

## Avant la lettre? The EU's comprehensive approach (to crises) in the Sahel

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### Key messages

The Comprehensive Approach is already being applied to a significant extent in the Sahel: in that sense what already works should be seen as good practice

Where there is a lack of comprehensiveness in the EU's response to the Sahel it is because of more structural shortcomings in EU's external action as well as external variables

The roles of the double hatted High Representative / Vice President Mogherini and Development Commissioner Mimica in endorsing a new and demanding action plan for the Sahel strategy will be instrumental to ensure coherence

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### Introduction

"We don't need a new European security strategy: we have the comprehensive approach" these words were used by former High Representative Catherine Ashton when she addressed think tanks' concerns and questions at the 2013 EUISS annual conference. There was still hope that the document then in the making would bring a number of solutions to EU's inconsistencies' problems primarily in responding to crises and conflict situations.

The EU is not the only international agent faced by the question of comprehensiveness as a huge body of literature shows.<sup>2</sup> Given that the EU is both a development agency and – perhaps to a lesser extent – a security provider, comprehensiveness consists of maximising the use of the EU toolbox in conflict and crisis contexts. Recent efforts of EU institutions to this end have led to the publication, in December 2013, of a Communication on "The EU's Comprehensive Approach to external conflict and crises", subsequently welcomed by the Council in its Conclusions of May 2014.<sup>3</sup> The idea of "comprehensive approach" (CA) is

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<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank all those who provided useful feedback on an earlier draft of this note, in addition to ECDPM colleagues Andrew Sherriff and Volker Hauck.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance, Metcalfe V., Haysom S. & Trends S.G., *Trends and challenges in humanitarian civil military coordination. A review of the literature. HPG Working Paper*. May 2012. <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/7679.pdf>. For an overview of EU-related challenges see for instance Furness, 2014. *Lets Get Comprehensive: The EU's Engagement with Fragile and Conflict Affected Countries* (Discussion Paper 5/14), German Development Institute; ADE (with ECDPM), 2011. *Evaluation of EC Support to Conflict Prevention and Peace Building 2001-2010*, Joint Evaluation Unit of the European Commission, and Hauck, V. & Rocca, C. *2014 Gaps between Comprehensive Approaches of the EU and the EU member states – A Scoping Study*, ECDPM & Knowledge Platform for Security & Rule of Law, the Hague.

<sup>3</sup> EEAS-EC Communication "The EU's Comprehensive Approach to external conflict and crises", 11 December 2013, [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131211\\_03\\_en.pdf](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131211_03_en.pdf) and Council Conclusions on the EU's Comprehensive Approach, 12 May 2014, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/142552.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/142552.pdf)

not that new<sup>4</sup> and the document does not really clarify the concept of “comprehensive approach”, but it is nevertheless a first milestone attempting to set out a joint understanding by the EC and EEAS.<sup>5</sup> Now that an official policy document on the CA has been adopted, foreign affairs specialists wonder what it will lead to.<sup>6</sup> Looking at concrete case studies such as Sahel might be useful to inform the formulation and the unfolding of an action plan to implement the CA communication by the first half of 2015.<sup>7</sup> The new EU leadership has yet to signal whether the ‘comprehensive approach’ documents are still to enjoy clear political sponsorship. Yet the intention for the EU to do more and better together is very much a central plank of the new political platform.

This briefing note argues that the adoption as such of the CA communication will not fundamentally change the practice of EU's external action in the Sahel because efforts to apply it there were already in the making, partly – but not only - in the framework of the EU strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel.<sup>8/9</sup> In other words, our first assumption states that the EU approach in the Sahel since 2011 can be seen as good practice applied even before the CA communication was adopted. In that case, the added value of the new policy document resides above all in creating an explicit political reference for future coherence efforts in the region and in other conflict-prone areas, eventually to be used to create further momentum. Our second assumption is that the very existence of the Communication, Council Conclusions and even of an Action Plan will probably not be sufficient to address more structural shortcomings in EU's external action that undermine working better together.

To test both assumptions, this briefing note explores to what extent EU efforts and practices in the Sahel have already been comprehensive in the last four years – since the adoption of the EU strategy for the Sahel<sup>10</sup> - before the adoption of the CA communication in December 2013. Second, it also checks to what extent the CA communication has had an effect so far. To do so, the note quickly<sup>11</sup> looks back at what CA has meant and is meaning in practice for EU stakeholders in the region in terms of the eight dimensions of the CA communication:

1. develop a shared analysis;
2. define a common strategic vision;
3. focus on prevention;
4. mobilise the different strengths and capacities of the EU;
5. commit to the long term;
6. linking policies and internal and external action;
7. make better use of EU Delegations;<sup>12</sup>
8. work in partnership.

This briefing note focuses on the three initial ‘core’ countries – Mali, Mauritania and Niger – of the EU Strategy for the Sahel.<sup>13</sup> It concludes by summarising a number of lessons that could inform the implementation of the CA communication in the region but also how the EU and its Member States can work better together in the Sahel and in other crisis-prone areas.

<sup>4</sup> The Communication acknowledges this but in the past an “integrated approach” had already been proposed under the EC Communication Conflict Prevention (2001) and the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflict (2001) and the EU Council conclusions on Security and Development (2007).

<sup>5</sup> Hauck, V. & Sherriff, A. 2013. Important progress but real EU comprehensiveness is still ahead of us. ECDPM Talking Point.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the different perspectives on the EU's comprehensive approach see, Faria, F. 2014. *What Comprehensive Approach? Challenges for the EU action plan and beyond*, Maastricht: ECDPM Briefing Note 71.

<sup>7</sup> Hauck, V. & Sherriff, A. 2014. Will the Action Plan to implement the EU's Comprehensive Approach have any bite? ECDPM Talking Point.

<sup>8</sup> It states that: “The concept of such a comprehensive approach is not new as such. It has already been successfully applied as the organizing principle for EU action in many cases in recent years, for example, in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and the Great Lakes.”

<sup>9</sup> See the EU ISS publication for a visual representation of the EU missions in the region

[http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Report\\_19\\_Sahel.pdf](http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Report_19_Sahel.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> EEAS. 2011. Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel. [http://eeas.europa.eu/africa/docs/sahel\\_strategy\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/africa/docs/sahel_strategy_en.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> This note provides only a snapshot of the most important elements of the EU interventions in the three Sahelian countries. For fuller official picture of the EU actions in the three countries please refer to official communication available on the EC and EEAS websites. Although one can identify when and where the eight types of comprehensive action do take place, there is no commonly established methodology to measure their quality or their impact.

<sup>12</sup> While this dimension is of paramount relevance for the comprehensive approach, it is not elaborated in this note since the authors already published a full-fledged Briefing Note on the topic of EU Delegations dealing with peace and security in the Sahel. Helly, D., Galeazzi, G. 2014. *Planting seeds and breaking eggs: EU Delegations dealing with peace and security - the Sahel case and beyond*. (Briefing Note 70). Maastricht: ECDPM. <http://ecdpm.org/publications/planting-seeds-breaking-eggs-eu-delegations-dealing-peace-security-sahel-case-beyond/>

<sup>13</sup> The scope of the strategy has been recently extended to Burkina Faso and Chad. See ECDPM & ISS, *Stratégies et initiatives Sahel : première cartographie comparée (tentative title)*, to be published, 2015.

