

The Sahel-Europe Dialogue Forum

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Europe-Maghreb-Sahel¹

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Interaction between the Maghreb, Sahel and Europe

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The geographical proximity of these three regions defines a dynamic set of threats and opportunities, but does not constitute an organised triangle of cooperation. Rather, independent vectors are recorded through Europe-Maghreb and Europe-Sahel relations, both of which are institutional in nature, with Maghreb-Sahel interactions limited to bilateral state-to-state relations. Although the Sahel has achieved a certain degree of regional organisation through the G5 Sahel, it could be argued that the institutional Maghreb does not exist in practice.

¹ This analysis is part of an ongoing line of research by the International Security Centre on the Sahel. Following the Sahel-Europe Dialogue Forum organised in March 2021, speakers belonging to the Sahel-Europe Dialogue Forum Expert Group have deepened the themes of their conferences, analysing the shared challenges, and the opportunities for cooperation on our common challenges. The political crises in Mali and Chad link the security crisis to governance challenges in these states, where the presence of self-defence militias and jihadist groups hinder economic and social development. In such a changing environment, with the Sahel being Europe's advanced frontier, it is now more important than ever to promote a space for dialogue in which both regions can share, cooperate and propose innovative solutions. This series of publications, as well as the Sahel-Europe Dialogue Forum, have received a grant from the General Secretariat for Defence Policy of the Ministry of Defence.

Europe-Maghreb relations

This has no direct impact on the Sahel, although it would go some way towards strengthening Maghreb resilience in the face of threats from that region. In addition to bilateral relations - particularly intense in cases such as Spain's anti-terrorism cooperation, for example - two inter-regional modalities should be highlighted:

The Joint Communication of the European Commission and HR/VP Borrell on the Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood of 9 February 2021, which includes Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria presents a comprehensive action agenda for the Mediterranean, including an economic and investment plan, aspects of human development, good governance, rule of law, mobility and migration, ecological transition and energy, introducing the new instrument NDICI (Neighbourhood Development International Cooperation Instrument).

The peace and security aspects include mentions of Western Sahara and Libya, as well as cooperation on counter-terrorism, cybercrime, foreign terrorist fighters, radicalisation and countering violent extremism, financing of terrorism, judicial and police cooperation, drugs and CBRN, among others.

On the other hand, the "5+5 Forum", created in 1990 with the initial purpose of supporting the creation of the Arab Maghreb Union in 1989, is made up of Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Malta, as well as Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. It was set up as an informal forum for dialogue and cooperation, initiated by the ministers of foreign affairs and later continued by the ministers of defence and the interior, to which have been added a wide range of departments on migration, the environment, tourism, transport, agriculture, education, research and water, among others.

The Forum is not set up as an international organisation, lacks a headquarters and budget, and is coordinated through contact points, with a light and informal structure perhaps more suited to practical progress and more immediate in nature than the 43-member Union for the Mediterranean, where technical cooperation predominates over security cooperation.

Europe-Sahel relations

With a financial effort of some 8.5 billion euros over the 2014-2020 period, the EU Sahel Strategy, revised on 16 April 2021, includes all available cooperation instruments in a wide range of sectors. In addition to French operations such as the Barkhane and Takuba Forces, which are supported by several member states, the EU's action in security matters includes initiatives such as EUTM Mali -to be extended to Burkina Faso and

Niger-, support for the G5 Sahel Joint Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force Lake Chad and MINUSMA, and projects with a strong Spanish role such as the GAR-SI Sahel, as well as Joint Investigation Teams on terrorism and illicit trafficking, among other internal security and justice training missions such as EUCAP-Sahel in Mali and Niger. Training in international humanitarian law and human rights is particularly relevant.

The list of development cooperation actions and basic services extends across multiple sectors, in addition to humanitarian aid. With the EDF and the Emergency Trust Fund having come to an end, a new chapter is now being opened through the NDICI.

Importantly, the revised EU Sahel Strategy incorporates, through the concept of mutual accountability, a more demanding approach to governance, rule of law, gender equality, the fight against impunity and corruption, and the defence of human rights. Concrete and measurable political objectives, agreed with the G5 Sahel countries, will be established and their results monitored.

