to continue joint efforts to expand the Coalition for the Sahel to other international partners.

Organised by the Mauritanian Presidency of the G5 Sahel, the European Union and France, the first ministerial meeting launched the Coalition for the Sahel on 12 June 2020. Sixty Heads of State and Government and international organisations – including the EU institutions – committed to strengthening the coordinated fight against terrorism in the Sahel in order to restore stability in the region. Participants included France, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Estonia, Italy, Portugal, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Sweden, representatives of the United Nations, the African Union, ECOWAS, other international partners, and non-Member States (the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States). The secretariat for the coalition is hosted by the French Ministry of Foreign affairs. Commitment for action covers four pillars:

- 1 support for G5 Sahel action in the fight against terrorism (jointly led by the G5 Sahel countries and France);
- 2 efforts to strengthen the military capabilities of the G5 Sahel States (jointly carried out by the EU in connection with the G5 Sahel);
- 3 support for the redeployment of the armed forces of the Sahelian countries on all of the territory of their respective countries;
- 4 assistance in the development of the region in the framework of the 'Partnership for Security and Stability in the Sahel' (P3S), in cooperation with the Sahel Alliance.

Source: ['First ministerial meeting of Sahel coalition confirms internationalisation of stability efforts'](#), *Agence Europe*, 15 June 2020; also see the website of the [Coalition for the Sahel](#).

Therefore, a series of international meetings, including the EU institutions, have been organised since the Pau Summit to discuss how to strengthen the strategic partnership for security, stability and development within the (overlapping) policy frameworks, such as the Sahel Coalition, the Partnership for Security and Stability in the Sahel and the G5 Sahel Integrated Framework for Priority Actions. A follow-up to the Pau summit laid the foundations for strengthened mobilisation against jihadist groups, with the creation of an international coalition. The European Commission was represented at the last G5 Sahel meeting in Nouakchott (Mauritania, late February 2020), where terrorism issues were the key issue on the agenda. The EU and the G5 Sahel met on 28 April 2020 by videoconference to discuss their shared objectives for the security and stability of the Sahel.⁵¹ Despite the coronavirus pandemic, in view of the increasing violence in the Sahel region, the momentum for meetings among the relevant international players (including the EU Member States and EU institutions) and local and regional actors has not subsided.

⁵⁰ L'Europe doit absolument faire plus au Sahel, Belga, 20 January 2020; [La stratégie Sahel sera réactualisée, EUTM Mali approfondie et EUCAP Sahel Mali et Niger renforcées](#), B2 Pro, 21 January 2020.

⁵¹ ['A G5 Sahel/EU summit to strengthen partnership for security, stability and development'](#), *Agence Europe*, 27 April 2020.

3. EU financial aid to the Sahel

In line with the goals of its comprehensive approach, the EU disbursed a generous humanitarian aid package of €1.12 billion for the period 2014-2020 to try to reach the most vulnerable populations and to confront humanitarian challenges in the Sahel region. In parallel, to support development and more sustainable growth, the EU has provided the Sahel states with development aid totalling €3.6 billion for the 2014-2020 period. If financial support provided by the Member States is added to that, for the same period, European aid represents €8 billion.⁵²

3.1. Humanitarian support

The European Union is one of the largest donors of humanitarian aid to the Sahel, providing emergency nutritional and food aid assistance for people facing hunger (including treatment for malnourished children) and assistance for people affected by conflicts and insecurity. At the donors' conference in Brussels on 15 May 2013 for Mali, the international community made commitments worth €3.2 billion (including €523 million from the European Commission).⁵³ In 2018, the European Commission allocated €271.3 million in humanitarian assistance. More specifically, in 2018, the EU paid €19.2 million in humanitarian aid for Burkina Faso and €66.7 million for Chad. Mali and Niger received €21 million and €38.7 million respectively in humanitarian aid. Since 2014, the EU has disbursed €74.9 million in humanitarian aid for Mauritania.⁵⁴ In 2019, the EU provided the region with €152.05 million in humanitarian assistance. In 2020, EU humanitarian assistance to the Sahel region stands at more than €142 million.⁵⁵

Vulnerable people living in conflict-hit areas in the Sahel (especially in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and the Lake Chad basin) are facing a food crisis for a fourth consecutive year in 2020. At the end of 2018, more than 4 million people from the region needed immediate food assistance to save them from facing acute hunger, with women and children being the worst-affected. Up to 2.8 million children in the Sahel are at risk of severe acute malnutrition and need lifesaving treatment. Malnutrition rates are particularly worrying in Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Since the beginning of 2019, the number of displaced people rose by more than 550 000 to reach 5.18 million people. The 2020 coronavirus pandemic has aggravated both the humanitarian crisis and the socio-economic perspectives of the region.

In addition, in line with the EU strategy for the Sahel, joint efforts with development partners have been established to help build long-term resilience in the region. The Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative (AGIR) was launched during the Sahel food and nutrition crisis in 2014 with the aim of achieving 'zero hunger' in the Sahel region by 2032. The EU was closely involved in setting up AGIR and continues to support it. AGIR has also become a coordinating mechanism, in a way, giving the EU the opportunity to work with ECOWAS and the G5 Sahel in a more synchronised manner. It provides a consensual framework consisting of a regional objective, broken down into 'resilience priorities' in each of the countries concerned, established following a dialogue between all the actors concerned (institutional actors, non-governmental organisations, and civil society).⁵⁶ The momentum created by AGIR has prompted 10 countries in the region to adopt national resilience

⁵² European Commission, [L'Union européenne et le G5 Sahel : Un partenariat plus que jamais d'actualité](#), April 2020.

⁵³ European External Action Service, [EU Training Mission in Mali \(EUTM Mali\)](#), 16 July 2016.

⁵⁴ European Commission, [The European Union's partnership with the G5 Sahel countries](#), July 2019.

⁵⁵ European Commission, [European civil protection and humanitarian aid operations: Sahel](#), 22 June 2020 and European Commission, [European civil protection and humanitarian aid operations](#), 13 November 2019.

⁵⁶ E. Pichon, [Understanding the EU strategy for the Sahel](#), EPRS, European Parliament, August 2020.

priorities. These countries seek comprehensive support from the international aid community to translate these priorities into effective action.

The EU is also working actively on implementing the humanitarian-development nexus to address the needs of vulnerable people through a more sustainable and long-term approach.⁵⁷ Furthermore, support is given to disaster risk reduction initiatives to help countries prepare better for and reduce the impact of natural disasters related to the climate and their effects on food security. EU funding ensures health centres have water and hygiene systems, offer training for staff, and provide screening facilities for children who are at risk of malnutrition. In many parts of the Sahel, the EU funds food assistance in the form of cash transfers and vouchers allowing vulnerable households the choice to what they need most for their families.⁵⁸

In May 2020, also in response to the worsening humanitarian situation due to the coronavirus pandemic, the European Commission announced an additional €50 million in humanitarian aid to be made available globally, including for the Sahel and Lake Chad regions, and west and central Africa.⁵⁹ It also announced the establishment of an EU humanitarian air-bridge to transport humanitarian workers and emergency supplies for the pandemic response to some of the most critically affected areas around the world, including the Sahel. The announced sum of €50 million in humanitarian aid comes in addition to the €30 million already allocated to the World Health Organization in February 2020. Since then, the European Commission has also planned for around €76 million to be disbursed to programmes of the UN Global Humanitarian Response Plan. In addition, the European Commission is providing direct funding for the work of humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, which are in the frontline of the humanitarian response to the pandemic.⁶⁰

3.2. Support for sustainable development

In 2014, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad set up the G5 Sahel group of countries to promote closer cooperation and address the major regional challenges facing them, including extreme poverty, terrorism and human trafficking, all of which have potential spillover effects beyond the region. The EU is also a member and key supporter of the Sahel Alliance, set up to improve coordination of existing EU and Member State development cooperation in the region, in a faster and more interlinked way than before through joint action (see Box 1). The EU allocated over €1.569 billion to Mali, Mauritania and Niger under the 10th European Development Fund (2007-2013).⁶¹ Since 2018, the EU has stepped up its cooperation with this African-led initiative to forge a strong partnership on various fronts: political dialogue, development cooperation and humanitarian aid, and efforts to enhance security and tackle irregular migration. The sum of €672.7 million has already been made available to support ongoing G5 Sahel priority activities. EU development cooperation in the G5 Sahel countries, which supplements that of the EU Member States, amounts to a total of €8 billion for the period 2014-2020. This financing is mobilised for projects focused on reducing poverty, improving food security, promoting sound and transparent

⁵⁷ European Commission, [European civil protection and humanitarian aid operations](#), 13 November 2019.

⁵⁸ European Commission, [European civil protection and humanitarian aid operations](#), 22 June 2020.

⁵⁹ European Commission, [Coronavirus response: A timeline of EU action](#), 2020.

⁶⁰ European Commission, [Coronavirus global response: EU allocates additional €50 million in humanitarian aid](#), Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 20 May 2020.

⁶¹ European External Action Service, [EU Training Mission in Mali \(EUTM Mali\)](#), 16 July 2016.

public finances and strengthening infrastructure.⁶² It brings total EU support to the G5 Sahel to almost €800 million.

In December 2018, the EU announced more funding totalling €125 million for the Sahel countries at the Partners and Donors Coordination Conference, which took place in Nouakchott, Mauritania. This fresh EU injection sought to launch new initiatives swiftly, in line with the priorities set by the G5 Sahel to enhance development and security. These priorities are developed in the 'Priority Investment Programme' (PIP), a strategy for the development and security of the G5 Sahel countries, which puts a particular emphasis on the resilience and social cohesion of the most vulnerable populations living in cross-border regions, where the challenges are the greatest. The PIP includes 40 projects for a total sum of €1.9 billion, and is implemented by several partners of the Sahel Alliance launched in 2017. More specifically, the projects seek to boost the resilience and social cohesion of the most vulnerable groups in the cross-border regions through the disbursement of €70 million for the improvement of living conditions, the provision of basic services (and the enhancement of their quality) and the boosting of resilience. Other initiatives worth €55 million aim to strengthen the capacities of the G5 Sahel institutions in the area of justice, security and the defence of human rights, and to combat human trafficking and give young people a proper voice in the public debate.

The EU has mobilised all of its available instruments for development to support the G5 Sahel (see Table 1). In particular, the African Investment Facility has put job creation at the heart of EU action in the Sahel by fostering private sustainable investments. This is done by blending operations (17 ongoing infrastructure projects in the five countries) and guarantee mechanisms (five guarantee mechanisms that will aim to help boost investments in micro, small and medium sized enterprises, sustainable cities and access to renewable energy in the Sahel region).⁶³ In addition to the funding in Table 1, Mauritania also benefits from the EU-Mauritania Fisheries Protocol, whereby the EU pays a financial contribution of €62.750 million per year for the partnership (€57.5 million for access to waters and €5.2 million for local fishing communities and to improve the fisheries governance).⁶⁴

Table 1 – EU development assistance to the countries of the G5 Sahel, in € million

	Burkina Faso	Chad	Mali	Mauritania	Niger
European Development Fund (EDF) (2014-2020)	628	542	665	160	716
African Investment Facility ^(date)			114.8 ^(n/a)	20.5 ⁽²⁰¹⁶⁾	111.2 ⁽²⁰¹⁹⁾
EU Trust Fund for Africa (since 2016)	245.8	170.7	270.8	135.5	317
Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (2015-2019)	22.7	9.85	22.5		

Source: European Commission, [The European Union's partnership with the G5 Sahel countries](#), July 2019.

For its part, for the 2014-2020 period, the European Development Fund (EDF) has financed support for delivery of social services, food security and resilience, state capacity to implement social

⁶² European Commission, [EU steps up support for the development of the Sahel](#), 6 December 2018; European Commission, [The European Union's partnership with the G5 Sahel countries](#), July 2019.

⁶³ European Commission, [The EU's Partnership with the Sahel](#), 23 February 2018.

⁶⁴ European Commission, [The European Union's partnership with the G5 Sahel countries](#), July 2019.

policies, judicial reform and good governance, and road infrastructure for regions at risk in Niger. In Burkina Faso, EDF priority areas have included good governance, health and food security (notably access to clean water and sanitation). For the same period, EDF has supported food security and sustainable agriculture, rule of law reform and the strengthening of the health system in Mauritania. The same programme supports food security, nutrition and rural development, sustainable management of natural resources, and the consolidation of rule of law in Chad. In Mali, EDF activities focus on peace consolidation and state reform aiming to reinforce the general governance of the country; food security and rural development; primary education and access to a quality education; and road infrastructure to link the north with the south of the country and create job opportunities.⁶⁵

Perhaps the most controversial funding mechanism available for the Sahel and Lake Chad region has been the EU Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF) for Africa (with a budget for the Sahel/Lake Chad region of €2 103 million).⁶⁶ The four main lines of action focus on promoting economic development and equal opportunities (especially for young people), strengthening the resilience of communities, improving migration governance and management, and supporting overall governance by addressing human rights abuses.⁶⁷ A key focus has been to support all aspects of stability and contribute to better migration management, while also addressing the root causes of destabilisation, forced displacement and irregular migration. Thus, the main targets are migrants and forcibly displaced people, their communities/countries of origin and host communities, and victims of human trafficking and migrant smuggling. To this end, the EUTF for Africa aims to collaborate closely with national and local authorities, and civil society organisations, to identify needs and carry out the activities.⁶⁸ Concretely, the European Commission's 2019 progress report on the implementation of the European agenda on migration stated that millions of asylum seekers, refugees and displaced people had benefited from programmes financed by the EUTF. Over 5 million vulnerable people had benefited from basic services and food security and nutrition programmes. The EU cooperates with UN agencies, in particular the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). Through the EU-IOM Initiative, it has supported 42 628 vulnerable migrants' voluntary returns, mostly from Libya and Niger.⁶⁹

The EUTF for Africa is at the heart of 62 projects that are currently being carried out in the region to support the return of control to the state, promote governance, social and economic development, and prevent radicalisation and violent extremism. In addition, in the context of the EUTF for Africa, the GAR-SI SAHEL (Rapid Action Groups – Surveillance and Intervention in the Sahel) programme was launched in 2017. It aims to strengthen the operational capacities of national authorities to allow effective control of the territory and extend rule of law action to the whole of the Sahel (including in remote and cross-border areas), circumstances seen as a precondition for sustainable socio-economic development in the Sahel region. In practice, it means that, through training, European gendarmes will support the creation of robust, flexible, mobile, multidisciplinary police

⁶⁵ European Commission, [Niger](#), [Burkina Faso](#), [Mauritania](#), [Chad](#) and [Mali](#), Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development (consulted on 15 May 2020).

⁶⁶ The majority of the EUTF for Africa funding comes from the European Development Fund (thus, Member States' funding that is currently outside the EU budget and therefore beyond the scrutiny of the European Parliament). Other contributors include the EU budget, some Member States, Norway and Switzerland. See, European Commission, [EU Trust Funds: State of Play and Financial Resources](#), 16 July 2020.

⁶⁷ European Commission, [EUTF for Africa](#), Factsheet, 17 January 2020.

⁶⁸ European Commission, [EU Emergency Fund for Africa](#). For further information, click [here](#).

⁶⁹ European Commission, [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council, Progress report on the Implementation of the European Agenda on Migration](#), COM(2019) 481 final, 16 October 2019.

units to deal with an array of threats – from terrorism, organised crime and human trafficking, to environmental degradation and the protection of borders.⁷⁰ Other long-term projects financed by the EUTF for Africa include: vocational training and economic programmes that create employment opportunities, especially for young people and women, with a focus on micro and small enterprises. Projects supporting basic services for local populations such as food and nutrition security, health, education and social protection, as well as environmental sustainability. Other projects that support the strengthening of good governance focus on promoting conflict prevention and enforcing the rule of law through capacity-building activities for a functioning law enforcement.⁷¹

This EU funding is also partly used for activities that do not usually make the international press, but are fundamental to sustainable change in the Sahel. They include support for youth participation, including through projects such as the 'Voices of the Sahel'. The project has so far contributed to a structured dialogue between young people in the Sahel and their authorities, facilitating the creation of local, national and regional dialogue mechanisms around five thematic areas: education and vocational education and training, economic opportunities, citizen participation and peace and security (including migration and radicalisation). It also includes capacity-building on international humanitarian law through, for example, training and workshops for senior officials from the region on civil-military coordination and protection of civilians.⁷²

These long-term and development oriented projects put into question the choices of projects for this instrument and the very nature of the EUTF for Africa. The 2018 European Commission annual report found that the EUTF had demonstrated its added value as a swift and effective implementation tool facilitating political dialogue with partner countries, applying innovative approaches and producing concrete results by pooling funding and expertise from different stakeholders.⁷³ However, experts have questioned the fact that the EUTF has been set up as an emergency EU trust fund (rather than a thematic one) because it tackles 'root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons' and long-term governance problems.⁷⁴ Along the same lines, the ECA special report on the EUTF concluded that, although the fund was flexible and more reactive than other instruments, it needed to be better focused with a strategy that ensures impact.⁷⁵

In parallel, EU Member States have been contributing to development goals across the Sahel through their contribution to official development assistance (ODA). Based on OECD data from 2018, Table 2 maps out ODA disbursements to the Sahel region of those EU Member States for which the countries of the region rank among the top five Sub-Saharan African recipients. Interestingly, Mauritania does not figure among the top five recipients of any of the countries in the Sahel, in itself demonstrating that Mauritania is at a more advanced development level than the rest of the region (and more stable). Moreover, beyond the massive investment of France (a natural partner of the region given its colonial past), it is interesting to note the diversity of EU Member States that are active in the Sahel region, including some surprising cases. A comparison of Table 2 with Figure 3 – EU and international peace support operations in the Sahel region – clearly demonstrates that while

⁷⁰ European Commission, [EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa](#) (consulted on 5 August 2020).

⁷¹ European Commission, [A European Agenda on Migration. 2015 Valetta Summit on Migration](#), 2015.

⁷² European External Action Service, [EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2019](#), 2020, pp. 86 and 129; see European Commission, [The Sahel's young people make their voices heard](#), European Youth Portal, 4 December 2019.

⁷³ European Commission, [2018 Annual Report EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa](#), 2019.

⁷⁴ S. Carrera et al., [Oversight and management of the EU Trust Funds democratic accountability: Challenges and promising practices](#), Study requested by the Budgetary Committee (CONT), Policy Department for Budgetary Affairs, Directorate General for Internal Policies of the Union, European Parliament, May 2018, pp. 8, 33-34.

⁷⁵ European Court of Auditors, [European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa: Flexible but lacking focus](#), Special report no 32/2018, 5 December 2018.

some EU Member States have favoured a development-oriented approach to tackling the conflicts in the Sahel region, others have clearly preferred a more militarised approach (counter-terrorism and migration control operations). Some experts argue that favouring national interests, EU Member States (especially those with particular relations with the countries in the region) 'infring[e] on the EU's policy legitimacy as well as outcome and impact effectiveness'.⁷⁶

Table 2 – EU Member States' net disbursements in official development assistance (ODA) to the Sahel countries, (priority ranking), current US\$ million, 2018

Chad	Burkina Faso	Mali	Niger
France (5th), 100.33	Austria (5th), 6.01	Czech Republic (3rd), 1.67	Czech Republic (5th), 0.69
	Denmark (4th), 38.06	Estonia (2nd), 0.08	Italy (3rd), 23.33
	Luxembourg (3rd), 24.27	Lithuania (1st), 0.13	Luxembourg (1st), 43.89
		Luxembourg (2nd), 24.46	Spain (5th), 10.37
		Netherlands (3rd), 48.93	
		Spain (1st), 19.7	

Source: Based on G. Faleg and C. Palleschi, [African Strategies: European and global approaches towards sub-Saharan Africa](#), Chaillot Paper 158, EU Institute for Security Studies, June 2020, p. 31.

In the context and given the wider regionalisation of the conflict, it is also relevant to examine the extent to which EU Member States have provided the states neighbouring the Sahel region with development aid. Nigeria, which is one of the regional powers and is currently entangled in the Sahel conflict, in its northeasterly regions, receives massive financing from Germany (US\$240.1 million) for which it is the number one priority in sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria is also a number one priority Hungary (US\$2.18 million) and Malta (US\$0.04 million), while Poland (ranked 3rd) disburses US\$0.69 million, and the Czech Republic (ranked 4th) US\$0.61 million. Other West African countries have received development disbursements from EU Member States as follows:

- Senegal from France (ranked 3rd, US\$220.08 million), Luxembourg (ranked 5th, US\$19.13 million), Slovenia (ranked 1st, US\$0.14 million) and Spain (2nd, US\$16.11 million).
- Ghana receives development assistance from Greece (ranked 4th, US\$0.02 million), Hungary (ranked 4th, US\$1.01 million) and Malta (ranked 4th, US\$0.02 million).
- Guinea to which Spain's ODA disbursements equal to US\$16.05 million (ranked as its 3rd priority country in sub-Saharan Africa).⁷⁷

⁷⁶ I. 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](#), Freie Universität Berlin, 5 October 2018, p. 4.

⁷⁷ G. Faleg and C. Palleschi, [African Strategies: European and global approaches towards sub-Saharan Africa](#), Chaillot Paper 158, EU Institute for Security Studies, June 2020, p. 31.

4. EU security support in the Sahel region

In addition to reacting to the major humanitarian crisis in the Sahel and supporting development in the region, the EU and its Member States have focused increasingly on bringing security and stabilisation to the Sahelian countries. The EU peace support operations (CSDP missions) active in the region – two civilian (EUCAP Sahel Niger, EUCAP Sahel Mali) and one military (EU Training Mission, EUTM, in Mali) – have essentially played a supporting role in this 'international security jam',⁷⁸ as experts have called it. The missions have had to limit their action in recent months during the coronavirus pandemic, some having to apply lockdown conditions owing to Covid19 cases among staff.⁷⁹ Moreover, the two missions in Mali have temporarily suspended their operations following the August 2020 coup.⁸⁰ Yet, the role of the CSDP missions in counter-terrorism and capacity building has been essential, despite their small size. To better contextualise the EU's efforts, this chapter also maps out the military presence of the other major international security actors, including key EU Member States, and other international and regional military initiatives. These are illustrated in Figure 3.

4.1. EU peace support operations

The military EU Training Mission (EUTM Mali) was the first mission deployed, in January 2013, at the request of the Malian government and in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions. More specifically, UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2071 had called directly on regional and international organisations, including the EU, to provide coordinated assistance, expertise, training and support for the development of the Malian armed and security forces to restore state authority. The Council responded quickly, requesting planning for a possible military CSDP mission in October 2012. This immediate response to UN Resolution 2071 even preceded by two months the official Malian request for help from France. The mission was organised quickly, taking about one month for each of the following steps: the presentation of the crisis management concept; its approval and the final Council decision on the EUTM on 17 January 2020; and its deployment.

Headquartered in Bamako, EUTM Mali was deployed in the south of the country (the military regions of Mopti, Ségou, the southern bank of the Niger River, and the cities of Gao and Timbuktu). It is composed of almost 600 soldiers from 25 European countries, including 21 EU Member States and 4 non-EU partners.⁸¹ Germany and Italy are by far the two EU Member States to have deployed most staff; the Czech Republic, Ireland and Belgium are the countries that follow.⁸² Observers consider that, in the case of Mali, the lead nation France (with strong support from Germany) has played an enabling role in formulating common European policies.⁸³

This EU peace support operation, which has a non-executive mandate, provides the Malian armed forces with training and advice to:

⁷⁸ S. M. Cold-Ravnkilde and K. Lindskov Jacobsen, 'Disentangling the security traffic jam in the Sahel: Constitutive effects of contemporary interventionism', *International Affairs*, Vol. 96(4), July 2020, pp. 855–874.