## 1. Early comprehensiveness in the implementation of the Sahel strategy at regional and national levels

To some extent the EU Sahel strategy was the comprehensive approach “*avant la lettre*”. For the French government and in particular its Ministry of Defence as well as other like-minded Member States such as Spain and the UK and the DG Development of the European Commission, a European approach to the Sahel was a way to find an internal consensus and assert shared vision.<sup>14</sup> The analysis underpinning the strategy emerged mostly from one or two sources and was then shared with a core group. The strategy reflects the variety but also commonality of visions and interests of Member States. It was initially conceived under the pre-Lisbon arrangements and prepared under several EU presidencies – notably the French, Spanish and Swedish ones<sup>15</sup> - and received also the support of British and Danish diplomats.<sup>16</sup>

The development of a shared analysis has happened since then through the work of coordinating bodies. The EU Crisis Platform was convened for the Sahel in October 2013 under the chairmanship of the Secretary General of the EEAS and led to carrying out in-depth analysis on some themes. For instance the ‘Groupe de travail interservices’ (GTI Sahel-Maghreb) had the mandate to put forward propositions for a better integration of EU and Member States’ initiatives in the view of adopting a ‘comprehensive approach’ in the field of regional security. The GTI Sahel-Maghreb received inputs from EU services, including Delegations, EU Member States and national actors, through missions in the region.

The common EU vision for the region is set out in the Sahel strategy. The EU has reacted to changing circumstances to update the vision. In March 2014, following inter-service missions in the region, the Council adopted conclusions that broadened the scope of the strategy to cover Burkina Faso and Chad in addition to Mali, Mauritania and Niger, which had been the core countries up to that moment.<sup>17</sup> A regional action plan for the implementation of the strategy is also being prepared by EEAS, the EU Special Representative for the Sahel, and the Commission. Several Sahel task forces gathering a comprehensive range of EU bodies and services were conveyed since September 2014. The Sahel strategy’s action could possibly be incorporated as a “country or regional case” into the action plan of the CA communication.

Although one of the criticisms made to the strategy in the wake of the 2012 Mali crisis was that it failed to act preventively and avoid the spiraling of tensions into conflict,<sup>18</sup> French attempts to build up a European approach to the Sahel as early as 2008 were preventive in nature and based on threats assessments related to state fragility, insecurity and organised crime in Northern Mali and Northern Niger. Several years later analyzing the 2012 crisis in Mali, even a Director of the French Ministry of Defense recognised that EU prevention in the Sahel had failed. That said, the strategy emphasised the prevention of extremism and radicalism, to be addressed by tackling poverty, social exclusion and unmet economic needs, which complemented the reinforcement of the security and rule of law sector. While recognising the multi-dimensional challenges of the region, it aimed to address them by mixing security, development and governance approaches. The strategy built on existing engagements in the region and sought to mainly reframe and connect initiatives existing in the fields of security and development,<sup>19</sup> and distinguishing between short, mid and long-term objectives.

All of the above show that the EU Sahel strategy, as a document, was quite forward-looking and to some extent very much pre-dated efforts on the CA.<sup>20</sup> One overarching challenge in the Sahel is to ensure a comprehensive and coherent approach between EU actors dealing with regional dynamics and those dealing with national contexts. Links between these two levels of intervention cannot be taken for granted in the neither Sahel, nor elsewhere as it has been noted in past evaluations of the EU’s conflict response.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Statement made by a high level EU official, Bamako, 18 May 2014.

<sup>15</sup> See Sherriff, A. 2011. The EU Strategy for security and development in the Sahel: an indicator for the future of EU External Action? ECDPM Talking Point.

<sup>16</sup> Rouppert, B. 2014. L’UE et ses Etats membres au Sahe : quelle presence et quels modes d’action?

<sup>17</sup> Rouppert, B. 2014. L’UE et ses Etats membres au Sahe : quelle presence et quels modes d’action?

<sup>18</sup> Bello, O. 2012. Quick fix or quicksand? Implementing the EU Sahel Strategy? FRIDE Working Paper.

<sup>19</sup> Sherriff, A. 2011. The EU Strategy for security and development in the Sahel: an indicator for the future of EU External Action? ECDPM Talking Point.

<sup>20</sup> Sherriff, A. 2011. The EU Strategy for security and development in the Sahel: an indicator for the future of EU External Action? ECDPM Talking Point.

<sup>21</sup> ADE (with ECDPM), 2011. *Thematic Evaluation of European Commission Support to Conflict Prevention and Peace-Building*, Final Report, Volume 1, p. 44-50.

The EU Strategy for the Sahel is a framework for regional action but does not tell the EU how to act regionally. This gap is still being filled by more operational documents. This challenge is not exclusive of the European actors: in another publication we have explored what a regional approach could mean for international players and donors.<sup>22</sup>

The EU is showing to be testing some options of regional approaches. For instance the Counter Terrorism (CT) Sahel is a regional programme that delivered trainings and exchanges to law enforcements agencies and judicial institutions in Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, with the view to supporting regional cooperation.<sup>23</sup> The initiative – a regional effort to implement the Sahel Strategy for the part on security and rule of law – was implemented via “national pillars” in the three countries. The programme shows the difficulty of regional action as the only “true regional component”, the College Sahélien de Sécurité, has been facing challenges since its early days.<sup>24</sup>

The EU is considering other modalities of regional action that allow supporting in an integrated manner development and security objectives. A proposition is to pilot cross-border projects between Sahelian states. Regional programming of the 11<sup>th</sup> EDF for West Africa was occurring from last quarter of 2014 and could provide resources for some activities: around 20-25% of the budget could be devoted to peace and stability.<sup>25</sup> Another option under discussion is to support the development of a network of centers for inter-agency border management cooperation in several Sahelian-Saharan countries.<sup>26</sup>

A long term initiative sponsored by the EU is the Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative (AGIR). The aim is to promote food security in the region and bridge the gap between humanitarian and development aid.<sup>27</sup> Efforts to plan together how to make best use of EU resources can be seen. For instance a joint seminar held in Dakar in 2013 served to inform the programming of both the humanitarian aid and the development assistance of the 11<sup>th</sup> EDF, though the results of the services growing closer to each other are perhaps not yet visible.

The recently signed Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with West Africa can provide opportunities to support regional integration and socio-economic growth.<sup>28</sup> The Council Conclusions on the Sahel strategy of March 2014 called for the swift implementation of the agreement.

