

Conflict and Unconstitutional Change of Government in Africa

Is there still a role for the EU-AU Partnership?

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KEY MESSAGES

1. In the Sahel region political instability is likely to continue. The EU and the AU need to navigate prudently by developing ad-hoc packages for each and integrated actions combining peace and security actions with economic and social measures.
2. Against this backdrop, the EU should try to keep the channels of communication open with the military governments. Today it seems reductive to think that such out-outs can be effective, which is why the Sahel represents a litmus test for Europe to measure its ability to act in the continent as a global power and in a multipolar context. Strategic patience is needed in the EU foreign and security policy in the region: if the Sahel collapses, the entire region will suffer consequences.
3. In order to renew the EU-AU relations, the African Union and its member states should first develop a political and economic strategy in order to better understand what they want from the EU. This is more important to develop a cohesive narrative within the Continent and, as a consequence, build a more equal relation with external powers
4. The AU and the EU should act together to push for the removal of economic sanctions on Niger that are straining the population, rather than the military junta. Most military coups tend to occur in poor countries, and reacting to them with economic sanctions, as in Mali and Niger, is unproductive. The military remains in power, and sanctions have not prevented other military coups from occurring. Rather than adopting sanctions, it would be necessary to address structural deficits such as democratic setbacks, insecurity, geopolitical challenges and weakness in human development indicators.

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INTRODUCTION

As of 2023, the Sahel crisis has persisted for 12 years and has taken on a new and concerning aspect. Terrorist assaults in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, alongside ongoing military coups, are perpetuating instability throughout the entire region. Additionally, the growing rivalry between global powers like Russia and the West has added complexity to regional dynamics. This complexity has notably intensified following the arrival of Wagner Group Russian mercenaries and the withdrawal of French military forces from Mali. French withdrawal and Wagner both put at test the relations between the EU and the Sahel governments, and highlighted the fact that the partnership between Europe and Africa needs to be conducted differently.

Coupled with the increasing presence of Russia in the Sahel, the EU faced challenges in implementing its foreign and security policy. Similar dynamics occurred in other parts of the African continent like the Central African Republic (CAR) and Ethiopia. Many countries of the Sahel, which remain crucial for the EU, identify themselves with the so-called "Global South" which especially after the Russian invasion of Ukraine asserted its foreign-policy autonomy and criticism towards the West.

Against this backdrop, the EU-African Union (AU) relations suffered, particularly in the field of peace and security. Mutual criticism, lack of trust and poor cooperation have characterised relations between the two institutions over the past two years. The aim of this paper is thus to analyse the challenges and opportunities for a renewed EU-AU partnership in a new geopolitical context. Rather than distrust and condemnation when confronted to crises – such as the military coups in the Sahel – both institutions should address the root causes of instability, promote good governance and economic development. The reactions that both the EU and the AU institutions have taken to the growing insecurity and military coups have proved ineffective in terms of both prevention and resolution. In order to promote greater stability on the continent, more sophisticated and long-term approaches must be at the core of EU and AU actions.

The first section of this report analyses what the EU-AU peace and security relationship is based on, and what the new obstacles to an effective and egalitarian partnership are. The second part focuses on the Sahel. The region contains most of the dynamics threatening the EU-Africa relationship, such as growing insecurity, military coups, weakness of the regional organisations and growing multipolar competition. The third part of the paper analyses the obstacles and opportunities for a renewed partnership not only in the peace and security domain but within financial institutions, trade and industry. A functional partnership in the area of peace and security cannot work without an equal partnership in the economic sphere.

The last part of the report is instead dedicated to a series of recommendations based on the analysis of the think-tanks involved in the project but also on the discussions of two closed-door meetings organised in Brussels and Dakar in October and November 2023. The meetings gathered some fifty European and African experts, diplomats and decision-makers. The authors of the report are grateful to all African and European partners who took part in these discussions.



Rather than distrust and condemnation when confronted to crises – such as the military coups in the Sahel – both the EU and the AU should address the root causes of instability, promote good governance and economic development. The reactions that both the EU and the AU institutions have taken to the growing insecurity and military coups have proved ineffective in terms of both prevention and resolution.



1 EU-AU PARTNERSHIP ON PEACE, SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE

1.1 A brief overview of the EU-AU Peace, Security and Governance relations

Peace and security has always been a key component of the European Union–African Union relations. As stated in the Joint Africa–EU Strategy (JAES 2007), the first area of cooperation between the two organisations is peace and security with the overall goal of enhancing dialogue and supporting peace operations in Africa. This cooperation was then reaffirmed during the AU-EU Summit in Abidjan in 2017 and enshrined in the 2018 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by the two institutions.¹ According to text, the EU and the AU aimed to achieve peace and security through an integrated approach to conflict and crises emphasising a better use of joint strategies and early warning systems, while also focusing on human security, fragility and human rights through a humanitarian-peace-development nexus approach.

The main instruments of cooperation have been the African Peace Facility (APF) and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), established by the AU as a long-term response to the continent's peace and security challenges and mostly funded by the EU. Since 2004, the EU has been the second largest financial partner for peace and security of the AU after the United Nations. Most of the funding went to the APF² (93%) for peace-support operations (the EU

supported 14 peace operations in 18 African countries), 6% for the institutional capacity-building of the AU Commission, and 1% to the Rapid Conflict Response Mechanism.

Although the EU-AU cooperation has not been without tensions in this field, the strategic objectives of the two institutions have often been aligned, as evidenced by the EU document "Toward a Comprehensive Strategy for Africa"³ and the AU initiative "Silencing the Guns".⁴ But in the last couple of years, the introduction of the European Peace Facility (EPF) and the increasing competition between external actors on the African continent soured the relationship between the two organisations.

The European Peace Facility was created by the EU in 2021 as an off-budget instrument with the aim to consolidate the Union's capacity to prevent conflicts, build peace and strengthen international security. Yet, within the EPF – which was created as a unilateral decision by the EU without consulting the AU – there is no longer a fund dedicated exclusively to Africa and, most importantly, the EU no longer has to go through the AU to finance national and sub-regional military operations in the continent. This weakened not only the EU-AU partnership, but also the AU's ability to lead peace and security measures in Africa. Before the creation of the EPF, the AU was the primary stakeholder and decision-maker in planning, authorising, coordinating and distributing European funds to African-led peace

1. Council of the European Union, *Memorandum of understanding between the Africa Union and the European Union on peace, security and governance*. Brussels, 22 May 2018, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8927-2018-INIT/en/pdf>.
2. The APF provided funding to the AU, African Regional Economic Communities and other coalitions to support peace operations.
3. European Commission, *Toward a comprehensive strategy for Africa*, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/fs_20_374
4. African Union, *African Union master roadmap of practical steps to silence the guns in Africa by year 2020*, 31 March 2020, <https://au.int/documents/20200331/au-master-road-map-practical-steps-silencing-guns-africa>.



support operations (Council of the European Union 2018). Furthermore, according to several AU member states the EPF represents Brussels' shift from political engagement in Africa to a militarised approach in defending its own interests closer to home.⁵

The EPF was created as a result of several factors among which the fact that the EU was disenchanted with the way the AU was using the money to finance its peacekeeping missions. A report by the European Court of Auditors in 2018 highlighted several contentious issues related to the financing of Africa's peace and security architecture, stressing the need to refocus the partnership. According to the report, the efficacy of APSA had been poor and faced several challenges such as a functional coordination between different bodies and institutions and the fact that there was no mechanism to enforce decisions.⁶ APSA and its operation depended on continued external support; and furthermore, the implementation of EU support was affected by delays, incoherent use of financing instruments and insufficient information on results achieved.

