EU security governance in the Sahel region: Implementing a multidimensional strategy in an unstable environment

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Abstract

While North African countries have experienced unprecedented political transformations since 2011, many countries in the adjacent Sahel zone were confronted with further deteriorations of their security, with Mali being the extreme case. The European Union (EU) tackled the challenges in the region through a comprehensive approach with the ‘Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel’. It advocated the combination of all relevant EU actors and instruments from different domains to foster progress and to fight instability. This paper aims at providing a deeper understanding of the implementation of the EU’s comprehensive approach in the Sahel, analyzing how EU security governance has responded to the multidimensional problems affecting the stability of the region. It identifies EU actors involved and their instruments and elaborates to what extent they contributed to the stabilization of the region. It evaluates how actors – also on the EU member states level as well as in the international and regional arenas, such as the U.N. or the African Union – interact, taking into account the EU’s combination of community and intergovernmental instruments, embedded in the new security structure given by the Lisbon treaty. The paper assesses challenges of their coordination as well as the cooperation with local, regional and international partners in a conflictive area.

Introduction

In the European Security Strategy (ESS), the European Council stressed the added value of the European Union (EU) as a ‘global player’ being in an enviable position to conduct global action through a large diversity of instruments and policies. The Treaty of Lisbon (2009) has enhanced the synergy between actors, policies and instruments to facilitate their coordination and to improve EU external action coherence as a whole. It brought together tools from the Council and the European Commission which are linked to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) who is assisted by the European External Action Service (EEAS).

Despite the many innovations introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, the EU’s external action system has been rapidly challenged by the further deteriorations in the political, economic and security-related situation in the Middle East and North Africa, and, specifically after Qaddafi’s toppling in Libya in August 2011, also in the Sahel. Neighbouring countries have been suffering from weak security structures and unstable

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economic developments. Particularly Mali was suffering from massive tribal clashes and criminal activities in its Northern territories, triggering a military coup in the capital Bamako in March 2012. The EU tackled the challenges in the region by implementing the ‘Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel’ (Sahel Strategy). Breaking down the comprehensive approach to the Sahel’s regional specifics, the EU anticipated combining humanitarian aid, development policies, diplomatic pressure and civilian as well as military missions (Petersberg Tasks) in a harmonized way. Though beyond EU rhetoric, it appears that converting this approach into practice is facing important challenges in terms of coherence among actors at different levels and of coordination between intergovernmental and community instruments. This paper aims at providing a deeper understanding of the implementation of the EU’s comprehensive approach in instable and conflicting environments like the Sahel, analyzing how EU security governance has responded to the multidimensional problems affecting the stability of the region.

The paper begins with a presentation of the EU integrated approach background and the theoretical framework analysis, namely EU security governance with insight from political sociology looking into relations and practices within this structure of power. Then, it underlies the roots of instability and the conflict course in the Sahel with a closer look into Mali to better understand the challenges the EU is facing through its participation in the peaceful conflict resolution in the region. It identifies EU actors involved and their instruments and elaborates to what extent they contributed to a stabilization of the region. Finally, the paper assesses challenges of their coordination as well as the cooperation with local, regional and international partners in a conflictive area such as the Sahel region.

1. EU Global Approach

More than ten years after its inception, the European Security Strategy (ESS) has made its way as omnipresent into the EU political rhetoric ‘as a reference framework for daily decision-making in all fields of foreign policy’. It underlines a clear strategic approach (key threats, strategic objectives and implications), based on a comprehensive approach to security. Discussions conducive to a holistic approach were and are not only run within the EU; we can found a similar strategic rhetoric in the United Nations (UN) and NATO. However, what makes the EU case distinctive is the sophisticated diversity of tools: diplomatic, economic, development, judicial, civilian and military which can be

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combined to tackle multifaceted problems and cross-sectoral threats over all cycles of crisis situations on the world stage.

The ESS states clearly that ‘(s)ecurity is a precondition of development’, based on the assumption that security and development are intrinsically linked. This nexus has been widely discussed in the academic literature. As a consequence, it has broadened the boundaries of the EU configuration of actors involved in the field of security, legitimating new actors to be part of it, for example the European Commission. A broadening process which comes also with the consideration of the merging of internal and external security threats and the need to increase civilian and military synergies to better deal with multidimensional situations. Moreover, the capability to be involved over all cycles of the crisis requires a close coordination between short-term (humanitarian aid and crisis response) and long-term (development, conflict prevention, crisis management) actions and actors involved, namely EU actors, regional as well as international partners towards what the ESS calls ‘effective multilateralism’.