Furthermore a two-days meeting in Dakar in 2014 brought together the Heads of EU Delegations of Sahel, West Africa and North Africa countries and Brussels teams to discuss how to work better together in the region. This kind of initiative facilitates regional dialogue between Delegations that usually follow separate chains of command and reporting because of administrative boundaries between financial assistance instruments.<sup>29</sup> The meeting benefited from the presence of DEVCO headquarters' staff, although some participants would have welcome a higher level participation demonstrating stronger interest in the comprehensive approach. The direct participation of Member States did not occur on this occasion but information circulates formally, for instance via reporting done by EEAS HQ, EU Member States ambassadors in a country, seconded national experts, and informally, via personal networks.

Working at regional level adds another layer of complexity to acting comprehensively. Some European Union Member States have launched regional initiatives in security (Operation Berkane by France) or post-conflict and development (Denmark's Peace and Stabilisation Programme).<sup>30</sup> The Netherlands, which have adopted 'integrated approaches' encompassing diplomacy, development and defense in other areas

<sup>22</sup> Helly, D. & Galeazzi, G. 2014. Six Ways to Think and Act Regionally in the Sahel-Saharan. ECDPM Talking Point.

<sup>23</sup> EC. 2014. Mid-Term Review of the CT Sahel Project. Final Report.

<sup>24</sup> EC. 2014. Mid-Term Review of the CT Sahel Project. Final Report.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.pir-rip.ecowas.int/non-class%C3%A9-en/the-strategic-orientation-committee-defines-the-key-actions-for-the-11th-edf-regional-indicative-programme-2/?lang=en>

<sup>26</sup> EAS. 2014. Options for CSDP Support to Sahel-Saharan Border Management. 01392/14

<sup>27</sup> ECHO. 2015. AGIR – Building Resilience in the Sahel & West Africa. Factsheet.

<sup>28</sup> Ramdoo, I. 2014. *Economic Partnership Agreements: Current situation and future prospects*. (ECDPM Presentation). Maastricht: ECDPM.

<sup>29</sup> The “core” Sahel countries – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger – receive financial assistance mainly via the 11<sup>th</sup> European Development Fund (EDF), as all Sub-Saharan countries (with the exception of South Africa). The financial line to provide assistance to North African countries is the European Neighbourhood Instrument, which covers also the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.

<sup>30</sup> For more information see <http://um.dk/en/news/newsdisplaypage/?newsid=0b2682e0-9cc2-4501-9e97-db1298fa34b1>

of the world,<sup>31</sup> have also conducted consultations on how to engage regionally in the Sahel, for instance in a meeting of all Dutch ambassadors of the region in Dakar in June 2014. Spain has a special envoy for the Sahel and Libya, focusing on security, terrorism and migration. The UK also has a special envoy and a large-scale regional humanitarian assistance programme working particularly with ECHO.<sup>32</sup>

In the region the Netherlands provide bilateral aid and troops to both EU initiatives (EUTM Mali for instance) and the UN mission, MINUSMA. Coordination happens thus at different levels and on a case-by-case and pragmatic basis. For instance analysis developed by Denmark in the framework of its programme have been shared and discussed with the EU and Member States in Bamako. Similarly there is information-sharing between the staff of EU, France and UN military operations in Mali.<sup>33</sup>

At the regional level, the EU takes part and is quite influential, via its EU Special Representative, in coordination fora such as the Ministerial coordinating platform for regional strategies and initiatives for the Sahel, where a number of key donors and organisations sit – among them, the UN, the AU, the ECOWAS, the World Bank, the AfDB.<sup>34</sup> The objective of this body is that regional priorities are identified, coherence between efforts of different actors is ensured, and synergies bring benefits. This is not the only regional coordination initiative that has sprung up: the EU is also engaging with the G5 grouping of Sahel countries, which includes Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso.<sup>35</sup> In summer 2014 the G5 started working on a Priority Investment Program, with the aim to better streamline donors' actions and align them to regional priorities.<sup>36</sup> African and international 'geopolitical tectonics', and, not least, shaping how to use the funds committed for the Sahel, are at play in the coordination game in the region<sup>37</sup> and also have to be taken into account in any EU comprehensive approach.

Yet working comprehensively in partnership is indeed a challenge. Bilateral exchanges allow for discussion on respective approaches and priorities - the UN Special Envoy visited the EU institutions in July 2014 and consults regularly with the EUSR. Some windows of opportunity for ideal solutions for "comprehensive partnerships" were perhaps missed. For instance in 2012 it was still possible to have a double-hatted EU Special Representative for the Sahel who could have been also the UN Sahel Special Envoy.<sup>38</sup>

#### **The US in the Sahel: how comprehensive?**

Beyond humanitarian and development assistance, the US engagement in the Sahel stems from the fight against terrorism of the early 2000s, first with the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI), launched in 2002 with a 8 million dollars budget to reinforce military capacities of countries in the region, and then replaced in 2005 by the Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP). The latter has a wider geographic mandate, including not only Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad but also Algeria, Burkina Faso, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia. The approach was also more ambitious, as it included several agencies under the coordination of the State Department and was expressed in military and civilian components. The US experience shows that it has faced its own challenges to implement a 'comprehensive approach' since the funds allocated from the Defense Department far outweighed the rest of the budget and questions on the results of the programme were raised.<sup>39</sup>

In spite of the traction created by the EU Sahel strategy, EU coherence and comprehensiveness is and will remain a Holy Grail. The CA communication is broader than the regional strategy and it brings more to the debate and focuses on implementation. Humanitarian aid is largely missing from the Sahel strategy yet there is intense collaboration between EU Delegations and ECHO field offices on its implementation. On paper humanitarian aid is among the tools considered by the communication on the comprehensive approach, which seeks to improve the coordination in emergency responses while respecting humanitarian principles. CSDP is not explicitly featured in the Sahel strategy – the deployment of a crisis management

<sup>31</sup> For more information on the '3D approach' see the research by Clingendael Institute, [http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20111130\\_cscsp\\_rapport\\_lijn.pdf](http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20111130_cscsp_rapport_lijn.pdf) and [http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20120500\\_goor\\_comprehensive.pdf](http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20120500_goor_comprehensive.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/people/stephen-o-brien>

<sup>33</sup> Leonore Hubaut. 2014. *La face discrète de la mission... le renseignement* (Un an d'EUTM Mali). B2

<sup>34</sup> Helly, D. & Galeazzi, G. 2014. The Alphabet Soup of Coordination in the Sahel: In Search of Collective Leadership. ECDPM Talking Point.

<sup>35</sup> [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-14-374\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-374_en.htm)

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/07/14/sahel-g5-meeting-brings-together-governments-and-donors-to-accelerate-regional-development>

<sup>37</sup> Helly, D. & Galeazzi, G. 2014. The Alphabet Soup of Coordination in the Sahel: In Search of Collective Leadership. ECDPM Talking Point.