Yet, although the EU believed that the EPF would enable its capacity to act in the African continent, results have been timid. Widespread insecurity and political instability in the continent have limited the EU's capacity to enhance peace and security in Africa. In the Sahel region, since 2021 military coups and multipolar competition have reduced the EU's ability to support democracy, security and human rights and, especially, to liaise with local governments. Furthermore, the presence of the Wagner group (Russia paramilitary mercenaries) in Mali and other African countries such as the CAR, strained the relations between the EU and its member states with local governments, driving Brussels to suspend its military cooperation with local armies.⁷

In Ethiopia, the 2020–2022 war in Tigray strained the relations between the Ethiopian government and the EU, thereby reducing the opportunities for the EU and the

African Union to collaborate in the quest for peace. This was quite evident in the Tigray war peace process during which the Ethiopian government refused to grant the EU or any of its member states an observer status, unlike the United States, the UN and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.⁸



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1.2 The impact of the war in Ukraine on the EU-AU partnership

Although seemingly unrelated, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has introduced further intricacies to EU-AU relations. Following the forced curtailing of Ukrainian grain exports, the war led to rising food and fuel prices across the globe and interfered with Africa's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic turbulence. In this context, a unified African stance vis-à-vis the Russian invasion of Ukraine did not emerge. Some African nations, such as Uganda or Sudan, openly rallied with Russia, others such as Kenya were quick to condemn the Russian aggression, while yet others were keen to preserve a more open-ended approach in the quest for

5. Woldemichael, Shewit, *Africa should be better prepared for Europe's security funding shift*. Institute for Security Studies, 12 April 2022, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/africa-should-be-better-prepared-for-europes-security-funding-shift>.
6. European Court of Auditors, *The Africa peace and security architecture: Need to refocus EU support*, 2018, https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR18_20/SR_APSA_EN.pdf.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Ethiopia Observer, *The US, the UN participating as observers in the Ethiopia peace talks*, 26 October 2022, <https://www.ethiopiaobserver.com/?p=12030>.

exploiting new economic opportunities. While the short-term impacts of the war on Africa's economic development were overall negative, some countries, including Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania and Mozambique, saw new economic opportunities in the likely EU demand for non-Russian oil and gas.⁹

At the EU level the Russian invasion of Ukraine triggered a prompt and united response which also included military support allowed by the swift activation of the EPF. The EPF allocated a budget of 5.5 billion for 2021–2027, which was depleted quickly. By February 2023, 65% of the Fund (€3.6 billion) had been committed to Ukraine. While some allocations had also been made to African peace support operations (in April 2023 the EU allocated €600 million to the AU), the speed at which the funds were depleted for Ukraine was a point of concern for both African and European policy-makers, leading to the decision of the EU Council to top up the budget of the EPF to 7.9 billion in March 2023, with a further top-up in June 2023 which increased the EPF ceiling to 12 billion.¹⁰ As of May 2023, the EU had committed 5.6 billion EPF funds to Ukraine, much of which will be used to procure weapons and artillery.¹¹ The heightened commitment to the Ukrainian situation has in fact led to concerns about the potential depletion of resources for African peace and security. The intensifying conflict in Ukraine diverted critical resources particularly towards Eastern Europe, not only in the security but also in the humanitarian field, potentially marginalising regions like the Sahel or the Horn of Africa¹² at a time when they were facing not only instability but also a humanitarian crisis due to conflict and the unprecedented consequences of climate change.

The manifestation of the disrupted relationship became evident within the context of the 2022 UN General Assembly's attempts to pass resolutions denouncing Russian aggression. Twenty-five African nations either abstained or were absent from the vote while Eritrea voted against, when the General

Assembly sought to condemn Russia's incursion into Ukraine (ES-11/1). Some European diplomats and policy-makers perceived this as a noteworthy alignment of Africa with Russia, triggering a need to re-evaluate and recalibrate the existing partnership and security alliances with Africa. However, for the majority of African states, the outcome of the vote in the UN General Assembly did not mean an unconditional backing of Russia. The African voting pattern was, to varying extents, guided by interest-driven considerations, strategic calculations, historical reasoning or ideological standpoints. African countries wanted to manifest their independence from Western influence and diversify their range of international partnerships. What rarely figured in African states' justification was the humanitarian dimension of the conflict.¹³ Official statements made reference to the broader implications of the war for Africa (e.g., food security). The financial strains caused by the sanctions against Russia substantially narrowed the space for fragile countries to adopt a principled and value-based position with regard to war.¹⁴

Although both Russia and African partners have a vested interest in continuing their cooperation, how exactly this is going to work without the group's leadership remains an open question – especially in a moment when multipolar competition between Moscow and the United States in these African countries has intensified. Since early 2023, the US has engaged in a strategy to remove Wagner groups from Africa by offering its military training and increasing its humanitarian aid. However, although the results are still to come this would not seem to have immediate consequences for the EU-AU partnership given that the US agenda – especially in the Sahel region – does not always seem to be in line with the European one¹⁵. During the last military coup in Niger (July 2023), while the EU pushed for a military intervention by the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) to restore the Constitutional order

9. Moti, U. G., "Russia-Ukraine war and the future of Africa-European relations: Is Europe dividing Africa?", *European Journal of Theoretical and Applied Sciences*, 1(4): 211-221, <https://ejtas.com/index.php/journal/article/view/140>.