Maghreb-Sahel relations

Despite the lack of operability of CEN-SAD (Community of Sahel-Saharan States, from which Algeria is absent) and an AMU incapable of configuring the Maghreb as a regional interlocutor of the G5 Sahel in the face of the Morocco-Algeria misunderstanding with Western Sahara and their regional rivalry as a backdrop, we can nevertheless find some clues in samples of the national positions of these two countries in relation to their southern neighbours.

Morocco

Its Prime Minister's speech at the N'Djamena Summit of the G5 Sahel on 15 February 2021 was a broad political declaration of intentions and cooperation projects, including support for the G5 Defence College in Nouakchott, military training, agricultural projects, drought relief and infrastructure, and training of imams through the Mohammed VI Institute and the promotion of a tolerant conception of Islam. The visit to Rabat on 25 February of Mali's vice-president of the transition, Colonel Goita, a coup leader, confirmed this interest.

A month later, on 16 March, the director of the Moroccan Central Bureau of Judicial Investigations, Haboub Cherkaoui, gave an interview published in 'The Africa Report' in which, regretting the lack of cooperation in the fight against terrorism with Algeria, he described the Sahel as 'the great threat to Morocco's security' due to its political, economic and social instability, with vast unguarded territories and the presence of foreign Daesh terrorists from other areas. It also added that more than 100 Polisario Front separatists are reportedly active with AQIM, noting, according to the aforementioned publication, that "in the Tindouf camps, imams indoctrinate in jihad".

Algeria

Although it is almost commonplace to say that terrorism in the Sahel was triggered by the fall of Gaddafi and the Tuareg revolt in Mali in 2012, at the start of the French Operation Serval in 2013, it is true that it is important not to lose sight of AQIM's Algerian origins through the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat and a group of actors such as Moctar Belmoktar and Al Morabitun, as well as episodes such as the elimination in June 2020 by Barkhane of AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel, of Algerian origin.

Algeria shares a border with Mali of more than 1,300 km, very permeable to all types of trafficking and in an area that is vital for its security. We should also remember the bloody hostage-taking at the In Amenas gas plant in 2013 by 32 terrorists from Mali.

Taking on a certain role as a regional gendarme, Algeria promoted the creation in 2010 of the so-called "Pays du champ" initiative and the creation of the CEMOC (Joint Operational Regional Command) with Algeria, Mauritania, Mali and Niger to combat terrorism and illicit trafficking. It also included in the project the UFL (Fusion and Liaison Unit) with the five Sahel countries, in addition to Libya and Nigeria, creating AFRIPOL in 2015 as an African police force in the fight against terrorism.

Although CEMOC's functionality seems limited and is not the subject of sustained attention by international observers, it continues to be active as evidenced by its recent Council in Bamako in February 2021, where it was apparently agreed to evaluate military operations in 2020, initiating a new rotating presidency of Mauritania.

Another initiative that does not seem to offer great results is the 2013 Nouakchott Process in the framework of the African Union's Peace and Security Architecture, which, in addition to the aforementioned countries, would include Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya and Nigeria, among others.

It is striking that these initiatives are absent from the cooperation framework opened by the Sahel Coalition, created in 2020 and which brings together the G5 Sahel with its main international partners, especially the EU. Algeria does not seem to have much interest in the Sahel Coalition, in apparent contrast to Morocco, which was very visible at the N'Djamena Summit in February and at the Coalition's Ministerial Summit on 19 March, where its Roadmap was approved.

Algeria is firmly committed to the implementation of the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for northern Mali and to MINUSMA, in addition to providing military training, school rehabilitation, scholarships and donations. Algeria has a clear interest in the stability of northern Mali in the face of both the terrorist threat and Tuareg independence fights. It also provides training in the fight against violent extremism through the University of Adrar and the Islamic Institute of Tamanrasset. In the Maghreb

area, counter-terrorism cooperation with Tunisia against groups in the Chaambi Mountains, on the border between the two countries, stands out.

Consequences of Sahel instability for Europe

Our proximity to the Sahel - they are our neighbours' neighbours - allows us to deduce them not only because of the defensive, immediate and purely intuitive pairing of migration and terrorism, but also because an unstable Sahel would deprive us of a future of shared interests. We need to see the Sahel and Africa not as a threat, but as an opportunity.

In addition to the consequences of climate change, we cannot ignore the challenges of exponential population growth and the extraordinary difficulties of creating jobs at an equally exponential rate in an environment where youth have growing alternatives in violent radicalisation, banditry or illicit trafficking.

