

The Mali crisis and Africa-Europe relations

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The crisis in Mali is a reality check and reset for Africa-Europe relations: it emphasised the role of influential member states over continental and regional organisations.

It triggered some reactions within the AU to ensure genuine African ownership of crisis response mechanisms.

The Africa-Europe relationship requires effective geographical differentiation and tailored approaches, and not only in development aid.

Introduction

On 15 May 2013 in Brussels, a donors' conference "for a new Mali" was organised by the European Union (EU) and France, in close collaboration with the Malian government. The current crisis in Mali and Sahel has peaked in 2013, following several years of deterioration unnoticed outside the region. Given the complexity of the crisis and the strong involvement of African states and regional organisations (the Regional Economic Communities – RECs), what has been happening in this part of Africa is likely to impact on Europe-Africa relations for some time. Indeed, it puts a number of international arrangements to a new test: the comprehensiveness and coherence of EU's external action, the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), and subsequently, the nature, ambition and depth of Africa-Europe and African RECs-Europe relations.

This note looks at the implications of the Malian crises for the relations between Africa and Europe, one year ahead of the next Africa-Europe summit in Brussels in 2014. Its starting point is the challenge posed by multiple and intertwined crises in Mali and the combination of factors which led to a coup in Mali in 2012: old development inequalities between the North and the South, absence of key infrastructure, the failure of aid through budget support, widespread corruption, a doomed governance system in Bamako, long lasting grievances from Northern Malian populations, foreign interventions responding and/or fuelling insecurity, organised crime and terrorism. It builds on existing detailed and field-based analysis of the crisis itself (with three focal areas around Gao, Timbuktu, Kidal) and of the role of armed groups and forces (marked by volatile alliances between the Mouvement National de Libération de L'Azawad (MNLA), Mouvement pour le Tawhîd et du Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO), Ansar Eddine, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other non-state groups, conflicting with French, Malian, Chadian, Nigerian and other African government troops, not to mention militia).

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Four main questions, focusing on listening to a selection of African views², have driven the preparation of this note: 1) Has there been some debate on Mali in your country? 2) What do the Mali/Sahel crises tell us about African regional and continental systems? 3) What do they show of the EU's long awaited comprehensive approach? 4) What impact will they have on Africa-Europe relations? The objective is ultimately to somewhat gauge whether the crises in Mali may have improved or worsened the relationship between Europeans and Africans, and what should be done to transform this experience into an opportunity.

1. African regional and continental systems confronted by the crises in Mali

Because of the transnational nature of terrorism and the strong economic and human interdependence between Mali and its neighbours, the crises have a strong regional and African dimension. How have they been perceived in Africa, and what do they tell us about the state of African regional and continental structures?

1.1. Continental, regional or global issue?

The Malian crises have mainly been a matter of concern for neighbouring countries and francophone Africa. Perhaps even more acutely, the Malian situation was initially seen as a francophone affair. It is of concern directly to French speaking Africa, including central African and Gulf of Guinea countries, where citizens and elites have kept a close eye on international dynamics and on the role of France. For them, what happens in Mali is potentially replicable in their own country. The topic is also easier to report about for French speaking journalists than for English speaking ones. Over time though, it increasingly became an item on the African continental agenda.

For neighbouring countries, insecurity in Mali has direct economic and human implications. Niger, which shares not only borders, history and trade but also a Northern Tuareg population with Mali, is directly and immediately affected by Malian dynamics. Malian issues are a matter of internal security for Niger.³ The port of Nouakchott in the last few years had become an important hub on the trade route to Mali. In Mauritania, cross border cattle breeders benefiting from Northern Mali's lands strongly felt the impact of the conflict and expressed some concerns about its economic damage on their business. Pressure on pastoralists and overcrowding of lands for cattle in Burkina Faso and Niger has also been flagged as a potentially dangerous trend for regional security.⁴ Debates in Mauritania also touched upon violence against Arabs, questioning the relevance of the participation of the country's army to the African intervention in Mali. In Senegal, the impact of drug trafficking and organised crime has been a source of attention, because of the risk for the country to be surrounded by crime-dominated neighbours (Guinea-Bissau and Mali). Economic interdependence with Mali, in particular in the field of water management, is also a source of concern in Dakar and the debates in this country have been lively.⁵ Debates in Algeria on Mali have been more divided (mixing skepticism and candid criticism of any form of military intervention from Algeria or foreign forces in its backyard⁶) looking at issues through the prism of the relationship with France.⁷

² We have focused this Briefing Note on acquiring views from across Africa on these topics to add to the considerable amount of analysis in the public domain on Mali from Europeans or individual African analysts.

