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EU-SAHEL. Regional action plan
(2015-2020): a tangible holistic
approach

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EU-SAHEL. Regional action plan (2015-2020): a tangible holistic approach

Abstract:

The EU has been concerned by the deteriorating political, security, humanitarian and human rights situation in the Sahel region since the early 2000s. The European Union formulated a broad approach in its EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel (2011), setting out specific aspects of a «comprehensive approach» where security and development are both necessary and complementary objectives, and where military and civilian tools may be of use. The Action Plan was adopted by Ministers of Foreign Affairs on April, the 20th 2015. The plan reinforces the EU's focus on their key priorities for the coming five years, thus the EU reiterates its readiness to continue working closely with the Sahel countries, on the assumption that the challenges in the Sahel require a regional response.

Keywords:

European Union. Sahel. Regional Plan. Security. Development.

“The Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel ... represent[s] [a] renewed line of thinking which goes beyond targeted, limited policies and missions addressing particular issues in individual states, to broader regional approaches where a wide range of complementary tools ... are mobilized and deployed to support and advance a complex agenda within a wider strategic framework”.

Hatzigeorgopoulos, M.

The EU's strategy for the Sahel: A new turn in EU external action?
European Security Review, 64 (2013). p.6

Introduction

The Sahel countries are facing extreme poverty, internal tensions, institutional deficiencies, high birth rates, and high exposure to climate change, as well as frequent food crises, fragile governments, illegal trafficking, radicalisation and violent extremism. The INFORM (Index for Risk Management) of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre –JRC¹ considers the Sahel a high-risk zone of disasters and humanitarian crises.

Since the early 2000s, the European Union has been worried about the deterioration of Human Rights, humanitarian security, and the political situation in the Sahel region. Despite preceding the Libyan crisis, the situation has been aggravated by its consequences.

On 1 March 2013, the Commission designated the Frenchman Michel Reveyrand – Special Representative of the European Union in the Sahel Region (SREU-Sahel), to steer the EU contribution to the regional and international efforts in order to promote peace, security and a sustainable development in the Sahel. Reveyrand also coordinates the EU's holistic approach in terms of the region's prevalent crisis, based on the EU's Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel.

The EU and its Member States (MS) have solid relations with the Sahel countries, shown –amongst other things- in their humanitarian aid, their support in terms of development, and the three relevant missions of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP); i.e. the civilian missions EUCAP Sahel-Niger and EUCAP Sahel-Mali, as well as the military training mission in Mali (EUTM).

On 20 April 2015, the Council adopted the Regional Action Plan for the Sahel (2015-2020), which establishes the framework for the implementation of the EU's Strategy for Security and Development (adopted on 21 March 2011 and reviewed on 17

¹ INFORM (*Index for Risk Management* <http://www.inform-index.org/>) is the first open-source-based global tool that assesses the risks of humanitarian crises and disasters. This index is the result of a joint effort between governmental entities and the *Joint Research Centre* -JRC, (Internal scientific service of the European Commission) and it was firstly introduced on the 19 of November 2014. <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/news/index-for-risk-management-humanitarian-crises-disasters-tool>

March 2014). The adoption of the Action Plan took place at a turning point for the Sahel countries.

The EU strategy for the Sahel

Shortly after the “Arab Spring” and the Libyan crisis, the EU adopted a holistic approach for the Sahel region, using a European Strategy for Security and Development (known as “Sahel Strategy”) as a reference². It is based on the hypothesis that development and security are mutually reinforced, and the problems that the Sahel is facing require a regional response. The strategy tries to cover the whole spectrum of actions that go from humanitarian diplomacy, to security, defence, finance, trade and development aid. In order to do so, four strands of action have been identified:

- Development, good governance and conflict resolution
- Political and diplomatic action
- Security and rule of law
- Fight against radicalisation and violent extremism

The strategy aims to tackle “the root causes of the extreme poverty” and create “the grass-root conditions for economic opportunity and human development to flourish”, to do so, the strategy stresses that security conditions are needed. The goal is to simultaneously tackle the development and security problems in order to prevent the deterioration of the political, humanitarian and security situations.