10. European Commission, *Timeline Peace Facility*, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-peace-facility/timeline-european-peace-facility/>

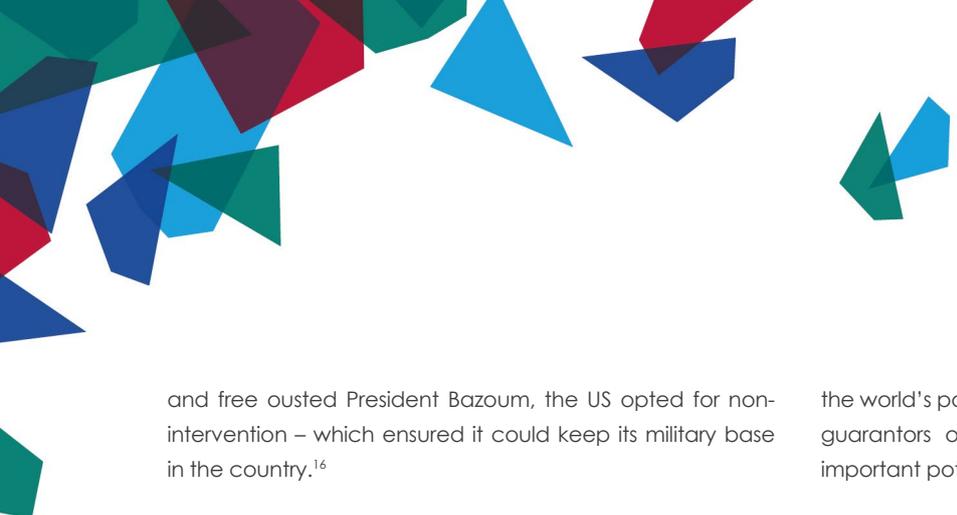
11. European Council of the European Union, *EU joint procurement of ammunition and missiles for Ukraine: Council agrees €1 billion support under the European Peace Facility*, May 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/05/05/eu-joint-procurement-of-ammunition-and-missiles-for-ukraine-council-agrees-1-billion-support-under-the-european-peace-facility/>

12. Shiferaw, L. T. and Hauck, V. The war in Ukraine: Implications for the Africa-Europe peace and security partnership. *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, 44(1): 93-110, <https://doi.org/10.35293/srsa.v44i1.4071>

13. Moti. Russia-Ukraine war. *Op cit*.

14. *Ibid*.

15. Sahel, F., *France abandoned by its Western allies*, Mondafrique, 8 January 2024, <https://mondafrique.com/a-la-une/sahel-la-france-abandonnee-par-ses-allies-occidentaux/>.



and free ousted President Bazoum, the US opted for non-intervention – which ensured it could keep its military base in the country.¹⁶

Furthermore, it remains to be seen to what extent EU Member States will remain willing to contribute troops and personnel to Common Security and Defence Policy military operations and civilian missions deployed in Africa. In the Sahel, the failure of a visible and lasting positive impact of the French intervention, the UN peacekeeping mission or the EU training mission, further contributes to a sense of disillusionment among both African leaders and citizens. Despite an additional EU commitment of €600 million to bolster the AU's peace and security efforts, African governments are increasingly trying to generate their own financial resources or additional support from other external partners beyond the EU.¹⁷

1.3 The new 'Global South'

All of this is happening in a time when several African countries are heavily criticising an unequal relationship with the West and, in particular, with the former colonial powers. This is particularly true in West and Central Africa, where several governments and swathes of the population are strongly criticising their relationship with France.¹⁸ (Caruso and Lenzi 2023). From a global perspective, this rejection of the West is part of a broader claim that is often heard in the so-called 'Global South', a group of non-Western countries including India, China and Brazil as well as African nations.

The ongoing competition, and the revision of the existing world order in general, offers opportunities for increased African agency. Some observers see "a neo-nonalignment driven by the pluralisation of partnerships to advance national political and economic agendas".¹⁹ If Africa were to get its act together it would enjoy significant voting power in the UN. It is also home to valuable natural resources necessary to achieve the global sustainability transformation, and constitutes an ever-growing market due to its spectacular demographics. By 2050 Africa will be home to a quarter of

the world's population. While these factors are by no means guarantors of prosperity, they ascertain the continent's important potential in the international system.

Crises provide opportunities, in particular for Africa as part of the 'new Global South', which no longer is primarily defined by poverty and instability. Clearly the distribution of power and influence in the global arena is shifting from traditional Western powers to new players in the Global South. For Africa it is crucial to become an integral part of the new centres of power, and to diversify the range of alliances. This new self-perception is paired with increasing anti-Western sentiments. However, such sentiments are not a new trend as frustrations against external interference and paternalism have often been at the centre of discussions in the relationship between the West and Africa. But what is worrisome for Europe is that these claims come at a moment when alternatives (i.e., Russia, Gulf States, China) seem more easily available.

However, in this context, notions of South-South cooperation and references to a new (non-dependent) Global South have become increasingly popular. During the 15th BRICS summit, which took place on August 23–24, 2023 in Johannesburg, the bloc declared its intention to expand its influence on global economic and political affairs. Commitments to become an active peace broker in the war between Russia and Ukraine and the suggestion to reduce their reliance on the dollar as currency of international exchange attest to this newfound self-assertion. Importantly, the bloc promotes a new vision of cooperation that is discernibly anti-Western and instead sees China and to a lesser extent Russia as their guiding powers.²⁰ Conversations revolved around the process of de-dollarisation, coupled with a growing emphasis on local currency trade paralleling the rising prominence of the renminbi as a reserve currency.²¹ The summit also led to an enlargement of the group with six new countries joining the alliance, two of which – Egypt and Ethiopia – are in Africa.²² Already in the current BRICS format, the countries involved represent about 40% of the world's population and a quarter of global GDP.

16. Ibidem.

17. African Union, *Africa's financial self-reliance is not self-isolation, but a commitment to base development on own resources: Ministers of Finance*, 22 June 2022, <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20220622/africas-financial-self-reliance-not-self-isolation-commitment-base>.

18. Caruso, F., Lenzi, F. *The Sahel Region: A Litmus Test for Eu–Africa Relations in a Changing Global Order*, Policy Brief, FEPS, June 2023, https://www.ici.it/sites/default/files/feeps_ps_9782931233177.pdf.

19. Ibid., p. 4

20. Harding, A., *Brics summit: How China's and Russia's clout is growing in Africa*, BBC, August 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-66562999>.

21. Gbadamosi, N., *Why the BRICS aren't crumbling in Africa*, Foreign Policy, August 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/08/23/brics-ukraine-russia-africa-summit-ramaphosa/>.