³ Interview with Mr Souleymane Issakou, Chargé d'affaires of Niger, Brussels, 28 May 2013.

⁴ See http://www.inter-reseaux.org/IMG/pdf/Plaidoyer_pour_le_pastoralisme.pdf

⁵ Phone interview with a regional expert, 8 May 2013.

⁶ Interview with the ambassador of Algeria to the EU, H.E. Amar Bendjama, Brussels, 30 May 2013.

⁷ See Couteau (2013). See also the debates between two experts from the US and France on Algerian views about Mali in 2012, illustrating well their complexity: see Kal (2012).

Linkages between jihadist groups in Mali and individuals close to Boko Haram movements in Northern Nigeria have been mentioned in a number of sources but there is no public evidence on the nature and depth of their cooperation.⁸ Soon after the French intervened in Mali, Nigeria engaged in a campaign and internal war against Boko Haram, with President Goodluck Jonathan declaring a state of emergency in three states. In Ghana, some debate took place but still, because of the language barrier and the absence of regular communication with Northern Mali, the crisis was perceived as a rather foreign issue in Accra.⁹

In South Africa, “there was no serious debate” on the Malian crises probably because South Africa was not directly involved in the crisis resolution.¹⁰ At the end of the day, events in Mali are dealt with primarily as a regional issue for Western Africa and the Sahel-Sahara area. African powers’ involvement from other regions was not necessarily welcome.¹¹ In the governments of Eastern Africa, the events in Mali are seen mostly through a counter-terrorism lens, with for instance the memory of past terror attacks in Tanzania¹² and current violence in Somalia.

Some left-wing pan-Africanist American analysts have very clearly criticised France and the US for carrying out a neo-imperialist and neo-colonial campaign in Northern Mali.¹³ In Africa though, unlike in the case of post-electoral crisis in Ivory Coast in 2010-2011, very little ideological debate took place in the public opinion about Mali until the topic was addressed within the forum of the AU summit.¹⁴ Some African Marxist authors like Samir Amin have actually supported the French intervention. For him, it avoided the risk of comparing the Malian case to a new Afghanistan (a “Sahelistan”): by making the repetition of the Afghanistan scenario in Mali impossible, it prevented an increased Western US-led capitalist military presence in Africa.¹⁵ Other analysts have investigated, in cooperation with Northern and Western African colleagues, the root causes of insecurity in the Sahel. They described it as made-up threats created by Algerian and US intelligence services in the early 2000s, which turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy.¹⁶ All these interpretations – even those close to conspiracy theories – are worth considering seriously, because they contribute to maintain some level of mistrust and to shape African and European actors’ reciprocal perceptions. This may then turn into real policy and implementation challenges when it is required for European and African to work collectively in regional or continental frameworks.

1.2. The AU and the institutional spaghetti bowl

On behalf of the African Union Commission (AUC), Mrs. Dlamini Zuma has expressed her gratitude “to the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS), member states and commission, the core countries and other African countries” for their efforts to set up the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), to which the African Union (AU) has allocated 50 million dollars. She also thanked France for its military intervention in Mali.¹⁷ This attitude marked a change in African continental and

⁸ Crisis Group, *Sécuriser, dialoguer et réformer en profondeur*, 11 avril 2013, note 142 p. 29. Observatoire de l’Afrique, Nigeria and constitutional reform TBK.

⁹ Interview with a West African diplomat, 26 April 2013.

¹⁰ Interview with Hengari Tijurimo, 21 May 2013.

¹¹ Interview with Hengari Tijurimo, 21 May 2013.

¹² Interview with a Tanzanian diplomat, 26 April 2013.

¹³ Omoyele Sowore of Sahara TV interviews Prof. Horace Campbell on the crisis in Mali, Pambazuka, 6 February 2013.

¹⁴ Phone interview with an African diplomat recalling the creation of academic clubs in African universities to discuss the Ivorian situation, 17 May 2013. Guinea’s president Alpha Condé stated in Addis during the AU summit that “it was a shame to have to clap hands for France after 50 years of independence” and that Africans were “all a bit humiliated that Africa could not solve this problem”, RFI, 27 Mai 2013.

¹⁵ Znet, Mali: Analysis by Samir Amin, 4 February 2013. See Boisbouvier (2013).

¹⁶ Keenan, J. 2009. *Dark Sahara*, Pluto pres. Keenan, J. 2013, *Dying Sahara*, Pluto press.