This is the European External Action Service’s (EEAS) first strategy that uses a holistic approach for a region. In view of the multidimensional crisis that the Sahel endured, the wide range of policies and tools available to the European Union are the best to simultaneously tackle the security and development issues at a regional level. Although it was created with the idea of being extended to other countries of the region, only three countries were initially identified (Mauritania, Mali and Niger), although Chad and Burkina Faso have recently been incorporated³. The EU does not solely consider bilateral relations with the Sahel countries, but rather a regional approach, given the fact that these States’ ills are –most of the time- equal (in different levels) and transnational.

Since the beginning of the Mali crisis (in the first quarter of 2012), the Council had reiterated the EU’s determination to accelerate and improve the application of this strategy in order to help tackle the consequences of the regional crises. This strategy

² Full text available at http://eeas.europa.eu/africa/docs/sahel_strategy_en.pdf

³ Foreign Affairs Council Meeting (Brussels, 17 March 2014). *Council conclusions on implementation of the EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel*, page 1, §3
http://Eeas.Europa.Eu/Documents/Pdf/2fac_Sahel1703_En.Pdf

has proved to be an essential tool for improving the coherence of the EU approach and to mobilise large additional efforts.

The current document is clear about it: security –with emphasis on migrations- has become the EU’s priority. Hence, the Sahel Strategy has become one of the EU’s security tools just as the EU Neighbourhood Policy is to a certain extent; which has enabled it to involve its neighbours in the management of issues that are crucial for the EU (illegal immigration, organised crime, terrorism, energy, etc.) without them being perceived as an interference.

Regional action plan for the Sahel (2015-2020)

The goal of the Regional Action Plan (RAP) is to identify actions and initiatives for the coming years –whilst coordinating with the Member States’ activities- based on its objectives and taking into account the acquired experience. The RAP tackles the need to focus on four specific areas:

- Fight against and prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation.
- Creation of appropriate conditions for the youth.
- Migration
- Mobility and border management, the fight against illicit trafficking and transnational organised crime⁴.

The structure of the *Council conclusions on the Sahel Regional Action Plan 2015-2020* document is shown in Figure 1⁵.

⁴ Mr. Stylianides’ Response (Commissioner responsible for Development and Humanitarian Aid) in name of the Commission to the written question E-002592/2015 on May 2, 2015.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2015-002592&language=EN>

⁵ Full text available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/04/20-council-conclusions-sahel-regional-plan/>



Figure 1

Analysis

The RAP is a response to the difficulties that the personnel have found in the application of the Sahel Strategy in the field, and it lays the foundation of the solutions for greater coherence, coordination and efficacy. The RAP had also become a need once the Sahel Strategy was expanded to two additional countries, making its updating unavoidable.

Although this plan is quite late, it should be given credit for having been the result of a lengthy gestation, having circulated for comments between the interested actors (EU Delegations, the different services in Brussels, the Missions, CSDP, etc.), and benefitting from the first learnt lessons of the personnel who have been in the field since the implementation of the strategy.

From the start, it can be seen that there is special focus on security, as proven by the need to concentrate on specific areas, three of which are clearly linked to security. Since 2011, it has been mildly obvious that EU interests came first and that the strategy placed more emphasis in security than in development⁶.

Even if the Plan establishes that it “should also aim at promoting human rights and democracy in the region”, and that the strategy should “also, [but not foremost], promote and improve good governance”; it supports this interpretation.⁷

However, it should be noticed that the implementation of security-related measures is also a development activity, since they improve the living conditions, which prevents radicalisation and the adoption of criminal acts and behaviours.