⁷⁹ See, for example, '[At least seven persons infected with COVID-19 within EUTM Mali](#)', *Agence Europe*, 14 April 2020.

⁸⁰ [EU freezes Mali training missions after military coup](#), *Deutsche Welle*, 26 August 2020.

⁸¹ For further information, see the EUTM [website](#).

⁸² G. Faleg and C. Palleschi, [African Strategies: European and global approaches towards sub-Saharan Africa](#), Chaillot Paper 158, EU Institute for Security Studies, June 2020, p. 36.

⁸³ I. 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](#), Freie Universität Berlin, 5 October 2018, p. 8.

- contribute to their capacity-building and ensure they work under the control of the political authorities;
- contribute to political stabilisation and the improvement of security in Mali through support for the implementation of the Algiers Peace Agreement;
- support the restoration of state control and the rule of law throughout Mali, and;
- support the G5 Sahel through the consolidation and improvement of the operational capabilities of its Joint Force, strengthening regional cooperation to address common security threats, especially terrorism and human trafficking.

Until March 2020, EU advisory activities were essentially carried out at central national level in Bamako and the training took place in the camp of Koulikoro (approximately 60 km from Bamako) and in an ad hoc manner in other areas of Mali (south of the Niger Bend).⁸⁴ In March 2020, the European Council extended the EUTM's area of intervention to the entire Sahel region and made the forces more mobile inside Mali.⁸⁵ This has given the EUTM a mandate to also support the G5 Sahel Joint Force and closely coordinate and cooperate with ECOWAS, the French Operation Barkhane and UN's stabilisation force – issues examined in the following section. The mission concentrates its action on the three frontiers of Mali, focusing especially on the border with Burkina Faso and with Niger.

Improvements to EU training have seen it become more holistic to ensure that what is learned in the training session is applied at tactical level when accompanying the military forces. While disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) activities no longer fall under the training component of the EUTM mission, they will be undertaken when supporting military forces at operational level. Moreover, the EUTM has been extended by four years (rather than two years, the case previously) demonstrating the EU's long-term engagement in the region.⁸⁶ Some achievements since EUTM Mali was launched in 2013 have included both the establishment of a coordination hub, to gather offers of international support for the G5 Joint Force and channel much needed assistance,⁸⁷ and the training of around 18 000 soldiers.

HR/VP Josep Borrell has insisted that the top officers behind the August 2020 coup d'état had not been trained the EU mission.⁸⁸ However, Germany's Minister of Defence admitted that some of the leading figures of the coup had benefited from training in Germany and France,⁸⁹ while other observers have suggested that a greater number of putschist soldiers and officers had been trained by the EU mission and/or European trainers.⁹⁰

EUCAP Sahel Niger was launched in August 2012, in Niamey, and currently 14 EU Member States contribute to it. It is an EU civilian mission that aims to support Niger's internal security forces and strengthen their capacities through training, strategic advice and equipment so that they can tackle the fight against terrorism and organised crime. EUCAP Sahel Niger's mandate also includes assisting Niger in managing and controlling irregular migration flows more effectively and fighting smugglers and traffickers who take advantage of desperate local populations. From 2012 to 2018,

⁸⁴ In the south of Mali, the Niger River makes a great turn to the southeast, known as the Niger Bend, and flows past Gao and Ansongo to the Niger border.

⁸⁵ Council of the European Union, [EUTM Mali: Council extends training mission with broadened mandate and increased budget](#), press release, 23 March 2020.

⁸⁶ [EUTM Mali évolue : focus sur l'accompagnement des FAMA et le G5 Sahel](#), B2Pro, 24 March 2020.

⁸⁷ European Commission, [The EU's partnership with the Sahel](#), 23 February 2018.

⁸⁸ [EU freezes Mali training missions after military coup](#), Deutsche Welle, 26 August 2020.

⁸⁹ [EU admits to having trained Mali putschists](#), EUobserver, 27 August 2020.

⁹⁰ N. Gros-Verheyde, [Les missions européennes de la PSDC au Mali \(EUCAP Sahel et EUTM\) suspendent leur activité \(v2\)](#), Bruxelles2, 25 August 2020.

the mission trained more than 13 000 members of the security forces. Moreover, by 2018, the mission had handed over equipment worth a total of €4.9 million. In an effort to ensure sustainability, the mission's efforts have focused on:

- border control management (training courses on document fraud, equipping border control stations, and the creation of border control mobile units);
- justice and human rights promotion through the training of key actors on gender and human rights, and;
- the development of technical expertise (e.g. in human resources, surveillance, forensics, and the fight against arms and drug trafficking).

Beyond the assistance offered to Niger's internal security forces, EUCAP Sahel Niger also works regionally by supporting the creation of a police component in the G5 Sahel Joint Force and contributes to the Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell (RACC) in Mauritania. The mission works closely with the other EU operations in the region (and with EUBAM Libya), with Frontex (the EU agency for European border management) and other international partners, including the International Organisation for Migration, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC). It hopes to promote the role of women in security by collaborating with women's associations and supporting their participation in confidence- and trust-building activities that bring together civil society and law enforcement actors.⁹¹

EUCAP Sahel Mali is also an EU civilian mission that was launched in Bamako in January 2015, at the request of the Malian authorities. Its objective is to assist the government in its security sector reform and to enable the government to regain control of the entire territory of Mali. Interethnic conflicts, religious extremist and criminal activities have underlined the need to reinforce the administrative capacity of the government and, more generally, the governance of the security sector, including rule of law institutions (in particular the judiciary). More specifically, the mission:

- trains officials and experts in the gendarmerie and police;
- works on capacity building in counter-terrorism, organised crime and integrated border management;
- assists the return of the Malian forces in the weakened regions of the centre and the north of the country;
- ensures the inclusion of human rights and gender in all training material and courses;
- coordinates its action with other international actors present on the ground, notably the EU Training Mission (EUTM) in Mali and the police component of MINUSMA (the UN stabilisation mission in Mali), and;
- is increasingly opening its activities to the participation of other G5 Sahel countries.⁹²

The mission numbers a staff of almost 220 (140 Europeans and 54 Malians) with the participation of 15 EU Member States and 3 non-EU partners. Its budget for 2018 was €28 million and with the recent renewal of its mandate until January 2021, it has received another €67 million.⁹³

Responding to increasing violence in Mali and the spillover of the conflict to neighbouring countries, and in line with the EU strategy for the Sahel and the prerogatives of the integrated approach, the European Council agreed the first phase of the regionalisation of CSDP missions in

⁹¹ European External Action Service, [EUCAP Sahel Niger: Partnership for security in the Sahel](#), 2019.

⁹² European External Action Service, [Politique de Sécurité et de Défense Commune: Mission civile EUCAP Sahel Mali](#), February 2019.

⁹³ Council of the European Union, [EUCAP Sahel Mali: mission prolongée jusqu'au 14 janvier 2021, budget de €67 million adopté](#), 21 February 2019.

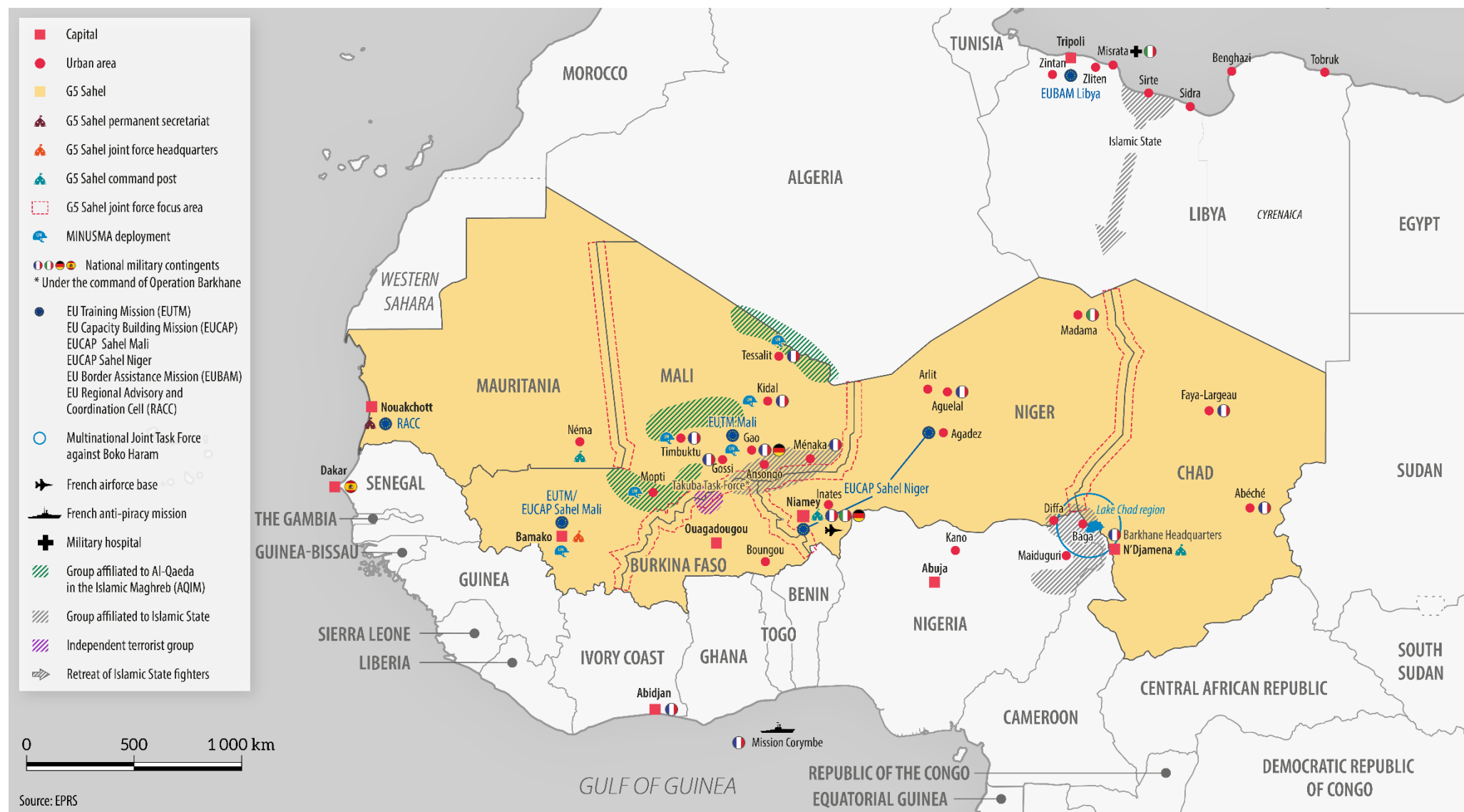
the Sahel on 20 June 2017.⁹⁴ This led to the establishment of an EU Regional Coordination Cell (RCC) based within the EUCAP Sahel Mali. The RCC included a network of internal security (civilian) and defence (military) experts, deployed in Mali but also in EU delegations in other G5 Sahel countries. As the violence increased at a regional level, the EU made the choice to build on the deployments that were already present on the ground in Mali and Niger rather than deploy more missions.⁹⁵ Consequently, the RCC was renamed the EU Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell (RACC) and was reinforced. Its command and control structure moved from Bamako (Mali) to Nouakchott (Mauritania) and its network of CSDP security and defence experts, embedded in EU delegations in the five countries, was enlarged and moved to Nouakchott, where the G5 Sahel permanent secretariat is also based. The RACC seeks to support the G5 Sahel structures and countries by means of strategic advice, in synergy with European Commission-funded programmes and in line with the integrated approach to EU external action. For the first time, this involves civilian and military staff working under the same umbrella, operationalising the EU integrated approach.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Council of the European Union, [Sahel: EU takes further steps to better support the security of the region](#), press release 18 February 2019.

⁹⁵ P. Serrano, 'Truth and dare: A personal reflection on 20 years of CSDP', in D. Fiott (ed.), [The CSDP in 2020: The EU's legacy and ambition in security and defence](#), EU Institute for Security Studies, 2020, p. 32.

⁹⁶ European External Action Service, [Working for Human Security – News on the civilian CSDP Missions / September 2019](#), 26 August 2018.

Figure 3 – EU and international peace support operations in the Sahel region, 2020



4.2. A crowded international security presence⁹⁷

On the European side, a number of Member States have been involved in efforts to bring the increasing violence in the Sahel under control. Figure 3 maps out the military presence of the main EU Member States active in the region. As the former colonial power in the region, France has been the agenda setter and driving force behind Western and specifically EU engagement in the Sahel region. France first deployed its military in the Sahel region, in 2013, with Operation Serval – replaced in August 2014 by Operation Barkhane – launched following UNSC Resolution 2085 of December 2012 and an official request by the Malian interim government for French military assistance to fight Islamist fighters in the north of Mali. The deployment of Operation Serval coincided with the launch of EUTM Mali. Operation Barkhane, which numbers approximately 5 100 soldiers, includes other – perhaps even surprising – EU Member State contributions in its ranks, including the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia and Poland. It has a mandate for counter-terrorism operations across the region and focuses its activity in insurgent-hit Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, working alongside local troops and other international operations, including the regional G5 Sahel Joint Force and the UN's stabilisation force (MINUSMA). Operation Barkhane has its headquarters in N'Djamena (Chad), two permanent posts in Gao and Niamey and a number of temporary/mobile presences depending on where violence is flaring (the data in Figure 3, from the French Ministry of Defence is dated June 2020).

The newly established Takuba Task Force will be mainly composed of European Special Operation Forces and deploy in the Liptako region, at the crossing of the frontiers of three countries (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso) where there has been a surge in violence. Operating under Barkhane's command and therefore headquartered in N'Djamena, Chad, it was launched at the request of the Malian and Nigerian authorities.⁹⁸ Takuba is framed in the context of the EU's integrated approach to the Sahel region, whereby treating the causes of the violence in Mali and the Sahel region is seen as creating the necessary conditions for development, the improvement of governance and the respect of rule of law, to eventually lead to sustainable peace.⁹⁹ This task force will be part of the counter-terrorism pillar of the Coalition for the Sahel, the broader coordinating framework announced in the France-G5 Sahel summit that took place in Pau (France), in January 2020. More specifically, Takuba will aim to assist, advise and accompany the Malian armed forces in countering armed groups by facilitating joint operations and improving intelligence sharing. It will complement efforts by France's Operation Barkhane, the regional G5 Sahel Joint Force, the UN's MINUSMA and the EU's CSDP missions in the region. The 500-strong French-led Takuba is expected to have an initial operational capability by the summer of 2020 and to be operational by early 2021. The countries participating are Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, as well as two non-EU countries, namely Norway and the United Kingdom.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Sources for Figure 3: MINUSMA; French Ministry of Defence, June 2020, N. Bagayoko, '[No simple solutions: The Sahel crisis requires a complex response](#)', *The Africa Report*, 5 June 2020; G. Faleg and C. Palleschi, '[African Strategies: European and global approaches towards sub-Saharan Africa](#)', Chaillot Paper 158, EU Institute for Security Studies, June 2020; A. Lebovich, '[Halting ambition: EU migration and security policy in the Sahel](#)', European Council for Foreign Relations, 25 September 2018.

⁹⁸ French Republic, '[Task Force Takuba: political statement by the governments of Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Mali, Niger, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom](#)', Ministry of Defence, 27 March 2020.

⁹⁹ '[La France et ses alliés forment officiellement la force Takuba au Sahel](#)', *Le Figaro*, 27 March 2020.

¹⁰⁰ '[11 European countries support creation of the Takuba advisory and assistance mission in Sahel](#)', *Agence Europe*, 30 March 2020; Swedish government, '[Task Force Takuba: Launching Ministerial Meeting, joint press statement](#)', 2020.

In addition, in January 2018, Italy's parliament approved the bilateral Mission of Support to the Republic of Niger (MISIN) and Spain continues to support France within the Operation Barkhane through two military detachments in Senegal (Destacamento Marfil) and in Gabon (Destacamento Mamba), which carry out strategic airlifts in support of the efforts of French troops.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, efforts in the Sahel are reinforced by France's maritime security presence in the Gulf of Guinea, through Operation Corymbe, which includes military installations in Côte d'Ivoire (900 personnel) and Gabon (350 personnel). Moreover, Portugal and Spain are also present in the area offering maritime defence cooperation.¹⁰²

On the side of the Sahelian countries, as a collective answer to the security situation, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger created the G5 Sahel, in 2014. This intergovernmental cooperation framework seeks to coordinate the security and development policies of its member states. In April 2017, the G5 Sahel countries set up their own regional security force, the G5 Sahel Joint Force (comprising 5 000 troops), to combat terrorism and organised crime in the region. It was authorised by the African Union Peace and Security Council and supported by UNSC Resolution 2359. The EU has supported this African-led initiative fully, including financially. An initial EU contribution of €50 million was made when the Joint Force was first deployed. In February 2018, the European Union, the United Nations, the African Union and the G5 Sahel countries co-chaired the 'International Conference on the Sahel', organised in Brussels. The conference mobilised political support for the Sahel region, €414 million to support the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and reinforced coordination of sustainable development efforts in the region. As of 2019, EU financial contributions to the G5 Sahel Joint Force totalled €100 million to support its efforts to improve security conditions in the region. In fact, the EU and its Member States together have contributed to half the international support of the Joint Force.¹⁰³ The EU funding is provided through the African Peace Facility (APF) and is used for the provision of non-lethal equipment. This means that the APF may for example cover allowances for the troops, salaries for civilians, logistical, transportation, medical, communication costs, but in no way can it fund military equipment, arms, ammunition or military training. It also funds services and infrastructure, the establishment of a compliance framework for the respect of human rights and international humanitarian law in the operations of the force and support for the governance structures of the G5 Sahel in the field of defence and security.¹⁰⁴

The EU has also supported the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) through funding to combat transnational crime in the Lake Chad region – between Nigeria, Chad and Niger – although as of April 2020, Chad has withdrawn from this regional initiative. The MNJTF, set up in 1998, is mandated by the African Union's Peace and Security Council and led by the Lake Chad Basin Commission. It has approximately 10 000 uniformed personnel and is headquartered in N'Djamena, Chad. The countries contributing troops are Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria and Benin.¹⁰⁵

The United Nations (UN) has been an important legitimising force for international action through the mandating function of the UN Security Council (UNSC). It has also been an important actor across cases with a multitude of policy programmes and changing significance over time. The UN's peacekeeping mission (Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali, MINUSMA), established in April 2013, numbers more than 15 600 soldiers and police officers, including from

¹⁰¹ On EU Member State interests in Africa, see G. Faleg and C. Palleschi, [African Strategies: European and global approaches towards sub-Saharan Africa](#), Chaillot Paper 158, EU Institute for Security Studies, June 2020.

¹⁰² T. Chanda, [Foreign armies in Africa: towards a strategic competition](#), *RFI*, 12 April 2019.

¹⁰³ European External Action Service, [EUCAP Sahel Niger: Partnership for Security in the Sahel](#), 2019.

¹⁰⁴ European Commission, [African Peace Facility](#), Directorate General for Cooperation and International Development, 16 August 2020.

¹⁰⁵ European Commission, [Multinational Joint Task Force \(MNJTF\) against Boko Haram](#), 11 April 2019.

17 EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and Sweden). It was initially deployed to keep the peace in Mali's northern regions, but its operations have expanded to Mopti and elsewhere in central Mali as insecurity in these regions has grown. The UN mission is also a guarantor of the 2015 peace deal for Mali, the Algiers Accords. Its work focuses on civilian protection, human rights monitoring, the creation of conditions for the provision of humanitarian assistance and the return of displaced persons, support to re-establish the Malian national authority on its entire territory, and the preparation of free, inclusive and peaceful elections.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ See the official website of [MINUSMA](#).

5. Parliament's oversight of EU action in the Sahel conflicts

As seen in this study, the European Council and the European Commission/EEAS have been predominantly concerned with security and migration threats. The European Parliament, however, seems to have had a more balanced outlook on EU action in the Sahel, addressing more comprehensively the challenges that the region and its countries face. European Parliament President Antonio Tajani's statement on the occasion of his meeting with Mali's Prime Minister, Abdoulaye Idrissa Maiga, in Brussels, in 2017, at the height of the violence in the region, is indicative of Parliament's support for a more holistic approach: 'We have to deepen our partnership and cooperation with the African continent in a range of areas, such as sustainable development, youth employment, climate change, peace, security, migration human rights'.¹⁰⁷ To demonstrate this, this chapter examines Parliament's position on the Sahel conflicts and how it has evolved from 2009 onwards. It also analyses the most relevant written questions of individual Members to the European Commission, the work carried out by the relevant parliamentary Committees, oral questions posed by Members to other EU institutions and delegation and committee visits to the region, to the extent that information was available.¹⁰⁸

Over the years, European Parliament resolutions addressing the conflicts in the Sahel region have increased in number and have increasingly addressed the political instability and increasing security concerns, terrorism and crime in the Sahel region. This follows logically from the worsening conditions in the Sahel region and the subsequent civilian and military engagement of the EU and its Member States in the region. In that light, Parliament has strongly supported the overall EU approach to the region and the positions of the European Commission and the EEAS. However, unlike the two aforementioned EU institutions, Parliament has also taken a strong stance in multiple instances on human rights violations, in the majority of cases calling either for respect for human rights or condemning the human rights violations perpetrated by national governments in the region, Islamist groups or other armed groups.

Although not the official European Parliament position, the analysis of about 300 relevant written questions posed by Members between January 2009 and April 2020 on the Sahel crisis reflects the diversity and wealth of concerns in Parliament. Figure 4 illustrates that the majority of questions have centred primarily around international trade and economic issues, especially on agriculture and fishing in the context of the EU agreement with Mauritania. The political instability in the Sahel region, followed by security concerns – including terrorism, cross-border crime and the performance of the EU's peace support operations in the region – have also attracted Members' attention. These concerns were closely followed by questions on human rights violations in the Sahel region and on the implementation of and use of funds for humanitarian and development aid. Perhaps unexpectedly given the prominence of the issue in the media and political narratives at EU Member State level, migratory flows in and from the Sahel region was the theme that raised the fewest questions by Members.¹⁰⁹ Overall, while substantial parliamentary activity has taken place on the Sahel region, especially since the escalation of the violence, Parliament has not been precursor for

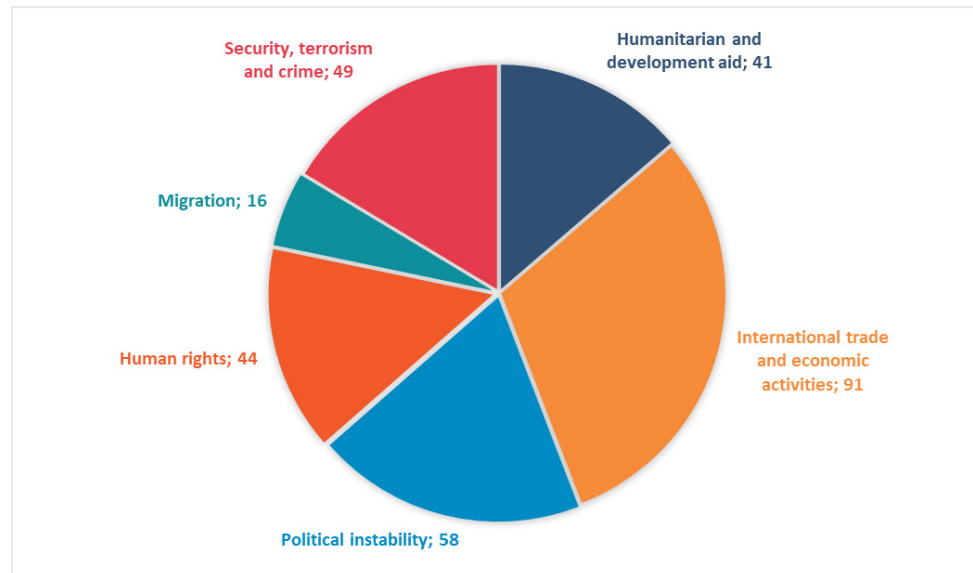
¹⁰⁷ European Parliament, [Statement following meeting with the Prime Minister of Republic of Mali](#), Brussels, 12 October 2017.