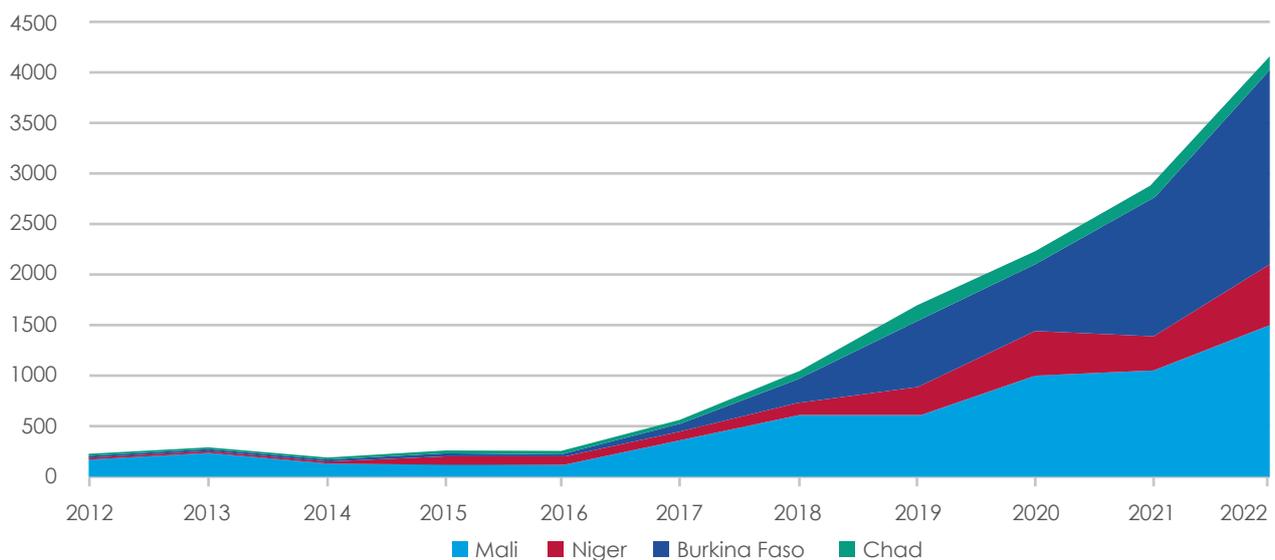
22. Chiappa, C., *6 new countries to join BRICS*, Politico, August 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/brics-summit-south-africa-six-new-countries-join-alliance/>.

2 THE ROLE OF THE EU-AU PARTNERSHIP IN THE SAHEL REGION

2.1 Growing insecurity, extremism and multipolar competition

In recent years, the region that has most challenged the EU-AU relationship has been the Sahel because of its insecurity and political instability. In 2023, the Sahel crisis entered its second year. Terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger and successive military coups continue to spread instability across the whole region.

Out of the five main pockets or regions of instability in the continent (Lake Chad Basin, the Sahel, North Africa, Somalia and Mozambique), the Sahel has experienced the most important escalation of violence linked to jihadi groups over the past years.²³ In 2007, terrorism-related deaths in the Sahel represented 1% of such deaths globally, compared to 43% in 2022.²⁴ In fact, fatalities due to jihadi violence in the region have almost tripled since 2021.²⁵



Graph 1. Number of violent events in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Niger. Source: ACLED (Curated Data – ACLED).

23. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *Mapping disinformation in Africa*, April 2023, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/mapping-disinformation-in-africa>.

24. Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global terrorism index 2023: Measuring the impact of terrorism*, June 2023, <http://visionofhumanity.org/resources>.

25. Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *Mapping disinformation in Africa*, Op. cit.



This degradation of the security situation in the Sahel has taken place despite numerous counterterrorist initiatives at national, regional and international level. Regional efforts include the Accra Initiative, the ECOWAS Standby Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force, as well as the G5 Sahel and its Joint Task Force, - although the latter has faced an institutional crisis following Mali and Niger's withdrawal. International counterterrorist initiatives have had a negative impact on EU–African relations, as some EU member states, especially France, have been spearheading these efforts. Europe present-day military engagement began in 2013. At the request of the then government of Mali, France launched a military operation to prevent insurgents and jihadists from advancing on Bamako. Launched under the name Operation Serval, the mission soon transformed into a broader counterterrorism operation, and was accordingly renamed Operation Barkhane in the following year. Simultaneously, the presence of French Special Forces in Burkina Faso was made public in 2013.²⁶ Meanwhile, the EU launched two civilian and one military missions: EUCAP Niger (2012), EUCAP Mali (2015) and EUTM Mali (2013), respectively. In an attempt to turn Barkhane into a European effort, the Takuba Task force was then created in 2020. Since 2021, the EU's strategy in the Sahel has increasingly focused on rebuilding governance structures enabling a return of the state, thus shifting away from a purely military approach.²⁷

In last year's EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, the Sahel was identified as a region of concern, requiring enhanced political dialogue and operational engagement with regional and pan-African groupings such as ECOWAS and the AU.²⁸ Additionally, the objectives of the 2021 EU Integrated Strategy²⁹ – focusing on state governance through cooperation with local governments and support for the military – could come across as overambitious. The EU has limited capabilities to foster democracy, security and human rights in the region, particularly in a context of extreme fragility of the institutional architecture.

The degradation of the security situation in the Sahel has taken place despite numerous counterterrorist initiatives at national, regional and international level. Regional efforts include the Accra Initiative, the ECOWAS Standby Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force, as well as the G5 Sahel and its Joint Task Force.



Despite considerable military deployment,³⁰ limited medium- and long-term results were achieved, as evidenced by the rise and expansion of jihadi violence in the region.³¹ This, in combination with accusations of neo-colonialism, fuelled frustration among the population in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and ultimately led to the outright rejection of French (and, more generally, European or multilateral) military presence in the countries. This process culminated in the discontinuation of the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the EU's Task Force Takouba and France's operations Barkhane and Sabre.

2.2 Dissatisfaction with the outcomes of democracy and transition to military rule in the Sahel

Security deterioration and multipolar competition went hand in hand with a strong trend of military coups in Africa: since 2020, there have been two successful military coups in Mali (2020 and

26. Bensimon, C., Vincent, E., and Le Cam, M. *Opération « Sabre » au Burkina Faso : d'une arrivée discrète à une fin amère*, Le Monde, February 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrrique/article/2023/02/21/operation-sabre-au-burkina-faso-d-une-arrivee-discrete-a-une-fin-amere_6162704_3212.html.

27. European Parliament Research Service, *New EU strategic priorities for the Sahel*, Briefing, 2021, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/696161/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)696161_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/696161/EPRS_BRI(2021)696161_EN.pdf).

28. Council of the European Union, *A strategic compass for security and defence for a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security*, 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/21/a-strategic-compass-for-a-stronger-eu-security-and-defence-in-the-next-decade/>.

29. Council of the European Union, *The European Union's integrated strategy in the Sahel: Council conclusions*, 16 April 2021, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7723-2021-INIT/en/pdf>.

30. European Commission, *EU announces €194 million additional support to the Sahel*, March 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_768.