One of this document's added values is the presence of the EU and the Member States' personalised allocation of actions for each country and in the whole region. It was a lacking element that was insistently called for by those in charge of carrying out the Strategy for the Sahel. Its existence is an important step forward to enable a better coordination, avoid duplication and reinforce the coherence of the actions. However, it must be acknowledged that its close reading is highly disappointing, given that the description of the actions is quite vague (“support to the Sahel Security College”, “political dialogue focussing notably on human rights and reform of the justice sector”, “fight against food insecurity and malnutrition”, etc.) or that it goes back to the objectives that should be attained (“political dialogue focussing on consolidation of democratic institutions and processes”, “decentralisation, democratisation and modern administration”, etc.) when what should be addressed is specifically what is behind said actions⁸.

Last but not least, it should be mentioned that the Action Plan has the virtue of being transparent and sending a message with a common vision.

The graph in Figure 2 gives a synthetised vision of the *Addendum III (Overview of Members States' Contribution)*, which describes the financial resources (in millions of €) to which some of the Member States commit in the plan and which are the receiving countries. In the tables in Annex 1 –at the end of the article- both the

⁶ «...improving security and development in Sahel has an obvious and direct impact on protecting European citizens and interests and on the EU internal security situation ». (EUROPEAN UNION EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE (EEAS), 2011) Page 4, § 3.

⁷ General Secretariat of the Council, “Council conclusions on the Sahel Regional Action Plan 2015-2020”, page 10, §20.

⁸ Bérangère Rouppert's intervention as part of the colloquium on “l'UE et l'approche globale : le cas des crises en Afrique”, jointly organised by the *Institut des hautes études de défense nationale* (IHEDN) and the *Institut Egmont* (Brussels, 9 July 2015).

<http://www.ihedn.fr/?q=content/ihedn-institut-egmont-%C2%AB-l%E2%80%99union-europ%C3%A9enne-et-l%E2%80%99approche-globale-le-cas-des-cris-es-en-afrique>

figures of the efforts in human resources and the amounts committed for the next five years are detailed.