¹⁰⁸ Please refer to Chapter 1.4 for further details on the methodology of this part of the study.

¹⁰⁹ Caveat: as the search for relevant written questions was limited to those where one of the Sahelian countries or the Sahel region itself appeared in the title of the question, the search did not return questions posed on the EU Trust Fund for Africa, which are likely to be linked to migration questions. For this reason, the number of questions on migration may be underestimated.

EU action, unlike in other conflicts (e.g. Colombia, which was the focus of an EPRS study for the 2019 Normandy Peace Forum).¹¹⁰

Figure 4 – Number of Members' written questions per theme, 2009 to April 2020



Source: Prepared by the author; data collection and analysis by Arto Väisänen, EPRS.

5.1. Parliament's position

In its resolutions,¹¹¹ Parliament has consistently supported the implementation of the comprehensive approach (since the 2016 EU Global Strategy referred to as the integrated approach)¹¹² for the stabilisation of the Sahel region. It has therefore called for its security, diplomatic and development tools to be aligned to re-establish peace in the region. In response to the 2011 EU Strategy for Security and development in the Sahel and the need to ensure that the integrated approach is implemented in the Sahel region, Parliament passed a resolution on 'human rights and the security situation in the Sahel region' in June 2012. In this resolution, Parliament called on the European Commission and the then new EEAS to implement the Sahel strategy while adopting 'as an overriding principle the linking of security with development needs'. It therefore encouraged coordination between development aid and political stability and human rights concerns.¹¹³ In its June 2016 resolution on peace support operations, Parliament went even further, pointing to the need for a long-term strategy for the region. In the same resolution it pointedly drew

¹¹⁰ I. Ioannides, [Peace and Security in 2019: Evaluating EU efforts to support peace in Colombia](#), EPRS, European Parliament, May 2019.

¹¹¹ European Parliament resolution of 14 June 2012 on human rights and the security situation in the Sahel region (2012/2680(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2012\)0263](#); European Parliament resolution of 3 April 2014 on the EU comprehensive approach and its implications for the coherence of EU external action (2013/2146(INI)), [P7_TA\(2014\)0286](#); European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2016 on the EU 2015 Report on Policy Coherence for Development (2015/2317(INI)), [P8_TA\(2016\)0246](#); European Parliament resolution of 19 December 2019 on violations of human rights including religious freedoms in Burkina Faso (2019/2980(RSP)), [P9_TA-PROV\(2019\)0106](#); European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2013 on the reconstruction and democratisation of Mali (2013/2587(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2013\)0281](#).

¹¹² European External Action Service, [Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe, A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy](#), Brussels, 2016.

¹¹³ European Parliament resolution of 14 June 2012 on human rights and the security situation in the Sahel region (2012/2680(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2012\)0263](#), p. 5.

a picture of the interconnectedness of the challenges the Sahel region faces: 'the security landscape in Africa in particular has changed dramatically in the last decade, with the emergence of terrorist and insurgent groups in Somalia, Nigeria, and the Sahel-Sahara region, and with peace enforcement and counter-terrorism operations becoming the rule rather than the exception in many areas; (...) fragile states and ungoverned spaces increasing in number, leaving so many people affected by poverty, lawlessness, corruption and violence; (...) the porous borders within the continent help fuel violence, reduce security and provide opportunities for criminal activity'.¹¹⁴

Parliament also called for consideration to be given to the impact of environmental degradation and climate change when carrying out development programmes in the Sahel region to ensure food production and agriculture.¹¹⁵ Therefore, already in its June 2012 resolution Parliament had placed food security among the core objectives of the EU engagement in the region, in line with 'the commitment of the Council to contribute to the development of a peaceful, stable region where food self-sufficiency is secured'.¹¹⁶ In fact, in its December 2013 resolution, referring to the 2012 Sahel food crisis, Parliament pointed to the limits of humanitarian assistance alone in breaking the cycle of chronic hunger and malnutrition and addressing its root causes. It also highlighted yet again the link between development, security and migration, stressing 'the importance of addressing the underlying causes of persistent food insecurity in these regions, namely poor access to appropriate basic services and education, acute poverty, inadequate support for small-scale agriculture and livestock keeping, land access problems, environmental degradation, rapid population growth, market failures, declining per capita food production and poor governance'.¹¹⁷ Similarly, in its April 2017 resolution on addressing refugee and migrant movements, natural disasters and the subsequent poverty were identified as drivers leading to migration flows (coming to the EU). In the same resolution, Parliament also called for closer cooperation between conflict prevention and conflict management, in addition to addressing the root causes of the conflict. In line with the December 2013 resolution, the assumption has been that such measures would in return promote resilience and provide economic opportunities in recipient countries.¹¹⁸

Although strongly supporting the comprehensive approach, Parliament criticised its ineffective implementation in the Sahel in the first years. In its resolution of June 2012, it noted that 'the EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, while delivering positive results, needs to address the risk of fragmentation, and improve the synchronisation of actions undertaken by the EU within different instruments addressing Sahel-related issues'.¹¹⁹ Equally, in its April 2014 resolution, Parliament regretted that 'even when strategies are defined, the EU often does not manage to implement them, and is instead forced to take contingency and emergency action'.¹²⁰ However, in

¹¹⁴ European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2016 on Peace Support Operations – EU engagement with the UN and the African Union (2015/2275(INI)), [P8_TA\(2016\)0249](#), p. 3.

¹¹⁵ European Parliament resolution of 14 June 2012 on human rights and the security situation in the Sahel region (2012/2680(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2012\)0263](#).

¹¹⁶ European Parliament resolution of 14 June 2012 on human rights and the security situation in the Sahel region (2012/2680(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2012\)0263](#), p.5; European Parliament resolution of 11 December 2013 on the EU approach to resilience and disaster risk reduction in developing countries: learning from food security crises (2013/2110(INI)), [P7_TA\(2013\)0578](#).

¹¹⁷ European Parliament resolution of 11 December 2013 on the EU approach to resilience and disaster risk reduction in developing countries: learning from food security crises (2013/2110(INI)), [P7_TA\(2013\)0578](#), p. 7.

¹¹⁸ European Parliament resolution of 5 April 2017 on addressing refugee and migrant movements: the role of EU External Action (2015/2342(INI)), [P8_TA\(2017\)0124](#).

¹¹⁹ European Parliament resolution of 14 June 2012 on human rights and the security situation in the Sahel region (2012/2680(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2012\)0263](#), p. 5.

¹²⁰ European Parliament resolution of 3 April 2014 on the EU comprehensive approach and its implications for the coherence of EU external action (2013/2146(INI)), [P7_TA\(2014\)0286](#), p. 8.

its June 2016 resolution on the 2015 EU policy coherence and development report, Parliament pointed to the merits of the Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel and the Sahel Regional Action Plan 2015-2020 as 'good examples of a successful implementation of the EU's comprehensive approach, effectively mixing security, development and governance responses'.¹²¹

Parliament first pointed to the worsening political situation in Mali in its April 2012 resolution that was adopted in response to the rapid escalation of the crisis in Mali following the expansion of the control of the Tuareg and other rebel groups in the northern parts of the country and the subsequent military coup in Bamako.¹²² In this resolution, Parliament made multiple calls to restore 'civilian institutions' and for de-escalatory measures to be taken (e.g. the release of prisoners captured during the coup and the cessation of hostilities). Parliament argued for a negotiated resolution to the crisis: 'there is no military solution to the conflict in the north'. Moreover, it condemned the acts of violence against civilians and the violence by armed rebel groups. It also pointed to the inequalities in the country and the need for human rights to be respected while supporting sustainable and equal development with strong state institutions.¹²³ To support these efforts, Parliament explicitly called on the United Nations to consider endorsing the deployment of a CSDP mission to support border management and offer logistical support to the Malian army. Two months later, Parliament also called on local and regional actors, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union to implement security-related measures on the ground.¹²⁴ It noted again the importance of working with regional partners in June 2016.¹²⁵

In its June 2013 resolution on Mali's reconstruction,¹²⁶ Parliament highlighted the need to complement development aid with other responses, such as security and good governance-related reforms. It called for a developmental approach (in parallel to law enforcement efforts) to reduce the incentives for local populations, especially young people, to join criminal and terrorist groups. Parliament's resolutions on the Sahel have consistently supported this dual approach to crime and terrorism.¹²⁷ In light of increased concern about perceived limited amounts of available development aid, Parliament welcomed the EU-led Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative (AGIR) contributions to the Sahel that provide additional development aid. In that context, it also called on 'the Commission and the Member States to continue improving links between humanitarian aid, development cooperation and resilience to disasters so as to enable a more flexible and effective response to growing needs.'¹²⁸ In its June 2016 resolution on peace support operations, Parliament welcomed 'the fact that the new African Peace Facility action programme addresses shortcomings, and places stronger emphasis on exit strategies, greater burden-sharing with African countries,

¹²¹ European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2016 on the EU 2015 Report on Policy Coherence for Development (2015/2317(INI)), [P8_TA\(2016\)0246](#).

¹²² European Parliament resolution of 20 April 2012 on the situation in Mali (2012/2603(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2012\)0141](#).

¹²³ European Parliament resolution of 20 April 2012 on the situation in Mali (2012/2603(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2012\)0141](#), p. 4.

¹²⁴ European Parliament resolution of 14 June 2012 on human rights and the security situation in the Sahel region (2012/2680(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2012\)0263](#).

¹²⁵ European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2016 on Peace Support Operations – EU engagement with the UN and the African Union (2015/2275(INI)), [P8_TA\(2016\)0249](#).

¹²⁶ European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2013 on the reconstruction and democratisation of Mali (2013/2587(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2013\)0281](#).

¹²⁷ European Parliament resolution of 14 June 2012 on human rights and the security situation in the Sahel region (2012/2680(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2012\)0263](#); European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2016 on the EU 2015 Report on Policy Coherence for Development (2015/2317(INI)), [P8_TA\(2016\)0246](#).

¹²⁸ European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2016 on the EU 2015 Report on Policy Coherence for Development (2015/2317(INI)), [P8_TA\(2016\)0246](#), p. 10.

more targeted support and improved decision-making procedures'.¹²⁹ While Parliament has not recently passed specific resolutions on development aid in the Sahel, in 2017, Members continued to highlight the need to integrate development aid with other responses in the Sahel.

Parliament's focus on how to re-establish political stability in the region has shifted over the years. The 2013 resolution on the 'reconstruction and democratisation of Mali'¹³⁰ highlighted the need for capacity-building of the Malian state, including promoting respect for human rights and strengthening the rule of law. However, Parliament's 2015 report on 'policy coherence for development' and the 2018 'mandate for budget trilogue' gave more prominence to the issue of migration.¹³¹ In a 2018 'resolution on the mandate for the trilogue on the 2019 draft budget', Parliament states that it 'believes that ensuring the security of the Union's citizens and addressing the challenges of migration and refugees remain two top Union priorities in 2019'.¹³² For this reason, the Parliament deemed it 'crucial to maintain spending in these areas at a level that is adequate to respond to the needs raised by the migration and refugee crisis in the African continent, especially in the Sahel [...]'.¹³³ Equally, in its April 2017 resolution on addressing refugee and migrant movements, Parliament considered that the Sahel region was a significant area of concern in terms of a source of migrants coming to Europe. Parliament assessed that the food and nutrition crisis, the increasing violence and conflict, and absence of basic services were the main drivers of migration from the Sahel.¹³⁴

Although he never visited the Sahel region, European Parliament President Jerzy Buzek was in Libya on 29 October 2011 to discuss the emerging Islamist threat in the region and migration at the Union for the Union for the Mediterranean.¹³⁵ The need to earmark more resources to control migratory flows to Niger and the Sahel was also raised, in July 2018, by the European Parliament President, Antonio Tajani, at the end of his official visit to Niamey, in Niger, where he had headed a mission of entrepreneurs, researchers, and representatives of international organisations. He also visited a UN High Commissioner for Refugees reception centre for people evacuated to Niger from Libya. At the centre, President Tajani expressed his commitment to strengthening 'the fight against traffickers who perpetrate unspeakable violence and torture to men, women and children'.¹³⁶ This shift is in many ways in line with the European Commission's discourse on the Sahel region and Member State concerns on migration management and flows inside the EU, in particular following the 2015 'migration crisis'.

¹²⁹ European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2016 on Peace Support Operations – EU engagement with the UN and the African Union (2015/2275(INI)), [P8_TA\(2016\)0249](#), p. 6.

¹³⁰ European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2013 on the reconstruction and democratisation of Mali (2013/2587(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2013\)0281](#).

¹³¹ European Parliament resolution of 5 July 2018 on the mandate for the trilogue on the 2019 draft budget (2018/2024(BUD)), [P8_TA\(2018\)0311](#); European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2016 on the EU 2015 Report on Policy Coherence for Development (2015/2317(INI)), [P8_TA\(2016\)0246](#).

¹³² European Parliament resolution of 5 July 2018 on the mandate for the trilogue on the 2019 draft budget (2018/2024(BUD)), [P8_TA\(2018\)0311](#), p. 4.

¹³³ European Parliament resolution of 5 July 2018 on the mandate for the trilogue on the 2019 draft budget (2018/2024(BUD)), [P8_TA\(2018\)0311](#).

¹³⁴ European Parliament resolution of 5 April 2017 addressing refugee and migrant movements: the role of EU External Action (2015/2342(INI)), [P8_TA\(2017\)0124](#); European Parliament resolution of 3 April 2014 on the EU comprehensive approach and its implications for the coherence of EU external action (2013/2146(INI)), [P7_TA\(2014\)0286](#).

¹³⁵ [Mediterranean Review](#), 1 November 2011, p. 2.

¹³⁶ European Parliament, [European Parliament President Antonio Tajani concludes visit to Niger: calls for more EU resources and investment to support control of migratory flows in Niger and Sahel](#), Niamey, 18 July 2018.

Parliament has placed emphasis on human rights since the June 2012 resolutions in response to the 2011 Sahel strategy and the April 2012 resolution on the crisis in Mali. It called for EU engagement in the region to be in line with the respect for human rights and at the core of its human rights positions. Parliament condemned the Malian state institutions, especially the military, for its human rights violations during both the 2012 coup d'état and recent operations in the country.¹³⁷ Following the 2015 migration crisis, Parliament continued to call for respect for human rights, as for example, in its April 2017 resolution on addressing refugee and migrant movements.¹³⁸ Recently, in the December 2019 resolution on Burkina Faso, Parliament called on the Burkinabe government to investigate instances of human rights violations and uphold the rule of law. It also called on the EEAS to undertake dialogue and mediation in the country, and to include human rights in its activities in Burkina Faso. Similarly, in Mauritania, Parliament condemned the government's use of violent force against protestors and human rights abuses carried out by authorities.¹³⁹ In its March 2019 resolution on the 2017 discharge of the European Development Fund, Parliament stated that EUTF projects must put human rights at the core of programming. It also stressed that the ECA's finding on implementation of the EUTF for Africa rendered its added value highly questionable.¹⁴⁰

Parliament also scrutinised the EU peace and security efforts undertaken in the Sahel by monitoring the performance of the CSDP missions in the region. Already in its November 2012 resolution on the implementation of the CSDP, Parliament expressed its concern at the overall political situation in the Sahel region. It considered 'it regrettable [...] that the EU does not take full advantage of CSDP military tools, even though a number of crises might have warranted a CSDP intervention, including those in Libya¹⁴¹ and Mali'.¹⁴² Accordingly, Parliament called 'on the HR/VP and on the Council to implement rapidly and fully the EU strategy for the Sahel and to take appropriate security measures, if necessary by having recourse to CSDP missions, to help states in the region strengthen their capabilities in the fight against organised cross-border crime and terrorist groups'.¹⁴³ It welcomed both the launch of EU capacity-building mission (EUCAP) Sahel Niger and the adoption of United Nations Resolution 2071 on Mali.

¹³⁷ European Parliament resolution of 14 June 2012 on human rights and the security situation in the Sahel region (2012/2680(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2012\)0263](#); European Parliament resolution of 20 April 2012 on the situation in Mali (2012/2603(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2012\)0141](#); European Parliament resolution of 15 January 2020 on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy – annual report (2019/2135(INI)), [P9_TA-PROV\(2020\)0009](#).

¹³⁸ European Parliament resolution of 5 April 2017 on addressing refugee and migrant movements: the role of EU External Action (2015/2342(INI)), [P8_TA\(2017\)0124](#).

¹³⁹ European Parliament resolution of 19 December 2019 on violations of human rights including religious freedoms in Burkina Faso (2019/2980(RSP)), [P9_TA-PROV\(2019\)0106](#); European Parliament resolution of 5 April 2017 on addressing refugee and migrant movements: the role of EU External Action (2015/2342(INI)), [P8_TA\(2017\)0124](#); European Parliament resolution of 18 December 2014 on Mauritania, in particular the case of Biram Dah Abeid (2014/2999(RSP)), [P8_TA\(2014\)0107](#).

¹⁴⁰ European Parliament 2017 discharge: General budget of the EU - 8th, 9th, 10th and 11th EDFs, [P8_TA\(2019\)0244](#), 26 March 2019.

¹⁴¹ The EU's CSDP mission in Libya (EU Integrated Border Assistance Mission in Libya, EUBAM Libya) was launched in 2013 and has been extended multiple times. In the short term, it aims to support the capacity of Libyan authorities so that they can re-establish security in the country and within the maritime and air borders. In the long term, it seeks to develop a broader integrated border management (IBM) strategy.

¹⁴² European Parliament resolution of 22 November 2012 on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy (based on the annual report from the Council to the European Parliament on the Common Foreign and Security Policy) (12562/2011 –2012/2138(INI)), [P7_TA\(2012\)0455](#), p. 6.

¹⁴³ European Parliament resolution of 22 November 2012 on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy (based on the annual report from the Council to the European Parliament on the Common Foreign and Security Policy) (12562/2011 –2012/2138(INI)), [P7_TA\(2012\)0455](#), p. 9.

Already in 2012, Parliament called for stronger regional cooperation among the Sahel countries, while noting the need for a CSDP mission for capacity-building on tackling cross-border crime. The 2012 resolution on the annual CSDP report called on regional and international organisations, including the EU, to provide 'coordinated assistance, expertise, training and capacity-building support to the armed and security forces of Mali in order to restore the authority of the State of Mali'.¹⁴⁴ In response to the increasing violence in the region, Parliament has welcomed the idea of 'regionalised' CSDP missions present in the Sahel, in response to requests from the countries in the region to increase security cooperation through the G5 Sahel group. Parliament 'is convinced that this could represent an opportunity to strengthen the efficiency and the relevance of the CSDP missions (EUCAP Sahel Mali and EUCAP Sahel Niger) present in the field'. It also 'strongly believes that this concept of 'regionalisation' must rely on field expertise, definite objectives and the means to achieve them, and should not be defined only under the impetus of political considerations'.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, in its June 2016 resolution on peace support operations, it underlined the major contribution of the EU, through the African Peace Facility and the funding of the African Union (AU), allowing the AU to strengthen its capacity to provide a collective response to crises on the continent. It also encouraged regional organisations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), to increase their efforts in the area of rapid African responses to crises and to complement the AU's efforts.¹⁴⁶

Similarly, in its most recent resolutions on the implementation of the CSDP (adopted in 2019 and 2020), Parliament has continued to stress that instability in the Sahel remains a threat to the EU.¹⁴⁷ It has again stressed the importance of the three EU missions in Mali (EUTM Mali, EUCAP Sahel Mali) and in Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger) in addressing the security challenges in the countries.¹⁴⁸ In the 2013 resolution on reconstruction of Mali, Parliament called for civilian control of the Malian armed and applicability of rule of law to actions by military,¹⁴⁹ while showing Parliament's continued support for efforts to tackle the root causes of the conflict in the Sahel, such as human rights violations and developmental challenges. To respond to these concerns, Parliament has called for CSDP missions to incorporate the respect for human rights into its activities, especially in the case of capacity-building in Mali (in 2013 and 2019 resolutions) and, more recently (in its 2019 resolution) in Burkina Faso.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, Parliament criticised 'the fact that the EEAS did not lay down any

¹⁴⁴ European Parliament resolution of 22 November 2012 on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy (based on the annual report from the Council to the European Parliament on the Common Foreign and Security Policy) (12562/2011 –2012/2138(INI)), [P7_TA\(2012\)0455](#), p. 9.

¹⁴⁵ European Parliament resolution of 23 November 2016 on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy (based on the annual report from the Council to the European Parliament on the Common Foreign and Security Policy) (2016/2067(INI)), [P8_TA\(2016\)0440](#), p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2016 on peace support operations – EU engagement with the UN and the African Union (2015/2275(INI)), [P8_TA\(2016\)0249](#), p. 6.

¹⁴⁷ European Parliament resolution of 15 January 2020 on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy – annual report (2019/2135(INI)), [P9_TA-PROV\(2020\)0009](#).

¹⁴⁸ European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2013 on the reconstruction and democratisation of Mali (2013/2587(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2013\)0281](#); European Parliament resolution of 15 January 2020 on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy – annual report (2019/2135(INI)), [P9_TA-PROV\(2020\)0009](#); European Parliament resolution of 12 December 2018 on the annual report on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy (2018/2099(INI)), [P8_TA\(2018\)0514](#).

¹⁴⁹ European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2013 on the reconstruction and democratisation of Mali (2013/2587(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2013\)0281](#).

¹⁵⁰ European Parliament resolution of 15 January 2020 on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy – annual report (2019/2135(INI)), [P9_TA-PROV\(2020\)0009](#); European Parliament resolution of 19 December 2019 on violations of human rights including religious freedoms in Burkina Faso (2019/2980(RSP)), [P9_TA-PROV\(2019\)0106](#); European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2013 on the reconstruction and democratisation of Mali (2013/2587(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2013\)0281](#).

suitable indicators to monitor the outcome of the EUCAP Niger and EUCAP Mali missions, and that the monitoring and assessment of the mission activities were inadequate and not geared to take account of their implications'.¹⁵¹

5.2. Members' written questions to the European Commission

In the period from 2009 to 2020, Parliament sent the European Commission approximately 300 relevant written questions on the conflict in the Sahel region. A look at the distribution of the questions across the two last legislatures shows that Members have consistently been interested in the region. More specifically, 176 written questions were sent to the European Commission during the 2009-2014 legislature and 114 during the 2014-2019 legislature (see Table 3). During the current legislature, by the end of April 2020 Members had already asked nine written questions, clearly reflecting growing concern regarding the escalation of the violence in the Sahel region.

Table 3 – Number of Members' written questions to the European Commission per legislative cycle, 2009 to April 2020

	2009-2014	2014-2019	2019-April 2020
Burkina Faso	6	7	1
Chad	7	3	0
Mali	77	24	0
Mauritania	62	51	2
Niger	8	17	0
Sahel	16	12	6
TOTAL	176	114	9

Source: Prepared by the author; data collection and analysis by Arto Väisänen, EPRS.