However, the EU member states have so far been reluctant to further develop the relatively flexible ESS towards a deeper review process. While the European Council adopted the ‘Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy’ in 2008 which broadened the threat spectrum, including more tools and actors in the European security field, it did neither clarify the objectives nor the priorities. It did not explain what the EU should do and how it should translate ESS into practice, leaving open the policy debates about EU purposes on the international stage and the need for a grand strategy. The multiplicity of roles that the EU plays at the same time has contributed to the

4 European Council (2003), infra n. 1, at 2.
7 Besides, in 2010, the Council adopted the Internal Security Strategy (ISS) which proposed five strategic objectives, based on the “complementarity between the internal and external aspects of European security”, acknowledging the trans-nationalization of the threats.
academic debate about which type of actor the EU is, normative, transformative and ethical power, 9 civilian power or soft imperialist actor, 10 the question is still open. At least, ‘an integrated policy requires of necessity the desire for consistency and a political vision as to how the different elements of that policy should be balanced’. 11

Hence, the EU comprehensive approach has stimulated an important literature on its components and theoretical impacts. 12 It offers indeed a holistic understanding of European security, admitting implicitly a shift from a strict intergovernmental framework to a political system in which several actors interact at different levels and should make use of all relevant instruments according to a given situation. The EU comprehensive approach has sustained a huge literature notably on the concept of EU security governance which seems to be appropriate to apprehend the transforming configuration of European security. 13 It has been defined as ‘intentional system of rules that involves the co-ordination, management and regulation of issues by multiple and separate authorities, interventions by both public and private actors, formal and informal arrangements and purposefully directed towards particular policy outcomes’. 14

The literature on EU security governance has however neglected an important aspect in the EU configuration, namely the power relations. 15 This paper is interested in relations and practices within what we consider as being a structure of power, it is therefore fundamental to underline the practices and to understand the logic of action of actors involved. ‘Actors possess varying resources [… ] that determine their position in

the field and thus their relations with each other.\textsuperscript{16} Also, and this is important here, they determine the actors’ logic of action. This relational approach is crucial to understand how the European external action system works and what the impact on EU conflict resolution is. It is this configuration of relations, power struggles and strategies among actors to influence policy processes that has been challenged by the conflict eruption in the Sahel region.

2. Situation in the Sahel

The wave of uprisings that swept through the Arab world in 2011 and toppled dinosaur leaders in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia can also be seen as catalyst for the following state collapse in neighbouring Mali. Especially the end of Qaddafi’s reign in Libya in summer 2011 triggered the subsequent developments in the region, with the insurgency of Tuareg rebel groups and Islamist criminal gangs in Northern Mali and the following coup d’état in Bamako in March 2012. Weak state structures and crippled socioeconomic conditions for most of the Malian locals provided the floor for the eruption of fights and clashes that displaced more than 500,000 people\textsuperscript{17} and killed several hundreds.

The Sahel, a semi-arid land strip that divides the Sahara desert in the north from the fertile savannah lands in the south, stretches from Mauritania and Senegal in the West over Mali and Niger unto Chad in the East, reaching into Sudan and Eritrea. State borders are often rather imaginative than real, as border controls are habitually defunct. Frequent and easy border crossings throughout the region contribute to region-wide intertwined problems.\textsuperscript{18} The Sahel as ‘one of the poorest regions of the world […] confronts grave problems regarding human rights, the rule of law, security and armed conflict, as well as economic and social development’.\textsuperscript{19} Consequently, the Sahel countries are to be found in the bottom of the latest 2013 Human Development Index, with Mali ranking on 182, Mauritania on 155, Burkina Faso on 183, Chad on 184, and Niger on 186 (from 186 countries), hence all belonging to the group of countries with low human development.\textsuperscript{20} This notwithstanding, the region proved to be relatively advanced in political standards.

Before Mali’s coup d’état, leading democracy indices showed a distinct better level of democracy in West Africa than in neighbouring North Africa. The Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index, for instance, named Mali a ‘flawed democracy’, and the Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2012 ranked the country as ‘defective democracy’, the index’ second-best category. But due to the massive deterioration in democratic standards after the coup, all indices downgraded Mali, with the Failed States Index 2013 calling it even the world’s ‘most worsened country’.  

Several overlapping conflict levels prevail in Mali and its neighbours. First, frequent droughts have pushed rural dwellers repeatedly at, or even beyond, the brink of absolute poverty and famine. In early 2014, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) spoke of 20 million people being at risk of hunger throughout the Sahel. Clashes between different pastoral groups occur regularly. Second, certain ethnic groups challenge the states’ unity and lobby for independence, most famously some Tuareg groups in Northern Mali. Armed groups and gangs, meanwhile, often lack durability and endurance, as liberation armies and independence movements quickly change mutual affiliations – the enemy of yesterday might be the partner of tomorrow. The identification of reliable partners in conflict resolution is hence already a difficult task for international actors. Third, criminal and terrorist groups have taken root in the region, making use of the corrupt and ineffective security structures and porous borders.  

While the first level of conflict has to do with unfavourable climate conditions and changes, leading to population shifts that increase competition about fertile lands and water resources, the second and third levels require deeper analysis here, also because the EU mainly refers to them as direct threat for the European continent. The fragile states, particularly Mali, and the resulting lawlessness foster criminal activities such as smuggling of illicit goods and trafficking people, which makes them one of the core roots for irregular migration, terrorism and drug dealing at Europe’s door steps. Also, it is no secret that members of Mali’s governmental institutions, including the army, are directly involved in criminal activities, ‘nowhere in the region were state institutions more implicated in

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organized crime than in northern Mali’.  

The second conflict level stems from the different local population groups in Northern Mali and Mauritania. The Tuaregs repeatedly refused central government’s monopoly on the use of force in their traditional homelands. They started rebellions from the early years of the states’ independence, particularly around the disputed National Pact peace agreement of 11 April 1992, in 2006, and most lately in January 2012. Being once the ‘masters of the desert’, the Tuaregs became the minority in many West African countries after their independence in 1960, and saw themselves suddenly ruled by black leaders whom they mostly did not accept as legitimate.

When Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi was toppled in Libya in August 2011, some 420,000 Tuaregs who had been hired in one of his militias returned to their territories in Northern Mali, bringing not only uncounted weapons and military equipment along but also ‘straining food stocks and shocking the region’s economic system’. Drug smuggling experienced an upswell as former mercenaries had to make up their lost subsistence. The Movement for the National Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) was founded as new local militia, dedicated to fight for ‘full independence of Azawad from Mali. The issue was no longer just about breaking into the Malian state, securing positions of power and privilege for Tuareg leaders and leading lineages, but breaking away from it’. Within few weeks, they inflicted serious losses to the Malian army and were about to even reach the capital Bamako.

This, eventually, triggered a military coup in Bamako on 22 March 2012. However due to the army’s restricted possibilities, ‘the coup could not hinder the rebel group’s advance, and just a few days later, two-thirds of Mali’s territory was occupied by non-state groups’. As a result, the confrontation between the central government and the local Tuareg tribes increased, also after the presidential elections of July and August 2013 that did not bring a hoped-for ease into the difficile power constellation, but rather deepened ‘the exclusion of the northern groups’. Now, double administrative structures

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27 cf. Bøås & Torheim, *supra* n. 25, at 1281.
30 Bøås & Torheim, *supra* n. 25, at 1281. – Azawad is the traditional name for the Northern Mali provinces Timbouctou, Kidal and Gao.
exist in many provinces in the north of Mali; the official ones on behalf of the central government, represented through the local governors, and the traditional ones, embodied in local nobles, sheikhs and leaders.

To complicate matters, Tuaregs must be sub-differentiated into their single groups and tribes. Most local tribes did not welcome MNLA as a looting organisation from outside, especially when the Ifoghas dominated Ansar ed-Din organisation sidelined them and thereby mixed ethnic request with radical religious demands. MNLA and Ansar ed-Din also allied with – and at the same time continued to rival – the non-Tuareg groups of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). Though both clearly belong to the Islamist-type of rebel groups, their aim is not only to spread their specific understanding of righteous belief, but ‘in many ways AQIM was acting as an Islamic charity, with the exception that its members carried arms and did not hesitate to use them’. With its growing presence in the region, AQIM increasingly engaged in criminal activities. Kidnapping of tourists turned out to be a lucrative business that helped AQIM buying weapons and 4-wheel cars as well as the support from the locals. While the generated dollar and euro millions helped AQIM, MUJAO and Tuareg as well as Arab groups like the Arab Movement for Azawad (MAA) to deepen and broaden their local roots, also in close cooperation with officials from the central government, the economic effect on those who did not join them was disastrous, as tourism came to a halt and opportunities for regular employment declined. At the same time, the massive influx of cash ‘weakened the traditional power configurations of the Tuareg society, leading to competing informal regimes of power, locally and regionally’.

Given the incremental state collapse, policy analysts heatedly debated about how the EU could effectively contribute to crisis management, conflict resolution and eventually peace establishing in the region. Marc Pierini, for example, lauded that

the EU possesses a wealth of expertise in peace negotiations, devolution of power to regional entities, police and justice training, business development, civil society support, governance reform, and more. Transferring this know-how to countries in need is the prime role of the European Union, one which should be restored to its pre-Lisbon levels in conjunction with the display of military strength by some of its members. The conjunction of instruments is key.

33 Bøås & Torheim, supra n. 25, at 1287.
36 Bøås & Torheim, supra n. 25, at 1286.
Among the critics, most prominently was Paul Collier who excoriated the EU’s involvement with clear words:

Mali is an object lesson in how not to manage European security policy for Africa. Support came belatedly as a panic response to the prospect of catastrophe, and was then only feasible by reverting to a colonial mode of operation. Such an approach does not belong in the 21 Century.  

3. EU action in conflict prevention and crisis management in the Sahel region

Analogue to Romano Prodi’s infamous ‘ring of friends’ that the European Union wished to have around it, the EU’s external relations since about ten years have mainly concentrated on the countries in its direct neighbourhood. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), including the Eastern Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean were designed to offer tailor-made relations with the adjacent states. Hence it did hardly come as surprise that the EU reacted relatively quickly to the unpredicted uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, Libya and other Arab countries in 2011. Here, the EU drew on those innovations of the Lisbon Treaty which contribute to a more comprehensive approach, using a wider range of tools to face intertwined issues on the international stage.

The broader neighbourhood was also under deep concern at that time already. Since 2009, the growing instability in the Sahel has led the EU to conduct several explorer missions to Mali, Mauritania and Niger, aiming to find out how it could best support the reform of the respective security sectors in each country. Under the impression of the on-going kidnappings of foreigners, the ideas were increasingly associated with military means despite local inhabitants criticised the proceeding militarisation of the region. Driving force behind all developments was the French administration, as former colonial power still influential in West and Central Africa.