In a brief summary, accessible to all, we can analyse the terrorist risk for Spain based on the speech given by National Police Commissioner Manuel García-Risco at the Elcano Institute on 17 November 2020, pointing to an unspecified but real and unpredictable threat, recalling episodes such as the kidnapping of aid workers in 2009 and the Tindouf camps in 2011, to which we should add the murder of a priest in southern Burkina Faso in 2017 and the recent murders of two Spanish journalists in the same country on 27 April.

Considering that the bulk of police operations in Spain correspond to Moroccan and Algerian nationals, the Commissioner pointed out that those corresponding to contacts with the Sahel are of little relevance: only one Moroccan national in 2013 and one Senegalese national in 2017, in addition to others from Mauritania and Nigeria expelled in 2015. In any case, subsequent data from the Jihadist Terrorism Yearbook reveal that 3% of those arrested in our country in 2020 are of Nigerian nationality.

It is clear that we cannot let our guard down. Spain is a transit country for the French-speaking countries of Europe, while the propaganda of terrorist organisations recalls the battle of Sagrajas (Badajoz) in 1086 as a historical milestone to be reproduced in the reconquest of "Al Andalus". To this should be added the origin of the leader of the Daesh-affiliated Islamic Army in the Greater Sahara, Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, born in El Aaiún in 1971.

Strategies to meet the challenges in the Sahel

We have already noted that the 2011 EU Security and Development Strategy has just been revised on 16 April with Council Conclusions that have incorporated relevant aspects of good governance and rule of law. We also have the G5 Sahel Regional Strategy, comprising Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad. Of particular note is the creation of the G5 Sahel Joint Military Force in 2017, as well as regional

cooperation coordination initiatives such as the Priority Investment Plan (PIP) and the Urgent Development Plan (PDU).

In addition to the actions of the African Union and the UN Sahel Strategy, including MINUSMA, ECOWAS has adopted a counter-terrorism plan 2020-2024. The Accra Initiative brings together a number of Sahelian countries with West African coastal states in counter-terrorism and security cooperation in the face of an increasingly southward-looking threat.

The Sahel Coalition, inspired by France at the Paul summit on 13 January 2020, was formed a few months later as an informal entity for information exchange and a test to rationalise and organise the actions of the international community, with the presence of the G5 Sahel and the EU as well as a wide range of international organisations and extra-regional states.

The Coalition is structured into four pillars, dedicated to the fight against terrorism (1), training and reinforcement of military capabilities (2), internal security, justice, penal chain, presence of the State Administration throughout the territory and provision of basic services in a context of stabilisation (3), and a fourth pillar dedicated to development cooperation actions, led by the Sahel Alliance, made up of 25 members and observers whose General Assembly is currently chaired by the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, the EU and Cooperation.

It should be noted that the N'Djamena Declaration was approved at the G5 Summit with the SC on 16 February, highlighting the promotion of civilian and political reinforcement that can facilitate social economic development and basic services as an essential complement to the fight against terrorism and illicit trafficking. This is a strong message to address the root causes of insecurity from a comprehensive perspective. The CS Roadmap was endorsed at the Ministerial meeting on 19 March.

In conclusion

Whether or not the existence of a supposed triangle between Europe, the Maghreb and the Sahel is taken for granted, the challenges presented by this region today more than ever call on us to integrate them as priorities in our foreign policy, although they do not seem to occupy the attention of the press, politicians or Spanish citizens themselves except very sporadically.

Local civil society organisations must be strengthened as promoters of initiatives for change that confront a conception of power that has often behaved in a self-satisfied and passive, if not predatory and corrupt, manner. The social contract needs to be renewed, and those in power must know that they are controlled by an educated and informed public opinion.

But strategic patience is key. Our political dialogue, while firm and determined, cannot fall into fundamentalism because it will have to strike a difficult balance between the demands of democratic governance and the elementary stability required by complex situations in extremely fragile countries.

There is also no lack of sincere efforts to move towards political stability, as demonstrated by the overall progress in Mauritania and the recent elections in Burkina Faso and Niger, which were successfully held despite difficult security conditions.

We must seek the return of the state to the whole of the vast territories of the Sahel, providing basic services, and targeting an education sector heavily impacted by the abandonment of schools due to insecurity, with the risk of a lost generation. The fight against terrorism requires a military response, but we must not forget the importance of the internal security forces and the penal chain. Ideological and religious radicalisation must be tackled, but solutions must also be found to inter-community conflicts aggravated by the pastoralism-agriculture dichotomy, aggravated by the struggle for scarce resources in a context of climate change, illicit trafficking, banditry and transnational organised crime.