2021), one in Guinée (2021), two in Burkina Faso (January and September 2022) and one in Niger (July 2023). Additionally, attempted military coups have taken place in Guinée Bissau and Gambia in 2022, as well as a successful one in Gabon in August 2023. Although the triggering factors of these coups differ from country to country, there is some sort of contagion effect.³² However, the regional coup domino effect is also the outcome of macro-trends characterising the Sahel region in particular: the failure of economic and social development; a high rate of youth unemployment; the absence of the State in vast part of the national territories; the existence of politicised national armies; and a small affiliation to political parties.³³

There are also common denominators in the speeches of the military juntas that took power in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger: the exploitation of unresolved historical grievances with France and the West, as well as the failure of the previous democratically elected government to tackle the dramatic security situation.³⁴ The proliferation of coups has normalised unconstitutional changes of government in the eyes of public opinion that is frustrated about the poor levels of governance and the worsening security situation under civilian leadership. Disinformation campaigns, some sponsored by Russia, have amplified pre-existing polarisation, anti-Western narratives and distrust in State institutions.³⁵ This results in undemocratic governments being perceived as an acceptable (or even a desirable) option³⁶: in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinée Conakry and Niger, coup leaders were received by cheering crowds and still enjoy great popularity, particularly among youth.

Yet, the EU's reaction to military coups and unconstitutional changes in the region has varied depending on the specific country involved. Unlike in Mali and Niger, the EU's reaction to Burkina military coups has been more cautious, keeping open the channels of communication with the government of coup leader Ibrahim Traoré despite his harsh criticism of

France and the West in general. Meanwhile, in Chad where the son of former President Idris Déby seized power after the violent death of his father, the EU pledged support to the new president, giving the impression of applying double standards in line with its own interests. Chad is perceived by Europeans as a key country in guaranteeing stability of the Sahel thanks to its functioning army and its ability to prevent the terrorist threat from penetrating too deeply, and thus expanding. The double-standard approach has certainly deteriorated relations between several African countries and the European Union – often accused not only of adopting an inconsistent approach but also of being influenced by France's foreign and security policy, notably during Paris EU presidency.

Because of this, but also because of ineffective communication, the EU has been also perceived in the region as a colonial power even though many of its member states do not have a colonial past.³⁷ At a time when France's colonial history has been strongly criticised in West Africa, the EU has failed to communicate that in reality only a minority of its member states were ever colonial powers. In this perspective, the EU has to rethink its engagement in the African continent and the Sahel represents a litmus test in EU-Africa relations considering that coups are likely to continue, especially in West Africa.³⁸

2.3 The impact of regional dynamics on multilateralism and the EU-AU partnership

The political instability in the region has also called into question the ability of regional actors and institutions, to prevent and resolve conflicts and above all to be seen as a legitimate institution. The withdrawal of Burkina Faso and Mali from the G5 Sahel³⁹ poses further challenges to security not only for themselves but also for their neighbouring countries, such as Niger and Chad, considering the fact that they share the Liptako-Gourma regional border which is experiencing the

31. European Parliament Research Service. *New EU strategic priorities for the Sahel*. *Op. cit.*

32. UNDP-ETT Conference at the Gorée Institute, 14-15 November 2023. See also: Przeworski, A., Álvarez, M., Cheibub, J. A., and Limongi, F., Las condiciones económicas e institucionales de la durabilidad de las democracias. *La Política*, 2(2): 89-108, 1996.

33. UNDP-ETT Conference at the Gorée Institute. *Op. cit.*

34. Even if, in the case of Niger, political violence had decreased by 39% in the six months prior to the coup, when compared to the last half of 2022 (ACLED, 2023).

35. Africa Center for Strategic Studies. *Mapping disinformation in Africa*. *Op. cit.*

36. International Crisis Group. *The attempted coup in Niger: Avoiding armed conflict, 2023*, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/tentative-de-coup-detat-au-niger-eviter-la-confrontation-armee>

37. UNDP-ETT Conference at the Gorée Institute. *Op. cit.*

38. *Ibid.*

39. The Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) was founded in 2014 as a regional, intergovernmental organization. It provides an institutional framework to promote development and security within its five member countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.



emergence of armed groups and notably violent extremists. Furthermore, military governments of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso signed the Liptako-Gourma charter in September 2023, establishing a new military and economic alliance.⁴⁰ Although it is not known whether this alliance will work, the new chart challenges the survival of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as it created major divisions in the West African regional grouping.⁴¹ With no surprise, Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali announced their withdrawal from the regional bloc in January 2024

Tensions within the regional bloc arose in July 2023, when soldiers in July overthrew Niger President Mohamed Bazoum. ECOWAS has threatened to intervene militarily in Niger over the coup but Mali and Burkina Faso quickly responded by saying that any such operation would be deemed a “declaration of war” against them. The new charter binds the signatories to assist one another – including militarily – in the event of an attack on any one of them.

ECOWAS military intervention was received with mixed reactions among its member States and the African Union, even if the deployment was unlikely due to both logistical and political reasons such as the sheer size of Niger, the reaction of Mali and Burkina Faso, as well as the general reluctance to apply coercive measures in African continental multilateralism.⁴² The disastrous impact of NATO’s military intervention in Libya is also an active memory among leaders and citizens alike in Africa – mostly notably in West Africa. The possibility of military intervention averted, ECOWAS adopted thoughtful economic sanctions against Niger by suspending all commercial transactions with Niamey, freezing its state assets in the regional central bank, and suspending all financial assistance with regional development banks. Yet, economic sanctions have been heavily criticised by the military junta governments, civil society representatives at the regional level and international NGOs. The common feeling is that economic sanctions only weaken the population – as has already happened with those imposed on Mali after the second coup – and not the political leaders.⁴³

ECOWAS sanctions are also perceived as driven by interests of a few heads of state and pressure from the West, especially France. This sentiment was further exacerbated by the possible threat of an ECOWAS military intervention, with support from France or the EU – which are also held responsible for the military action in Libya and the regional instability it has created to date.

The fragility of ECOWAS is also problematic for the EU capacity to act in the region as a global power implementing peace and security. In the 2021 EU Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, Brussels based much of its action on the capacity of regional organisations to act in conflict prevention and resolution.

However, the structure of ECOWAS, with officials holding national-government positions, contributes to its ineffectiveness. This setup prioritizes national interests over the principles outlined in its protocols.⁴⁴ In addition to this, to military intervene, ECOWAS needs a mandate from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the endorsement of the African Union and sometimes the validation of member countries’ state institutions (senate or national assembly). Furthermore, to deal with complex political and security threats, Regional Economic Communities need technical and financial resources and autonomy, which they do not really have, thus limiting their potential for intervention.