<sup>38</sup> Helly, D. 2012. *From Sahel to Somalia. Responding to crises*. In

[http://fride.org/descarga/Challenges\\_for\\_European\\_Foreign\\_Policy\\_2013.pdf](http://fride.org/descarga/Challenges_for_European_Foreign_Policy_2013.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion see Rouppert, B. & Tisseron, A. Approche comparée des politiques européenne et américaine de lutte contre le terrorisme et l'extrémisme violent. In: Rouppert, B. et al. 2013. *Sahel: Éclairer le passé pour mieux dessiner l'avenir*. GRIP.

mission was not envisaged when the strategy was drafted in a preventative mode - while one of the aims of the comprehensive approach is to combine CSDP and other EU actions. Lastly, the Sahel strategy mentioned that EU Member States resources should be geared towards its objectives, but de facto the EU institutions – managing the lion's share of aid funds with knowledge of and presence in the region - were at the centre.<sup>40</sup> The shared responsibilities of EU level and Member States are much clearer in the comprehensive approach communication.<sup>41</sup> In parallel, efforts towards the joint programming<sup>42</sup> of EU and Member States' development aid carried out in all three core countries studied here also serves comprehensiveness purposes.

The next sections delve into EU's action in the Sahel to assess to what extent, at country level, the implementation of the Sahel strategy anticipated the CA communication and to which degree this document will actually bring change to ongoing practice.

## 2. Mali

The EU Strategy for the Sahel briefly preceded the full-blown crisis in Mali, the start of which is usually identified with the capture of the town of Kidal, in the north of the country, by the Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA) in early January 2012.<sup>43</sup> Mali, which ranks 176 out of 187 in the Human Development Index,<sup>44</sup> has been considered by donors until recently a "good pupil" (bon élève) of development and democracy but the resurgence of the Touareg rebellion followed by the Sanogo coup d'état in March 2012 and the takeover by Islamic jihadist organisations of northern provinces, have led analysts to ask critical questions about the country's governance and even the role of aid in the crisis.<sup>45</sup>

The 2012 crisis has put Mali at the centre of the EU's action in the Sahel: the wide range of EU tools are now deployed there.<sup>46</sup> The crisis forced the EU to act differently and quickly and paradoxically offered the opportunity to test new ways of working comprehensively. Coordination mechanisms developed in country and those at headquarters level, created by the Sahel Strategy, to some extent contributed to bring together EU stakeholders on the Mali crisis. Mali is also a good example of the use by the EU of all its tools, under the cover provided by the Sahel strategy, and assets even before the adoption of the CA communication. There has also been a string of numerous high-level visits and exchanges.<sup>47</sup>

As for shared analysis and understanding of Sahel, one main source of common approach is the inter-service group on the Sahel established in 2013 by the EU Crisis Platform in Brussels. All EU entities operating in Mali produce analyses and specific political reporting (Member States, EU Delegations, CSDP Heads of Missions, EUSRs and ECHO's) inevitably creating a diversity of views. The example of the early 2013 joint planning mission demonstrated that shared analysis is very much possible.<sup>48</sup>

Diplomatic initiatives, also a component of the Sahel Strategy, have seen EU institutions staff from a variety of bodies (EUSR team, EU Delegations, DEVCO) sitting at the negotiations table in Ouagadougou in summer 2013 and the Algiers negotiations in July 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Sherriff, A. 2011. The EU Strategy for security and development in the Sahel: an indicator for the future of EU External Action? ECDPM Talking Point.

<sup>41</sup> EC & EEAS. 2014. Joint Communication « The EU's comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises ».

<sup>42</sup> For an explanation of joint programming, including early experiences and challenges, see Galeazzi, G., Helly, D., and Krätke, F. 2013. *All for one or free-for-all? Early experiences in EU joint programming* (ECDPM Briefing Note 50). ECDPM will publish new papers on EU joint programming in 2015.

<sup>43</sup> For an overview of the Mali crisis and updates, see International Crisis Group (ICG). 2014. *Mali: Last Chance in Algiers*, Africa Briefing N°104, 18 November 2014; and International Crisis Group (ICG). 2014. *Mali: Reform or Relapse*, Africa Report N°210, 10 January 2014. For an overview of dynamics in north Mali see Bourgeot, A. La crise malienne : vers une recomposition géopolitique des espaces sahariens. In Mokhefi, M. and Antil, A. *Le Maghreb et son sud : vers des liens renouvelés*. IFRI. 2012.

<sup>44</sup> Human Development Index. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-1-human-development-index-and-its-components>

<sup>45</sup> <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=9321969&fileId=S0022278X14000251>

<sup>46</sup> EEAS. 2014. Factsheet. The European Union and the Sahel. 6 February 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Former Commissioner Piebalgs' leading role in the Mali donors' conference in May 2013 in Brussels together with other high level EU officials, <http://donor-conference-mali.eu/together-new-mali>, Former European Council's President Van Rompuy, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/141134.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/141134.pdf), ministers of various Member States, Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita spoke at the European Parliament in December 2013, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20131206IPR30055/html/We-must-bind-Africa-and-Europe-together-irreversibly-says-Mali%E2%80%99s-President>, role of Former Humanitarian Commissioner Georgieva at the Brussels 6 February high-level meeting on the Sahel.

<sup>48</sup> Interviews with African and North American officials in Bamako, May-June 2014. For background on the joint inter-service mission see [http://en.dii.dk/files/publications/Reports2013/RP2013-21-Linking-instruments\\_web.jpg.pdf](http://en.dii.dk/files/publications/Reports2013/RP2013-21-Linking-instruments_web.jpg.pdf)

Although several Member States are engaged in different ways in Mali, they have a variety of interests: combining them in a comprehensive way (including through the joint programming of EU development aid) is not always an easy task.<sup>49</sup> France, with military troops on the ground and long-standing influence in the country and in the region, is a key player. Although EU officials pay tribute to the role of France in the defence of EU collective interests in the Sahel, external observers still question the lack of clarity surrounding its objectives and the increase of its national military presence.<sup>50</sup>

Numerous Member States contribute to the EUTM or EUCAP (in 2013 France, Spain, Germany were expected to be the main contributors to EUTM<sup>51</sup> which received a total of 577 staff from 27 countries in 2014),<sup>52</sup> clearly demonstrating the security dimension of the EU comprehensive engagement in the country. Some Member States participate to EU missions as well as to MINUSMA (important EU contributors to the UN-led mission are The Netherlands with around 400 troops<sup>53</sup> and Germany with around 150 troops as of June 2014)<sup>54</sup> showing that the EU's approach tends to be comprehensive, but is not exclusive. Others - the UK and Spain for instance - have their own special envoys also.

The question therefore lies with the efficiency with which some EU leadership makes the best out of the EU toolbox. Here comes the role of EU Delegations<sup>55</sup> but also of the most involved Member States in civilian (diplomatic and security leadership) and military crisis management as well as the heads of EU CSDP missions EUTM and EUCAP.<sup>56</sup>

The collaboration between DG DEVCO and DG ECHO – an “act of maturity”<sup>57</sup> – benefits from lessons learnt from experiences in the Horn of Africa, political sponsorship and backing from the top, and ownership by regional bodies through initiatives like AGIR. Co-location of ECHO field offices within some EU Delegations in the region have been made, fostering better communication, though personalities matter for effective collaboration.