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41 Article 21.3 of the Lisbon Treaty states: ‘The Union shall ensure consistency between the different areas of its external action and between these and its other policies. The Council and the Commission, assisted by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, shall ensure that consistency and shall cooperate to that effect’.
42 For example, the EU had opened a Center for Information and Management of Migration (CIGEM, Centre d’Information et de Gestion des Migrations) in Mali in October 2008, after first consultations with relevant governments since July 2006, when the Malian government had signed a (hardly respected) peace agreement (Algiers Accord) with the Tuareg ‘May 23 Democratic Alliance for Change’ (ADC, Alliance Démocratique du 23 mai pour le Changement); cf. http://www.cigem.org/?rub=cigem&srub=creation (accessed 7 Mar. 2014).
During the French presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2008, not only the Sahel, but Sub-Sahara Africa as a whole had made its way to the forefront of EU priorities. In this regard, ‘An EU Policy on the Horn of Africa – towards a Comprehensive EU Strategy’ was adopted in 2009 as the attempt to react to the multiple problems in Somalia, Ethiopia and the greater East Africa region. Therefore, the ‘Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel’ adopted in March 2011 should not only be seen as a reaction to the political changes brought about by the Arab Spring on the further periphery, but also in line with the EU’s willpower to react to the crisis challenges in Africa with diverse soft and hard tools.

The Sahel Strategy has become the key framework for its action in the region, ‘including an ambitious security dimension’. The strategy claims that ‘[p]olitical action and adequate engagement of the EU are now vital’ due to the consequences of the political changes in the North Africa. The European apprehensions had grown up from the risk assessment that ‘if Al Qaeda and its offshoots establish footholds in the Sahel, they could use them as launch pads into Libya and other vulnerable post-Arab Spring countries. Eventually, the wave of terrorism could reach Europe’. In the floors of Brussels ‘with the growing attention to security, Africa is increasingly perceived as the first line of defence’ for the EU. Since the inception of the African Union (AU) in 2002, the European Union has increased its cooperation with the regional organisation, notably in the area of peace and security. Through the African Peace Facility, the EU has allocated more than €1.1 billion to AU peace programmes, recognizing that instability on the African continent also affects Europe’s security. The Sahel Strategy, based on a comprehensive approach, acknowledges that any security and development improvement

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47 European External Action Service, supra n. 24, at 8.
51 cf. Carbone, supra n. 5, at 111.
in the region

has an obvious and direct impact on protecting European citizens and interests and on the EU internal security situation. It is therefore important to ensure and strengthen coherence and complementarity between internal and external aspects of EU security.\textsuperscript{52}

The Sahel Strategy is an ambitious program which might foster the tendency to further securitize development policies.\textsuperscript{53} Moreover, the strategy aims at coordinating the implementation of both, EU short-term (humanitarian aid and crisis response) and long-term (development and conflict prevention) actions in the Sahel to promote progress and to fight instability. It emphasizes the cross-border and intertwined challenges throughout the Sahel region, hence calling for a regional approach. While the Sahel Strategy has originally focused on Mali, Mauritania and Niger, considered by the EU as the ‘core Sahelian states’, in March 2014, the Foreign Affairs Council invited ‘the EEAS, the [EU Special Representative] EUSR for the Sahel and the Commission to extend the implementation of the Strategy to Burkina Faso and Chad while intensifying relevant activities in Mali, Mauritania and Niger’.\textsuperscript{54}

The EU is one of Africa’s main assistance donors, notably in the area of food safety, nutrition and sheltering victims of war and violence, including the Sahel:

Since the beginning of the Sahel crisis in 2012, the European Commission has mobilised €383.4 million in emergency aid for both the Sahel and Mali crises […] and has announced (on 3 February 2014) it will give €142 million in humanitarian funds to the Sahel region […] in 2014.\textsuperscript{55}

In parallel, the EU long-term development assistance, through the 10\textsuperscript{th} European Development Fund (EDF, 2007-2013) which is the main assistance instrument towards African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, has allocated more than €1.5 billion to Mali, Mauritania and Niger.\textsuperscript{56} It is managed by the Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DG-DEVCO) particularly to support good governance, rule of law, justice, decentralization process, agriculture and rural development, social sectors, the Millennium Development Goals, economic development and infrastructures. Based on the comprehensive approach, the EU with governments and organisations from the region as well as international donors established in 2012 a ‘Partnership for Resilience’ (Alliance Globale pour l’Initiative Résilience, AGIR) in the Sahel to better define and

\textsuperscript{52} European External Action Service, supra n. 24, at 4.
manage resilience priorities among actors involved. The European Commission contributes €1.5 billion for the period 2014–2020 to this partnership.

The EU also funded many projects within the framework of the Instrument for Stability (IfS), a financial instrument under the authority of HR/VP without any sectoral or geographical limitation, including a short-term component to react to crises and a long-term component to prevent conflict. In Mali, an IfS short-term measure to restore state presence in the region, co-funded by some EU member states and international donors, started in March 2011 to support the special program for Peace, Security and Development of North Mali, initiated by the Malian government with the intention to fight insecurity and terrorism. However, due to the growing insecurity and attacks on two project locations, the Malian authorities suspended the program in February 2012.