ECOWAS’s greatest handicap remains the financial aspect. All ECOWAS missions have been financed by external funds from partners, including the EU. Even for its operations, the organisation’s own funds, derived from member states’ subscriptions, are insufficient. The lack of coherent positions combined with institutional and financial weaknesses represents a real challenge for ECOWAS and the African Peace and Security Architecture in itself. Regarding the United Nations peacekeeping missions, after the MINUSMA withdrawal from Mali (September 2023) there will be no more peacekeeping missions in the ECOWAS zone from 2024 onwards, and ECOWAS will have to find its own way to maintain peace and stability in the sub-region.

40. Le Monde, *Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger sign mutual defense pact*, 16 September 2023,

https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/09/16/mali-burkina-faso-and-niger-sign-mutual-defense-pact_6136615_4.html

41. The bloc is constituted by Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sénégal and Togo. The aim of the organization, created in 1975 is to promote cooperation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa in order to raise the living standards of its peoples, and to maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations-among Member States and contribute to the progress and development of the African continent.

42. UNDP-ETT Conference at the Gorée Institute. *Op. cit.*

43. *Ibid.*

44. Mills, L., *The Effectiveness of ECOWAS in Mitigating Coups in West Africa*, the IPI African Junior Professionals Fellowship Program, April 2022, <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Leonie-Mills-Effectiveness-of-ECOWAS.pdf>



3 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE EU-AU PARTNERSHIP COOPERATION

3.1 Transforming International Multilateral Institutions: EU-Africa Collaboration for Change

In light of global geopolitical competition and insecurity, there is a growing realisation in Europe that the partnership with Africa needs to be conducted differently, and not only in the peace and security field. The differences in the management of the pandemic and access to vaccines, international reaction to the War in Ukraine, and more recently the war in Gaza – all are exposing the difference between the 'West' and the 'rest' whereby the 'rest' hold grievances against the current economic and security governance system. Multilateral institutions such as the UN, which are the primary instruments of global governance, need to be more representative and effective in dealing with the various changes that have occurred since World War II when they were established. International financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank also come short of meeting the specific needs of developing countries, and favour the developed countries that provide their economic and political backing. This has renewed the call for UNSC reform including the permanent representation of Africa in the Security Council. Given the highly political nature of the debate on reforming and enlarging the UNSC, this ambition may not be realised in the shorter term. In this

perspective, the EU should endorse the reform of multilateral institutions – especially in the financial system. In addition to this, COVID-19 and subsequent economic downturns worldwide and in Africa have put debt management back on the global agenda. Following the pandemic, African countries were negotiating debt restrictions with the Paris Club and had argued for more Special Drawing Rights (SDR) allocations. Several African governments struggled to finance the pandemic and service their debts, endangering their credit rating.⁴⁵ Furthermore, this particular crisis has highlighted the fact that the Sahel region faces a combination of food, socio-economic, climatic, environmental, security and governance vulnerabilities that are driven by structural factors, including the demographic shift. The region's population is set to increase by 250 million over the next 20 years for a total of 700 million people, most of them young. These irreversible changes are putting the region's food systems in crisis and put even more strain on the economic and social fabric of the region which, not being industrialised, is unable to absorb young people into the labour market. Furthermore, security crises and violence, as well as climate change, are exacerbating the humanitarian crisis by straining state budgets and jeopardising the development gains of recent decades. The financial crisis facing many of these countries has been further exacerbated by the war in Ukraine and the subsequent global rise in the cost of food and oil.

45. United Nations, Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, *Africa spends more on debt servicing than health care, Secretary-General tells high-level policy dialogue, urging financing, investment in continent*, SG/SM/21809, 24 May 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21809.doc.htm>. See also: Chandler, Ben, *Covid-19 & African debt: Further distress or the beginning of a new paradigm?*, Mo Ibrahim Foundation, June 2020, <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2020-06/debt-distress-covid19.pdf>



The differences in the management of the pandemic and access to vaccines, international reaction to the War in Ukraine, and more recently the war in Gaza – all are exposing the difference between the ‘West’ and the ‘rest’ whereby the ‘rest’ hold grievances against the current economic and security governance system.



These multiple crises, including the global climate crisis, have given rise to a new call to reform the international financial architecture to address developing countries' debt problem, their access to capital markets and the high cost of borrowing for African countries. In this regard, the demands of African countries include making low-interest funds available to developing countries over a more extended period to finance the Sustainable Development Goals, endowing the IMF Poverty Reduction Fund with additional finance, devising new mechanisms for debt management and the permanent membership of the AU in the G20.⁴⁶

These demands require global concerted action and are not within the sole remit of the EU or its member states. The AU's formal membership in the G20 has already been

achieved since September 2023. It was a request the EU and its member states supported. However, Europe and Africa should support the creation of 'green debts' in order to address debt distress.⁴⁷ They should also expedite the re-channelling of SDR allocations from European countries to African countries, following the commitment of the Netherlands, Germany and Spain. Moreover, fighting illicit financial flows responsible for a loss of more than 80 billion dollars from Africa, and helping address biases in Africa's credit rating⁴⁸ and the high cost of borrowing for African countries would be other avenues to unlock finance for Africa's development. On the one hand, these types of changes in the EU-AU partnership are more costly, but on the other hand they are more fundamentally transformative than development aid. Such moves would also signal a new chapter in the EU-Africa partnership.

3.2 Sahel Development: EU-Africa Cooperation and Economic Prospects

In the Sahel, where climate vulnerability is high and economic development is essential to stabilising the region, access to capital, including development finance, will be essential. A decade of a highly securitised approach to counterterrorism and stability in the Sahel (and elsewhere) has shown that holistic approaches beyond maintaining state/regime security are needed. In the short term, the political fragility of countries where coups have taken place and their shaky relationship with 'the West' may discourage the continuation of development aid. Yet, in light of the expected humanitarian crisis and the risk of expansion of jihadi groups, European and African stakeholders should focus on the long term and devise ways of supporting economic and human development in Sahelian countries – while pursuing a cautious and even stern relationship with the military regimes. Furthermore, a trade and investment partnership, rather than an aid-based relationship, has been an aspirational goal of the EU and African countries in the past decade.