Members from France, Portugal, Spain, Italy and the UK have been most active in posing questions to the European Commission. It is also worth noting the general interest in terms of both the distribution of nationalities and political affiliation for this crisis. This is seen, for example, from the fact that written questions to the European Commission were posed not only by those Members who have acted as rapporteurs of annual reports on the CSDP or other resolutions.¹⁵²

In terms of Members' interest in each of the countries in the Sahel region, the highest number of questions were on Mauritania (115 questions), of which 76 focused on international trade and economic activities (mostly relating to fisheries issues). Mali, which has remained the epicentre of

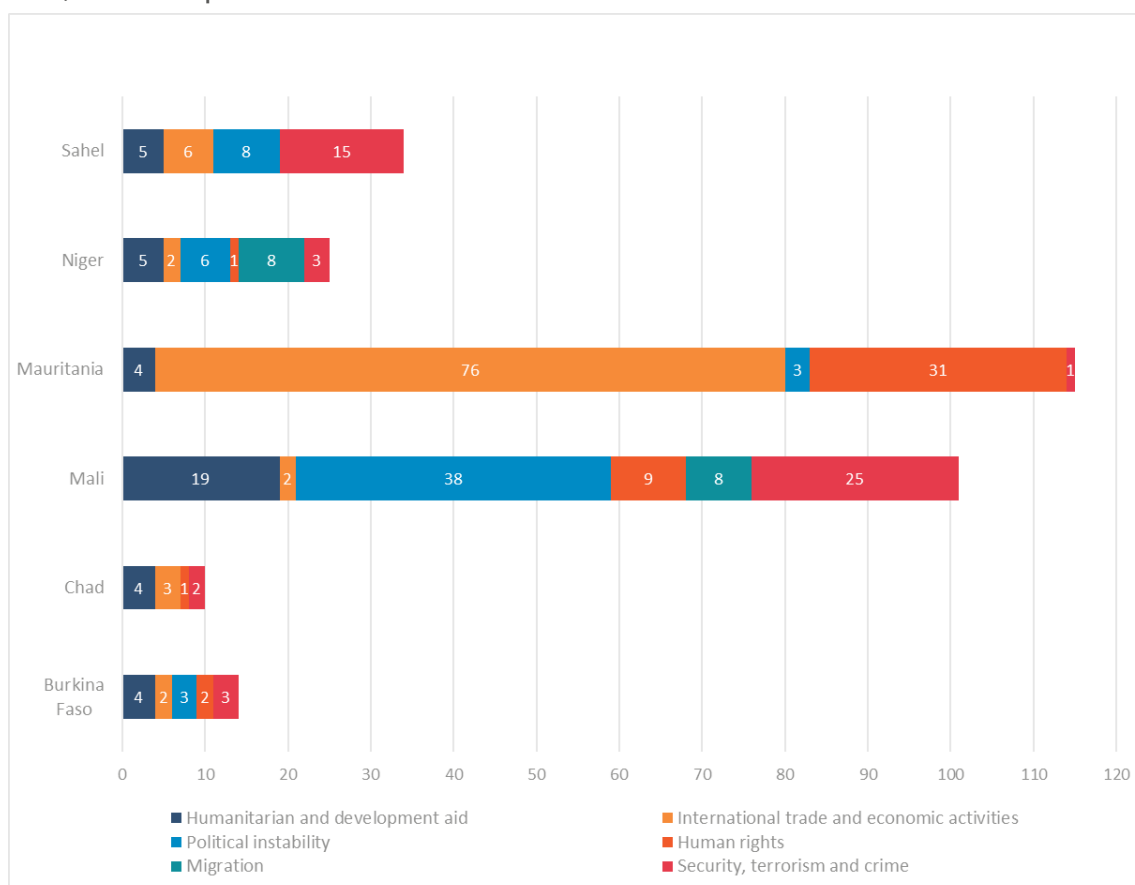
¹⁵⁰ European Parliament resolution of 19 December 2019 on violations of human rights including religious freedoms in Burkina Faso (2019/2980(RSP)), [P9_TA-PROV\(2019\)0106](#); European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2013 on the reconstruction and democratisation of Mali (2013/2587(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2013\)0281](#).

¹⁵¹ European Parliament resolution of 15 January 2020 on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy – annual report (2019/2135(INI)), [P9_TA-PROV\(2020\)0009](#).

¹⁵² Only in two cases did the rapporteurs of resolutions also play a more active role in sending written questions to the European Commission. See, European Parliament resolution of 22 October 2013 on the situation of human rights in the Sahel region (2013/2020(INI)), [P7_TA\(2013\)0431](#); European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2016 on Peace Support Operations – EU engagement with the UN and the African Union (2015/2275(INI)), [P8_TA\(2016\)0249](#).

the political and security crisis in the region, came in second, with Members posing 101 questions, primarily on security, terrorism and crime (including questions on the CSDP missions). Following far behind are Niger (25 questions evenly distributed across the legislatures), Burkina Faso (14 questions) and Chad (10 questions). Interestingly, Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger were the subject of fewer questions than the Sahel as a region (34 questions), as Members have tended to treat the region as a block. The graph below (Figure 5) illustrates how Members' written questions to the European Commission are distributed per country and the Sahel region itself by theme, 2009 to April 2020.

Figure 5 – Members' written questions per country in the Sahel and on the region itself by theme, 2009 to April 2020



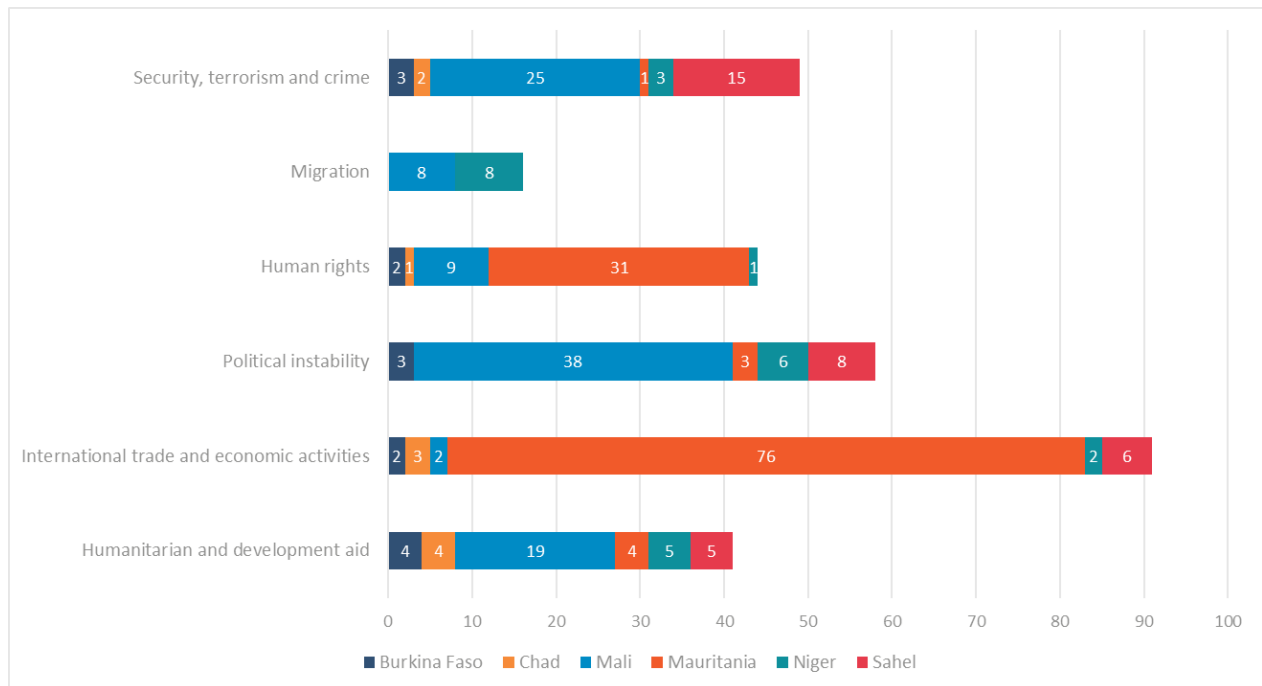
Source: Prepared by the author; data collection and analysis by Arto Väisänen, EPRS.

Figure 6 is organised according to clusters of recurrent concerns facing the Sahel region and the countries it comprises, as identified in Members' written questions to the European Commission. These six categories of interests are: international trade and other economic activities (including agriculture and fisheries); development aid; security, terrorism and crime (including the CSDP missions and trafficking of drugs, arms and humans); political instability; migration; human rights violations (including women's rights and gender issues).

The category on 'international trade and economic activities' is the category with the highest number of questions (91 questions) asked across all three legislatures. As seen in Figure 6, the majority (76) of questions in this area were raised primarily in the context of the EU-Mauritania Fisheries Protocol, which drew significant attention from Members. Questions were raised across political groups, especially on developments in the negotiations leading to the 2015 Protocols and

the subsequent monitoring of the impact of the agreement.¹⁵³ In terms of Members' individual questions on international trade and economic activities in Mauritania, Spanish Members across political parties posed more than 60 questions. This is likely due to Spanish concerns regarding the potential impacts of the EU-Mauritania Fisheries Protocol and how it could affect the Spanish fishing industry. Portuguese Members and a limited number of Italian and French Members raised similar concerns on the fisheries protocol with Mauritania.¹⁵⁴

Figure 6 – Members' written questions per topic for each of the countries of the Sahel and the region as a whole, 2009 to April 2020



Source: Prepared by the author; data collection and analysis by Arto Väisänen, EPRS.

Members also raised questions about mining activity in Mali, especially in the case of gold mining and the potential use of child labour.¹⁵⁵ In addition to gold mining, one Member wondered whether

¹⁵³ Francisco José Millán Mon (EPP), Recurrent problems for the EU fleet in transporting fresh fish from Mauritania, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [P-002289/2019](#), 16 July 2019; Peter van Dalen (EPP), Fisheries agreement with Mauritania, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-003176/2019](#), 9 October 2019; Francisco José Millán Mon (EPP), EU-Mauritania Agreement, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-006292/2018](#), 14 December 2018; Francisco José Millán Mon (EPP), Problems for the European fleet transporting fresh fish from Mauritania, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-001215/2019](#), 6 March 2019.

¹⁵⁴ See: François Alfonsi (Greens/EFA), Fisheries agreement with Mauritania, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-002522-1](#), 5 March 2013; Clara Eugenia Aguilera García (S&D), Fisheries agreement with Mauritania, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-005845/2014](#), 17 July 2014; José Blanco López (S&D), State of negotiations on the new fishing protocol with Mauritania, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-005811-14](#), 17 July 2014; Siôn Simon (S&D), Fisheries agreement with Mauritania, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-010973/2014](#), 18 December 2014; Nuno Melo (EPP), EU fisheries partnership agreements, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [P-002706/2012](#), 9 March 2012; José Blanco López (S&D), Expiry of Fisheries Protocol with Mauritania, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-011161/2014](#), 22 December 2014; Ana Miranda (Greens/EFA), Situation regarding the agreement signed by the EU and the Republic of Mauritania, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-004230-13](#), 15 April 2013.

¹⁵⁵ Fiorello Provera (EFD/ID), Child labour in mining in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-012396/2011](#), 6 January 2012.

the Cotonou Agreement in each country had contributed to peace, security, democratic governance and political stability in addition to poverty reduction.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, while Parliament has in multiple resolutions underlined the importance of climate and environmental aspects in the Sahel context, the number of questions addressing climate and environment as a regional and transboundary aspect remains low (4 questions).¹⁵⁷ The overall number of questions that addressed issues other than agriculture and fisheries in the category on international trade and economic activity in the region has also been low.

Members raised 41 questions during 2009-2020 addressing concerns regarding development aid in the Sahel region. These questions were evenly split across the Sahel countries. Members who raised the majority of questions about development aid were from Malta, Italy, Portugal, Germany and Romania. Almost half of these questions dealt with EU development aid to Mali and the majority of these addressed the amount of financing¹⁵⁸ spent on specific projects, such as malnutrition¹⁵⁹ and post-conflict reconstruction.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, Members enquired on how aid was distributed, and especially how the distribution of aid was accounted for, monitored and evaluated.¹⁶¹ Members were also interested in how much and where development financing went in the case of Mauritania and Niger. Members also addressed specific crises, such as the food crisis in Niger or lack of education in Burkina Faso.¹⁶² Questions were also raised about the Sahel region on current and

¹⁵⁶ Nuno Melo (EPP), VP/HR – Cotonou Agreement – EU and Mauritania, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-010466-13](#), 16 September 2013; Nuno Melo (EPP), International trade – European Union and Mauritania, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-010516-13](#), 17 September 2013; Nuno Melo (EPP), International Trade – European Union and Burkina Faso, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-010542-13](#), 17 September 2013; Nuno Melo (EPP), VP/HR – Cotonou Agreement – EU and Burkina Faso, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-010403-13](#), 16 September 2013; Nuno Melo (EPP), International trade – European Union and Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-010517-13](#), 17 September 2013; Nuno Melo (EPP), VP/HR – Cotonou Agreement – EU and Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-010464-13](#), 16 September 2013; Nuno Melo (EPP), International trade – European Union and Chad, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-010548-13](#), 17 September 2013; Nuno Melo (EPP), VP/HR – Cotonou Agreement – EU and Chad, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-010415-13](#), 16 September 2013; Nuno Melo (EPP), International trade – European Union and Niger, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-010522-13](#), 17 September 2013; Nuno Melo (EPP), VP/HR – Cotonou Agreement – EU and Niger, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-010475-13](#), 16 September 2013.

¹⁵⁷ Michèle Striffler (EPP), State of Lake Chad, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-003506/12](#), 30 March 2012; Cristiana Muscardini (ECR), Transacqua project for the Sahel, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [P-008774-13](#), 17 July 2013; Cristiana Muscardini (ECR), Transacqua project (2), Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-011691-13](#), 14 October 2013; Mario Borghezio (ENF), Plans for a waterway to Lake Chad, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-001663/2018](#), 19 March 2018.

¹⁵⁸ Diogo Feio (EPP), VP/HR – Donors to Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-005813-13](#), 23 May 2013.

¹⁵⁹ Siôn Simon (S&D), Financial aid for Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-003695/2015](#), 6 March 2015; Doru-Claudian Frunzulică (S&D), Humanitarian aid in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-006449-18](#), 21 December 2018.

¹⁶⁰ Monica Luisa Macovei (EPP), Mali's reconstruction and the EU's financial commitment, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-008657-13](#), 15 July 2013; James Nicholson (ECR), State building contract and aid to Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-008602-13](#), 12 July 2013.

¹⁶¹ Marlene Mizzi (S&D), Funding for Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-001994/2015](#); Nuno Melo (EPP), Financial aid for Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-006226-13](#), 3 June 2013.

¹⁶² Nuno Melo (EPP), Food crisis in Niger, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-005634-13](#), 21 May 2013; Marlene Mizzi (S&D), Funding for education, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-007773/2015](#), 13 May 2015.

potential overall sums of EU development assistance and on the manner in which aid was/is spent.¹⁶³

A clear majority of Members' written questions regarding respect for human rights (31 out of 44) concerned Mauritania specifically. Members focused in particular on the anti-slavery measures, reflecting Parliament's 2014 resolution on the same issue.¹⁶⁴ The interest in human rights in Mauritania continued across the legislatures and was shared across the main political groups. Members raised disproportionately few questions on the human rights situation in the other countries in the region – Mali (nine questions), Burkina Faso (two questions) and Niger and Chad (one question each) across all legislatures under examination – perhaps because these countries were well covered in Parliament's reports/resolutions.¹⁶⁵ No questions on the human rights' situation in the Sahel region (in general) were found. Beyond the case of Mauritania, however, Members' human rights-related questions largely came from the same parliamentary group, mostly from Malta, Belgium and Romania. In addition, Members raised questions about the incorporation of human rights into EU-funded actions and measures seeking to address migration and issues linked to child labour and use of child soldiers.¹⁶⁶

In addition to human rights, Members raised women's rights and gender issues four times during the period under examination and all were raised during the 2014-2019 legislature. These questions touched on almost all countries in the region and, in half of the cases, they also focused on the forced marriage of girls and women. In this context, one Member pointed to the need for potential EU support for civil society actors to assist victims of sexual violence in Mauritania.¹⁶⁷ Another question concerned the Chibok crisis in Nigeria and the release of the kidnapped girls,¹⁶⁸ while the issue of women's healthcare issues in Burkina Faso was also raised.¹⁶⁹ The written questions on women's rights and gender came from three political groups, even if one Member raised half of the questions.

¹⁶³ Pablo Iglesias (GUE/NGL), Increase in EU assistance for the Sahel, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-009519/2015](#), 11 June 2015; Mario Borghezio (ID), EUR 156 million in additional aid for Sahel in 2015, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-002592/2015](#), 19 February 2015.

¹⁶⁴ European Parliament resolution of 18 December 2014 on Mauritania, in particular the case of Biram Dah Abeid (2014/2999(RSP)), [P8_TA\(2014\)0107](#).

¹⁶⁵ European Parliament resolution of 19 December 2019 on violations of human rights including religious freedoms in Burkina Faso (2019/2980(RSP)), [P9_TA-PROV\(2019\)0106](#); European Parliament resolution of 22 October 2013 on the situation of human rights in the Sahel region (2013/2020(INI)), [P7_TA\(2013\)0431](#).

¹⁶⁶ Charles Tannock (ECR), Child soldiers in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-009404-12](#), 16 October 2012; Gaston Franco (EPP), VP/HR — Towards a world without child soldiers, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-011131-12](#), 5 December 2012; Barbara Lochbihler (Greens/EFA), Bodil Valero (Greens/EFA) and Judith Sargentini (Greens/EFA), VP/HR — support for the G5 Sahel Joint Force, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [P-006105/2017/rev.1](#), 29 September 2017; Doru-Claudian Frunzulică (S&D), Child labour in Burkina Faso, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-004291/2015](#), 17 March 2015.

¹⁶⁷ Corina Cretu (S&D), Forced marriage of girl, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-009361-12](#), 15 October 2012; Marlene Mizzi (S&D), Protecting girls from forced marriage in Burkina Faso, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-000643/2016](#), 27 January 2016; Barbara Matera (EPP), VP/HR — Mauritanian sexual assault survivors, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-004584/2018](#), 10 September 2018.

¹⁶⁸ Marlene Mizzi (S&D), Release of the Chibok girls, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-009159/2014](#), 12 November 2014.

¹⁶⁹ Nicole Sinclair (NI), Aid to Burkina Faso – women's healthcare issues, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-1103/10](#), 4 March 2010.

Political instability¹⁷⁰ remained a significant area of concern for Members with 58 questions raised. These questions were raised by a variety of Members across almost all political groups (apart from the non-affiliated) and from a variety of countries. The nationality most represented in this category was Italian (with 13 questions). The distribution of questions per country (see Figure 6) demonstrates that Mali (38 questions out of 58) has been a country to which Members have paid particular attention. Questions on Mali covered a broad range of topics, including the general political situation in the country following the 2012 coup d'état and the foreign military intervention.¹⁷¹ In addition, Members from multiple countries – notably from the United Kingdom, Italy and to a lesser degree from Portugal – and representing a broad spectrum of political groups have raised questions about the political challenges facing Mali. These include questions about the limited capacity of government institutions to maintain stability in the entire country, especially in the northern areas; the deteriorating security situation; and the increasing use of violence against civilians. Questions have also addressed the relationship between the dire security and humanitarian situation and food insecurity in Mali.¹⁷² Furthermore, reflecting the April 2012 and June 2013 resolutions and thus the rather reactive response of Parliament to the Sahel crisis, the overwhelming majority of questions falling under the category of political instability were raised in the latter part of the 2009-2014 legislature, that is, once the crisis in Mali had already reached distressing levels.

Political instability in the entire Sahel region (eight questions) and in Niger (six questions) typically addressed the French participation and leadership in foreign military operations in the Sahel region,¹⁷³ the level of violence, and general developments in the region.¹⁷⁴ Members raised fewer

¹⁷⁰ While 'political stability' remains a broad concept, here it refers to written questions on the overall situation of the country in question or the region, overlapping questions about the political, economic and military situations and questions about the external actions taken by individual EU Member States, such as France, in the country or region.

¹⁷¹ See Andreas Mölzer (ID), Jihadists in Mali – French military intervention, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-001335-14](#), 10 February 2014; Fiorello Provera (ID), VP/HR – French counter-terrorism strategies in North Africa, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-000968-14](#), 30 January 2014; Marc Tarabella (S&D), Subject: VP/HR – Reward for mounting a coup d'état, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-009740-13](#), 29 August 2013; Oreste Rossi (EPP), VP/HR – Instability in Mali: swift, practical action by the EU, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-008634-13](#), 15 July 2013; Nuno Melo (EPP), VP/HR – The war in Mali testing Europe's defences, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-001971-13](#), 22 February 2013; Diane Dodds (NI), French intervention in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-001506-13](#), 13 February 2013; Willy Meyer (GUE/NGL), VP/HR – Military action by France in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-000723-13](#), 24 January 2013; Nuno Melo (EPP), France: Intervention in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-000524-13](#), 21 January 2013.

¹⁷² Michał Tomasz Kamiński (ECR), VP/HR – Situation in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-005181/2012](#), 22 May 2012; Mariya Nedelcheva (EPP), VP/HR – Security and humanitarian crisis in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-004294/2012](#), 25 April 2012; Mariya Nedelcheva (EPP), VP/HR – Security and humanitarian crisis in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-004293/2012](#), 26 April 2012; Peter Simon (S&D), VP/HR – Current security position, humanitarian situation and EU aid in Northern Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-003482/2012](#), 30 March 2012; Ilhan Kyuchyuk (RE), VP/HR – Growing ethnic violence in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-002649/2017](#), 11 April 2017; Ilhan Kyuchyuk (RE), VP/HR – Situation in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-006137/2016](#), 29 July 2016; Doru-Claudian Frunzulică (S&D), VP/HR – Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-015814/2015](#), 15 December 2015.

¹⁷³ Cristiana Muscardini (ECR), VP/HR – The Sahel and the Tuareg, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-011465-12](#), 17 December 2012; Olivier Chastel (RE), Security in the Sahel, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-003782/2019](#), 11 November 2019; Dominique Bilde (ID), Operation Barkhane against Islamist terrorism in the Sahel, and European support, Question for written answer to the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, [E-000910/2020/rev.1](#), 16 February 2020.

¹⁷⁴ Lars Patrick Berg (ID), VP/HR – Sahel, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-003075/2019](#), 2 October 2019; John Stuart Agnew (ID), EU Sahel Strategy, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-000972/2019](#), 22 February 2019.

questions on political instability in the other countries in the region: three questions each on Mauritania and Burkina Faso, and no questions on Chad. In terms of topics, Members' questions ranged from general updates on the political situation in the Sahelian countries, to more specific ones (e.g. food insecurity in Niger).¹⁷⁵ In terms of timing, besides those on Mali, the questions on political instability were evenly distributed in the period examined. The fact that no questions were raised on the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the Sahel could point to the fact that the EU's diplomatic efforts have not raised any concerns. The EUSR is uniquely positioned to ensure coordination between the EU delegations and among the civilian and military activities in the region.

Members raised 49 questions about crime, terrorism and security during the 2009-2020 period. In this category, Members raised questions about major criminal activities (e.g. trafficking of humans, arms and drugs).¹⁷⁶ It was difficult to categorise questions clearly since the EU response to the challenges that crime-related activities pose overlapped with terrorism- and security-related actions. Most of the questions on terrorism focused essentially on the actions of and developments concerning specific terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda, in the Sahel region.¹⁷⁷ Finally, for the most part security-related questions concerned the functioning of the CSDP missions deployed in the region.