The risk of destabilisation is not only Sahelian, but regional in scope in West Africa, particularly with a country victim of multiple security threats such as Nigeria, which will reach 800 million inhabitants by 2100.

The main problem is not a shortage of resources but a lack of political will, as would be demonstrated by the fact that mutual trust between countries in the region has a long way to go to strengthen international cooperation, starting with something as inexpensive and yet cost-effective as intelligence sharing.

Ultimately, however, we must build our relationship with optimism, because we must be willing to see Africa as an opportunity and a hope for the 21st century.



EU security cooperation in the Sahel

Javier Albaladejo

Following the general analysis of the cooperation framework between the European Union and the Sahel region, two very relevant activities can be briefly mentioned, by way of example, from the security point of view, both financed by the Union and led by Spain, one of a multilateral nature and the other bilateral.

One is called "Rapid Action Groups - Surveillance and Intervention in the Sahel", known as GAR-SI Sahel by its French acronym, developed by a consortium of police forces from some EU Member States. This consortium, led by the Spanish Guardia Civil, also includes the Portuguese Guardia Nacional Republicana, the French Gendamería and the Italian Carabinieri.

The programme is being developed in the following states: Burkina Faso; Mali; Mauritania; Niger; Senegal and Chad, and is therefore multilateral in nature. Its purpose is to help the national authorities of these states to exercise more efficiently and effectively their powers of control over their territory, reinforcing the fight against terrorism and crime. To this end, police units (one unit in each of the States targeted by the action programme) have been created with specific characteristics: ease of mobility; rapid movement; response material appropriate to the risks they must face; multidisciplinary; flexible; and common specialised training. The aim is to contribute to strengthening the rule of law in these States.

The identification of common threats in these states is one of the key elements in deciding the convenience and opportunity of this joint action in the region, increasing

the possibilities of cooperation between all the states participating in the project, instead of bilateral actions with each of them.

The current Rapid Action Groups of the Guardia Civil are one of the reference models for the development of these Units in the Sahel.

The common training of the members of these Units, at all levels, facilitates the creation of a doctrinal unit, which allows for future cooperation and collaboration activities between all of them.

The second phase of the project is currently underway, following the success of the initial phase (implemented between 2016 and 2021), both funded by the European Union. The budget of the first phase amounted to more than 66 million euros, and its management was awarded to Spain, through the Fundación Internacional y para Iberoamérica de Administración y Políticas Públicas (FIIAPP).

The other initiative is the so-called "Joint Investigation Team with Niger", known by its acronym ECI Niger, led by the Spanish National Police in collaboration with the French Air and Border Police.

The programme is aimed at collaborating with the national authorities of Niger, and is therefore a bilateral activity, in order to reinforce their capacity to fight illegal immigration.

The joint investigation teams are an international cooperation mechanism provided for in the United Nations Palermo Convention on combating organised crime, signed in 2000. The European Union also regulated the operation of joint investigation teams by means of a Council Decision in 2002.

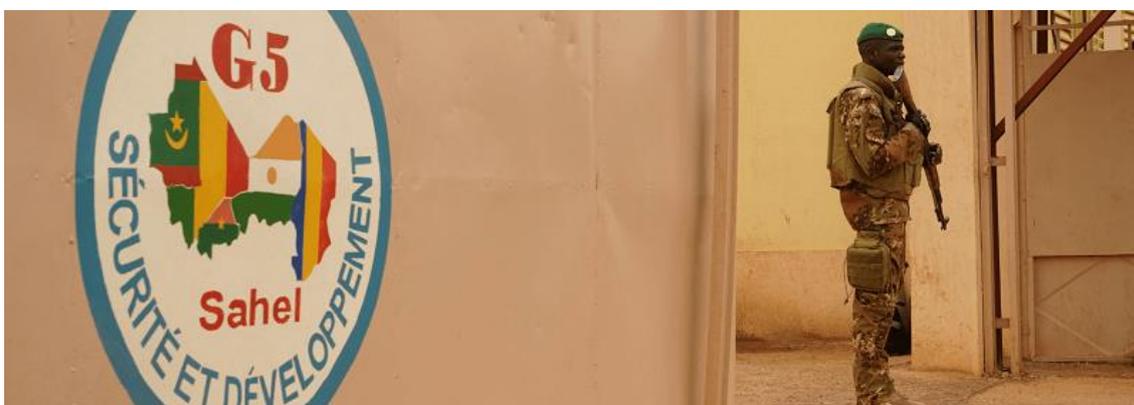
The crisis caused in 2005 by the massive arrival of illegal immigration to the Canary Islands, partly by means of small boats leaving from Mauritania, led Spain and Mauritania to reach an agreement to create a joint police team in Nouadhibou to reinforce the fight against illegal immigration networks. Spain sent several officers from the National Police Corps to the city, who began to work together with Mauritanian police officers, all of whom were based in the same building. The success of this initiative has led to its continuation today.