46. Leary, M., *African finance ministers demand action on global financial architecture reform*. Africa Center for Economic Transformation, April 2023, <https://acelforafrica.org/news-and-media/press-releases/african-finance-ministers-demand-action-on-global-financial-architecture-reform/>

47. Fattibene, D. (ed.), *Europe-Africa relations in a multi-crises world: Turning the page after COVID-19, the EU-AU Summit and the war against Ukraine*, ETG, January 2023, https://ettg.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/ETG-Report_Europe-%E2%80%93-Africa-relations-in-a-multi-crises-world.pdf

48. Fofak, H., *The ruinous price for Africa of pernicious 'perception premiums'*. October 2021. Africa Growth Initiative. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/21.10.07_Perception-premiums.pdf; The Economist. African countries say credit rating agencies are biased against them. May 2023, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2023/05/25/african-governments-say-credit-rating-agencies-are-biased-against-them>

While the EU provides various packages to African countries through preferential trade agreements through Economic Partner Agreements, low or free tariffs and duty access to specific markets, the EU's trade relationship with Africa tends to be concentrated in North Africa. Moreover, non-tariff barriers such as high quality and regulatory standards, certification requirements (on sustainability or due diligence) and European subsidies in specific sectors like agriculture continue to limit Africa's access to the EU market, and this is especially true for small and medium enterprises. Recent European policies, such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), primarily focused on countering carbon leakages from the EU's external trade engagement, are also reported to have negative economic consequences for developing countries. It is estimated that Africa could lose around 25 billion dollars annually⁴⁹ because of this mechanism, particularly affecting African countries that export iron, steel, cement and aluminium to Europe.⁵⁰



In light of the expected humanitarian crisis and the risk of expansion of jihadi groups, European and African stakeholders should focus on the long term and devise ways of supporting economic and human development in Sahelian countries – while pursuing a cautious and even stern relationship with the military regimes.



The EU and its member states will undoubtedly find it politically challenging to make concessions related to subsidies and access to the European agricultural market or the EU's sustainability objectives and green transition plans. However, there is still room to support Africa's economic transformation and boost EU-Africa economic partnership by supporting African producers and especially SMEs to overcome the technical barriers to entry into the European market, supporting African value chains and manufacturing to ensure African countries can transition from exporting commodities and raw materials to processing, supporting skills development in Africa related to both the service and manufacturing sectors.⁵¹ Progress in these areas would also boost intra-Africa trade through the Africa Continental Free Trade Area.

Through the EIB, the EU has put in place mechanisms to support private sector investment in Africa by providing risk guarantees. These are essential incentives to draw FDI to African markets and can aid Africa's industrialisation agenda. But there are quite a few gaps that need to be filled to ensure that FDI from Europe to Africa goes to sub-Saharan African countries and low-income countries (as opposed to being concentrated on middle-income countries in North Africa), that the (high) volume of money the EIB and other multilateral development banks avail for private sector development match the reality and (low) absorption capacity of private sector needs in African countries, and that these funds go into supporting the generation of bankable projects as well.⁵²

For their part, African countries should contribute with political and financial capital to manage the infrastructure and the security and rule of law gap that is a structural barrier to industrialisation and trade. The EU's development cooperation with African countries can help support institutional and regulatory reforms related to ease of business and the rule of law. The EU's recent flagship project Global Gateway, which aims to fund major infrastructure projects abroad, including in

49. London School of Economics. *Africa could lose up to \$25 billion per annum as a direct result of the EU's CBAM*, May 2023, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/News/Latest-news-from-LSE/2023/e-May-2023/Africa-could-lose-up-to-25-billion-per-annum-as-a-direct-result-of-the-EUs-CBAM>

50. *Ibid.*

51. Ahairwe, P., Tadesse Shiferaw, L., and Bilal, S., *Financing fragile contexts: What can development finance institutions do better?* May 2023, <https://ecdpm.org/work/financing-fragile-contexts-what-can-development-finance-institutions-do-better>.

52. *Ibid.*



Africa, can be a valuable tool to augment infrastructure development in Africa. However, these initiatives and development agendas can only succeed if the primary drive and leadership come from African countries.

3.3 Addressing Double Standards and Promoting Sustainable Cooperation

Finally, the war in Ukraine and the EU's subsequent desire to reduce reliance on Russian gas and energy has been an incentive for the diversification of energy sources to Africa. While several African countries consider Europe's interest in natural gas as an economic opportunity, they also stress the contradiction in Europe's appetite for natural gas in the context of war, after having called repeatedly for stopping investments in natural gas in Africa because of the damaging effects on climate change. These European double standards have been perceived in Africa and elsewhere in the world as hypocritical and incoherent. In addition to natural gas, hydrogen was initially seen as an alternative energy source that some African countries could export to Europe. In 2022, Morocco, Egypt, Algeria and Namibia secured agreements to export hydrogen to Europe. However, various considerations (mobility of produced hydrogen, price competitiveness, cost efficiency) cast doubt on the feasibility of hydrogen export from Africa to Europe and how central this would be in the EU-Africa energy partnership.

While energy and critical raw materials needed for green energy transition open opportunities for cooperation between Europe and Africa, such collaboration should be pursued without undermining Africa's energy and industrialisation needs. African countries should carefully consider the nature of their partnership with interested European countries to ensure that the structural trade imbalances that have left Africa at the bottom of the industrial supply chain are addressed upfront. This means that African states should ensure that they can process some of the raw materials they export to create value added. The policy direction recently followed by Ghana,

Namibia and Mozambique to export lithium in semi-processed (and not raw) form is a positive step.⁵³ Other countries should follow suit on lithium and other minerals such as cobalt and graphite. Moreover, they should export energy, with due consideration to the energy needs of their population and without overlooking that energy is the basis of the industrial policies many African countries have put in place. Taking a long-term and coherent perspective to economic development is essential.



While energy and critical raw materials needed for green energy transition open opportunities for cooperation between Europe and Africa, such collaboration should be pursued without undermining Africa's energy and industrialisation needs. New partnerships should ensure that the structural trade imbalances that have left Africa at the bottom of the industrial supply chain are addressed upfront.



53. Mining.com, *Africa gears up to keep more of the profits from lithium boom*, February 2023, <https://www.mining.com/web/africa-gears-up-to-keep-more-of-the-profits-from-lithium-boom/>



4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the long-standing relationship between the EU and AU in the field of peace and security, regional and global dynamics have called into question the relationship between the two institutions. Meetings held in Brussels and Dakar, along with a group of European and African experts, have highlighted that especially in the Sahel, the political and security context is extremely complex. Military coups, the weakness of multilateral regional institutions, and multipolar competition have diminished the capacity to prevent and reduce conflicts, and at the same time have strained the relationship between the EU and Africa. In this context,

in order to address the crisis in the Sahel, it is certainly necessary to reconsider the approach that both the EU and the AU have taken to respond to military coups and escalating insecurity, by starting to develop a more sophisticated strategy. This is necessary especially because there is a belief that such political instability and humanitarian crisis will continue to characterise the region for several years. In this perspective, both the EU and the AU need to navigate prudently by developing ad-hoc packages for each and integrated actions combining peace and security actions with economic and social measures.