Members asked six crime-related questions, with half of these addressing the Sahel region as a whole because of the cross-border nature of crime. Furthermore, Members asked two questions on crime in Mali and one in Niger, focusing on the trafficking of illicit goods between the two countries.¹⁷⁸ The other Sahel countries were not the subject of questions on crime during the period examined. The majority of questions were raised by Members from right-leaning political groups during the two last legislatures (2009-2014 and 2015-2019) from Members who in their majority were from the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Italy.

In addition, Members raised 15 questions on terrorism, most on Mali (11 questions), three questions on the Sahel region, and one question on Burkina Faso. Terrorism was not raised for Chad, Mauritania or Niger. The questions concerned the two last legislatures (2009-2014 and 2014-2019), with the majority of questions having been posed by Italian and British Members. Questions on terrorism focused on the activities of Islamist armed groups, such as al-Qaeda.¹⁷⁹ Members were also interested in the destruction of culturally historical sites and other historical artefacts (e.g.

¹⁷⁵ Nuna Melo (EPP), Food crisis in Niger, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-005634-13](#), 21 May 2013.

¹⁷⁶ David Casa (EPP), VP/HR – Arms proliferation in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-003940/2012](#), 16 April 2012; Ivo Belet (EPP), Combating human smugglers in Niger, North Africa, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-006780/2016](#), 8 September 2016.

¹⁷⁷ Fiorello Provera (ID), VP/HR – Al-Qaeda advances in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-000208-13](#), 10 January 2013; Aldo Patriciello (EPP), VP/HR – Recent attacks in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-012661/2015](#), 9 September 2015.

¹⁷⁸ Fiorello Provera (ID), VP/HR – Smuggling of portable anti-aircraft missiles in Libya, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-008387/2011](#), 19 September 2011.

¹⁷⁹ Fiorello Provera (ID), Charles Tannock (ECR), VP/HR – Saharan Jihadist groups form an alliance, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-009861-13](#), 4 September 2013; Philippe Boulland (EPP), VP/HR – Islamist threat in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-008497/2012](#), 26 September 2012; Angelika Werthmann (NI), VP/HR – Merger the MNLA and Ansar al-Din in Northern Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-005682/2012](#), 6 June 2012; Fiorello Provera (ID), VP/HR – Malian Islamists in Timbuktu, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-005306/2012](#), 25 May 2012.

manuscripts) in Mali by jihadist groups.¹⁸⁰ Other questions relating to terrorism concerned the kidnapping of EU citizens by jihadist groups.¹⁸¹

Members raised 28 security-related questions, dealing with the CSDP missions deployed in the Sahel region: 11 questions on the EU missions in Mali, 10 on the EU missions in the Sahel region in general, two each on Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso, and one question on Mauritania. The majority of questions addressed concerns with the EU training mission in Mali (EUTM Mali),¹⁸² while few questions were on EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUCAP Sahel Mali.¹⁸³ Overall, the questions focused on the funding, mandate, planning and operational aspects of the EU missions, as well as their broader role in the Sahel. EU missions attracted the attention of a diverse group of Members: primarily Italian and Portuguese Members, but also German, British, French and Belgian Members (broadly interested at the same level). Despite the political discourse in Paris on Mali and the repeated calls by President Macron for more European engagement in the region, French Members posed only four questions between 2009 and 2020 on Mali. Similarly, Estonian Members did not pose any questions on Mali, although their country sends the next highest number of combat forces to Mali. Only one Estonian Member raised a general question about the military missions in Mali in the context of the CSDP missions.¹⁸⁴ Probably because of the presence of contingents from their respective countries in the region, several Italian and German Members were interested in the work of the CSDP operations in the region and individual countries.

Interestingly, although present in the political discourse in several EU Member States, migratory concerns were raised in just 16 questions between 2009 and 2020. Written questions falling under this category were evenly distributed across political groups during the legislative periods. Members raised concerns about the number of migrants and the effectiveness of existing measures in Niger

¹⁸⁰ Charles Tannock (ECR), Protection of Islamic manuscripts in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-005122-13](#), 8 May 2013; Mario Borghezio (ID), The Commission should take action to protect the artistic and cultural heritage of Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-009297-12](#), 15 October 2012; Fiorello Provera (ID), VP/HR – The destruction of historic sites in Timbuktu, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-006786/2012](#), 6 July 2012; Lara Comi (EPP), Destruction of archaeological sites and remains by ISIS, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-005395/2015](#), 31 March 2015.

¹⁸¹ Diane Dodds (NI), VP/HR – Kidnappings following French intervention in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-002959-13](#), 14 March 2013; Brice Hortefeux (EPP), VP/HR – Kidnapping of Europeans and the Sahel Strategy, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-011930/2011](#), 15 December 2011.

¹⁸² Hans-Peter Martin (NI), VP/HR – EU training mission in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-005389-13](#), 15 May 2013; Diogo Feio (EPP), VP/HR – The needs of the Malian army, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-005049-13](#), 7 May 2013; Diane Dodds (NI), VP/HR – EU training mission in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-004794-13](#), 29 April 2013; Nuno Melo (EPP), VP/HR – Sending an EU training mission to Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-002361-13](#), 28 February 2013; Geoffrey Van Orden (ECR), VP/HR – European Union Training Mission (EUTM) Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-001933-13](#), 22 February 2013; James Carver (NI), Costs of the EU Training Mission in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-008516/2014](#), 29 October 2014; Sabine Lösing (GUE/NGL), VP/HR – Joint G5 Sahel intervention force to prevent migration to Libya, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-005719/2017/rev.1](#), 14 September 2017; Joëlle Bergeron (ID), Military spending and the Maastricht criteria, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-000667/2015](#), 19 January 2015; Lynn Boylan (GUE/NGL), EU training mission in Mali, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-000302/2019](#), 23 January 2019; Geoffrey Van Orden (ECR), VP/HR – EU CSDP training missions, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-007290/2014](#), 30 September 2014.

¹⁸³ Hugues Bayet (S&D), EUCAP Sahel Niger, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-008034/2015](#), 20 May 2015; Rachida Dati (EPP), VP/HR – Sahel G5 Joint Force, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-004285/2017](#), 27 June 2017.

¹⁸⁴ Urmas Paet (RE), VP/HR – EU military aid in Mali and the Central African Republic, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-015056/2015](#), 25 November 2015.

and Mali to address the movement of migrants.¹⁸⁵ Mali and Niger attracted similar interest on this issue during the timeframe studied. It should be noted that the apparent low interest in migration may be due to the fact that Members addressed this issue in the context of the refugee/migrant flows from Libya rather than an issue pertaining to the Sahel crisis per se.¹⁸⁶

5.3. Parliament's activities at committee and plenary level

The most relevant parliamentary committees (AFET, DEVE, DROI and SEDE) have followed the situation in the Sahel region closely. They have done so by engaging with different stakeholders and exchanging on issues relating to migration, security, the EU Trust Fund for Africa, support for the Joint Force, CSDP missions and the EU-G5 Sahel political dialogue. According to the data available, on six occasions Members posed relevant oral questions to the European Commission, which were subsequently debated in plenary. All oral questions were raised during the 2009-2014 legislative period, two on behalf of a political group and the other four on behalf of a committee (once each for AFET and PECH, twice for DEVE). The questions covered migration, the EU-Mauritania Fisheries Protocol, caste-based discrimination in Mauritania, political instability in the Sahel region, and the reestablishment of national governance and reform in Mali.¹⁸⁷

In terms of parliamentary committee visits to the Sahel region, SEDE was the most active committee. A SEDE delegation travelled to Mali in April 2013 and again in July 2016, with DROI, to visit EUTM Mali and EUCAP Sahel Niger and, during the second visit, to also have an exchange of views with the UN's stabilisation mission (MINUSMA) in Mali.¹⁸⁸ AFET's political and security relations with Africa were also reflected in a high profile AFET delegation to the African Union in September 2011. Moreover, SEDE and AFET sent a joint-delegation to Niger in December 2017.¹⁸⁹ For its part, DEVE organised a fact-finding mission to Chad in February 2017.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ Hugues Bayet (S&D), Externalisation of European border controls and respect for human rights, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-007194/2015](#), 30 April 2015; Marina Albiol Guzmán (GUE/NGL), Information campaigns aimed at migrants and asylum seekers in third countries, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-008260/2015](#), 21 May 2015; Richard Sulík (ECR), Multi-purpose migration centre in Niger, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-014909/2015](#), 19 November 2015.

¹⁸⁶ Sabine Lösing (GUE/NGL), VP/HR – Joint G5 Sahel intervention force to prevent migration to Libya, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-005719/2017/rev.1](#), 14 September 2017; Neena Gill (S&D), VP/HR – Situation of refugees and migrants in Libya, Question to the European Commission for written answer, [E-000674/2017](#), 31 January 2017.

¹⁸⁷ Eva Joly (on behalf of the Committee on Development) and Elmar Brok, (on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs), Reconstruction and democratisation of Mali, Question for oral answer to the Council, [O-000040/2013](#), 8 April 2013; Arnaud Danjean, Ioannis Kasoulides, Elmar Brok, José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, Michael Gahler, Krzysztof Lisek, Andrey Kovatchev (on behalf of the EPP Group), The Sahel region, Question for oral answer to the Council, [O-0180/2010](#), 9 November 2010; Franziska Keller, Hélène Flautre, Jean Lambert, Raúl Romeva i Rueda, Judith Sargentini, (on behalf of the Greens/EFA Group), Response to the migration flows in North Africa and the southern Mediterranean, Question for oral answer to the Council, [O-000075/2011/rev.1](#), 30 March 2011; Carmen Fraga Estévez, (on behalf of the Committee on Fisheries), Negotiations regarding the renewal of the Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Union and Mauritania, Question for oral answer to the European Commission, [O-000038/2011](#), 15 February 2011; Eva Joly, (on behalf of the Committee on Development), Caste-based discrimination, Question for oral answer to the Council, [O-000090/2013](#), 18 September 2013.

¹⁸⁸ Subcommittee on Security and Defence, Draft Agenda: Meeting Monday 26 September 2016, 15.00–18.30, [SEDE\(2016\)0926_1](#), Brussels.

¹⁸⁹ Committee on Foreign Affairs, Draft Agenda: Meeting Tuesday 23 January 2018, 9.00–12.30 and 14.30–18.30, [AFET\(2018\)0123_1](#), Brussels.

¹⁹⁰ Committee on Development, 'Draft Agenda: Meeting Monday 24 April 2017, 15.00–18.30 and Tuesday 25 April 2017, 9.00–12.30 and 15.00–18.30', [DEVE\(2017\)0424_1](#), Brussels.

Where relevant, the work of the Parliamentary Delegation to the EU-ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly (DACP), the Delegation for relations with Maghreb Countries (DMAG) and the Delegation for relations with the Pan-African Parliament (DPAP) was also examined. The DACP travelled to Mali, in March 2013 and 2018, to carry out fact-finding missions.¹⁹¹ These visits were followed up with the participation of a delegation from Parliament in the election observation missions Mali, in July and November 2013, as well as during the July 2018 elections. In 2011, the assembly called on the EU, the African Union and the UN to help tackle the humanitarian crisis affecting hundreds of thousands of refugees who had fled Libya to neighbouring countries, including Niger, Mali and Chad (as well as Europe).¹⁹² Furthermore, the DPAP participated in an ordinary session, in July 2018, in Mauritania.¹⁹³ Since 2009, three EU-Mauritania inter-parliamentary meetings have taken place in Mauritania, in the context of the DMAG.¹⁹⁴ From the data available, neither parliamentary committees nor delegations have visited Burkina Faso.

The Sahel region and countries featured as a specific item on the meeting agendas of parliamentary committees likely to discuss this region (AFET, SEDE, DROI and DEVE) more than 30 times during the period 2009-2020. The majority of times when the Sahel or Sahelian countries were a point on the agenda was during 2014-2019 legislature. With the increasing violence in the Sahel region, Parliament's focus on Sahel's conflicts increased, with exchanges in committee intensifying as of 2017. The region and its countries were most discussed in SEDE with a clear majority of 20 (out of 34) agenda items. Most of the SEDE agenda items concerned the CSDP missions and the security situation in the Sahel countries (six times on the Sahel per se and 11 times on Mali). Most exchanges were organised with either military or civilian staff from the EEAS, as was the case with Niger, which was twice on a SEDE agenda. SEDE discussed the security situation in Burkina Faso once, in January 2020, while Chad and Mauritania did not appear as agenda items during the period examined.

Other than in SEDE, the Sahel was discussed twice in AFET and three times in DEVE, during the period covered. Exchanges (with EEAS officials) usually focused on the security-humanitarian or the security-development nexus in the region. Niger was an agenda item a total of five times – three times in AFET and twice in DEVE. It is noteworthy that Mali was discussed in the AFET committee in 2010, when Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré addressed the committee, and in regular meetings with African foreign ministers.¹⁹⁵ Mauritania was discussed twice in DEVE in October 2009: first, in an exchange on the 2015 fisheries protocol; second, in a general discussion with European Commission and Council officials on the situation in the country. Chad was an agenda point in DEVE once to discuss a fact-finding mission of the committee to the country, in February 2017. DROI was the committee that held the fewest meetings on the Sahel region, having Mauritania once on its agenda during the period covered by the study, to discuss problems of slavery in the country with an EEAS official.

¹⁹¹ ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, 'Draft Agenda: Meeting Wednesday 21 March 2018, 15.30-19.00, [ACP_OJ\(2018\)0321_1](#), Brussels.

¹⁹² European Parliament, [EU-ACP Assembly: Libyan weapons threaten security in the Sahel region](#), press releases, 23 November 2011.

¹⁹³ Delegation for relations with the Pan-African Parliament, Draft Agenda: Meeting Wednesday 4 July 2018, 15.00-16.00, [DPAP_OJ\(2018\)0704](#), Strasbourg.

¹⁹⁴ Delegation for relations with the Maghreb countries and the Arab Maghreb Union, [Sixth Interparliamentary meeting between the Delegation for relations with the Maghreb countries and the Delegation from the Mauritanian Parliament](#), 15-18 February 2010; Délégation pour les relations avec les pays du Maghreb et l'Union du Maghreb arabe, [Compte rendu de mission faisant suite à la visite de la Délégation pour les pays du Maghreb en Mauritanie](#), 7 March 2017.

¹⁹⁵ European Parliament, [The Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament Activity report of the 7th legislature \(2009-2014\)](#), Directorate General for External Relations, June 2014.

6. Challenges faced by EU action in the Sahel

Given the volatile security situation in the Sahel region, several of the challenges the EU has faced in its peace and security efforts have been out of its control. They have been linked to increasing violence and complex local realities (in terms of the proliferation of parastatal and communal militia groups, as well as jihadist armed groups). Other challenges, however, have been linked to EU operational difficulties and choices in priority setting (counter-terrorism and migration at the expense of development and good governance). These issues are further developed in this chapter.

6.1. Uncontrolled violence in a fractured setting

The Sahel conflict, as this study has demonstrated, is characterised by an amalgam of complex local dynamics that go beyond the spread of jihadism. One of the biggest challenges for the international community, including the EU, has been to recognise and contain the multiple actors on the ground. While the authorities in the Sahelian countries (in particular Mali) and international operations embed their action in the framework of counter-terrorism, the dynamics on the ground are far from being limited to a confrontation between jihadist groups and pro-government forces. On the contrary, intra- and inter-ethnic tensions, persisting banditry, rackets carried out by local armed groups in the name of protection – some of which are indirectly affiliated to the movements that are signatories to the 2015 Malian peace deal – also nurture generalised insecurity and the deterioration of social trust. These groups, along with the more established jihadists in Mali (especially AQIM, Nusrat al-Islam and Islamic State), manage to fill the government void and appear to the populations living on the territories where they have taken over as credible actors who understand the environment and the social codes. The recruitment of combatants in the villages and communities that have come under the control of the extremists armed groups are not only a way to strengthen their movements, but also a way to interfere in local dynamics and endgames. They do so by engendering the idea that they stand against the national government and its policies and local and international partners, in the name of their protection. This is especially true in Mali¹⁹⁶

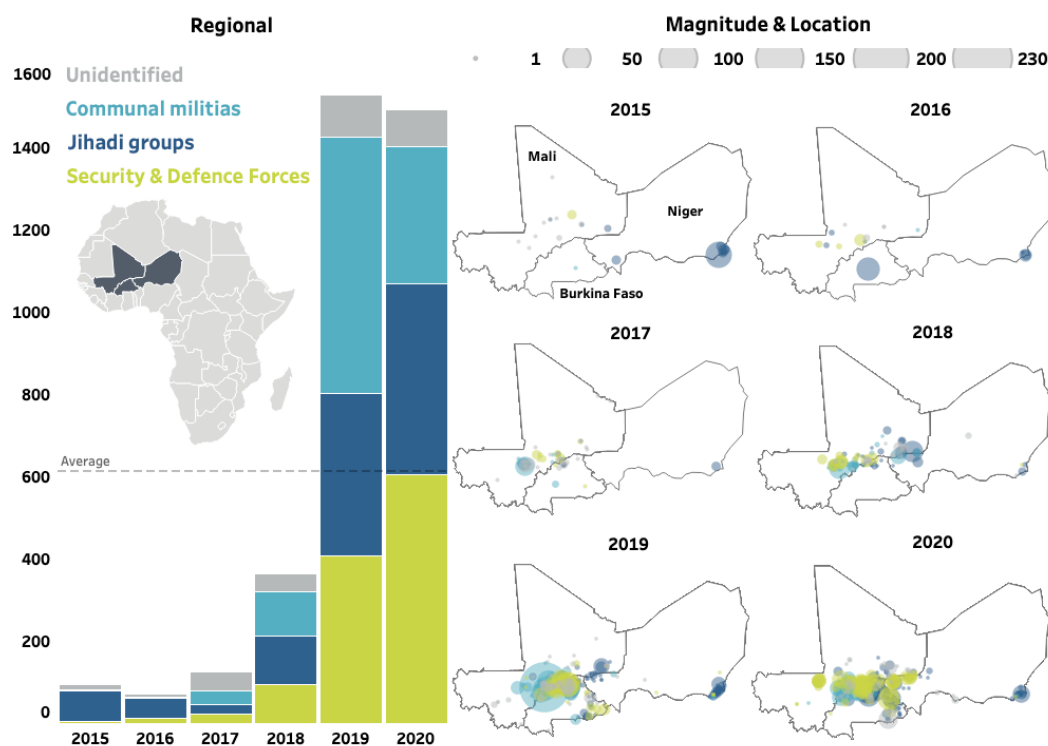
The aforementioned dynamics that initially developed in Mali, have spread, as of 2015 in particular, to the rest of the Sahel region. It is undeniable that the western Sahel countries – primarily at the Burkina Faso/Mali/Niger border (Liptako region) and the Chad/Niger/Nigeria border (Chad Lake region) – are still entangled in violent conflicts. In its latest CrisisWatch analysis, the International Crisis Group states that the region is continuing to experience a deteriorating situation, with an increasing number of fatalities.¹⁹⁷ Figure 7 clearly demonstrates that diverse types of armed fighters are responsible for the growing number of civilian fatalities in the past five years in the western Sahel region (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger). It also shows that the movement of violence has not only become more nebulous over the years, but that it is moving south towards the Gulf of Guinea, which faces its own challenges. The exponential growth of civilian fatalities caused by communal militias, to which government authorities have outsourced counter-terrorism action, shows the ineffectiveness of these parastatal forces. The sharp increase in civilian casualties perpetrated by the security and defence forces points to the strengthening of the armed forces of the Sahelian countries, but also to their likely continuing ineffectiveness. Importantly, what this graphic

¹⁹⁶ A. Sandor, and A. Campana, 'Les groupes djihadistes au Mali, entre violence, recherche de légitimité et politiques locales', *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, 2019; A. Tobie and B. Sangaré, [The impact of armed groups on the populations of central and northern Mali: Necessary adaptations of the strategies for re-establishing peace](#), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, October 2019.

¹⁹⁷ International Crisis Group, [CrisisWatch: Tracking conflict worldwide](#), July 2020; [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project \(ACLED\)](#), August 2020.

illustrates is that the Islamist groups are not the only actors responsible for civilian fatalities, nor have they been the worst perpetrator in the last two years.

Figure 7 – Reported civilian fatalities in western Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger), from direct targeting by type of attributed perpetrator, first half of each year, 2015-2020



Source: Prepared by José Luengo-Cabrera with data from [ACLED](#) (27 June 2020).
 N.B. data should be viewed as indicative, not definitive. See ACLED codebook for data caveats.

As a result, the Sahel appears to be in a constant war stance from which it cannot get out and where on the contrary, the upsurge of violence remains uncontrolled.¹⁹⁸ The EU and the international community have built their discourse around the idea that this uncontrolled violence will have important consequences for Europe. The Sahel region, it is argued, is facing destabilising migrations, potentially massive, leading to unprecedented population growth in almost all Sahelian states (Niger holds the world birth rate record).¹⁹⁹ The response to criticism of the ineffectiveness of international (including EU) efforts on counter-terrorism has been to redouble efforts, through support for the G5 Sahel Joint Force, the creation of other regional initiatives (the Sahel Alliance and the Coalition for the Sahel) and a growing foreign military presence in the Sahel-Sahara. However, since security operations (be they international, regional or carried out by national governments) are based on a top-down interpretation of the situation, they respond to a division guided solely by the jihadist threat, rather than by a detailed understanding of the micro-local dynamics of challenges to modes of governance or appropriation of local resources. Consequently, the impact of the presence of armed groups responding to much greater social needs has been masked. By

¹⁹⁸ B. Charbonneau, 'Faire la paix au Mali: les limites de l'acharnement contre-terroriste', *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, 2019.

¹⁹⁹ N. Normand, [Pour un Sahel pacifique et prospère](#), Institut d'études de prospectives du monde méditerranéen, 2018.

defining the main target of security operations in central and northern Mali solely as a vague concept of jihadists, the EU (and international security actors) have focused only on part of the social reality on the ground. The parastatal and self-defence groups, as well as those cooperating with Sahelian government authorities have escaped the attention of international actors.²⁰⁰

6.2. Weak governments in the Sahel

The entanglement of several conflicts shaped by transnational and international dynamics cannot be tackled solely at national level. For this reason, the EU's choice to address the Sahel conflicts at regional level, while coordinating its contribution with other international and regional actors, has been the right one. Nonetheless, challenges at the level of national governments persist, as they have yet to develop an approach that would help them cope with the conflicts and prevent possible contagion.

The weakest link in the Sahel puzzle has been the Malian government, despite a peace accord in place (though partial) and the presence of a multitude of international actors. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's government had been accused of resisting reform. As noted in the latest report of the Carter Center, which since 2017 has served as the independent observer of the 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, there is a lack of commitment to the implementation of the Algiers Accord. The parties have so far been seen to be using delaying tactics in the accelerated demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) process.²⁰¹ Following the 2020 August coup d'état, it remains to be seen whether the civilian transitional government in Mali, once in place, will be more committed to implementing the peace deal.