Truly, last years’ increasing instability, particularly in Mali, has seriously challenged the implementation of the Sahel Strategy in many respects. Notably the military coup in March 2012 obliged the EU to postpone and freeze many projects in the region. While the EU planned to intervene to mitigate the impact of the Libyan crisis in the northern regions of Niger and Mali, projects have been mainly implemented in Niger and Mauritania. In Mauritania, a security sector reform measure has been implemented from March 2011 to support the national initiative to fight terrorism and enhance border management capacities to cope with the thriving criminal and terrorist activities. In Niger an IfS short-term project of post-conflict recovery, ‘Support to Security and Stabilization in Northern Niger and Mali’, started from January 2012, taking into account the crisis in Mali after the coup. Then, to strengthen the overall capability to face terrorist attacks and the regional cooperation, the EU implemented the IfS long-term project ‘Contre Terrorism Sahel’ (CT Sahel) in Niger and Mauritania. Within this project, the Sahel Security College was established on 25 September 2012 ‘as a regional network for the identification of common needs and strategies on CT and organised crime’.

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58 European Commission, supra n. 55, at 2.
61 One might see it as irony of history that the putschists’ demands were almost identical – if not even inspired – by the EU Sahel Strategy’s core idea: a better equipment and training of the army to fight rebels, terrorists, and criminals; cf. Marischka, supra n. 43.
62 European Commission, supra n. 60, at 26f. – The initiative became a strategy in April 2012 in the wake of the coup in Mali.
college has no direct operational role, but aims at fostering the sharing of information and expertise. In this regard, also under IfS long-term components, the West Africa Police Information System was launched in September 2012, implemented by Interpol, to create a platform for police information exchange among Benin, Ghana, Niger, Mauritania and Mali. It is designed to be eventually enlarged to all the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).64

In complement to those on-going efforts under the EDF and financial instruments, when the crisis in Mali intensified, the EU launched in August 2012 at the request of the Nigerien authorities a CSDP civilian mission in Niger (EUCAP SAHEL Niger) for two years, until 15 July 2014, with the contribution of ten EU member states.65 This mission aims at strengthening the regional cooperation between the security forces and justice departments providing advice and training to fight terrorism and organized crime in Mali, Niger and Mauritania. It confirms the link between CSDP and counterterrorism, elaborates on the external dimension of EU counterterrorism, and gives as one of the first CSDP mission ever a formal mandate that clearly focuses on the fight against terrorism.66 In that sense, EUCAP SAHEL Niger marks the entering into a new CSDP mission generation.

Regarding Mali, further political deteriorations in early 2013 acted as catalyst for broader and deeper EU action in the Sahel. After the required UN Security Council resolution 2085 of 20 December 2012 and at the request of the Malian president, the French military operation ‘Serval’ started on 11 January 2013.67 In parallel, the Crisis Response and Operational Coordination Department (CROC) of the EEAS activated two crisis platforms to monitor the Malian crisis and to identify EU response options, based on a comprehensive approach.68 An extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council on 17 January 2013 supported the French operation and confirmed EU financial as well as logistical support to the deployment of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA, integrated on 1 July 2013 into the UN mission MINUSMA69). The Council also decided, at

64 European Commission, supra n. 63, at 6.
67 The Serval operation with some ‘4,000 well-equipped French troops and close to 4,000 African troops from seven countries led to an equally rapid retreat of Islamist jihadists back to the north of the country’ (Pierini, supra n. 37). Serval occurred ‘within the framework of the UN Security Council’s Resolutions 2071 and 2085 in order to defend the territorial integrity and restore the state’s authority within the occupied territory’ (A. Bata, EUTM Mali, in the absence of the EU, International Security Observer, 1 Mar. 2013, http://securityobserver.org/eutm-mali-in-the-absence-of-the-eu (accessed 8 Mar. 2014).
69 MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali) was established by UN-SC Res. 2100 of 25 Apr. 2013 and shall comprise up to 11,200 military and 1,440

[t]he EU would take on the training role of the Malian Armed Forces, including the command and control chain, logistics and human resources. African countries would produce the bulk of a stabilisation force. The idea was to provide ownership for military crisis management and to avoid any European involvement that could cause resentment against the presence of forces from Western and former colonial powers.\footnote{K. Engberg, \textit{The EU and Military operations: A comparative analysis} (Abingdon: Routledge 2014), 172f.}

Furthermore, on 15 May 2013, an International Donors Conference ‘Together for a New Mali’ was organized by the EU and France, in Brussels. The Malian government, closely associated to this event, presented a Plan for the Sustainable Recovery of Mali 2013-2014 which estimated the cost to cope with the needs at €4.343 billion. It received a €3.25 billion pledge from the donors, including €1.35 billion from the EU of which €523.9 million from the European Commission and €280 million from France.

In addition, over the period 2014-2020, the EU will provide €615 million to Mali, half of which will be in the form of general budget support, which constitutes direct financial support to the government of Mali to pursue agreed reform priorities […] state reform and peacebuilding; food security and rural development; education; construction of a section of a road that will link Bourem and Kidal to the Algerian border and support economic development in the north.

In sum, to face the multiple challenges and threats in the Sahel, the EU has deployed a mixture of political and economic, civilian and military, short, medium and long-term instruments in complement with its member states engagement while building upon strengthening regional as well as international cooperation. However, at the end of the day, the question remains whether the EU security governance has responded adequately to tackle the regional instability through an effective implementation of its comprehensive approach, as expressed in the Sahel Strategy.