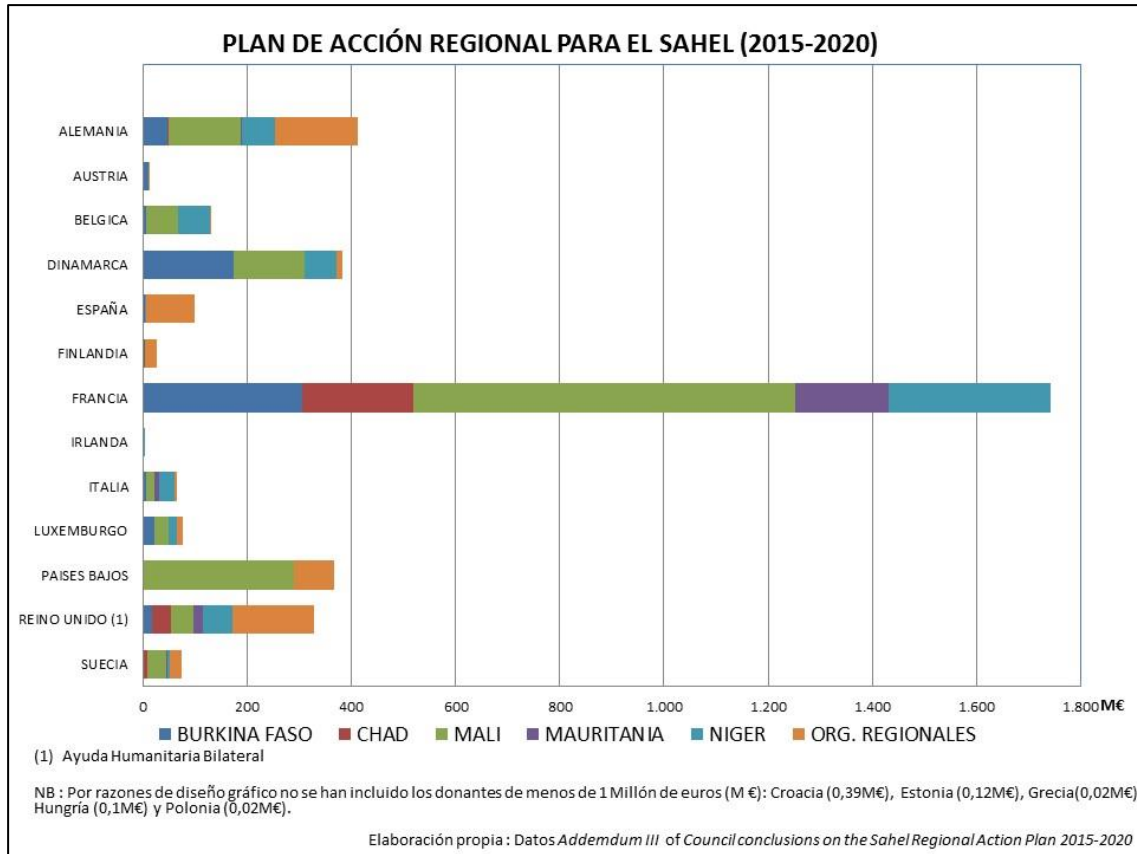


Figure 2

Execution

The implementation of the Action Plan will be carried out under the full direction and primordial responsibility of the affected countries, and in coordination with the main regional and international organisations and other associates –particularly the United Nations, the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS), the G5 Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, and the World Bank– as well as with the civil society. In this respect, the EU stresses the importance of pursuing the close regional and international coordination –including that between the SREU-Sahel, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Mali, and the High Representative of the AU for Mali and the Sahel– in order to build synergies in the implementation of the respective strategies⁹.

⁹ Council Conclusions on the Regional Action Plan on the Sahel. Press release. § 3. <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/es/press/press-releases/2015/04/20-council-conclusions-sahel-regional-plan/>

The execution of the Regional Action plan for the Sahel has already begun, since the National Indicative Programmes (NIP) for the five countries in the Sahel and the Regional Indicative Programme for Western Africa have already been signed. These Programmes are an important source of funding. In fact, the five NIP offer a joint amount of 2 470 million euros (M€), for information purposes, to this region. Furthermore, a process for identification and planning of actions that contribute to attain the objectives established in the Action Plan is being carried out¹⁰.

In order to have a holistic approach in this situation, other tools such as the CSDP missions, the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, the Pan African Programme, the African Peace Facility, the European Neighbourhood Instrument, and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights; have also moved in contributing to the execution of the Action Plan and will continue to have an important role in it.

The meeting between High Representative Federica Mogherini and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the “G5 Sahel”¹¹ (Brussels, 17 June 2015) must be framed in this multidisciplinary level. It has been the first meeting with this format, albeit the EU has close bilateral relations with each Sahel country. A joint statement was approved, welcoming the understanding between the associates, confirming that both regions share the same opinion in regards to the security challenges that they face (Libya, Boko Haram, etc.), and trying to embark on a regular and structured political dialogue between the EU and the G5¹².

Conclusions and Prospective

International Community

Damien Helly¹³ observes three trends in the policies that the international community has implemented in the Sahel:

- Relative Europeanisation of French policy in the region.

¹⁰ Vicepresident Mogherini's response in name of the Commission to MEP Mr Pablo Iglesias' (NGL) written question E-011021-15 on July 9, 2015.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2015-011021&language=ES>

¹¹ The G5 Sahel was created in February 2014 to enable the collaboration of the whole region in the political and security situation of the Sahel-Sahara. Its members are Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali, as well as representatives of the African Union, the United Nations, the Economic Community of Western Africa States (ECOWAS), the European Union and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

¹² http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/150617_07_fr.htm

¹³ (HELLY & GALEAZZI, 2015) Damien Helly Deputy Head of the Programme “Strengthening of the European External Action” <http://ecdpm.org/fr/publications/situation-au-sahel/>

- Internationalisation of foreign presence –particularly in Mali and in the Sahel in general- with important fund-injection commitments.
- Very recently, a regionalisation of the Boko Haram issue.

