Human rights and the security situation in the Sahel region

European Parliament resolution of 14 June 2012 on human rights and the security situation in the Sahel region (2012/2680(RSP))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the Council of the European Union Conclusions on Mali/Sahel of 23 April 2012¹,

– having regard to the Council of the European Union Conclusions on Sahel of 23 March 2012² approving the Crisis Management Concept for a civilian CSDP Advisory, Assistance and Training mission in the Sahel,


– having regard to the UN report of the assessment mission on the impact of Libyan crisis on the Sahel region, UN Security Council of 2012³, and to the UN Security Council statements on Mali of 22 March⁴, 26 March⁵, 4 April⁶ and 9 April⁷ 2012,

– having regard to the Council Conclusions on a European Union Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel of 21 March 2011 (3076th Foreign Affairs Council meeting),

– having regard to the ACP-EU JPA resolutions of 18 May 2011 on the democratic upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East – consequences for the ACP countries, for Europe and for the world⁸ and of 23 November 2011 on the Arab Spring and its impact on neighbouring sub-Saharan states⁹,

– having regard to the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions of 1 December 2011 encouraging the High Representative to take forward preparatory work on a CSDP engagement to reinforce regional security capabilities in the Sahel region, in close cooperation with the African Union,

– having regard to the Council Conclusions on Libya of 21 March, 23 May and 18 July 2011 and 23 March 2012;

¹ Doc. 9009/12.
² Doc. 8067/12.
³ S/2012/42.
⁴ SC/10590.
⁵ SC/10592.
⁶ SC/10600.
⁷ SC/10603.
⁸ OJ C 327, 10.11.2011, p. 38.
⁹ OJ C 145, 23.5.2012, p. 34.
having regard to the Council of the European Union final report on the Sahel security and development initiative of 1 October 2010¹,

having regard to the additional relevant provisions of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), in particular Articles 3, 6, 21 and 39 thereof, and of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), in particular Articles 205, 208, 214 and 222 thereof,

having regard to the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement (‘Cotonou Agreement’), and in particular to Articles 1, 8, 25 and 28 thereof,

having regard to the Africa-EU Peace and Security Partnership, in particular initiatives 2, 7 and 8 of the Action Plan 2011-2013, adopted at the Africa-EU Summit held in Tripoli on 29 and 30 November 2010,

having regard to the Protocol to the African Union Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, adopted in Addis Ababa on 8 July 2004 at the 3rd ordinary session of the African Union Conference,

having regard to Ban Ki-moon’s address to the Luxembourg Parliament on 17 April 2012, in which he called on the international community to respond to the growing conflict and unrest in the Sahel region which is suffering a severe drought, where the number of displaced people is growing and where food and fuel prices are rising,

having regard to the distress call to the international community sent on 5 June 2012 by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) after its high-level meeting in Lomé, Togo, aimed at addressing the issue of food security in the region, especially in Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad,

having regard to the strategic document ‘Preparation for a food and nutrition crisis in the Sahel and neighbouring countries’, prepared jointly and updated in February 2012 by Action Against Hunger, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Children’s Fund (Unicef) and the World Food Programme (WFP), and launched as a strategy to better respond to the risk of a new food and nutritional crisis in the Sahel in 2012 on behalf of the IASC Regional Food Security and Nutrition Working Group,

having regard to the call on 10 April 2012 by various UN agencies – Unicef, UNHCR and the WHO – for additional funding for the millions of people affected by food insecurity in the Sahel region,

having regard to Unicef’s appeal for USD 26 million for Mali to enable it to meet the health and nutritional needs of children until the end of the year,

having regard to its previous resolutions on West Africa, in particular its resolution on Mali of 20 April 2012²,

¹ Doc 14361/2010.
having regard to the ACP-EU JPA resolution on the political impact of the Libyan conflict on neighbouring ACP and EU States (101.157/fin) adopted in Horsens, Denmark on 30 May 2012,

having regard to Rule 122(5) and 110(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas the combination in the Sahel region of drought, floods, soil degradation, low crop yields, high food prices, displacement, a refugee crisis, chronic poverty, weak governance and, as a result of conflicts, a deteriorating situation for security and human rights is affecting millions of people across the region;

B. whereas people affected by the political and food crisis are living in conditions of extreme poverty, such that their basic human needs are not being met and social tensions are increasing; whereas the majority of those persons are women who, deprived of any form of protection, constitute a particularly vulnerable group;

C. whereas the ECOWAS member states have recorded a 9 % drop in cereal production in 2012 compared with the previous year, with Sahel’s cereal production dropping by 26 %, and Chad and Gambia experiencing 50 % decreases;

D. whereas, according to the UN, 18 million people have been affected by the drought- and conflict-related crisis in the Sahel region of West Africa, where more than 200 000 children died of malnutrition in 2011 and where currently one million children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition;