In parallel, experts have pointed to the contradictory manner in which the international community and the Malian authorities define the security sector. On the one hand, the international community, in line with OECD guidelines, considers that the army takes care of security action outside a country's frontiers while the police and gendarmerie ensure security inside the country. On the other hand, the Malian authorities adopt a more all-encompassing definition of security, whereby the army can take care of all security-related matters, including inside the country. It is argued therefore that national authorities – in particular the Malian army – have been reluctant to endorse security sector reforms, since they perceive that security in the international community is principally attached to police reform.²⁰²

Moreover, the Carter Center report explains the risks of delaying the constitutional referendum in Mali. This referendum was planned in Mali for 9 July 2017, but was postponed despite efforts to reorganise it (in 2019); it has still not taken place. A 2017 proposal to reform the constitution to deliver more decentralisation has been blocked by opposition parties in parliament. The report stresses that without more resolute action by the leaders of the government, the CMA, and the Platform of Armed Groups (known as the 'Platform'), implementation will continue to be characterised by chronic delays and foot-dragging, which poses risks to Mali and the region.²⁰³ The inclusive political dialogue in Mali, the process designed to increase support for constitutional reform, needs to be completed before the reform process restarts. However, former President

²⁰⁰ A. Tobie and B. Sangaré, [The impact of armed groups on the populations of central and northern Mali: Necessary adaptations of the strategies for re-establishing peace](#), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, October 2019, p. 26.

²⁰¹ The Carter Center, [Mali independent observer releases new report on implementation of the peace agreement](#), 23 September 2019.

²⁰² N. Bagayoko, 'La réforme du système de sécurité malien à l'épreuve des mutations du nexus "défense/sécurité intérieure" dans l'espace sahélien', *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, 2019.

²⁰³ The Carter Center, [Mali independent observer releases new report on implementation of the peace agreement](#), Atlanta, Georgia, 23 September 2019.

Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's efforts to convene this dialogue had faltered because the talks were boycotted by most opposition groups. Although fractures run deep, the failure to find a military solution to the eight-year long violence has encouraged a feeling that dialogue with the jihadists – in part meant to reconcile a divided political class in Mali – is the way out of the crisis.²⁰⁴

In the meantime, the new Malian institutions that were supposed to support development in the north of the country are not operating. The management team for the development zone and work plan are not yet complete. Sharp differences remain between the signatories over the leadership and operations of the Sustainable Development Fund, which was to serve as a key pillar of development in north Mali. This situation is likely to persist in the interim period as a new civilian transitional government is being decided in Mali. Yet, as experts have pointed out, 'provided that they ensure a steady cooperation in the fight against terrorism and irregular migration, local governments are shielded from the criticism about human rights standards and democracy credentials'. Moreover, this trend does not only take place in areas that were captured by the jihadists, where state authorities are absent. Raineri and Strazzari explain that high-ranking officers, security forces, and even some units that have benefited from EU capacity-building have been involved in wheeling and dealing. They claim that the EU is aware of the practice but chooses 'to turn a blind eye on bad governance, considering it too demanding or premature a goal, when priority is to be given to continued cooperation with local partners able to address EU security concerns'. That, in turn, has also created a problem of EU credibility, as local observers, also aware of this practice, emphasise that it is too late for the EU to speak of fighting organised crime since it has endorsed such illegal activities and their perpetrators,²⁰⁵ even if unintentionally.

The dynamics observed in Mali have in the past two years become a reality in Burkina Faso. While the causes of the violence in Burkina Faso are external and are found in the contest between militant Salafism and the Western 'war on terror', the reasons explaining why the conflict has become entrenched can be found in internal structural challenges that Burkina Faso faces, starting with state formation and weak governance.²⁰⁶ Niagalé Bogayoko argues that there is a growing danger that civil defence groups, such as those that were involved in brutal attacks in the Fulani village in Mali in 2019 (see annexed chronology), are co-opted by political authorities. Particular concerns are expressed with regard to Burkina Faso having passed a law allowing these groups – such as the Koglweogo and the Dozos – to enlist in the new 'Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie' civilian guard under the supervision of the Ministry of Defence. These groups, which are sympathetic to political leaders and the governments in power, are seen as representing a tangible danger of creating 'a new conflict within a conflict',²⁰⁷ and further compromising good governance reforms.

6.3. Limits to EU security action

The EU's peace support operations (CSDP missions) and their mandates have been adapted over the years to try and respond to security challenges on the ground, including the surge and expansion of violence in the Sahel region, which threatens to create a corridor stretching from the Mediterranean coast in Libya to the Gulf of Guinea on the coast of Togo. However, efforts have not always had the desired results. Experts have pointed to a number of operational deficiencies, which have negatively affected the effectiveness of the CSDP missions. A 2018 audit conducted by the

²⁰⁴ ['Mali crisis talks end urging new elections and constitution'](#), *France24*, 22 December 2019.

²⁰⁵ L. Raineri and F. Strazzari, '(B)ordering hybrid security? EU stabilisation practices in the Sahara-Sahel region', *Ethnopolitics*, 2019, Vol. 18(5), pp. 553-554.

²⁰⁶ R. Idrissa, [Tinder to the fire: Burkina Faso in the conflict zone](#), RLS research papers on peace and conflict studies in West and Central Africa, 02/2019.

²⁰⁷ N. Bagayoko, ['No simple solutions: The Sahel crisis requires a complex response'](#), *The Africa Report*, 5 June 2020.

European Court of Auditors (ECA) pointed to EU procurement procedures being applied flexibly because they were not adapted to the conditions in Mali and Niger and to the lack of operational guidance for new recruits (e.g. good practice or standard templates from the previous civilian CSDP missions). The ECA special report also found that, on average, only three quarters of advertised posts were occupied and recruitment procedures were time-consuming and often unsuccessful.²⁰⁸ EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUCAP Sahel Mali account for 20 % of the total authorised strength of civilian CSDP missions. Moreover, these two civilian missions are relatively dependent on Belgium and France for their seconded personnel and relatively dependent on contracted staff, most of whom are nationals of Belgium or France. Both countries have been increasingly prioritising francophone missions in the Sahel, which has resulted in the personnel they are currently seconding representing 84 % in missions in Mali and Niger. For France alone, this share has risen to 90 %. The expansion of the missions in recent years has further reinforced these dependencies.²⁰⁹

The CSDP missions also face more substantive problems. The ECA special report explains that staff in the CSDP missions in the Sahel region 'did not receive adequate practical guidance and, in the case of EUCAP Sahel Niger, pre-deployment training'. The report also highlights the absence of follow up work on the training offered to ensure that the lessons are applied, that national policies are updated/adapted, that local staff trained work in the field in which they have been trained.²¹⁰ Equally, the European Parliament in its 2019 annual report on the implementation of the CSDP pointed that 'the EEAS did not lay down any suitable indicators to monitor the outcome of the EUCAP Niger and EUCAP Mali missions, and that the monitoring and assessment of the mission activities were inadequate and not geared to take account of their implications'.²¹¹ These practices have made it difficult to adapt the missions to the realities on the ground and have undermined the sustainability of the changes introduced.

Moreover, observers have pointed out that the EEAS and the European Commission did not provide enough support and in some cases applied procedures that were unsuited to the working conditions on the ground. For example, it is unclear how the latest adjustment of the EUTM's mandate will translate its ambitions into action given that the creation of new antennas for the mission in other parts of Mali has been taken off the table, to France's disappointment. Questions are also posed as to how to ensure the security of the trainers in such a volatile environment. Thus, the extension of the EUTM to the entire territory of Mali will be progressive and will take time.²¹²

Beyond the operational difficulties, there are also political ones. Some observers have highlighted that EU interventions in the region sometimes fail to adapt to conditions on the ground because of their drive to respond to political pressure from EU Member States. The recruitment practices described above are seen as building a national bias into CSDP missions in favour of the interests of certain EU Member States. This situation can exacerbate local tensions and potentially contributes to instability in the long run.²¹³ It also points to the complexity of the presence of a multitude of actors in the region. For example, beyond the complex nebula of jihadist armed groups, there are today in Mali, no fewer

²⁰⁸ European Court of Auditors, [Strengthening the capacity of the internal security forces in Niger and Mali: only limited and slow progress](#), Special Report No 15, 2018, p. 7, 22-23.

²⁰⁹ T. Smit, [Towards a more capable European Union civilian CSDP](#), SIPRI Policy Brief, Stockholm Peace Research Institute, November 2019, pp. 7, 11.

²¹⁰ European Court of Auditors, [Strengthening the capacity of the internal security forces in Niger and Mali: only limited and slow progress](#), Special Report No 15, 2018, pp. 7, 33-34.

²¹¹ European Parliament report on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy – annual report (2019/2135(INI)), [P9_TA\(2020\)0009](#), 11 December 2019.

²¹² [EUTM Mali évolue : focus sur l'accompagnement des FAMA et le G5 Sahel](#), B2Pro, 24 March 2020.

²¹³ A. Lebovich, [Halting ambition: EU migration and security policy in the Sahel](#), European Council for Foreign Relations, 25 September 2018.

than 17 politico-military regular army groups, six international missions (three CSDP missions, MINUSMA, the G5 Sahel, and the MJTF), a number of EU Member State troops and a US presence. These interventions risk creating overly large, untenable bureaucracies, which can limit what external actors (including the EU) can accomplish despite the best intentions to coordinate action.

Analysts have also argued that working closely with local partners has been a sub-optimal option for the EU and compromised the EU's values-based foreign policy. More specifically, they highlight that by framing the drivers of the conflict as emergencies and therefore prioritising quick-fix solutions to achieve a semblance of stability in remote borderlands, the EU and its Member states have outsourced security priorities – including border control and the fight against terrorism. Yet, while these local partners have come to be regarded as 'those who deliver' and therefore have been legitimised, they are not aligned with EU principles.²¹⁴ This practice has led, in turn, to the entrenchment of dysfunctional governance and patronage politics. Thus, it has compromised the EU's often-repeated commitment to promoting good governance and human rights.

6.4. The securitisation of development and migration

Much of the EU discourse has been based on the premise that security has become a precondition for 'real' development, when the opposite is also true: development is key for sustainable security. However, there are also more profound normative reasons that can explain the lack of progress on the development front. Against the difficult realities in the Sahelian countries that would necessitate long-term commitment to development, numerous EU policy documents (the EU Global Strategy, the 2011 Sahel strategy and the subsequent regional action plan) have drawn links between security and development agendas. Although the focus on terrorism in the Sahel strategy is a particular concern, the strategy is not radical in its merging of security and development, but rather seeks mainly to recast and link existing initiatives. This trend has turned political attention from long-term engagement to short-termism and to a confusion as to whose interests the EU aims to protect. That has also meant that there is confusion regarding compatibility between the objectives of the recipient Sahelian countries and those of the EU institutions and its Member States.²¹⁵

The landlocked countries of the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Chad) are those that suffer the most from both extreme poverty and conflicts. Notwithstanding the fact that education takes place in a language foreign to traditional culture, the rate of illiteracy exceeds 50 % in the countries of the Sahel and even 75 % in Mali and Niger. Moreover, in these societies, where the economy is based on interpersonal relations and politics on clientelism rather than law, and the institutions are weak (stuck between colonialism, traditionalism and modernity), the populations feel disconnected and far from central authority.²¹⁶ At an operational level, this has meant that EU institutions are often unable to sufficiently monitor the development programmes they establish. This is partly because much depends on local governments cooperating, when they may not have the administrative capacity to take on and deliver on cumbersome EU development programmes.²¹⁷

In addition, ever since the 'migration crisis' of 2015, there is an increasing consensus at EU level on the need for a greater focus on improving the internal-external security nexus and projecting perceived

²¹⁴ L. Raineri and F. Strazzari, '(B)ordering hybrid security? EU stabilisation practices in the Sahara-Sahel region', *Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 18(5), 2019, pp. 544–559.

²¹⁵ A. Sheriff, [The EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel – An indicator for the future of EU external action?](#), European Centre for Development Policy Management, Maastricht, 23 September 2011.

²¹⁶ N. Normand, [Pour un Sahel pacifique et prospère](#), Institut d'études de perspectives du monde méditerranéen, Paris, 2018.

²¹⁷ A. Lebovich, [Halting ambition: EU migration and security policy in the Sahel](#), European Council for Foreign Relations, 25 September 2018.

EU internal security concerns in its foreign policy. The EU's most pressing domestic interests – countering terrorists, smugglers and migrants – are brought to the foreground. Observers have argued, for example, that civilian CSDP missions have sought to pursue those interests by strengthening the capacities of external partners to confront security threats, while CSDP missions concentrate on more security-focused tasks such as illegal immigration (EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUCAP Sahel Mali) and counter-terrorism (EUCAP Sahel Niger).²¹⁸ More specifically, analysts argue that by delivering to Frontex timely information about migration trends (in defence of EU interests in the Sahel region), EUCAP Sahel Niger could compromise the credibility of the CSDP mission vis-à-vis the local population. This risk increases with the fact that in Niger, the EU has transformed customs posts into immigration controls.²¹⁹ This has resulted from Niger's EU new migration partnership framework of with third countries, designed to strengthen the capacity of state institutions to control borders and fight organised crime. In return, Niger benefits from strengthened cooperation with the EU.²²⁰ Security analysts, however, argue that this European practice of outsourcing is feeding into conflict and abuse (in Niger and Libya) – and reinforcing the drivers of migration.²²¹

Equally, experts have argued that while the EUTF for Africa is said to have been conceived as providing temporary solutions, there is a risk that it may end up building the EU's migration interests more systematically into its external policy. It notes that, even if it does not apply to all projects, 'an increasingly instrumental understanding of development cooperation' is emerging, where the focus might switch from improving living conditions to reducing irregular migration. Observers question the legitimacy of the EUTF for Africa, given lack of oversight by the European Parliament over decisions and procurement processes of this instrument.²²² Parliament has also insisted on this point repeatedly, in 2016 and 2019.²²³ Moreover, an NGO report on the EUTF for Africa, has pointed out that the EUTF for Africa is almost exclusively (90 %) financed by official development assistance (ODA) from the European Development Fund (EDF), which implies that it should be implemented on the basis of the key principles of development effectiveness. It notes, however, that ODA disbursements are to an extent being diverted to objectives that are no longer linked to EU development goals, something dangerous for the future, as it could set a precedent for how development goals are defined.²²⁴ In the same light, in an opinion on the draft general EU budget for the 2020 financial year, the European Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control reiterated that when resources are pooled from the EU budget, the EDF and other donors, money flagged for development and cooperation policy should follow their original objectives.²²⁵

²¹⁸ A. Juncos, 'Beyond civilian power? Civilian CSDP two decades on', in D. Fiott (ed.), *The CSDP in 2020: The EU's legacy and ambition in security and defence*, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2020, pp. 77-78.

²¹⁹ R. Parkes, 'Reading the runes: The future of CSDP and AFSJ', in D. Fiott (ed.), *The CSDP in 2020: The EU's legacy and ambition in security and defence*, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2020, pp. 101, 105-106.

²²⁰ M. Latek, *La mise en œuvre du nouveau cadre de partenariat avec les pays tiers : Le cas du Niger*, EPRS, European Parliament, September 2019.

²²¹ R. Andersson and D. Keen, *Partners in crime? The impacts of Europe's outsourced migration controls on peace, stability and rights*, Saferworld, July 2019.

²²² D. Kipp, *From exception to rule – the EU Trust Fund for Africa*, SWP Research Paper 2018/RP 13, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, December 2018.

²²³ European Parliament resolution of 9 March 2016 on general guidelines for the preparation of the 2017 budget, Section III – Commission (2016/2004(BUD)), [P8_TA\(2016\)0080](#); and European Parliament legislative resolution of 5 July 2018 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, [P8_TA\(2018\)0309](#).

²²⁴ *European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa: Partnership or conditionality?*, CONCORD Europe, November 2017.

²²⁵ European Parliament, *Opinion of the Committee on Budgetary Control for the Committee on Budgets on the draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2020 (2019/2028(BUD))*, 26 September 2019.

7. Options for the future

Given the circumstances described in Chapter 6, re-establishing security on the territory of the Sahelian countries will remain a priority, and in that context, so will the fight against the Islamist armed groups. In addition, as demonstrated in this study, the EU is only one of a number of international actors in a crowded and competitive geopolitical environment, where the EU has framed its action (and discourse) as needing to also take into account the protection of its own interests and those of its citizens. The EU must also contend with its Member States' competing interests and overlapping missions and contributions. Furthermore, the EU's leverage can only be compared against that of the other players on the scene: EU Member States (especially France) that have special relations with the Sahel region (because of historical ties) and actors that are imposing by their size (the UN's MINUSMA).²²⁶ Nevertheless, even in a supporting role (rather than a frontline firefighter), there is much the EU can do in parallel to contribute to regaining control over lost territory in the Sahelian countries.

The main EU security concerns, such as terrorism and irregular migration, are often not perceived as the priority in the Sahel region, even if they end up monopolising the political agenda. While the EU's integrated approach has been implemented on some levels and has borne fruit, especially in regionalising the EU response to violence in the Sahel, more needs to be done to ensure that the EU approach to tackling the conflicts in the region is truly integrated. Challenges left unanswered include the need to reinforce weak states; ensure that populations (especially in liberated areas) have access to rudimentary services and commodities; disarm, demobilise and reintegrate ex-combatants into society; and rebuild a social contract and trust with citizens (especially in liberated areas). Some possible initiatives the EU could take are analysed in this chapter.

7.1. Reinforce the CSDP missions

Observers have claimed that the French intervention (more than 5 000 troops) in Mali and the major UN peacekeeping presence (more than 15 000 forces), are creating a dependency on international military resources that continues to this day. At the same time, the fact that neither the international community nor the regional or local forces have managed to control the violence in the Sahel means there is still room to strengthen the EU's footprint in the Sahel region. Against this backdrop and as the comprehensive approach requires, the EU has tried to adapt to the realities on the ground, within the bureaucratic constraints of its institutions and the difficulties of finding consensus among EU Member States on sensitive foreign policy issues.²²⁷ Pedro Serrano, a senior EEAS official closely engaged in the development of CSDP over many years and currently Head of Cabinet of the HR/VP Josep Borrell, recently wrote that, as the violence in the Sahel region increased, there was no real political appetite from EU Member States to completely review EU security and defence action in the region. Consequently, in line with the EU Sahel strategy, the EU chose to regionalise CSDP missions with the aim of creating a dynamic that would allow the EU to engage with the necessary level of ambition and resources. This is discreetly leading the EU into one of the most ambitious

²²⁶ One of the limits set to the scope of the study was to study only EU and EU Member State action in the Sahel, analysing also its contributions to international partners' action. Consequently, the role the United States and other global powers play in the region has been left outside the scope of this study.

²²⁷ See, for example, « [Au Sahel, je trouve l'Europe un peu longue à se mettre en branle](#) » (général Lecointre), B2 Pro, 22 January 2020.

enterprises ever undertaken under CSDP, with efforts to combine the security response under CSDP with development and humanitarian programmes, as well as strong political engagement.²²⁸

Nevertheless, the 'incremental approach for a regionalisation' of the CSDP missions in the Sahel has not allowed for control of the violence in the region. For that reason, Serrano has proposed that, based on established CSDP coordination arrangements, EU Member States agree on fully extending the mandates of the three CSDP missions in the Sahel – EUTM Mali and EUCAPs Mali and Niger – to all G5 countries. Such a move would help support their security and defence forces bilaterally, also in the framework of the G5 Joint Force. While maintaining the non-executive nature of the mandate, the mandates of the CSDP missions would provide for the accompaniment of security and defence forces to enhance the EU advisory capacity and its effectiveness. Such a move would help the credibility of CSDP action in addressing today's insurgency-type challenges.²²⁹ In the same line of thinking, French Chief of Defence Staff François Lecointre has called for a focus on monitoring human resources in the local armies and offering hands-on advice to trained officers during their missions on the ground.²³⁰ Reinforcing EU action on the ground, however, will not be enough without the commitment of the countries in the region directly concerned and, from that perspective, the G5 Sahel Joint Force could be a catalyst for increased action. Moreover, such decisions will need to be taken in full cognisance of recent statements by US President Donald Trump to withdraw from the Sahel. An American withdrawal from the region would leave behind a critical intelligence vacuum. While the United States does not have a substantial foot presence in Africa (about 6 000 defence personnel), it has a major drone base in Niger with important intelligence capabilities.²³¹

In the context of helping the countries in the Sahel in their fight against jihadism and organised crime, some have called for use to be made of the proposed European Peace Facility (EPF) (should it be approved with the new EU budget). The new instrument would allow the EU to provide military assistance (including lethal equipment) to partners individually, in addition to regional or sub-regional operations, in a more flexible and comprehensive manner. It is argued that this would support the EU lessons learned in the Sahel region, namely that 'the best way to fight jihadism is by empowering local military and police forces'.²³² This idea is supported by the latest European Parliament resolution on the Sahel region that has been adopted at level of the Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET), but is pending adoption in plenary. It calls on the EU and its Member States to 'fill any gaps in EU missions and projects with a view to supporting the capacity-building of partners in the security sector, including through funding for military spending and the provision of weapons, ammunition or lethal equipment, transport and training essential for improving the combat capability of African armed forces fighting against jihadism'.²³³ A number of peacebuilding NGOs have contested this suggestion, warning of a boomerang effect and as compromising the EU's

²²⁸ P. Serrano, 'Truth and dare: A personal reflection on 20 years of CSDP', in D. Fiott (ed.), *The CSDP in 2020: The EU's legacy and ambition in security and defence*, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2020, pp. 32.

²²⁹ P. Serrano, 'Truth and dare: A personal reflection on 20 years of CSDP', in D. Fiott (ed.), *The CSDP in 2020: The EU's legacy and ambition in security and defence*, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2020, pp. 32-33.

²³⁰ « Au Sahel, je trouve l'Europe un peu longue à se mettre en branle » (général Lecointre), B2 Pro, 22 January 2020.

²³¹ 'Macron urges Trump not to get out of Africa', *Politico*, 14 January 2020.

²³² P. Serrano, 'Truth and dare: A personal reflection on 20 years of CSDP', in D. Fiott (ed.), *The CSDP in 2020: The EU's legacy and ambition in security and defence*, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2020, p. 34.

²³³ European Parliament, *Draft report on EU-African security cooperation in the Sahel region, West Africa and the Horn of Africa (2020/2002(INI))* (rapporteur: Javier Nart), AFET_PR(2020)646966, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 14 April 2020.

values-based foreign policy.²³⁴ In Mali, abuses by EU-backed Malian security forces in counter-terror operations have fuelled grievances and motivated people to join armed groups, while the EU training mission in Mali has failed to prevent atrocities even by soldiers it has trained.²³⁵

7.2. Strengthen security sector reform

The reconstruction of the region's security apparatus – through the reinforcement of CSDP missions (see Point 7.1) and parallel to European Commission efforts with development aid – should become a bigger priority. It will be a fundamental step in moving the countries of the Sahel towards good governance. It is important for the EU to overcome the possible contradictions between the EU's political priority on counter-terrorism and its blind eye to the cooperation of the armed forces of the national governments, with self-defence groups that are often accused by local populations of not respecting human rights (see Chapter 6.2.) Experts have consistently (at least as of 2018) recommended that the EU do more to encourage the governments of Niger and Mali (in particular) to pursue substantive security sector reform and develop long-term national security strategies. They insist that only if EU strategies and programmes in the Sahel emphasise good governance, especially access to justice, will the EU's CSDP missions have a positive impact.²³⁶

At a normative level, the armed forces in the Sahelian countries – according to analysts, Mali is a flagrant case²³⁷ – still conceive their role as providing security and defending the interests of the government rather than those of the population (see Chapter 6.2). At an operational level, experts argue that security sector reform in Mali has been barely stumbling ahead, failing to achieve the milestones for reform. Weak state authorities have limited themselves to formalising and integrating non-state groups (militias) into the state apparatus, sometimes in grey zones. The institutionalisation of militias has been a scattered and uncoordinated process, in many cases following ad hoc decisions akin to personalised co-option strategies that look like clientelism. The lure of significant gains attached to externally financed (including by the EU) reintegration packages (especially into the military) have incited the upper-echelons of militias to extort the adoption of unsustainable solutions based on unrealistic integration claims. Observers have referred to these patterns in terms of bottom-up militia institutionalisation, whereby non-state armed groups have managed to coerce the state into designating them as institutions.²³⁸ UN figures talk of the integration of 1 330 former combatants of the armed movements into the national defence and security forces, in the five years since the signature of the Algiers Accord. 1 100 trained personnel have been redeployed to Kidal, Gao, Timbuktu and Ménaka as part of the reconstituted units of the national armed forces. The UN's plan was to resume efforts to integrate the 510 remaining combatants and another batch of 1 160 to reach the objective of 3 000 newly integrated soldiers by mid-2020.²³⁹ The truth, however, is that it is very difficult to have verifiable figures on combatants,

²³⁴ See, for example, L. Montanaro and T. Rätty, ['EU's new €10bn 'peace facility' risks fuelling conflict'](#), *EUobserver*, 27 November 2019.