More specifically, the EU should:

KEEP THE POLITICAL DIALOGUE OPEN WITH SAHELIAN MILITARY JUNTAS

Most of the time, the EU has reacted to military coups by condemning and suspending military cooperation with the military junta. This has come at a time when these countries are facing an exponential growth in the terrorist threat combined with a structural weakness of local armies in ensuring greater stability for the country. Faced with the European reaction, the military governments have further accentuated their anti-Western posture by weaving – still unclear – relations with Russia.

Against this backdrop, the EU should try to keep the channels of communication open with the military governments. Beyond promises of limited transitions, these juntas will most likely last longer than stated. Furthermore, although they harshly criticise the West and have forged relations with other partners (e.g., Russia or China), they would still appear not to have replaced their model of governance with an alternative to the

democratic one. As the 2023 Mali Constitution demonstrates, they often use the instruments of democracy to legitimise their own power: in the charter, the word 'participatory democracy' is mentioned four times.⁵³ This expresses the possibility that there is still a space for Europe to share its values with the region.

Third, dialogue should foster the restoration of confidence between Europe and several African countries. Many Sahelian governments criticise the West and in particular Europe for putting them in a framework of choice: either with us or with Russia. Today it seems reductive to think that such out-outs can be effective, which is why the Sahel represents a litmus test for Europe to measure its ability to act in the continent as a global power and in a multipolar context. Strategic patience is needed in the EU foreign and security policy in the region: if the Sahel collapses, the entire region will suffer consequences.

ENGAGE WITH NON-STATE ACTORS, AVOID DOUBLE-STANDARD APPROACHES AND IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

The EU should also continue to engage with non-state actors – in particular civil society, religious leaders and political party leaders. This would improve the EU's capacity to understand the context in which it operates through an effective analysis of power dynamics and popular demands. Lasting stability and peace cannot only be without a restructuring of social cohesion between institutions and non-state actors. With this in mind, the EU should continue its contribution to mediation and dialogue by dedicating funds to help representatives of civil society, political parties and religious platforms with capacity- building activities.

In order to be considered a long-standing partner, the EU should act consistently and without double standards – especially if it wants to promote the protection of human rights in the region. The double-standard approach should be avoided not only in the Sahel region but worldwide. The European Union must also improve its external communication in the Sahel through concrete actions. One of these could for instance include an internal restructuring of its deployed staff in the region showing the plurality of the 27 Member States that make up the EU. Today there is a need to avoid the perception in West Africa that the EU is an 'extension' of France and to explain that most of the EU member states never have had a colonial past in Africa.

KEEP ITS PROMISES AND BE BOLD

Sahel states need transparent relations with the EU. There is no need for the EU to hide its interest – as for instance towards natural resources – and pretend to be in the Sahel just to defend democracy and human rights in the region. In this context, the EU should not make ambitious promises that cannot be kept or that can be kept only in part, such as the EPF or the Global Gateway. It should instead concentrate

on existing agreements with Africa and try to improve them – while avoiding the duplication of initiatives. In addition, the EU could act as an important partner to support African aspirations in reforming the multilateral system – especially within the United Nation Security Council, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. There is a role for the EU in shifting the overall balance.

54. Official Journal of the Republic of Mali, *Decree No. 2023-0401/Pt-Rm Of 22 July 2023 Promulgating the Constitution*, 22 July 2023, <https://sgg-mali.ml/JO/2023/mali-jo-2023-13-sp-2.pdf>.

DEVELOP A POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL STRATEGY TOWARDS THE EU

In order to renew the EU-AU relations, the African Union and its member states should first develop a political and economic strategy in order to better understand what they want from the EU. This is more important to develop a cohesive narrative within the Continent and, as a consequence, build a more equal relation with external powers. In this perspective, African

countries should develop a clear African strategy on the partnership that clearly spells out expectations and priorities vis-à-vis the EU, while the AU should refuse to sign agreements that are not in the interest of Africa. In its policy, the AU must put in place an appropriate legal arsenal to control foreign investment.

SUPPORT THE RESTORE OF REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS

The African Union and Regional Economic Communities should guarantee a stronger coordination between themselves and coherence in their response to conflict and constitutional crisis. The latest military coups have demonstrated the incapacity of the regional organisations to deter potential putsches – despite its commitment to support good governance, the rule of law and sustainable development for peace and conflict prevention. Furthermore, ECOWAS incoherence in its response to coups led local governments and swathes of the population to claim that the organisation had been manipulated by France, and that it defends the interests of a few heads of state rather than the population at large.

One of the reasons for the ineffectiveness of ECOWAS lies precisely in its structure, which includes officials who are currently serving in national-government positions. This element makes the organisation more susceptible to national interests to the detriment of the principles stated in its protocols. African States should also invest their own financial resources in the regional institutions so as to avoid over-dependence on external partners.

Furthermore, the African Union should work to reduce tensions within ECOWAS in order to enhance the region's cooperation and economic integration. In this perspective the AU and the EU should act together to push for the removal of economic sanctions on Niger that are straining the population, rather than the military junta. Most military coups tend to occur in poor countries, and reacting to them with economic sanctions, as in Mali and Niger, is unproductive. The military remain in power, and sanctions have not prevented other military coups from occurring.

Rather than adopting sanctions, it would be necessary to address structural deficits such as democratic setbacks, insecurity, geopolitical challenges and weakness in human development indicators. The African Union should invite and support international and regional actors to better manage transitions. Rather than expecting short transitions, outcomes can be optimised by looking beyond elections to promote inclusive transition processes.

IMPROVE AND PROTECT GOOD GOVERNANCE

The wave of military coups has demonstrated the need to foster the institutionalisation of political power. African experts consider the military coups to have demonstrated that the Sahel seems to be in the hands of political leaders rather than in the institutions. There is therefore a necessity to rethink democracy in Africa by fostering the restoration of the rule

of law; by counterbalancing powers reducing excessive presidential powers in African constitutions; appointing more women and younger generations in leading positions and opening up civil space. African institutions should also adopt mechanisms that would be able to guarantee a transparent election process.

INVEST IN AN INCLUSIVE INDUSTRIALISATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

There is also the need to support development by investing in African transformative industrialisation and agriculture. The overall population of the Sahel region is set to increase by 250 million over the next 20 years for a total of 700 million people, most of them young. In this perspective, local governments and African institutions need to consider youth as an asset to foster industrialization and agriculture.

Agriculture should foster the production of indigenous products – such as millet – and female empowerment. Access to land is still very difficult for women. In this perspective the AU should not only foster changes in legislation but also support governments in placing much greater emphasis on deconstructing social norms in order to reduce inequalities.

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