The fight against terrorist threats is the most obvious common denominator between EU internal policies and external action in Mali. The Sahel strategy has since the very beginning envisaged counter-radicalisation programmes to attempt to prevent the recruitment of the youth by terrorist organisations. The office of the EU Counter-terrorism Coordinator has been involved in the strategy from the outset. The fight against terrorism also consists of supporting the fight against impunity and strengthening justice systems. The EU has been present in this field for many years in Mali as a part of its support for decentralization and state reform,<sup>58</sup> although in Mali it is Canada that is leading in this sector of cooperation.

Mali has seen an influx of donors' initiatives and mediation efforts. Financial heavyweights have committed or disbursed important sums – the IMF, the World Bank. There was coordination with the IMF and the WB in the case of suspension of budget support disbursements while the financial institutions were investigating the case of the presidential plane. International actors are providing security, humanitarian and development assistance: the UN, with its peacekeeping mission and a string of humanitarian agencies; the US, with its military cooperation and financial weight.

African actors are many and active in different fields. Continental and regional organisations, the AU and ECOWAS, are chiefly doing mediation and diplomatic initiatives. Their capacity is still limited – for instance MISAHEL, the AU office in Mali, is still relatively small compared to the human resources at the disposal of Europeans. A number of countries of the region are or aspire to be key players in the negotiations between the Malian government and the armed groups (and in those within the armed groups themselves).<sup>59</sup>

<sup>49</sup> For some points on the parallel action of some Member States see Bello, O. 2012. Quick fix or quicksand? Implementing the EU Sahel Strategy? FRIDE Working Paper.

<sup>50</sup> Gnanguènon, A. 2014. Operation Barkhane: a show of force and political games in the Sahel-Sahara. Institute for Security Studies.

<sup>51</sup> See Nicolas Gros-Verheyde, 2013, *Qui participera à EUTM Mali ?* 3e version (maj5), B2.

<sup>52</sup> See Nicolas Gros-Verheyde. 2014. *Un relais franco-espagnol pour EUTM Mali*. B2.

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.defensie.nl/english/latest/news/2014/06/02/dutch-units-under-authority-of-minusma>

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.dw.de/german-troops-to-stay-in-mali/a-17738558>

<sup>55</sup> Helly, D., Galeazzi, G. 2014. *Planting seeds and breaking eggs: EU Delegations dealing with peace and security - the Sahel case and beyond*. (Briefing Note 70). Maastricht: ECDPM. <http://ecdpm.org/publications/planting-seeds-breaking-eggs-eu-delegations-dealing-peace-security-sahel-case-beyond/>

<sup>56</sup> See Tardy, T. 2015. Mali : restaurer la paix dans un pays en guerre. EUISS Alert 8, and Rasmussen, C.V. 2013. Linking Instruments in Development and Foreign Policy: Comprehensive Approaches in the EU. DISS Report 2013:21.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with European official, Brussels, July 2014.

<sup>58</sup> [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-11-808\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-11-808_en.htm)

<sup>59</sup> Helly, D., Rocca, C. 2013. The Mali crisis and Africa-Europe relations. (ECDPM Briefing Note 52).

All the above shows that the whole EU's toolbox is applied in Mali and several pragmatic initiatives have helped EU institutions and to some extent Member States to work together. Yet the EU comprehensive approach is never applied in a void: EU's action happens in a context marked by a multiplicity of intra-EU agendas as well as external interventions that may have knock-on effects on its own comprehensiveness.<sup>60</sup> The fact that there is actually little steering from host authorities beyond the official rhetoric<sup>61</sup> may additionally challenge both international coordination and EU's internal coherence and therefore the EU's comprehensive approach itself. In that respect the Malian case is worth being further explored.

### 3. Mauritania

With a Human Development Ranking of 161 on 187<sup>th</sup> countries in 2013,<sup>62</sup> Mauritania is a country confronted by institutional weaknesses and corruption and ethnic-racial divisions causing socio-political tensions.<sup>63</sup> For some analysts the Islamic radicalisation of the Mauritanian youth is a major challenge since it can be fertile ground for new recruits of terrorist organisations, though this view is not universally shared.<sup>64</sup> Beyond the introduction of Salafi ideas in the society, the causes of radicalisation are the lack of access to education, perceptions of injustice, ethnic discrimination,<sup>65</sup> and the widening gap between a wealthy group of officials and businessmen and the rest of the population.<sup>66</sup> The need to address comprehensively, at national and regional level, these multi-dimensional phenomena is evident. Even though the governments' policies, which have included attacking terrorists beyond the border with Mali, have put a brake on the growth of terrorist movements according to experts,<sup>67</sup> Mauritania remains exposed to threats such as drug trafficking and the presence of AQIM militias.

Coordination among EU actors in analysis sharing is easier than elsewhere since there are few Member States represented permanently in the country – only France, Germany, and Spain.<sup>68</sup> At some point France chose to play a liaison and brokering role between the Mauritanian government and the EU institutions.<sup>69</sup> Initiatives such as developing a joint strategy for development cooperation (joint programming) are starting.

European actors cooperated for a project to support the capacities of border police and strengthen regional cooperation. The project "West Sahel", which received 80% of its funding from the EU, was implemented by the Spanish Guardia Civil, by providing training.<sup>70</sup> Other Member States and donors were then involved in the training of the national police and gendarmerie.<sup>71</sup> This is a telling example of efforts to find synergies between the financial weight of the EU institutions and the technical expertise of the Member States in countries where they have direct national interests.<sup>72</sup>

In Mauritania the delayed programming of the 10<sup>th</sup> EDF was undertaken in the spirit of the Sahel Strategy and of the comprehensive approach. The programming process benefited from a timely combination of variables. First, cooperation was resumed in 2010, after having been suspended two years earlier, following a coup d'état that had deposed the President. Second, the fresh publication of the Sahel strategy in 2011 inspired the EU Delegation to make the link between strategy and programming and merge security and development components in its new interventions. For instance almost 60 million Euro were devoted to the Rule of Law, one of the line of action of the EU Strategy for the Sahel. The EU is also using its financial tools in a complementary way. Among other projects that follow the Sahel strategy priorities, assistance in the area of border control is complemented by a 10<sup>th</sup> EDF programme of 8 million Euro in support to the Mauritanian national strategy on migration.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Rouppert, B. 2014. *Le concept européen d'approche globale à l'épreuve de la crise sahélienne*. GRIP Note d'Analyse.

<sup>61</sup> Several European officials interviewed, Bamako, May and June 2014.

<sup>62</sup> Human Development Index. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-1-human-development-index-and-its-components>

<sup>63</sup> [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/mauritania\\_insecurity.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/mauritania_insecurity.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> For an overview of common positions see [http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/gsdrc\\_conflanal\\_mauritania.pdf](http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/gsdrc_conflanal_mauritania.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> See [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/mauritania\\_insecurity.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/mauritania_insecurity.pdf)

<sup>66</sup> [http://www.bti-project.de/uploads/tx\\_itao\\_download/BTI\\_2014\\_Mauritania.pdf](http://www.bti-project.de/uploads/tx_itao_download/BTI_2014_Mauritania.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> See [http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/gsdrc\\_conflanal\\_mauritania.pdf](http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/gsdrc_conflanal_mauritania.pdf)

<sup>68</sup> France, Germany and Spain have embassies and technical cooperation offices in Mauritania. Interview with a European official, August 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Rouppert, B. 2014. *Le concept européen d'approche globale à l'épreuve de la crise sahélienne*. GRIP Note d'Analyse.