²³⁵ R. Carayol, [Mali. Le jeu trouble de l'État avec les milices](#), orientxx, 9 August 2019.

²³⁶ A. Lebovich, [Halting ambition: EU migration and security policy in the Sahel](#), European Council for Foreign Relations, 25 September 2018.

²³⁷ N. Bagayoko, 'La réforme du système de sécurité malien à l'épreuve des mutations du nexus "défense/sécurité intérieure" dans l'espace sahélien', *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, 2019.

²³⁸ L. Raineri and F. Strazzari, '(B)ordering hybrid security? EU stabilisation practices in the Sahara-Sahel region', *Ethnopolitics*, 2019, Vol. 18(5), pp. 552.

²³⁹ UNSC, [Collective, sustained commitment vital to building a more secure, stable Mali, Sahel region, Secretary-General tells Security Council](#), press release, SC/14211, 11 June 2020.

since the magnitude of self-defence groups is unclear (see Figure 7 on the reported civilian fatalities caused by the different armed groups in the Sahel).

Strengthening security sector reform is also important for restoring the population's trust towards government institutions and for recapturing control in local agro-rural communities. Positioning themselves as mediators and providers of resources and security in the territories under their control in contrast to an absent and deficient Malian state unable to do the same, jihadist groups have established themselves as legitimately perceived local governance actors in several regions. Although they use violent coercive methods to control local populations, jihadist groups in Mali primarily leverage inter- and intra-communal tensions in order to disseminate alternative modes of governance.²⁴⁰ A working security sector could help bridge this gap. Observers have noted that tackling fast-moving criminal networks requires an on-the-ground police force, and, importantly, a functioning justice system that prosecutes and sanctions those breaking the law (including when military forces target civilians). This will allow citizens to see justice restored: the lack of a justice system is an important recruiting argument for jihadist and rebel groups alike.²⁴¹

A similar situation exists in Burkina Faso, where reforms of the military and the intelligence services have been stalling. In the words of Abdoul Karim Saidou, Burkina Faso has a 'political army' whose depoliticisation appears to be a fundamental issue in the process of change launched by the uprising that led Campaoré out of office. However, reform efforts under President Kaboré (in office since 2015) have not yet questioned the foundations of the defence doctrine inherited from the Compaoré regime. Moreover, the military (with a natural reticence to change) has been allowed substantial control over the reform process, with senior officers refraining from opening the field of defence to civilian control and from including junior officers' voices.²⁴² Equally, some observers report that the Burkinabe army has never been prepared, physically or psychologically, for asymmetric warfare and counter-terrorism. Instead, their role has been to protect the regime; intelligence-gathering was long focused on targeting political opposition, civil society, and labour unions, rather than on dismantling groups such as Ansar al-Islam or the Islamic State. For their part, the police and the gendarmerie forces are accused of widespread banditry and theft, and of dealing with suspected criminals unreliably, while the state is seen as having failed to secure rural areas and urban peripheries.²⁴³

On this front, the EU could also conduct a more egalitarian dialogue with the African Union, regional organisations like ECOWAS, and relevant African Union Member countries to define and focus on shared interests and ensure that the region and the countries directly concerned are actively committed to reforms. It would also be useful to synchronise efforts more closely with other international players in this field. For example, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is working with the Sahel countries on regional law enforcement cooperation, including through the Sahel Judicial Platform.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁰ A. Sandor and A. Campana, 'Les groupes djihadistes au Mali, entre violence, recherche de légitimité et politiques locales', *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, 2019.

²⁴¹ N. Bagayoko, '[No simple solutions: The Sahel crisis requires a complex response](#)', *The Africa Report*, 5 June 2020.

²⁴² A. K. Saidou, Burkina Faso : où en est la réforme de l'armée, deux ans après l'insurrection populaire ?, Le Groupe de recherche et d'information sur la paix et la sécurité, Brussels, 12 January 2017, pp. 2, 6.

²⁴³ A. Thurston, 'Escalating conflicts in Burkina Faso', *RLS Research Papers on Peace and Conflict Studies in West and Central Africa*, Vol 1, 2019, pp. 37, 51.

²⁴⁴ See: UNODC, [Sahel Judicial Platform: Regional judicial platform of the Sahel countries](#), not dated.

7.3. Balance dialogue with sanctions on uncooperative regimes

The EU and its Member States are seen as having a tendency to lecture governmental and political counterparts in African countries, and to impose EU norm-based external policies. Notwithstanding, it should be noted that EU norms/values are underpinned by the universal values that the African nations have endorsed themselves when joining the United Nations. Nevertheless, if the EU is truly committed to a partnership approach to Africa, it is important to find a way of balancing the EU norm-based approach with the pragmatism of a mutual partnership, where even difficult issues can be discussed frankly without threatening the very basis for the relationship. Analysts and activists recommend that the EU support dialogue initiatives at all levels, in particular: (1) between communities, (2) between national security forces and populations, and (3) between armed groups, communities and authorities. Moreover, it is recommended that governments in the Sahel (in particular in Mali) allow civil society organisations (CSOs) to engage in dialogue with armed groups without repercussions from authorities, since a sustainable solution to the Sahelian conflicts cannot come about without engaging in dialogue with armed groups and their members,²⁴⁵ as experience with other conflicts (e.g. Colombia) has shown.

In addition, addressing such issues as the management of taxation and the control of illicit financial flows²⁴⁶ as a core governance matter for a sustained EU-Sahel partnership could also be a useful in-road for the discussion on social contracts. That would in turn include questions concerning political participation and freedom – in other words, the issue of respect for human rights. Fiscal capacity – the ability to generate and manage government revenue domestically – is key to state-building, but not even mentioned in the latest European Commission/EEAS communication for a strategy for Africa. Nevertheless, the ability to collect the revenue needed to maintain state stability could gradually increase a state's legitimacy, under the right circumstances, through the establishment of a sustainable social contract between the state and its citizens.²⁴⁷

For those states in the Sahel where the leaders profess to be following universal values, but do not follow through, more serious measures should be taken. In that light, for the first time since beginning its mandate, the independent observer mandated to monitor the implementation of the peace deal in Mali has recommended that the international community consider imposing disincentives and sanctions against leaders if they continue to use stalling tactics to delay the DDR process.²⁴⁸

7.4. Reinforce EU action on good governance and sustainable development

The inability of the armies in the Sahelian countries to control violence is symptomatic of a deeper problem of governance in these countries. One of the root causes of the increasing violence in the Sahel region is that these countries are characterised by unstable governments (at best), failed

²⁴⁵ European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, [Conflict dynamics and drivers of peace in the Sahel region: Gathering civil society perspectives: Meeting report](#), Civil Society Dialogue Network Policy Meeting, 6 March 2020.

²⁴⁶ « [Au Sahel, je trouve l'Europe un peu longue à se mettre en branle](#) » (général Lecointre), B2 Pro, 22 January 2020.

²⁴⁷ M. Bøås, [The Comprehensive EU Strategy for Africa](#), Policy Department for External Relations, Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, European Parliament, June 2020.

²⁴⁸ The Carter Center, [Mali independent observer releases new report on implementation of the peace agreement](#), 23 September 2019.

political transitions and political vacuums (at worst). The UNDP Human Development Report²⁴⁹ has consistently ranked four out of five of the Sahelian countries in the bottom 10 least developed countries. In its 2019 report, Niger is at the absolute bottom (189th), followed by Chad (187th), Mali (184th) and Burkina Faso (182th).²⁵⁰ Of the four levels of engagement outlined in the EU strategy for the Sahel, the weakest link is the EU's ability to work with the local level. Yet, it is the level at which the most dire needs can be observed. Long-term conflict resolution entails restoring the legitimacy of governments, which has been undermined 'from below' by the proliferation of armed groups.

As Chapter 6 on the challenges in the Sahel has demonstrated, the biggest victims of these conflicts are at local level. Experts have pointed to poverty in agro-rural communities as being at the core of the rupture between these communities and representatives of state authorities (for example, in the east of Burkina Faso). About 50 million people in the Sahel depend on livestock rearing for survival, but the land available to pastoralists is shrinking. As climate risks intensify, these agro-rural communities in the Sahel will face the degradation of roughly 80 % of the farmland and the rise of temperatures at a rate of 1.5 times faster than the global average, according to UN figures.²⁵¹ Mauritania faces the second highest risk of drought according to the INFORM Global Risk Index,²⁵² as its southern regions experienced drought-like conditions in 2019 for the third consecutive year. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is particularly concerned with food deprivation in the Sahel region in the current pandemic crisis.²⁵³ The need to consider 'the importance of addressing the underlying causes of persistent food insecurity in these regions, namely poor access to appropriate basic services and education, acute poverty, inadequate support for small-scale agriculture and livestock keeping, land access problems, environmental degradation, rapid population growth, market failures, declining per capita food production and poor governance', are issues that the European Parliament has raised.²⁵⁴

This sense of abandonment is instrumentalised by transnational armed groups that are active in particular in Mali and Burkina Faso. This poverty is as much the result of a lack of access to natural resources as to local struggles for the distribution of power. The void created by national authorities is bridged by transnational criminal bandits and armed groups that aim to buy the confidence of local populations to expand their territorial control.²⁵⁵ Jihadist armed groups are able to hold the power in these local communities because, beyond actions of proselytism, their promises of economic growth and better financial indicators fall on the ears of local populations who do not have access to other information and who feel they do not have access to opportunities allowing for social ascendance or jobs. This weak governance at national level has had devastating consequences on EU development efforts, partly because the organisation and effective use of

²⁴⁹ The human development approach focuses on improving the lives people lead rather than assuming that economic growth will lead, automatically, to greater opportunities for all. For further information, refer to the relevant [UNDP website](#).

²⁵⁰ UNDP, [Human Development Report 2019, Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century](#), 2019; direct link to [UNDP data](#).

²⁵¹ R. Muggah and J. Luengo Cabrera, [The Sahel is engulfed by violence. Climate change, food insecurity and extremists are largely to blame](#), World Economic Forum, 23 January 2019.

²⁵² [INFORM](#) is a collaboration of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Risk, Early Warning and Preparedness and the European Commission.

²⁵³ Institute for Economics & Peace, [Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring peace in a complex world](#), June 2020, p. 65.

²⁵⁴ European Parliament resolution of 11 December 2013 on the EU approach to resilience and disaster risk reduction in developing countries: learning from food security crises (2013/2110(INI)), [P7_TA\(2013\)0578](#).

²⁵⁵ N. Hubert, [Burkina Faso : un terreau pour la propagation du conflit malien ?](#), Chaire Raoul-Dandurand en études stratégiques et diplomatiques, Université du Québec, July 2019.

funds depends on the cooperation of local governments and partly because EU institutions are often unable to monitor the programmes they establish sufficiently.²⁵⁶

In that context, a strategy aiming to protect the civilian population from violence and gain their support could be an effective way of countering the strategies of extremist groups based on fear and exclusion. This strategy could entail the creation of secure regions where alternative, more inclusive forms of policy are put in place by establishing a dialogue between the states and local actors known for their integrity more than for their opportunism, and initiatives to rehabilitate rebels and religious extremists.²⁵⁷ In the case of Burkina Faso, the onus should be on local actors to devise solutions adapted to local circumstances since this is where the conflict is felt most intensely. The parastatal governance structures that are emerging in Burkina Faso include not just jihadists, but also the Koglweogo militia and various private business interests. Specifically, by 2017, the violence had broadened to include multiple other kinds of civilian targets as well, including chiefs and Christian leaders and congregants. Some interlocutors felt that the jihadists were deliberately attempting to tear at the fabric of Burkinabe society, first by stoking inter-ethnic tensions and then by driving a wedge between Christians and Muslims.²⁵⁸ For local populations in agro-rural communities in Burkina Faso, terrorism is as much a source of insecurity as trafficking (of humans, drugs, gold) and racketeering. Speaking of the definition of security at local level in Burkina Faso, Hagberg explains that, '[t]heir perceptions and perspectives of security, seen and experienced from below, condition profound social transformations, in a context where the decentralisation process, which has been under way for almost two decades, is struggling to take a lasting hold in governance'. For this reason, dialogue should be organised in the framework of local understanding of security concerns and with all concerned stakeholders. That would entail including elected local leaders, religious leaders, but also 'ordinary citizens', such as young people and women.²⁵⁹

International actors can at best encourage intercommunal and inter-generational dialogue.²⁶⁰ The presence of foreign forces in Burkina Faso and in Mali seems to be driving some recruitment to jihadism (jihadists have made anti-French rhetoric a key part of their messaging).²⁶¹ In that context, the EU could play a supporting role towards local authorities and the government rather than leading the dialogue between the opposing parties. The European Parliament has also consistently supported boosting the development leg of the EU strategy to the Sahel in parallel to the security leg.²⁶² Working with its partners to access the local communities will be key (knowledge of the local language, culture and access to communities). For example, ECOWAS has developed a comprehensive regional framework for promoting good governance, peace and security, based on the ECOWAS conflict prevention framework. It has also adopted a common position on migration and a strategy for the fight against drug trafficking and organised crime, completed with an action plan (Praia Action Plan), which provides a framework for regulatory and operational action by West

²⁵⁶ A. Lebovich, [Halting ambition: EU migration and security policy in the Sahel](#), European Council for Foreign Relations, 25 September 2018.

²⁵⁷ O. J. Walther, [Wars and conflicts in the Sahara-Sahel](#), West African Papers No 10, OECD, September 2017, p. 21.

²⁵⁸ Thurston, Alex, 'Escalating conflicts in Burkina Faso', *RLS Research Papers on Peace and Conflict Studies in West and Central Africa*, 01/2019, p. 6.

²⁵⁹ S. Hagberg et al., [Renforcer la sécurité par le bas au Burkina Faso ?](#), Notes de Recherche du LACET 2020: 1, Uppsala University, August 2020, p. 8.

²⁶⁰ International Crisis Group, [The social roots of jihadist violence in Burkina Faso's north](#), 12 October 2017.

²⁶¹ A. Thurston, 'Escalating conflicts in Burkina Faso', *RLS Research Papers on Peace and Conflict Studies in West and Central Africa*, 01/2019, p. 31.

²⁶² European Parliament resolution of 14 June 2012 on human rights and the security situation in the Sahel region (2012/2680(RSP)), [P7_TA\(2012\)0263](#); European Parliament resolution of 7 June 2016 on the EU 2015 Report on Policy Coherence for Development (2015/2317(INI)), [P8_TA\(2016\)0246](#).

Africa States.²⁶³ Equally, experts recommend that the EU ensure that decisions and implementation on development are driven by civil society inputs and initiatives, in order to maximise the effectiveness and sustainability of aid. Accordingly, more investment should go into local/national civil society peacebuilding initiatives.²⁶⁴

In the case of Mali, independent observers of the Mali peace process also recommend that the reform process be infused with more transparency. They call on the Malian government – the task will now fall on the shoulders of the transitional government – and international partners to publish an up-to-date report on the spending of the international pledges made in support of the agreement. The signatories should also rapidly launch the newly created development zone and resolve their dispute over the Fund for Sustainable Development. In that context, international donors, including the EU, have largely fulfilled the US\$3.5 billion in financial pledges made at the 2015 Paris Conference. The amount pledged, however, was in large part for already identified projects rather than new, additional funding specifically linked to the agreement. Overall, the absence of economic development since 2015 contributes to the public's growing scepticism towards the agreement.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ European External Action Service, [Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel](#), 21 June 2016, p. 6.

²⁶⁴ European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, [Conflict dynamics and drivers of peace in the Sahel region: Gathering civil society perspectives: Meeting report](#), Civil Society Dialogue Network Policy Meeting, Brussels, 6 March 2020.

²⁶⁵ The Carter Center, [Mali independent observer releases new report on implementation of the peace agreement](#), 23 September 2019.

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Annex: A chronology contextualising the Sahel conflict²⁶⁶

The rise of Islamism in Nigeria (Boko Haram) and Algeria (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and its spillover to the Sahel	
Jan 2004, Nigeria	Mohamed Youssouf forms Boko Haram, a jihadist group based on the Afghan Taliban model. Its purpose is to establish the sharia law throughout the country and abolish Western styles of education and life.
Sept 2005, Algeria	Algerians vote in a referendum to support the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation, in theory putting an end to civil war in Algeria (150 000 dead since 1992). President Abdelaziz Bouteflika is the strongman of the peace process, which is supported by the EU and the UN. At the end of the transition period, only half of the jihadist groups have disarmed and been reintegrated.
Spring-summer 2007, Algeria	Terrorist attacks are orchestrated by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and carried out in Algeria against the new regime and the President.
Jan 2008-March 2009, Chad-CAR	The EU deploys a military bridging operation, EUFOR Chad/CAR, in eastern Chad and in the northeast of the Central African Republic (CAR), with the agreement of the Chadian and CAR governments. To tackle the crisis in Darfur, the CSDP mission aims to protect civilians in danger, particularly refugees and displaced persons; protect UN installations; and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid.
1-27 Feb 2008, Chad	Chadian rebels, backed by the Islamist regime of Sudan, carry out an attack against N'Djamena. France intervenes. There follows violent repression of Islamist groups in Chad by President Idriss Déby, in power since 1990. The EUFOR Chad/CAR operation aiming to protect the victims of the Darfur genocide seeking refuge in Chad cannot be deployed.
4-15 May 2008, Chad	Signature of a reconciliation agreement between Chad and the Islamic regime of Sudan under the auspices of Qatar. Nevertheless, Chadian rebels groups hostile to the agreement launch a new attack on N'Djamena and are defeated by the Chadian army on 8 May.
8-9 Feb 2009, Chad	Normalisation of relations between Chad and Sudan. The government of Chadian President Idriss Déby (in power since 1990) remains stable to date.
2008-2009, Algeria	Renewed terrorist attacks, including suicide attacks. Despite the violence perpetrated by AQIM during the presidential election campaign, President Bouteflika is re-elected for the third time.
30 July 2009, Nigeria	From 2004 to 2009, violent fighting breaks out between Muslim shepherds and Christian farmers in the north of Nigeria. On 30 July 2009, the Nigerian army surrounds the Boko Haram stronghold of Maiduguri and kills Mohamed Youssouf. Boko Haram continues its operations in the north of the country.
8 Aug 2009, Mauritania	AQIM attacks the French embassy. The regime established by General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz after the military coup of 2008 remains stable.
July 2010, Mali	AQIM kidnaps and assassinates a French humanitarian worker in Mali.
Nov 2010, Burkina Faso	Blaise Compaoré, who has led Burkina Faso since 1987, is re-elected as president with a resounding majority (80 % of votes).
2010, Niger	AQIM kidnaps French company employees working in the uranium mine in Arlit, in the Agadez region, in the northern part of Niger. Arlit represents one of the largest uranium reserves in Niger and is therefore considered of strategic importance.

²⁶⁶ The main locations mentioned in this timeline are included in Figure 3 – EU and international peace support operations in the Sahel region, 2020. The boxes highlighted in blue refer to EU action specifically.

The rise of Islamism in Nigeria (Boko Haram) and Algeria (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and its spillover to the Sahel

2011, Niger	Jihadist groups (primarily AQIM) carry out new kidnappings, capturing hostages that they are willing to consider releasing only for large ransoms. This includes the abduction, in January 2011, of two French hostages in Niamey, the capital of Niger, and five more French workers, in the mining town of Arlit.
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The Arab Spring and the disintegration of Libya, in a context of expanding Islamism

Jan-March 2011, Algeria	Demonstrations and riots are organised in Algiers and Oran (also happening at the time in Tunisia and Egypt) in protest at the rising cost of living (especially the price of basic commodities). The regime lifts the state of emergency (except in Algiers) that had been in place since the civil war (1992).
March 2011, on the Sahel	The EU adopts the strategy for security and development in the Sahel, its first ever strategy for the region, which calls for a comprehensive approach to tackling the challenges in the region and aims to synchronise the EU's various policy instruments.
16-25 Feb 2011, Libya	Uprising in Libya: protests in Benghazi, leading to clashes with security forces who fire on the crowd. The protests escalate into a rebellion that spreads across the country, with the forces opposing Colonel Muammar Gaddafi establishing an interim governing body, the National Transitional Council.
10 March 2011, Libya	France recognises the National Transitional Council as the legitimate authority in Libya.
17 March 2011, Libya	UN Security Council Resolution 1973 (proposed by France, Lebanon and the United Kingdom) is adopted. This resolution forms the legal basis for military intervention in the Libyan civil war, demanding 'an immediate ceasefire' and authorising the international community to establish a no-fly zone and to use all means necessary short of foreign occupation to protect civilians.
19 March 2011, Libya	Under US coordination, France, the United Kingdom and the United States carry out airstrikes against Libya. NATO becomes responsible for coordinating the intervention on 31 March.
26 Aug 2011, Nigeria	Boko Haram proclaims that it will fight against the Christian President Goodluck Jonathan, elected in April 2011. Boko Haram carry out a suicide attack against the UN, in Abuja. Boko Haram is described at the time as being affiliated to AQIM.
20 Oct 2011, Libya	Fall of Sirte and killing of Colonel Gaddafi.
29 Oct 2011, Libya	European Parliament President Jerzy Buzek visits Libya to discuss the emerging Islamist threat in the region and migration at the Union for the Mediterranean.
Dec 2011, Nigeria	New attack by Boko Haram against Christians in Aduja. The death toll of violence against Christians since the election reaches at least 800, mainly in the north of the country.
March 2012, Libya	The Cyrenaica National Council in the eastern region of Libya declares the area to be semi-autonomous, a sign of growing territorial tensions in the country, just months after Muammar Gaddafi's killing.