E. whereas state fragility, poor governance and corruption in the Sahel countries, accompanied by economic underdevelopment resulting in chronic poverty, provide a perfect environment for terrorist groups, drug and human traffickers, and groups engaged in piracy, arms trade, money laundering, illegal immigration and organised crime networks, which combine to destabilise the region, with a negative impact also on neighbouring regions;

F. whereas the region has been experiencing an alarming strengthening of linkages between drug traffickers in Latin America and in states in West/Central Africa, and whereas the latter region now forms a key transit route for drug shipments to Europe, which accounts for more than 25 % of the global consumption of cocaine; whereas these trends require greater engagement by the European Union;

G. whereas conflicts in Libya and Mali, with hundreds of thousands of displaced people migrating towards Burkina Faso, Niger and Mauritania, have negatively influenced the security situation in the region, which suffers from acute food insecurity, water scarcity, increasing criminality and profound instability;

H. whereas the Libyan conflict has given rise to the proliferation, in the Sahel-Saharan region, of huge quantities of arms, and to a sudden influx of heavy weapons, which, in the hands of the various terrorist and criminal groups and drug traffickers that are rife in this region, poses a serious threat to the security and stability of the entire sub-region;

I. whereas former combatants returning from Libya to Niger, Chad, Mali and Mauritania, with large quantities of arms and munitions, are potential recruits for rebel movements, groups affiliated to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and criminal gangs, and contribute to the destabilisation of the region as a whole;
J. having regard to the traditions of tolerance, solidarity and respect for the human person adhered to by Islam as practised in the region;

K. whereas the lack of meaningful socio-economic development, unfair distribution of resources, high rates of youth unemployment, chronic poverty, lack of job security and hopeless social deprivation play an important role in the recruitment of youth by terrorist groups;

L. whereas the rise of rebel groups such as Boko Haram in Chad and in Nigeria is a threat to the stability of the whole Sahel region;

M. whereas this development, together with the resurgence of Tuareg irredentism in countries such as Mali and Niger, jeopardise the stability and territorial integrity of the countries of the Sahel-Saharan region, especially Mauritania and Burkina Faso;

N. whereas avowed links exist between terrorist groups in the Sahel-Saharan region and traffickers in drugs, arms, cigarettes and human beings; whereas several Europeans have been abducted and held hostage, in particular in recent years;

O. whereas terrorism in the Sahel needs to be fought partly by means of an active policy to promote development, social justice, the rule of law and integration; whereas it is necessary to hold out to local population groups economic prospects which provide an alternative to the criminal economy;

P. whereas the Sahel arc is a pivotal area between Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe and whereas the situation in the Sahel-Saharan strip is therefore a key security issue for both Africa and Europe;

Q. whereas all international, regional and national stakeholders should be mobilised in order to step up the fight against terrorism and strengthen security in the region, including through structured dialogue;

R. whereas the EU’s strategy identifies Mauritania, Mali and Niger as core Sahel countries and argues that lack of governmental capacity and systemic poverty are mutually reinforcing dynamics;

S. having regard to the serious repercussions of insecurity on the region’s economy, in particular the mining and tourism sectors, on its development and on job creation; whereas the worsening security situation has resulted in the shelving of development projects under way in several countries in the sub-region, thus leaving many young people unemployed, whose vulnerability is likely to benefit terrorist or criminal groups;

I. Expresses deep concerns about the deterioration of the security situation in the Sahel region, and calls on the EU to work in close cooperation with the authorities and parliaments of the countries of the region, civil society and regional and international bodies, including the African Union and ECOWAS, to comprehensively address underlying political, economic, social and environmental root causes of poverty, support economic development, good governance and improved access to key infrastructures and basic services for the local population, and help consolidate state institutions, justice, police and customs in order to strengthen security and the rule of law in the region;
2. Unequivocally condemns all attempts to seize power by force, any acts of terrorism and of pillaging of hospitals, schools, aid agencies and government buildings, all forms of cruel and inhuman punishments associated with the application of Sharia law, and all war crimes, kidnappings and serious violations of human right abuses directed at the population of Mali, especially in rebel-held northern areas, and calls on the Malian authorities and the Tuareg liberation movement to reach a peaceful and lasting solution through a constructive dialogue;

3. Condemns in particular the atrocities committed against the civilian population, which have been directed against women and children more than other victims, and particularly condemns the use of abduction and rape as weapons of war;

4. Urges the Vice-President / High Representative to speed up the implementation of the various components of the EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel; supports the commitment of the Council to contribute to the development of a peaceful, stable region where food self-sufficiency is secured;

5. Recalls that, as security and development are closely interlinked, improving the security situation is integral to economic growth and the reduction of poverty in the region; calls, therefore, on the EU to introduce instruments to improve the region’s security, focusing especially on capacity building in the countries concerned and on promoting and strengthening a comprehensive dialogue among the main regional actors;

6. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS, in implementing the EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel (focusing on four groups of action: development, good governance and internal conflict resolution; political and diplomatic action; security and rule of law; action to counter violent extremism and radicalisation), to adopt as an overriding principle the linking of security with development needs, especially food security;