In 2016, the European Union approved funding for the ECI-Niger project, presented jointly by Spain and France, in response to the increase in illegal immigration from Niger. The experience of the aforementioned joint Spanish-Mauritanian team served as a reference model for the articulation of this proposal.

The joint team's activities have focused mainly on the Nigerian city of Agadez, considered an essential enclave on the illegal immigration route to the north, a strategic crossing point for sub-Saharan immigration.

The first phase of the project began in 2017 and its good results have led to the approval of an extension for a further three years in 2020. The budget for the first phase was 6 million euros, increased to 11.5 million euros after its extension, financed with European Union funds, and the management of the project was attributed to the FIIAPP, as in the case of the GARSÍ SAHEL project.

Moreover, the success of the initiative has led to a study, at the request of the Nigerian authorities, to create a joint research team for the fight against terrorism.



The Maghreb and security cooperation with the Sahel and Europe

Nizar Derdabi

The geographical area comprising the Sahel, the Maghreb and Europe shares a number of common challenges and threats. The two most important of these are undoubtedly terrorism and illicit trafficking of all kinds: drugs, arms trafficking, human trafficking, smuggling of pharmaceutical products, cigarettes, etc.

1. In drug trafficking, more specifically, two global trends have emerged in recent years: Cocaine trafficking, which used to go directly from South America to Europe by sea, now partly transits through Africa. Thus, cocaine enters West African ports (Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea), transits the Sahel and then North Africa, and crosses the Mediterranean to finally reach the European market.
2. Cannabis originating in Morocco and destined for Europe, which is the main market for Moroccan cannabis, no longer only passes through the coasts of northern Morocco to southern Spain across the Mediterranean. In fact, in order to circumvent law enforcement control mechanisms, traffickers have diversified the routes they use. Today, these new routes also pass through the south, crossing the Sahel countries (Mauritania, Mali, Niger) to reach Libya. From Libyan territory, international drug trafficking networks take advantage of the deterioration of security in that country to organise the transfer of cannabis to southern Europe via the eastern Mediterranean, which is much less monitored and controlled by the security services than the Strait of Gibraltar.

One of the factors that facilitates the activity of these transnational criminal networks and hinders police action is the limitation posed by borders. The police are limited in

their interventions and investigations by borders, which constitute a limit to their jurisdiction and area of intervention. Criminal networks, on the other hand, have an easier time overcoming this obstacle, as they move freely on both sides of the border. In fact, in these criminal networks there are many binationals who, as soon as they are pursued or wanted by the police services of one country, cross the border and escape the control of these police services. There is also a continuity of criminal activity, which manages to cross the border, which does not happen with the police services.

Given these limitations and difficulties, the solution to combat this trafficking effectively necessarily involves inter-state police cooperation. The cooperation established by Spain and Morocco is a model of this type. The gendarmerie and police services regularly exchange and share criminal information. This exchange is carried out through liaison officers from both countries who are stationed in Madrid and Rabat. There are frequent and regular contacts on the members of criminal networks, the means used and the routes followed.

As an example of this cooperation, I had the opportunity to participate in a judicial case, in which we were able to arrest the organisers of an international drug trafficking network in Morocco (composed of Spaniards, Moroccans and sub-Saharan), seize their assets and the proceeds of their trafficking, and also dismantle a large part of the network on the basis of precise information provided by the Guardia Civil. The Gendarmerie also regularly shares important information with the Guardia Civil on the activity of drug trafficking networks.

In summary, it is important to note that the fight against transnational criminal networks, which are increasingly well organised and established in all territories, necessarily requires effective cooperation between police services and the exchange of information in a framework of partnership and mutual trust.

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