Currently, the great challenge of the international community is the coordination between the strategies/initiatives of the different institutional partners involved (see Figure 2) to transform the strategic achievements attained in specific and dynamic accomplishments in a quest for development –in the widest and most positive sense of the concept.



Figure 3

Strategy for the Sahel

Geographically, it was ill-thought from the beginning, since it barely reflected the complex relations between the different conflicts throughout the Sahel. It limited its approach to the region’s weakest countries, i.e. Mali, Niger and Mauritania. The European Union has excluded fundamental States of the region –particularly Nigeria and Algeria-, hence, the successful inclusion of all regional actors (including ECOWAS¹⁴, Nigeria and Algeria) is still an important challenge. The EU needs be proactive in taking advantage of these key States’ regional potential, essential for a viable regional approach. The majority of analysts consider that a short-sighted

¹⁴Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS)

regional strategy that is limited to a group of central countries and excludes the main States of the region is unsustainable¹⁵.

The Strategy for the Sahel has slowly adapted to the changing dynamics of a very complex region. Despite its deficiencies, it is becoming a project that could help mobilise the currently fragmented regional actors. What is important of the EU's holistic approach in the Sahel are the considerable efforts that have taken place. Efforts driven by a real political determination, given that there is unanimity in the Member States (MS) to confront the region's challenges.

Regional Action Plan (RAP)

The Plan's strong security content is, undoubtedly, the acknowledgement of a reality: that of a context where the Security Sector Reform (SSR) –which participates in the State's strengthening- became the main problem for the political stabilisation and the safety of the countries where the EU acts. In it, it must also be seen the result of the widening of the EEAS' scope. The EEAS is increasingly taking on responsibilities, developing its knowledge in this area: before the Lisbon Treaty it was "sustainable/durable development"; after Lisbon, the security policies are being carried out with the application of the holistic approach.

The fact that this RAP is focused in the problem of immigration shows the failure of the EU in preventing it. The immigrant tragedies in the Mediterranean have been happening for years, however; it is not until they make it into the news that the EU takes care of the issue; just so no one can accuse them of letting people die. One could ask if the measures envisaged are merely playing to the gallery: immigration – just like trafficking- does not begin in Niger, the causes are elsewhere.

The European Commission: Fund Management

The issue of the duration and slowness of the processes, and the rigidity of the Financial Regulation are widely known. It is clear that the European Commission is making efforts to be more flexible and support projects with smaller funds –which are more manageable for the smaller Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). However, the trend has been to disburse large sums because they are easier to manage for the EU, given that it has reduced its personnel and that has made it harder to manage a large amount of small projects. There is a real dilemma between the need for administrative efficiency on one hand, and on the other hand, the will to give opportunities to as many associates in one country¹⁶.

¹⁵ (BELLO, 2012) (INTERNATIONAL PEACE INSTITUTE-IPI, 2013) pages 5-6

¹⁶ Le Courrier (Niger) N 372, 7 July 2015 <http://ecdpm.org/fr/publications/aide-ue-societe-civile-sahel/>

The Regional Dimension

The EU has stressed the importance of promoting closer synergies between the countries of the Sahel region and the neighbouring countries. Considering the Sahel's proximity to the EU and its immediate neighbours, the EU highlights that, in order to better tackle the cross-border matters, it is essential to keep looking for a common space for dialogue and cooperation between the Sahel, the Maghreb and the EU in relevant areas such as security and migration. This must be done within the framework of the existing mechanisms and dialogues, such as the Rabat and Khartoum Processes on migration and development¹⁷.

If the EU's objective in Central Africa is to promote that the parties involved develop a collective security project in a context of lasting stability, political means must be used. On the contrary, the absence of use of these political means has proved that, beyond words, the EU does not "believe" in the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)¹⁸ as a subregional security actor. Nevertheless, the key question is: does the African Union have the technical and political leadership capacity to take said responsibility?