7. Welcomes the Sahel counter-terrorism programme, the West Africa Information System, the ECOWAS Peace and Security Project and the ECOWAS Drug and Crime Action Plan, undertaken in the framework of the EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, as well as regional initiatives such as those organised by the African Centre for Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) on the capacity of national legal systems to respond to terrorism;

8. Is of the opinion 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;

9. Calls on the Council and the Member States to mobilise all available resources to promote security and development in the Sahel-Saharan region in cooperation with the countries of the region, the United Nations and other international partners;

10. Welcomes the West African community package of USD 80 million, pledged in response to the emergency crisis in the Sahel region, and the EU’s humanitarian aid increase to the Sahel region from EUR 45 million to over EUR 120 million since the beginning of 2012, and urges all sides to make sure that this aid benefits those in need; calls, at the same time,
on the international community to make the financial efforts needed to address the food crisis and the lack of security in the region;

11. Points out that the Sahel is one of the regions most affected by climate change and loss of biodiversity, which have a profound impact on agriculture, farmers and local people’s lives and increase poverty and inequalities; welcomes the action taken by the FAO, in conjunction with the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET), the WFP and governments;

12. Urges the EU, while coordinating with other donors, to exercise strong leadership and take rapid action in order to prevent the crisis in the Sahel region from becoming a catastrophe, as the humanitarian situation in the region is expected to remain critical until at least the main harvest this autumn;

13. Is convinced that it is indispensible for the international community, in the medium and long-term perspective, to focus its actions on reinforcing the ability of the populations concerned to cope with future droughts and other shocks and thereby reduce their dependence on emergency aid, to improve hunger-response strategies and to fight against structural vulnerabilities, and in so doing tackle the problem in a more efficient way;

14. Urges the EU and the international community to focus their activities on efforts to protect the livelihoods of the most vulnerable households, strengthen the resilience of pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and farmers, support the management/conservation of natural resources such as water, trees and soil, provide integrated emergency nutrition assistance to the most vulnerable families, especially women, reinforce disaster risk reduction and management at local, national and regional levels, and support the coordination of, and strengthen, food security information management and early warning systems;

15. Believes that there is an urgent need to support initiatives aimed at strengthening dialogue about, and increasing the ability of local communities to resist and counter, the appeal of terrorism and the recruitment of youth by terrorist and other criminal groups, including through support for youth employment and training;

16. Urges the states of the Sahel-Saharan region, the new Libyan authorities and the competent multilateral agencies to take all necessary measures to stop the proliferation of arms in the region by establishing adequate mechanisms to control and secure national borders across the region, including mechanism to halt the transfer of small arms and light weapons, to implement programmes for collecting and destroying illegal small arms and light weapons, and to institute measures for exchanging information and launching joint security operations in the region;

17. Welcomes the establishment in 2010 of the Joint Staff Operations Committee (CEMOC) by Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and Niger to coordinate the fight against terrorism, organised crime and drug trafficking in the Sahel-Saharan region;

18. Calls on the international community in general, and the EU in particular, to step up their cooperation with the countries of the Sahel-Saharan region and with ECOWAS in the fight against terrorism and organised crime in the sub-region, especially by increasing the resources available to CEMOC;
19. Calls for all the measures taken to combat terrorism to comply with international human rights conventions and protocols;

20. Stresses that effective measures should be taken to cut off sources of funding for terrorists and their accomplices, and calls for the states of the region to take the measures advocated by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), namely reform of criminal justice systems, anti-corruption laws, improved monitoring of the trade in light weapons and the freezing of suspects’ bank accounts;

21. Recalls and condemns the abduction on 24-25 November 2011 of two French nationals, a Swede, a Dutchman and a South African holding a British passport, along with the killing of a German citizen who resisted the kidnappers; notes that this brings the number of EU hostages in the Sahel area to 12, with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb still holding two Spanish nationals and an Italian national abducted in western Algeria in October 2011, four French nationals abducted in Niger in September 2010 and, on 15 April 2012, a Swiss missionary abducted in Timbuktu;

22. Hopes that any European Security Defence Policy (ESDP) mission officially requested by the Government of Mali will help the countries in the sub-region control their borders more effectively and, in particular, to combat trafficking in arms, drugs and human beings;

23. Commends the actions taken by ECOWAS, the African Union, the United Nations and neighbouring countries with a view to facilitating Mali’s rapid return to constitutional order and to initiating concrete measures to protect its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity; takes note of the outcome of the conference held in Ouagadougou on 14 and 15 April 2012 under the auspices of Burkinabe President Blaise Compaoré, the mediator appointed by ECOWAS, and hopes that the timetable and detailed arrangements for the transition will swiftly be clarified further;

24. Calls on the EU and its Member States to pay particular attention to the situation of women and girls in the Sahel region and to take all the necessary measures to ensure their protection from every type of violence and from violations of their human rights;

25. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the UN and AU Secretaries-General, ECOWAS and the EU Member States.