4. Challenges facing EU’s crisis response mechanism

4.1 EU Internal challenges facing the complex crisis situation

Although the EU multidimensional engagement in the Sahel brought certain success, the situation in the region remains unstable, particularly in Mali with the resurgence of tensions in the north since May 2014. Besides recurrent difficulties facing the EU on the ground due to the difficile power constellation, EU internal institutional challenges
must also not be overlooked. The EU is an atypical actor which can be described as a polycentric political configuration where several actors interact with various tools. It is not just a question of actors’ will to work closely together, but also a matter of logic of action, legal prerogatives, strategies and interests within the EU security governance.

HR/VP Catherine Ashton admitted that while ‘[t]urning a comprehensive approach [...] into comprehensive action remains a key priority for the EU’, it still constitutes an enormous challenge in terms of coherence and coordination between several actors and tools. In a joint communication with the Commission in December 2013, she identified a set of measures that are needed to further improve the EU crisis response and conflict prevention capabilities. This document offered guidelines, but leaves open to concerned actors to follow them and this has yet to be seen. Therefore, criticism has been voiced that the idea that there is a coherent and comprehensive and harmonious EU approach rather than a collection of different EU efforts is still fanciful. The EU’s comprehensive approach, to be real, has to be more than a repackaging of existing and new initiatives under one rhetorical umbrella.

Truly, the communication on the comprehensive approach is naïve, as it ignores power relations and difficulties connected to the various decision-making processes (intergovernmental for CSDP missions or Community procedure for financial instruments), to policy implementation and legal prerogatives regarding EU budget, EEAS budget or member states’ contributions which fuel the power struggle among actors within EU security governance. For instance, management and implementation of IfS projects are divided between the Security Policy and Conflict Prevention Department of the EEAS, DG-DEVCO and the Service of Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) linked to the Commission for the long-term component, and mainly FPI Service for the short-term component which represents more than 70% of the IfS budget. While EEAS is involved in the preparation of the IfS short-term measures due to their strong political nature (non-programmable) and scope (without geographical limitation), only FPI Service is responsible for their implementation because of the Commission budget prerogative. CSDP missions, meanwhile, are decided unanimously in the Foreign Affairs Council, and their strategic planning is managed by its civilian-military structures. CSDP civilian mission costs are covered by the CFSP budget which is managed by the FPI Service.

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while CSDP military mission common costs are entirely paid by the member states involved. Although DG-ECHO agreed to cooperate with DG-DEVCO in ‘AGIR Sahel’, it insists to keep its neutrality, impartiality and especially, its independence from EEAS and FPI activities.\textsuperscript{85} Those principles face the risk of politization of humanitarian aid within a regional strategic framework in the Sahel under the comprehensive approach.

The restructuring of the EU’s foreign policy architecture with the creation of the EEAS at its core led also to a merging of former differentiated policies on development (more in the realm of the Commission) and on external relations (more in the realm of the Council). Hence capacity building, as classic element of development cooperation, and geostrategic security, as classic element of external relations, have been merged under one roof, ‘as both foreign policy and development cooperation are now to a large extent the responsibility of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy’.\textsuperscript{86} However, there is a clear lack of strategic coordination and logistic as a whole in Brussels and on the ground due to legal vagueness about what is inside and outside EEAS. Few years after its inception, ‘inter-departments tensions within the EEAS or between the EEAS and the DG-DEVCO are almost unavoidable, and policies towards Mali are not an exception’.\textsuperscript{87}

Within EU external action system, the civil-military nexus and internal-external security nexus raised also a set of challenges regarding the coordination between actors coming from different organizational and institutional cultures. Civilian actors and militaries should learn to work together, notably in operation planning, but different skills, means, methods, perceptions of security and threats as well as purposes and logics of action make this difficult. Comprehensive actions in crisis countries could ‘provide an opportunity to the newly established EEAS to assert its institutional independence and legitimacy’\textsuperscript{88} to position itself as an interface among EU actors involved in crisis response. In spite of all this, the distribution of powers and institutional prerogatives that refer to legal authority affect the whole strategic planning, management and on-the-ground implementation, and a clear political guidance is still required.

As a result, crisis response planning authorities are scattered across different parts of the bureaucracy […], multiple documents contend for the status of the EU strategic plan vis-à-vis the region or crisis situation […] and no single individual or institution bears responsibility for the overall performance of the Union.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{86} Del Biondo, supra n. 53, at 667.
\textsuperscript{87} Helly & Rocca, supra n. 82, at 170.
\textsuperscript{89} A. Mattelaer, supra n. 3, at 136.
Political and security challenges in Africa offer indeed an occasion for the EU to become an influential foreign policy actor, enriching its economic and diplomatic power with military assets.\textsuperscript{90} While the European Union tried to help the Malian authorities to stabilize the country against the uprisings from certain Tuareg and Islamist groups in the north, it did so mainly through the strong engagement of one of its 28 member states, namely France. Notwithstanding the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty, some scholars still argue that ‘member states remain at the centre of European foreign policy making, [...] and] the EEAS is still only one coordination instrument among others’.\textsuperscript{91}

Since the beginning of the crisis and even before, the French leadership is based on a clear political commitment with its pressure at the UN Security Council, its influence at the EU level to launch EUTM Mali, its strong financial support of, and involvement in the “Together for a New Mali” conference and its follow-up commitments, namely delegating the EUSR of the Sahel (French diplomat Michel Reveyrand de Menthon), the bilateral cooperation with Algeria to tackle the threats in Mali, the command of EUTM Mali and the ongoing ‘Serval’ operation. Moreover, a new defence agreement for military cooperation between France and Mali shall be signed on 16 July 2014 to give a legal basis to the French military presence after the end of the ‘Serval’ operation and afterward to make another operation in the broader region of Mali, Niger and Chad possible.\textsuperscript{92}