Civil war, military intervention and peace process in Mali

Jan 2012, Mali	A renewed Tuareg rebellion takes place in northern Mali against the central government, led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) the leader of which is Colonel Mohamed Ag Najem. The MNLA demands the secession of the Azawad region, traditionally recognised only as a cultural entity by the Malian government. Experts consider that some of the MNLA fighters had served in the Libyan army at the side of Gaddafi during the 2011 Libyan civil war.
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Civil war, military intervention and peace process in Mali	
March 2012, Mali	Beginning of a political transition. Captain Amadou Sanogo leads a coup that overthrows President Amadou Toumani Touré.
April 2012, Mali	A coalition between the Tuareg MNLA and the local jihadist organisation Ansar Dine (also known as Ansar al-Din) take the main cities in the north: Tessalit, Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu.
June 2012, Mali	Fight between former allies. The Tuareg MNLA loses Gao to jihadist groups affiliated to AQIM and Timbuktu to the local jihadist group Ansar Dine. Nine shrines in Timbuktu that are part of the UNESCO World Heritage are destroyed, while the local population suffers under the terror of the new rulers.
July-Sept 2012, Mali	The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) imposes sanctions on Mali and initiates political negotiations with the rebels. It calls on those who carried out the coup to establish a national unity government and allow the return of President Dioncounda Traoré in an interim capacity. The President calls for international intervention of the ECOWAS troops to regain control, something the junta rejects. AQIM accuses France of intending to invade 'Muslim Mali' and in response threatens to kill all hostages. The US is reluctant to approve such a military intervention.
Aug 2012, Niger	EUCAP Sahel Niger, a civilian mission of the EU, is launched in Niamey to assist the Nigerien security forces in the fight against terrorism and organised crime.
Sept 2012, Libya	Salafist militias attack the US consulate in Benghazi.
Oct-Nov 2012, Mali	UN Security Council Resolution 2071 calls on regional and international organisations, including the EU, to provide coordinated assistance, expertise, training and support for the development of the Malian Armed and Security Forces in order to restore state authority. This purpose is reiterated in the European Parliament resolution of 22 November 2012.
Dec 2012, Mali	The head of the putschists, Captain Sanogo, arrests the Malian Prime Minister Cheikh Modibo Diarra, who had positioned himself in favour of international intervention. The UN Special Envoy for the Sahel, former European Commission President Romano Prodi, declares that it is necessary for the international community to identify and support one unique centre of decision-making in Mali.
20 Dec 2012, Mali	UN Security Council Resolution 2085, proposed by France, authorises the deployment of the African-led a peace enforcement mission. In response, the African Union (AU) deploys the International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA). It also calls on the Malian authorities to engage in negotiations with armed groups that would agree to distance themselves from terrorist organisations. The ultimate aim is the full restoration of Mali's constitutional order and territorial integrity.
10 Jan 2013, Mali	Konna, located in central Mali between Mopti and Timbuktu, is taken over by the jihadist allies Ansar Dine and AQIM. Konna is considered strategic because of the presence of a Malian army checkpoint. This event opens the way for jihadists to southern Mali.
11 Jan 2013, Mali	As rebels threaten to advance on Bamako, Algeria authorises French aircrafts to fly over the Algerian Sahara to bomb jihadist positions in northern Mali (French-led Operation Serval). ²⁶⁷ Algeria closes its borders with Mali. The US and the UK, followed by the UN Security Council, unanimously support the French intervention.
17 Jan 2013, Mali	The European Union expresses its support for the French intervention in Northern Mali.
End of Jan 2013, Mali	French and Malian forces liberate Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal, the Tuareg stronghold. Some elements of the rebel armed groups leave the local jihadist organisation Ansar Dine. The Tuareg MNLA also takes its distance from the jihadists. Nevertheless, the Tuareg are held responsible for the jihadist success in the region in 2012, and are consequently subjected to reprisals in the liberated towns.
Jan 2013, Algeria	Kidnapping in the gas fields in southern Algeria by the jihadist group led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, Al-Murabitoun, a dissident group of AQIM.

²⁶⁷ Chad was the only African country to participate militarily in the operation with 2 000 troops. Other EU Member States included Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden. Non-EU states also participated in Operation Serval, including Canada, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Civil war, military intervention and peace process in Mali	
Feb 2013, Mali	On the request of Mali, the EU military training mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) is launched. It aims to respond to the need to strengthen the capabilities of the Malian Armed Forces, with the ultimate result being self-sustaining armed forces capable of contributing to the defence of their population and territory.
9 March 2013, Nigeria	The radical jihadist group Ansar-ul-Islam, affiliated to Boko Haram, announces the killing of seven foreign hostages. Violence by Islamists against Christians in Nigeria (particularly in the north of the country on the border with the Sahel) continues throughout 2010-2013. Human Rights Watch estimates the death toll between 2009 and May 2013 to be at least 3 600.
23 April 2013, in Libya	Attack by jihadist militia against the French embassy in Tripoli.
June 2013, Mali-Burkina Faso	Agreement signed between the Tuareg armed groups and the Malian government, following an agreement between the different Tuareg groups, an effort that was mediated by the President of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré.
July 2013, Mali	A UN peacekeeping mission – the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) – takes over from AFISMA, with the aim to ensure free elections and reconstruction. Within MINUSMA's mandate lie provisions for support from the European Union and the EUTM Mali.
Sept 2013, Mali	French President François Hollande is the guest of honour at the inauguration of the newly elected President of Mali, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta.

Challenging political transitions and the proliferation of jihadist groups in a violent environment ²⁶⁸	
5 Oct 2013, Libya	US operation against Al-Qaida leaders in Tripoli.
Oct 2013, on the Sahel	The European Parliament resolution of 22 October 2013 on the situation of human rights in the Sahel region (2013/2020(INI)), P7_TA(2013)0431, is adopted.
May-Sept 2013, Nigeria	On 14-16 May 2013, the Nigerian President proclaims a state of emergency in the north of the country and launches a large military operation against Boko Haram. In September 2013, the Nigerian military operation against Boko Haram in its stronghold Maiduguri. Boko Haram retaliates.
June 2013, on Mali	The European Parliament resolution of 13 June 2013 on the reconstruction and democratisation of Mali (2013/2587(RSP)), P7_TA(2013)0281, is adopted.
Oct 2013, Mali	Continued jihadist attacks by AQIM in Timbuktu.
Nov 2013, Libya	Ongoing fighting between militias and the army in Tripoli.
20 Feb 2014, Libya	A video of the radical jihadist group Da'esh/Islamic State shows Egyptian Coptic prisoners decapitated. The group is present in Sirte, in Libya, where it increases its influence.
Feb 2014, Mali	Massacre of loyalist Tuaregs in the north of Gao by the jihadist group Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). Two French journalists are killed by AQIM in Kidal, as a response to the 'French crusade'. A French organises a counter-offensive. Hostages in the hands of the jihadist group MUJAO are liberated.
May 2014, Niger	Suicide attacks in Agadez carried out by the jihadist group MUJAO under the leadership of Mokhtar Belmokhtar. The stated aim is to take revenge on the French and their allies that are cooperating in the 'war against the sharia'.
May 2014, Nigeria	On 17 May 2014, the Paris Security Summit is organised, with the heads of State of Nigeria, Cameroun, Niger, Chad, Benin and France, and representatives from the United States, the UK and

²⁶⁸ For a useful mapping of the armed groups active in Libya, see: C. Glenn, [Libya's Islamists: Who they are – and what they want](#), Wilson Center, 8 August 2017; European Council for Foreign Relations, [Mapping armed groups in Mali and the Sahel](#).

Challenging political transitions and the proliferation of jihadist groups in a violent environment ²⁶⁸	
	the EU participating. They decide to create a joint multi-national force against Boko Haram. The UN Security Council puts Boko Haram on its list of terrorist organisations.
Spring 2014, Mali-Algeria	A long process of dialogue and negotiation begins in Algiers between the Malian government and six armed groups operating in northern Mali.
25 June 2014, Libya	Failure of the political transition in Libya. Elections take place in a climate of violence and fear. The secularists gain a clear mandate over the Islamist agenda, who reject the result. The newly elected Parliament takes refuge in Tobruk, in the Cyrenaica region, in the east of Libya that is controlled by the Libyan National Army (LNA) and is under the command of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. At that time, the LNA is supported by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, and financed by Saudi Arabia.
13-29 July 2014, Libya	Violent fighting between the militia of Misrata and the militia of Zintan allied with Marshal Haftar, the strong man of Cyrenaica. Embassies and foreign residents leave Tripoli. The Islamist 'Libya Dawn', described as 'an uneasy coalition', is qualified as terrorist by the elected parliament in Tobruk. The 'Libya Dawn' includes an offshoot of al-Qaeda jihadists (the Ansar al-sharia) who fought against Gaddafi in the 1990s, members of Libya's branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, a network of conservative merchants (militia) from Misrata, whose fighters make up the largest block of Libya Dawn's forces, and Berber and Tuareg tribes from the West. This Islamic coalition seizes Tripoli International Airport.
Aug 2014, Chad	Launch of Operation Barkhane, an ongoing anti-insurgent operation, led by the French military against Islamist groups in the Sahel region. It consists of a roughly 5 000-strong French force and is permanently headquartered in N'Djamena, the capital of Chad. The operation is now led in cooperation with the G5 Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger), all five former French colonies.
Aug 2014, Nigeria	Boko Haram proclaims its own caliphate with the town of Gwoza as its capital.
Sept 2014, Algeria	A jihadist dissident group of AQIM claiming to be affiliated to the Salafist organisation Islamic State in the Greater Sahara kidnaps and assassinates a French hostage in Tizi Ouzou.
Oct-Nov 2014, Burkina Faso	A political transition is launched in Burkina Faso. Blaise Compaoré, who has been leading the country since 1987, is forced out of power, and an interim government is put in place.
Nov 2014, Nigeria	Boko Haram attacks the great mosque of Kano in the north of the country, killing 120 people. Religious leaders call on local communities to organise self-defence against Boko Haram, since the Nigerian army seems unable to restore order.
Nov 2014, Libya	US bombing of Sirte, the stronghold of the Da'esh/Islamic State group.
15 Jan 2015, Mali	EUCAP Sahel Mali, an EU civilian mission, is deployed in Bamako, Mali, following an official invitation by the Malian government to assist the internal security forces with reasserting the government's authority over the whole of the country.
Jan 2015, Nigeria/Chad	Boko Haram attacks the city of Baga, in the Lake Chad region. Soldiers of the multinational force and local civilians are killed. Chad reacts by deploying a large military operation of 3 500 soldiers on the Nigerian border and in northern Cameroon.
Feb 2015, Nigeria	Attacks by Boko Haram continue in the Lake Chad region, at the border between Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger (at Diffa) with hundreds of casualties. On 7 February 2015, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Benin meet at the Yaounde Security Summit and decide to embark on more decisive joint action supported by a larger multinational force of 8 700 soldiers. The Nigerian army liberates Baga.
March 2015, Nigeria	The leader of the Nigerian jihadist group Boko Haram, Abubakar Sheka, declares its affiliation with the radical jihadist group Da'esh/Islamic State. Later that month, the Nigerian Army liberates the town of Gwoza, the 'capital' of the Boko Haram caliphate.
28 March 2015, Nigeria	Muslim General Muhammadu Buhari replaces Christian President Goodluck Jonathan. This is the first democratic change in Nigeria.

Challenging political transitions and the proliferation of jihadist groups in a violent environment ²⁶⁸	
April 2015, on Sahel	The EU strategy for the Sahel is reinforced with the adoption of the EU's Sahel regional action plan 2015-2020. The security dimension is strengthened, in response to the potential consequences of the fall of the Libyan regime, the rebellions in northern Mali, and the rise of Da'esh/Islamic State.
15 June 2015, Chad	A suicide attack in N'Djamena is attributed to Boko Haram-Da'esh/Islamic State. Chad engages in the struggle against jihadist groups in Mali and in Nigeria.
May-June 2015, Mali	A peace accord is concluded between the Malian government and two coalitions of armed groups that have been fighting the government and each other – the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) and the Platform of Armed Groups (the Platform). ²⁶⁹ The new peace accord, 'Accord for peace and reconciliation in Mali emanating from the Algiers process', is formally signed on 15 May 2015 by the government of Mali, the Platform and two groups forming part of the CMA. The remaining CMA groups sign the accord on 20 June 2015.
June 2015, Algeria	Second visit by French President François Hollande to Algiers. The priority is the fight against the terrorist threat.
July 2015, Algeria	AQIM ambushes the Algerian military.
Summer 2015, Algeria	Start of a political transition in Algeria leading to changes within the Algerian deep state: intelligence chief General Toufik and anti-terrorism chief General Hassan are removed, arrested and convicted for the organisation of armed groups and their participation in arms smuggling. Internal security and intelligence are put under the direct control of the presidency.
Sept 2015, Burkina Faso	End of the political transition with a failed coup d'état carried out by a controversial autonomous military unit, formed under President Blaise Compaoré, with the aim to detain the interim government. This transitional government had been formed in the wake of the 2014 Burkinabe uprising, when a popular movement had overthrown the long-time President Compaoré, who himself had come to power following the 1987 coup. Roch Marc Christian Kaboré is elected, becoming the first non-interim President of Burkina Faso in 49 years not to have had any ties to the military.
Nov 2015, Mali	Terrorist attack at the Radison Blu Hotel in Bamako.
Jan 2016, Burkina Faso	First major terrorist attack by AQIM in the centre of Ouagadougou, where gunmen opened fire in a hotel and coffee shop popular with foreigners. The assault was jointly claimed by AQIM (an Algerian-led regional network) and an offshoot known as MUJAO/Al-Murabitoun.
4-7 Jan 2016, Libya	Attacks perpetrated by the radical jihadist group Da'esh/Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) against strategic targets (the Sidra Oil Terminal, in the Oil Crescent region, and the al-Jahfal police training camp, in Zliten).
Feb 2016, Libya	New US operations against Da'esh/ISIS in Sirte and west of Tripoli.
Feb 2016, Algeria	To appease social and political tensions, a new Algerian constitution is adopted. Berber is declared an official language. The number of presidential mandates are limited.
March 2016, Niger	Re-election of President Mahamadou Issoufou, a post he has held since 2011. He has been described by <i>The Economist</i> as 'a staunch ally of the West'. ²⁷⁰
June 2016, Mali	Following an agreement between the government and the rebels in Mali and the continuously challenging security environment, calls are made to reinforce MINUSMA, clarifying its mandate and making it more robust.
1 Aug 2016, Libya	Major US air strikes against the Da'esh/ISIS, responding to requests from the UN-backed Libyan government in Tripoli (GNA).

²⁶⁹ The Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA) takes its cue from the National Liberation Movement of Azawad (MNLA), drivers of the Tuareg insurgency in January 2012 and still pursues a quasi-separatist agenda. The other group, the 'Platform', is a loose collection of armed movements, broadly described as pro-government, but from diverse constituencies and driven by different, local agendas.

²⁷⁰ ['The eyes in Africa's skies: Taking on West Africa's terrorists'](#), *The Economist*, 26 November 2016.

Challenging political transitions and the proliferation of jihadist groups in a violent environment ²⁶⁸	
5 Dec 2016, Libya	Fall of the Da'esh/ISIS stronghold into the hands of the GNA.
3 Feb 2017, Libya	Agreement between the GNA and the EU on migration control. The Libyan coast-guards and militias acting under the authority of the GNA in Tripoli to receive €200 million to manage transit camps for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa.
Spring 2017, Algeria	New demonstrations and social unrest triggered by the poor economic situation. New 'political purge' in the Algerian security sector. The national oil and gas company (Sonatrach) is placed under the control of the presidency. Conflicts of interest between Sonatrach and the French company Total are resolved paving the way for the improvement of Franco-Algerian relations.
March 2017, Libya	Violent fighting between the LNA and the militia of Misrata, the third force in the Libyan civil war, over the control of oil-export terminals.

Unification of jihadist groups, regionalisation of conflict and international activism	
March 2017, Mali-Niger	Unification of jihadist groups and organisations under a new name, Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, JNIM), known as Nusrat al-Islam. The new organisation brings together the local Ansar Dine, the Macina Liberation Front (active in Mali), AQIM, and the MUJAO/AI-Murabitoun of the Algerian jihadist Mokhtar Belmokhtar.
July 2017, Libya	Liberation by the Libyan National Army (with the support by Egypt, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) of Benghazi, occupied since the revolution by jihadist militias (including Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in Libya and the Ansar al-Sharia).
July 2017, the Sahel	Establishment of a cross-border anti-terrorist force, the G5 Sahel Joint Force, bringing together contributions from Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad.
July 2017, France	Meeting of Libyan leaders of the GNA and the LNA at La Celle Saint-Cloud, outside Paris, to explore a new ceasefire and peace agreement.
Aug 2017, Burkina Faso	New jihadist terrorist attack in the centre of Ouagadougou. At the time, analysts estimate that jihadist violence in the north has been the cause of 700 deaths and the displacement of 500 000 people.
14 Nov 2017, Libya	CNN reveals the existence of slave markets in Tripoli where sub-Saharan migrants are sold. The EU comes under attack for cooperating with the GNA in Tripoli, especially from human rights organisations that are critical of the EU-GNA migration scheme in Libya. ²⁷¹
Dec 2017, Niger	French President Emmanuel Macron visits Niamey to show support for French Operation Barkhane and the G5 Sahel anti-terrorist force. The President also pays tribute to the work of the work of transit centres for migration control opened in Niger under the auspices of the EU. The purpose is to break down the business model of human trafficking.
Jan 2018, Algeria	French President Macron visits Algiers. The priority remains the fight against terrorism.
Feb 2018, Algeria	New wave of expulsions of sub-Saharan migrants.
Feb 2018, Nigeria	New kidnapping by Boko Haram in a school in the State of Yobe, an area stretching from Kano to Maiduguri. Boko Haram remains active since 2015 in the Lake Chad region.
March 2018, Burkina Faso	Attacks against the French embassy and the Burkinabe army headquarters by Nusrat al-Islam.
Spring 2018, Mali	Attacks by Nusrat al-Islam in Gao and in the Mopti region, where there is an international airport.

²⁷¹ See, for example, [No escape from hell: EU policies contribute to abuse of migrants in Libya](#), 21 January 2019.

Unification of jihadist groups, regionalisation of conflict and international activism	
28 May 2018, Libya	Paris summit on the Libya ceasefire and peace process.
June 2018, Nigeria	Renewed fighting between Muslims and Christians over land use in the centre of the country begins. In response, a curfew is established.
June-Oct 2018, Algeria	Further political purges in the Algerian security sector, with the dismissal of Major General Abdelghani Hamel, head of the Ministry of the Interior, and all national security officers with a direct relationship to him. In the past, General Hamel had been considered as the natural successor to President Bouteflika. A cholera epidemic is declared, the first since the beginning of the civil war (1992) bringing to the surface the deep economic and social crisis in large parts of the country.
5 Sept 2018, Libya	The UN High Commissioner for Refugees warns that Libya cannot be considered a safe place to host migrants. The Aquarius refuses to hand over those rescued at sea to the Libyan coast guards under the authority of the GNA in Tripoli.
Jan 2019, Niger	New jihadist attacks on the Nigerien border with Mali.
Jan-Aug 2019, Algeria	End of the political transition. End of President Bouteflika's era under the pressure of large demonstrations and the influence of the army. The President's brother and his two successive prime ministers are arrested and charged with corruption in the pharmaceutical and automobile industries.
4 April 2019, Libya	Resumption of the civil war. Renewed attacks by the LNA against Tripoli and the GNA, who accuses France of supporting the LNA.
19 April 2019, Libya	The White House supports the LNA, which has a 'good track record' in the fight against jihadist groups.
18 June 2019, Strasbourg	The Council of Europe calls on Member States not to send migrants rescued at sea to the Libyan coast guards under the authority of the GNA in Tripoli, because of human rights violations.
March-April 2019, Mali	Violent conflict between primarily the Fulani and Dozos ethnic groups escalates leading to a massacre of the Fulani community, in central Mali, a region where natural resources are scarce. Other villages with a Fulani majority near Ogossagou, in the Mopti region, are threatened and some are reportedly attacked. The Dozos have become paramilitary groups equipped with weapons of war.
April 2019, Mali	The President of the High Islamic Council of Mali calls for demonstrations against President Keïta's bad governance and French involvement in Mali. The prime minister resigns.
May 2019, Burkina Faso	French operation against the jihadist group Macina Liberation Front, which is affiliated to Nusrat al-Islam and operates between Benin and Burkina. Hostages are released.
26-30 June 2019, Libya	Turkey provides the GNA in Tripoli with new military equipment and assistance. The LNA concedes defeat and threatens to escalate the crisis.
July 2018, Niger	European Parliament President Antonio Tajani visits Niamey to discuss the need for more resources to control migratory flows to Niger and the Sahel.
Aug 2019, Burkina Faso	Jihadists attack the Koutougou barracks in Burkina Faso's north-western department. It is one of the deadliest attacks on the military in Burkina Faso's history.
Nov 2019, Burkina Faso	Jihadists ambush a convoy transporting workers of Canadian gold mining company Semafo, in Boungou, in eastern Burkina, killing and wounding many civilians.
27 Nov 2019	Agreement between Ankara and the GNA in Tripoli. Military equipment and rapid reaction force promised to the GNA in exchange for border delimitation in the eastern Mediterranean, where gas fields are located and disputed with Greece, Cyprus and Israel.

Unification of jihadist groups, regionalisation of conflict and international activism	
Dec 2019, on Burkina Faso	European Parliament adopts resolution of 19 December 2019 on violations of human rights including religious freedoms in Burkina Faso (2019/2980(RSP)), P9_TA-PROV(2019)0106.
Dec 2019, Ethiopia	Within her first 100 days in office, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen organises her first official visit to a country outside the EU, to Addis Ababa, in a symbolic move meant to show Europe's increased focus on Africa. She is accompanied by 21 European Commissioners, the biggest ever College delegation to a third country. The situation in the Sahel is also a focus of discussions.
Dec 2019, Burkina Faso	Violent jihadist attack against the city of Arbinda, in northern Burkina Faso. A deteriorating security situation prompts the government to declare a state of emergency in several northern provinces bordering Mali, from where the violence has spilled over.
Dec 2019, Niger	Repeated attacks against Inates – a town bordering Mali, Niger and Burkina – by the group Da'esh/Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (of Salafist ideology).
2 Jan 2020, Libya	Turkey sends troops to support the GNA in Tripoli.
8 Jan 2020, Libya	Russian President Putin and Turkey's President Erdogan call for a ceasefire in Libya
19 March 2020, Libya	Berlin conference on Libya calls for a ceasefire, declaring a 55-point list of conclusions, creating a military 5+5 GNA+LNA Follow-up Committee, and an International Follow-up Committee to monitor progress in the peace process.
Jan 2020, Mali	Frustrated by the rampant insecurity, protesters flood the streets of Bamako, capital, calling on the French military to leave its former colonies, and demanding the resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, and political and economic reforms. At the time of the writing, these demonstrations continue.
June 2020, Mali	The leader of AQIM, the Algerian Abdelmalek Droukdal, is killed by the French troops, in northern Mali, on the frontier with Algeria. The death of one of the key leaders of the al-Qaeda movement in the Sahelo-Sahara region during the last 20 years is considered a possible turning point in the fight against Islamist groups in the region.
19 Aug 2020, Mali	Following two months of protests, a coup d'état against President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita takes place resulting in his resignation. As these events are unravelling at the time of writing, it is unclear what the consequences will be.

Source: Based primarily on Encyclopædia Universalis, France, 2020, for [Algeria](#), [Burkina Faso](#), [Chad](#), [Libya](#), [Mali](#), [Mauritania](#), [Niger](#) and [Nigeria](#).

The Peace and Security series evaluates European Union (EU) performance in the field of peace and security in a specific geographical region each year. This, the third thematic study in the series, focuses on the EU's contribution to resolving the conflicts in the Sahel, restoring stability and building peace in the region.

The EU has adopted a comprehensive and integrated approach to tackling the numerous political, security and defence, humanitarian, development, and environmental challenges facing the five countries in the Sahel: Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, issuing a strategy specifically for the region in 2011. This evaluation first outlines the complex local and geopolitical dynamics framing the conflicts in the Sahel. It then assesses the various aspects of the EU's approach to supporting peace efforts in the region in an already crowded international landscape. The study also analyses the European Parliament's engagement with the Sahel region, considers the challenges that the EU (and other international actors) have faced in the Sahel, and presents options for improving the effectiveness of EU action.

A parallel study, published separately, provides an overview of current EU action on peace and security, while a third presents the 2020 Normandy Index. The studies have been drafted as a contribution to the Normandy World Peace Forum in October 2020.

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