<sup>70</sup> See [http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/mauritania/documents/press\\_corner/discours\\_west\\_sahel\\_22jan2012\\_fr.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/mauritania/documents/press_corner/discours_west_sahel_22jan2012_fr.pdf)

<sup>71</sup> Interview with a European official based in Mali, June 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with European officials based in Mauritania, August 2014.

<sup>73</sup> See [http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/mauritania/documents/press\\_corner/discours\\_west\\_sahel\\_22jan2012\\_fr.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/mauritania/documents/press_corner/discours_west_sahel_22jan2012_fr.pdf)

Human resources on the ground are scarce but the EU Delegation finds ways to temporarily share expertise mutually between its different political and operational sections.<sup>74</sup> The expertise brought by a Spanish seconded national expert from the Guardia Civil detached to the EU Delegation is considered a positive experience.<sup>75</sup>

Despite these innovations, a comprehensive approach endorsed by all the staff in the EU Delegation is a challenge to constantly strive for. Furthermore, political and security expertise is still very much in the hands of Member States that have more human resources in this area than the EU Delegation.<sup>76</sup> This makes the job of the EU Delegations' staff more difficult, especially to fulfill its coordination and chairing role in crisis prevention and early warning.<sup>77</sup> This has been observed also in other countries in the region. The Mauritanian case demonstrates that the EU Sahel strategy has been the main driver for EU actors to try to act comprehensively. Whether the comprehensive approach communication or Action Plan will be a game changer still remains to be seen: it is still unclear which added value the Action Plan will bring to the conditions in which the EU and its Member States are currently designing and implementing their policies and interventions in the Sahel.

## 4. Niger

Perceived sometimes as a more stable country than some of its Sahelian and Saharan neighbors, Niger is however described by analysts as in a "precarious balance".<sup>78</sup> This has only been confirmed by domestic politics events in summer 2014 and following months<sup>79</sup> and the more recent protests that caused at least 10 dead in January 2015.<sup>80</sup> The country has the lowest ranking in the Human Development Index of 2013 (187 out of 187)<sup>81</sup> and has one of the highest population growth rates of the world – Niger's population is expected to double in the next 20 years<sup>82</sup> – which will have repercussions on among others, poverty reduction, education, and food security and ultimately the country's long term stability.

Strategically located, the vast open spaces and porous borders with Libya and Mali make Niger, in particular the northern regions, vulnerable to cross-border threats such as weapons smuggling<sup>83</sup> and a key country for Western counter-terrorism policies and actions.<sup>84</sup> Tuareg populations are present and while the situation seems better managed than in neighbouring Mali, issues are not fully resolved.<sup>85</sup> This explains also Niamey's responses to the Libyan and Malian crisis – for instance in the latter, Nigerien troops were deployed first in the AU peacekeeping mission AFISMA and then in the UN-led MINUSMA.<sup>86</sup> The northern regions of the country are the crossroads of migration routes and illicit trafficking of human beings. In

<sup>74</sup> Interview with European officials based in Mauritania, August 2014.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with European officials based in Mauritania, August 2014.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with European officials based in Mauritania, August 2014.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with European officials based in Mauritania, August 2014.

<sup>78</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG). 2013. *Niger: Another Weak Link in the Sahel?*, Africa Report N°208, 19 September 2013. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/west-africa/niger/208-niger-un-autre-maillon-faible-dans-le-sahel.pdf>

<sup>79</sup> Student protests erupted in May 2014. In August 2014 the president of the National Assembly of Niger and leader of the opposition Hama Amadou, fled to Burkina Faso first and then to France. The move followed the arrest of Amadou's wife in the context of investigations on child trafficking, which he accuses to be politically motivated. There had been already arrests of members of the opposition and the closing down of an opposition newspaper in previous months. See <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/crisiswatch/crisiswatch-database.aspx?CountryIDs=%7BF26B8D94-91A6-4238-BEA8-0D07EF0D800D%7D>. In January 2015 the opposition denounced the partiality of the Constitutional Court, perceived as a close ally of the President Issoufou. <http://www.nigerexpress.info/index.php/politique/539-niger-opposition-livre-blanc-tome-1-la-cour-constitutionnelle-disqualifie-a-organiser-les-presidentielles-de-2016.html>

<sup>80</sup> On 17 and 18 January, protests against the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, whose cover image was perceived as offensive for Islam, turned violent as protestors in Niamey and in Zinder set fire to churches, Christian-owned businesses and the French cultural center in Zinder; at least 10 people died. President Issoufou had taken part in the 11 January march in Paris in support of Charlie Hebdo which had been the target of an Islamic terrorist attack on January 7 that caused the death of 12 staff. For analysis on the protests see <http://www.20minutes.fr/monde/1519751-20150118-violences-niger-davantage-fait-voir-president-venir-soutenir-charlie-hebdo-denonce> and <http://blogs.mediapart.fr/blog/jean-louis-couture/200115/niger-une-lettre-de-jean-pierre-olivier-de-sardan-anthropologue-ird-apat>

<sup>81</sup> Human Development Index. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-1-human-development-index-and-its-components>

<sup>82</sup> [http://umr-developpement-societes.univ-paris1.fr/fileadmin/UMRDS/page-perso/pdf/etude\\_Niger\\_1.pdf](http://umr-developpement-societes.univ-paris1.fr/fileadmin/UMRDS/page-perso/pdf/etude_Niger_1.pdf)

<sup>83</sup> <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2014/10/16/97001-20141016FILWWW00216-niger-importante-saisie-d-armes-de-djihadistes.php>

<sup>84</sup> For some points on military cooperation between Niger and Western actors see Deycard, F. Les Tuaregs du Niger et la crise du Sahel. In: Rouppert, B. et al. 2013. *Sahel: Éclairer le passé pour mieux dessiner l'avenir*. GRIP.