For that matter, we support Algerian professor Aomar Baghzour's proposal that the creation of a new framework for cooperation in the Western Mediterranean –including the North of Africa, the countries of the South of Europe and the Sahel countries- can become the new geopolitics of the region; without overlooking the necessary association with the United States as a key actor¹⁹. However, even if a Maghreb-Europe-Sahel bloc would be the desirable goal to face the new security threats and the development challenges in this vast area, the pragmatic reality advises to start by resuming/promoting the already-existing cooperation initiatives.

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¹⁷ Council Conclusions on the Regional Action Plan on the Sahel. Press release § 2. <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/es/press/press-releases/2015/04/20-council-conclusions-sahel-regional-plan/>

¹⁸ <http://www.ceeac-eccas.org/index.php/fr/>

¹⁹ (BAGHZOUZ, 2013)

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ANNEX I**REGIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR THE SAHEL (2015-2020)****SUMMARY OF THE MEMBER STATES' ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION (Millions of euros)**

RECIPIENTS DONORS	BURKINA FASO	CHAD	MALI	MAURITANIA	NIGER	REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS
AUSTRIA	10.60		0.8			0.5
BELGIUM	7.30		61.14		60.27	1.35
CROATIA			0.39			
DENMARK	174.43		135.37		62.69	11.01
ESTONIA			0.05		0.07	
FINLAND		3.2	3		0.8	19.65
FRANCE	305	213.5	733	180	310	
GERMANY		2.06	137.87	1.61	64.58	158.92
GREECE			0.05			
HUNGARY			0.10			
IRELAND	0.27	0.60	1.48	0.37	2.19	
ITALY	6.80		15	9.58	29.15	4,99
LUXEMBOURG	21.83		27,64		15.92	11,72
POLAND	0.02					
SPAIN			2,56	2.86	1.76	92,3
SWEDEN	1.47	7.65	35.88	1.9	5.87	20.96
THE NETHERLANDS			291.04			76,62
UNITED KINGDOM ⁽¹⁾	18.58	34.81	43.14	19.14	55.75	157,81

(1) Bilateral Humanitarian Aid

REGIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR THE SAHEL (2015-2020)
SUMMARY OF THE ALLOCATION OF HUMAN RESOURCES

	EUTM MALI	EUCAP NIGER	EUCAP SAHEL MALI
AUSTRIA	8 Military personnel		
BELGIUM	77 Military personnel	4 Policemen 1 Magistrate 2 Experts	1 Financial expert
BULGARIA	4 Doctors		
CYPRUS	1 Superior Official (1)		
CZECH REPUBLIC	34 Military personnel 4 Instructors		
DENMARK		1 Expert	1 Expert
ESTONIA	7 Military personnel		
FINLAND	12 Officials		
FRANCE		107 Experts 57 Military personnel (Instructors)	
GERMANY	150 Military personnel	3 Civilian Experts	2 Civilian Experts
GREECE	4 Officials		
HUNGARY	4 Instructors		
IRELAND	10 Military personnel	1 Superior Official	
ITALY	10 Military personnel	3 Military personnel	6 Experts
LATVIA	7 Officials		
LITHUANIA	2 Officials 2 Instructors		
LUXEMBOURG	1 Military personnel	1 Policeman	1 Policeman
PORTUGAL			47 Military personnel 1 Tpt. C-130 Plane
ROMANIA	3 Military personnel	1 Policeman	
SPAIN	163 Military personnel	6 Policemen	4 Military personnel
SWEDEN	10 Military personnel	2 Officials	
THE NETHERLANDS ⁽²⁾	1 Policeman		1 Policeman
UNITED KINGDOM ⁽³⁾	24 Military personnel 2 Civilians	1 Coordination leader	1 POLAD

(1) 2.360 assault rifles

(2) **MINUSMA**: 450 military personnel. 4 *Apache* AH-64D attack helicopters.
3 CH-47D/F *Chinook* transport helicopters

(3) Bilateral Humanitarian Aid.