Besides its historic background as former colonial power, France has prime economic interests in West Africa. French nuclear technology conglomerate Areva runs two uranium mines in Niger and is the main economic partner of the government, but also target of outspoken criticism from ecologic activists;\textsuperscript{93} repeatedly, their production plants have been target of armed attacks by local resistance groups.\textsuperscript{94} The French army runs the Hadji Kossei airbase at N’Djamena airport in Chad.\textsuperscript{95} Politically, the French government seems to catch its chance to eventually correct its negative image. ‘Bamako and Bangui are the touchstones of the French President’s intention to finish once and for all with “Françafrique” and start a new partnership with African countries based on

\textsuperscript{91} Olsen, supra n. 49, at 1834 (own omission and adding).
mutual respect’.  

The deployment of first French troops and then military experts through CSDP Military Training Mission in Mali and security experts through CSDP civilian mission in Niger with liaison officers in Mali and in Mauritania brought a certain success in Mali. However, within the EU security governance fundamentally different perception, approaches and strategies among EU member states towards Africa between former colonial rulers (such as Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal, United Kingdom) and non-colonial rulers (notably the Scandinavian states, but also all Central and Eastern European countries) impact on their position. Besides, their different strategic culture backgrounds raise the question about which type of actor the EU is or should be. It is a normative, civilian power, a military or soft imperialist actor. The answer is not yet unanimous as confirmed length, low level of enthusiasm over the force generation process and to deploy an EU operation there and more recently in Central African Republic. Can the EU comprehensive approach be sustainable despite those divergences and clear reluctance of some EU member states on the way to implement it? Hence, while the French ‘Serval’ operation received a unanimous political support from EU partners, it can count on a limited military support only from the United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium, Denmark and international partners, namely Canada and the United States, plus troops from seven African countries. As France is an EU member, the operation has been associated to the EU engagement in the region, but the operational planning is still conducted only by Paris. France as Framework Nation with the French command of EUTM Mali has certainly helped the coordination, but the overall coherence of EU action is still at stake.

4.2 EU external challenges in the Sahel region

In the line of the EU comprehensive approach and in the terms of the European Security Strategy, one could ask how effective and efficient the multilateralism is in the Sahel. First, the EU has a doubtful understanding of the Sahel-Sahara as one region. Indeed, several borders overlap here: between the Arab North African countries and the Sub-Saharan states, but also between North Africa’s Algeria, Tunisia and Libya:

Rivalries between the three North African states had long been an obstacle to regional integration: Libya and Algeria each sought to mediate in the conflicts in northern Mali and Niger in 2006/7, and Libya’s ties to rebel factions allowed it to torpedo Algerian efforts. Algerian rivalry with Morocco over the deadlocked Western Sahara conflict played an equally important role; Moroccan diplomacy in Mali and Mauritania sought to prevent the emergence of an effective regional security framework from which Morocco was excluded.  

96 Bata, supra n. 68.
97 M. Pierini, supra n. 37, at 1.
In consequence, all modern attempts to integrate the region have been hardly successful. ECOWAS, for example, covers all West African Sub-Saharan states, with the exception of Mauritania that, after having ‘a long history of resisting integration with other West African states,’ withdrew its membership in December 2000. The Arab North African states are also no ECOWAS members. They, meanwhile, are united in the League of Arab States, the regional Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA), the Arab Maghreb Union and the North Africa Regional Capability, but de facto cooperation is whatsoever merely existent. Certainly, the African Union could play a central role in the conflict resolution in Africa as it has a special partnership with the EU as well as with the UN. It is in addition identified as ‘a privileged EU’s partner in the implementation of the Sahel Strategy’. The conclusions of the AU’s 2013 Assembly summit, by deciding on the creation of an interim AU rapid intervention force, indicated that Mali’s experience had a triggering effect. African experts go even further, suggesting that the question of African security capabilities (including not only expeditionary forces but also force enablers, strategic transportation and surveillance), enabled by European financial support, should be part of future Africa-EU discussions.

However, the conclusions from the 4th EU-Africa summit in Brussels in April 2014 remained somewhat disappointing, with hardly any new decisions on more cooperation in the Sahel. In best diplomatic language, an agreement was reached ‘to sustain the level of resources’ at the AU’s African Peace and Security Architecture, an initiative started in 2002 with mainly EU financial support.