<sup>85</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG). 2013. *Niger: Another Weak Link in the Sahel?* Africa Report N°208, 19 September 2013. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/west-africa/niger/208-niger-un-autre-maillon-faible-dans-le-sahel.pdf>

<sup>86</sup> For a discussion of the Tuaregs in Niger and the Libyan crisis see Deycard, F. Les Tuaregs du Niger et la crise du Sahel. In: Rouppert, B. et al. 2013. *Sahel: Éclairer le passé pour mieux dessiner l'avenir*. GRIP.

particular the cities of Agadez and Arlit have been known migrants' hubs for years,<sup>87</sup> as the deaths of almost a hundred migrants attempting to cross the desert in September 2013 confirmed.<sup>88</sup>

Over time, EU institutions, agencies and Member States have comprehensively shared analyses of the challenges mentioned above, with a focus on security sector reform and radical violence prevention. A lot of security and development work targets the multi-faceted challenges in the north of the country, for instance the EU is supporting the town police and the creation of employment possibilities in those regions, through the Instrument for Stability and the EDF.<sup>89</sup> Boko Haram is becoming a threat in the southern regions of Niger sharing the border with Nigeria due to refugees' pressure, concerns about radicalisation and the possible spillover of attacks.<sup>90</sup>

In fact the government's own "Stratégie de Développement et Sécurité", inscribed in the government's "Plan de Développement Economique et Social" which serves as the basis for donors' interventions. The EU Strategy for the Sahel served as a source of inspiration for the Nigerien strategy, although the latter does not provide enough steering in the security sphere to be used as the basis for partners' action: for this reason coordination among partners is key and ensured by the EU Delegation and EUCAP<sup>91</sup>. In that respect, Europeans have worked along a shared strategic vision, focusing both on crisis management and prevention, before the adoption of the EU communication on the comprehensive approach.

In addition to its EU Delegation and financial and humanitarian assistance,<sup>92</sup> the EU has deployed, since the launch in 2012, a civilian mission, EUCAP Sahel, with the aim to support and strengthen the security capacities of Niger. Multiple levels of coordination exist – at 'project' level to coordinate with EUCAP and Instrument for Stability staff; with the government; with the member states; with the external partners.<sup>93</sup> The EU Delegation is at the heart of the system since it manages locally the Instrument for Stability budget line as well as the EDF and other financial instruments.

At the technical and operational level, step by step things have improved over years, after a slow take off of EUCAP Sahel. Coordination between EUCAP Sahel and the EU Delegation has improved markedly over the years, as staff has gradually got to know better the work of their counterparts.<sup>94</sup> The EU aims to coordinate interventions 'ex post' and tries to avoid duplications in the programming.

Some improvements could be made. Some EU security interventions, in particular those concerning the training of police forces financed under the Instrument for Stability, could benefit from more collaboration from the mission EUCAP.<sup>95</sup> More importantly, moving from 'ex post' coordination to 'ex ante' approach is felt as the next step to take but already inspired internal EU brainstorming for the drafting process of the communication on CA.<sup>96</sup>

In terms of working with national authorities, a 'piloting committee' and technical committees have been created for coordination between EUCAP, the EU Delegation and the government and security forces. This way of working, which has proven successful at technical level, has been opened to Member States.

The mission EUCAP Sahel is coordinating the international partners' assistance in the security sector.<sup>97</sup> Joint reporting is not yet there, but a space for information sharing and coordination has been created.<sup>98</sup> The context is one of several actors having a military presence – the French military and US drone base.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Bensaïd A. 2003. « Agadez, carrefour migratoire sahélo-maghrébin », Revue européenne des migrations internationales, vol. 19 - n°1 | 2003. <http://remi.revues.org/336>

<sup>88</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/15/us-europe-immigration-niger-specialreport-idUSBREA4E08W20140515>

<sup>89</sup> Report on the implementation of the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy. 2014. <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2015/jan/eu-2014-10-10-13971-report-implementation-ct-strategy.pdf>

<sup>90</sup> On January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015, President Issoufou, who had been calling for a military intervention against the Islamist group, hosted a regional conference on Boko Haram. <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20150120-niger-reunion-regionale-lutter-boko-haram-nigeria-absent/>

<sup>91</sup> Phone interview with a European official in Niger, August 2014.

<sup>92</sup> Under the 11th EDF, an envelope of 596 €M is available for four priority sectors: food and nutrition security and resilience; strengthening of State capacities and implementation of social policies; security, good governance and peace consolidation; "desenclavement" of regions affected by insecurity and conflict risks.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with European officials in Niger, May 2014.

<sup>94</sup> Phone interview with a European official in Niger, August 2014.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with European officials in Niger, May 2014.

<sup>96</sup> Phone interview with a European official in Niger, August 2014.

<sup>97</sup> [http://eeas.europa.eu/csdp/missions-and-operations/eucap-sahel-niger/pdf/factsheet\\_eucap\\_sahel\\_niger\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/csdp/missions-and-operations/eucap-sahel-niger/pdf/factsheet_eucap_sahel_niger_en.pdf)

<sup>98</sup> Phone interview with a European official in Niger, August 2014.

<sup>99</sup> See <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/02/us-niger-usa-drones-idUSKBN0GX2D020140902>

Also big humanitarian NGOs and UN agencies are working in the country and European donors have their cooperation programmes in several sectors.

Cooperation has been established between EUBAM Libya and EUCAP SAHEL Niger.<sup>100</sup> The possibility to start a joint pilot project to connect border management and inter-agency cooperation initiatives of the two missions on the two sides of the border were under consideration.<sup>101</sup> However, those options are likely to be postponed or reassessed given the security situation in Libya and the relocation of EUBAM to Tunisia.

What is less clear though is the political line taken regarding governance and donors' coordination. The country seems to have become an ally for the EU to work with and in Niger to tackle the Mali, Sahara and now Boko Haram urgent security threats. In time of crisis, governance and long-term development interventions may appear to come second despite the size of their funding. In such a setting, international (not only EU) short-term humanitarian emergency actions seem to prevail over structural development considerations, according to observers in Niamey.<sup>102</sup> In that regard, the EU comprehensive approach is framed by internal (long-lasting sequencing and synchronisation challenges and tensions between humanitarian, security and development interventions) as much as external (international politics and competition in the aid industry) variables that it does not really master yet.

To sum up, while the practice of EU comprehensive approach in Niger has initially benefited from the percolation of the EU Sahel strategy into Niger's government plans – with the EU Delegation steadily finding its coordination role - there is still a long way to ensure that the EU and Member States comprehensively addresses country's broader development, governance and security issues and international partnerships.

## Observations and areas for further work

**1) The comprehensive approach is already being applied to a significant extent in the Sahel: in that sense what already works should be seen as good practice.**

In many ways practitioners in the Sahel feel – as it was acknowledged in the comprehensive approach communication - the EU action in the Sahel has been a forerunner of the comprehensive approach, which is however broader and a remake of old attempts for the EU to act in a holistic or integrated manner.

Cross-cutting analysis of the elements of the comprehensive approach shows a number of good practices in the Sahel that can inform the steps that EU institutions as well as some EU Member States are taking or may take to implement the Communication and its Action Plan. At regional level, shared analysis, which was already undertaken for the formulation of the Sahel strategy, is being developed under the impulse of coordinating bodies.

Examples of comprehensiveness in the three countries examined are joint missions, co-location and liaison officers, joint dialogue, joint programming, planning and implementation between security, development and humanitarian experts and coordination bodies in country. The Sahel Task Force and inter-service groups set up after a meeting led by the Secretary General of the EEAS Pierre Vimont in October 2013 have also had a role to promote a comprehensive approach to the crisis. There is also joint participation of various member states in CSDP missions (EUTM, EUCAP) and joint programming of EU and member states development cooperation is advancing, albeit at different pace in the three countries.

**2) Where there is a lack of comprehensiveness in the EU's response to the Sahel it is because of more structural shortcomings in EU's external action as well external variables that a Communication, Council conclusions and Action Plan can do little to remedy.**

The comprehensiveness of EU's approach can only be context-specific, as the Sahel case demonstrates.

<sup>100</sup> EEAS. 2014. Draft CivCom Advice on the Strategic Review of EUBAM Libya. <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2014/aug/eu-eeas-civ-com-review-eubam.pdf>

<sup>101</sup> EEAS. 2014. Options for CSDP Support to Sahel-Saharan Border Management. 01392/14

<sup>102</sup> UN agencies working on resilience and short term relief interventions were described as a "parallel government", interview with a European development official, Niamey, May 2014.

Prevention is the area in which the Sahel strategy largely failed to be implemented.<sup>103</sup> It is true that at the time of its publication the EEAS was still very new and had to properly establish its ways of working, including truly effective early warning systems. In terms of fight against radicalism, at country level, prevention is undertaken through anti-radicalisation programmes (for instance via radio programmes) and creation of employment.

There are real opportunities to further enhance the EU's comprehensive approach in the region and beyond. The Sahel regional action plan being prepared by the EU institutions is one of them and could be at the core of the EU's efforts for strengthening the comprehensive approach in the region if coupled with an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism of comprehensive implementation. Another is the new leadership at EU level by the HR/VP and new Commissioners – including for DG ECHO. The former chief of MINUSMA, Dutch politician Bert Koenders has taken up the position of Minister for Foreign Affairs in The Netherlands and a new head of this mission, Mongi Hamdi from Tunisia, has been appointed. Another opportunity is the role of coordinating groups at regional level, such as the Platform for coordination of regional strategies and initiatives (and its AU/UN Technical Secretariat) and the G5.

But several wild cards remain: a question is if the French operation “Berkhane” works in silo and to what extent synergies can be built with other international and European activities in the region. EU actors have of course to cope with resistance and existence of silos and parallel chains of command which are inevitable as the strategic environment is crowded: an EU Special Representative, an EEAS coordinator for Sahel but also a Director for West Africa and various crisis management structures; DG DEVCO has also its West Africa Head of Unit and its Sahel coordinator. In the region itself the EU comprises EU delegations (representing the EU as a whole), EUTM Mali and two EUCAP heads of missions. The replacement of the Secretary General of the EEAS Pierre Vimont by another French Alain Le Roy, could also have some impact.

As for partnership, the role MINUSMA, which has a strong Dutch contingent and its own reporting line, will be a key factor for the EU's comprehensive approach. There are also factors having a positive effect on comprehensiveness: there is eagerness amongst dedicated EU and national staff to play the game of the comprehensive approach – for instance from ECHO's side for humanitarian-development coordination. Yet individuals with strong bureaucratic, ideological or exaggeratedly self-centred views at times may play a spoiling role.

### **3) Lessons for future work in the Sahel and for future EU work in conflict areas**

As the implementation of the Communication on the comprehensive approach is still in its infancy, a number of questions remain open and of potential relevance for the EU engagement in other crisis and conflict environments.

The political pressure in crisis times, such as in the Sahel, means that often a lot of actors want to be involved, which makes doing things “comprehensively” more difficult. Yet the presence of many stakeholders can also create opportunities for coordination, that, if managed well, can bring results.

A question that could be asked is where the EU stands in politico-diplomatic objectives, which is one of the lines of action of the Sahel strategy. High level engagement has been focused on Mali and to some extent at the regional level. There is perhaps also a role to play for the Council of the European Union, including the Political and Security Committee (PSC), to give strategic and political direction and to ensure that the comprehensive approach is applied systematically. For the preparation of the Sahel strategy's action plan 2014-2016, the EEAS has consulted Member States on lessons learnt and recommendations for future implementation.

The roles of the double hatted High Representative/Vice President Mogherini and Development Commissioner Mimica in endorsing a new and demanding action plan for the Sahel strategy will be instrumental to ensure coherence between Member States expectations in the PSC, strategic programming (steered by EEAS), aid programming (done by DEVCO and EU Delegations) and other implementing instruments managed by various EU bodies. The role of EU Delegations will then be central to link policy to practice. How monitoring and evaluation could be applied remains to be seen.

<sup>103</sup> Simon, L., Mattelaer, A., Hadfield, A. 2011. A coherent EU Strategy for the Sahel. DG for External Policies. European Parliament.

A substantial part of EU actors in the three Sahelian countries seem to have “internalised” that security and development cannot be treated separately and as a consequence are open to working together across EU entities and with Member States. Of course personalities and attitudes should not be dismissed lightly, but stakeholders have also suggested that the role of trainings could be explored.<sup>104</sup> For some in the field, the very concept of the comprehensive approach as stated in the Communication will not change much the substance of the work that they are already doing. For others perhaps the Communication, or the messaging from the top management that comes with it, could represent incentives to pay more attention to what others are doing and avoid silo-thinking. In that respect the added value of context-specific and results-oriented action plans could play an important role in the future.

The experience of the Sahel shows also where the bottlenecks lie and improvements are needed. The challenge to implement the comprehensive approach now is to move from ‘ex post’ and ‘ad hoc’ coordination to an ‘ex ante’ joint approach which stems from the formulation of strategic and political objectives (a strategy and its regular reviews) to programming and implementation phases. EU actors are already thinking of how to do that in specific areas such as cross-border interventions but clarified intra-EU burden sharing, coordination and programming efforts are necessary.<sup>105</sup> Time will tell whether EU analysis and planning tools such as Joint Framework Documents (envisaged in a possible action plan for the comprehensive approach) will prove an effective way-out.

Similarly, a reflection is ongoing on modalities of regional interventions, necessary given the amount of multidimensional and cross-border challenges ranging from migration flows to drug trafficking to questions linked to pastoralism. Applying a comprehensive approach on a regional scale is not an easy task, as rightly noted by analysts,<sup>106</sup> since each Sahelian country has its own specific political situation. The EU as a whole has a wealth of resources that could be used to identify pilot modalities adapted to the local contexts, while using instruments covering different geographical areas such as West Africa (EDF and DCI inter alia) and the Maghreb (Neighbourhood instrument).

Examples from the region show pragmatic coordination and ad hoc but sometimes quite effective cooperation with Member States. Such hands-on approach would certainly benefit from a stronger guiding implementation framework that an outcome-oriented action plan can offer if well connected to implementation and results monitoring. There is certainly scope for moving towards a more concerted action, since many obstacles still stand in the way – including on basic but fundamental issues such as information sharing.

### **ECDPM Briefing Notes**

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<sup>104</sup> Interviews with several European officials, June-August 2014.

<sup>105</sup> EU officials interviews, January and February 2015.

<sup>106</sup> Rouppert, B. 2014. *Le concept européen d'approche globale à l'épreuve de la crise sahélienne*. GRIP Note d'Analyse.