Problematic is that Morocco has yet been refused AU membership due to the unsolved Western Sahara question. Therefore, it is in principle hard to expect that the AU can reach comprehensive reconciliation in the region. Here, the EU drives a wedge between Morocco and Algeria as well as Mauritania, through its constant privileging of

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the Maghreb kingdom. To keep its good relations with Morocco, particularly in the areas of migration and fisheries, the EU takes a soft stance on Morocco’s objectionable behaviour in the Western Sahara question. In 2011 and 2012, the EU re-negotiated its multi-species fisheries agreement with Morocco,\(^\text{105}\) and to not put its successful conclusion at risk, the EU negligently forfeits to push for a definite solution for the Western Sahara.\(^\text{106}\)

Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and Niger are engaged in the yet widely dysfunctional Joint Operational General Staff Committee.\(^\text{107}\) In early 2014, the governments of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso – hence the core countries of the EU Sahel Strategy – decided to form a permanent framework ‘G5 Sahel’ to foster their regional cooperation, with Mauritania hosting the headquarter.\(^\text{108}\) This initiative was well received by the EU; hopes may be justified that it might bring some detention.\(^\text{109}\) However, given the difficulties of the past with mutual withdrawals of ambassadors\(^\text{110}\) and mutual accusations of supporting rebels and terrorist,\(^\text{111}\) especially between Mali and Mauritania, doubts about the real perspectives are not eradicated.

After all, the flaw remains that ‘no […] framework exists that straddles the Saharan divide’.\(^\text{112}\) This also bears the risk ‘that Sahel states see security cooperation with the EU or EU member states as an alternative to regional cooperation’,\(^\text{113}\) especially if the cooperation with the EU goes in hand with massive financial support. Then, the overarching aim of improving regional cooperation among the Sahel countries might be further torpedoed. The principal problem, however, is the exclusion of Algeria from almost all peace attempts, which has transformed into a regional hegemon. Algeria ‘has been mediating in northern Mali’s conflicts since the 1990s; it functions as a lifeline for northern Mali for supplies in food and petrol; and it is believed to have an extensive


\(^{107}\) cf. Helly & Rocca, supra n. 82, at 167.


\(^{109}\) Council, supra n. 54, at 3.

\(^{110}\) Lacher, supra n. 98, at 3.


\(^{112}\) Lacher, supra n. 98, at 4 (own omission).

\(^{113}\) Lacher, supra n. 98, at 5.
intelligence presence in the area”. Admittedly, in 2010, the Algeria-backed ‘pays du champ’ initiative established an intelligence sharing centre and a joint military operations centre in Algiers together with Mauritania, Mali and Niger, yet ‘the group has not been able to coordinate their actions, with Niger vociferously advocating a military intervention and Algeria and Mauritania opposed’. Over the last years, Mali was in constant confrontation with Algeria over the right treatment of AQIM members, and in parallel also with Mauritania that somehow buddied up with Bouteflika. While Algeria and Mauritania demanded a tough oppression, former Malian president Amadou Toumani Touré remained reluctant, apparently because of his own government’s involvement in, and profit from, AQIM’s criminal activities. The (hidden) ransom payments by several European governments to bail out hostages brought release to those who could be freed, but strongly fuelled the fire here. In line with the AU’s 2009 Decision to Combat the Payment of Ransom to Terrorist Groups, Algeria categorically refused ransoms with the argument that these just keep kidnapping a lucrative business.

Moreover, on several occasions, European governments successfully pressured the Malian government into releasing suspects in the abductions, among them convicted AQIM members. When two Algerians and a Mauritanian were released in one such deal in 2010, Nouakchott and Algiers recalled their ambassadors from Bamako to protest.

Despite rhetorical claims for an inclusion of the North African states, the Sahel Strategy continues to leave Algeria out, though it is clear that without Algeria, and Libya alike, a lasting solution to the Sahel problem cannot be found. It is only the French government which is continuously deepening its cooperation with the Algerian government: during a visit of French defence minister Jean-Yves Le Drian in Algiers, end of May 2014, the military cooperation between both countries was renewed in the perspective of the ongoing Sahel instability.

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114 Lacher, supra n. 98, at 3.
116 cf. Lacher, supra n. 98, at 3.
117 cf. Lacher, supra n. 98, at 3.
119 Lacher, supra n. 98, at 3.
Conclusion

To sum up, this paper has stressed principles and challenges facing the EU comprehensive approach, particularly when it is deployed in instable and conflicting environments like the Sahel. On the one hand, the paper underlined the reasoning behind the EU action in the region. On the other hand, beyond the EU rhetoric, it emphasized how the holistic approach involved different configuration of actors according the domain concerned (humanitarian aid, development, conflict prevention, crisis management) which follow various logic of action, interests and strategies with diverse tools. Therefore to translate the EU rhetoric into practice they should learn to coordinate their action and to work closely together over the overall process. While the Treaty of Lisbon has further contributed to improve the synergy between actors, policies and instruments, notably with the creation of the EEAS, to respond to, and manage, crises; innovations did not allow so far overcoming conflictive power relations which continue to affect the EU’s global action.

Therefore, in the wake of the further deteriorations in the political, socio-economic and security-related situation in the Sahel region, and particularly the resurgence of tensions in northern Mali since May 2014, the EU security governance is facing internal and external challenges to achieve the Sahel Strategy goals and to respond efficiently to the multidimensional problems affecting the stability of the region. Although the Sahel region seems to be the appropriate environment to implement the EU comprehensive approach, results are meagre at best and neither the Foreign Affairs Council nor the European Council in late June 2014 raised the issue.

Besides the complex Sahel crisis situation, the limits facing the EU comprehensive approach will probably remain as long as the EU external action system as a structure of power will be downplayed. Moreover, the member states should agree on a clear political vision about what the EU wants to reach in its external relations, as well as the way to balance the different elements of EU global action in complementarity with their own foreign and security policies, and accordingly with a deep review of the EU institutional setting.