¹⁷ Introductory remarks of the chairperson of the Commission, Donor’s conference on Mali, 29 January 2013.

regional politics, after serious divisions about 2010 French intervention in Ivory Coast (which displeased Angola and South Africa but was supported by Nigeria) and the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya (also fiercely criticised then by South Africa).

On Mali, a new consensus has emerged between South Africa and Nigeria about the French intervention. However, tensions between ECOWAS and the AU have persisted up until the French intervention, as some mistrust remained within ECOWAS about Mrs. Zuma's South African agenda within the AU.¹⁸ Paul Buyoya explained why "the AU has not been moving the process forward quickly" by "in-fighting amongst Malian politicians who do not share a common vision for the country has been holding back progress."¹⁹ However, as one expert from the region puts it, on the Mali dossier "everyone agrees with the failure of the AU after all other crises".²⁰ Not only did the AU struggle to find some legitimacy in addressing the crisis, but it seems to have lost a credibility battle with the United Nations (UN) which will be the leading organisation in the future Mali.²¹

1.3. The ECOWAS

Existing reports note a large consensus about the fact that the French operation Serval has opened an insecurity Pandora box²² resulting in the spreading of terrorist groups across the region. Yet, a number of other nuanced perceptions have been expressed. According to some opinion polls and press reviews, the intervention of France with European back-up has been positively perceived in Mali itself and in most of Francophone Western and Central Africa.²³ Early on in the crisis, the same consensus emerged when president Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) was overthrown: many leaders in Western and Central Africa considered that the Malian president had played with fire.²⁴ However, in spite of notable progress (pretty quick deployment of African forces in the immediate aftermath of Operation Serval, disbursement of African funds for AFISMA²⁵), many still deem that, "although the response at the beginning was good" it has been far too slow.²⁶ As some diplomats from the region underlined, this poses the question of the role of armies in the region, of their core purpose and function, and of their relation with political elites in each country.²⁷ On the political side, the leadership of Burkina Faso has played a mediation role on behalf of ECOWAS but with ambiguous methods and mixed results. The vigorous military action by Chadian forces has led to mixed comments in the region: on the one hand it was seen as a salutary move from Africa itself, some even say the *sine qua non* condition for the French operation, with strong international and continental

¹⁸ Comfort Ero, interviewed on by the Africa report, 21 January 2013 "What we have noticed in the past six months has been a degree of reluctance by ECOWAS to give way to the AU. What Dlamini-Zuma needs to do is to reassure ECOWAS that it is very much the AU supporting ECOWAS. We should remember that Mali is not just a regional problem but a continental one that gets to the heart of the AU's security architecture."

¹⁹ African Union Perspective on Mali and the Sahel, Pierre Buyoya, AU representative Mali and Sahel and head of AFISMA, Chatham House, 26 March 2013.

²⁰ Phone interview with a regional expert, 8 May 2013.

²¹ See Boutellis (2013).

²² Crisis Group Report, Mali: Security, dialogue and meaningful reform, 11 April 2013, note 188. "la perception que l'intervention a ouvert une boîte de Pandore qu'il sera difficile de refermer est irrémédiablement ancrée dans les esprits."

²³ An opinion poll was conducted end of 2012 in Mali by Orb, a UK and US-based company. <http://orb-international.com/perch/resources/mali-public-opinion-poll-2013-01-24.pdf>. Radio France International reviewed francophone press right after Operation Serval in Mali, Burkina Faso, Republic of Guinea, Benin. See Couteau 2013.

²⁴ Phone interview with an African diplomat, 17 May 2013.

²⁵ Ambassador Natama, Chief of staff of the AU Commission chairperson. "ECOWAS gave 10 million USD, AU gave 50 million USD to contribute to the AFISMA, and some Member States gave bilateral support. It is much more than contributions given in the past to AMIS in Darfur." Colonel Dieng, Head of the ECOWAS Security Department, made at the IHEDN-DAS seminar on the securitisation of flows in Africa, 3 April 2013.

²⁶ Interviews with SAIIA researcher Alfredo Tijurimo Hengari, 21 May 2013, the deputy head of the South African mission to the EU, the ambassador of Republic of Guinea, Dr Ousman Sylla, 3 and 4 June 2013.

²⁷ Phone interview with an African diplomat, 17 May 2013.

support.²⁸ On the other hand, it is perceived as the repetition of a françafrikan neo-colonial war by proxy.²⁹ In the case of Senegal, similar divergences have been noted within the country's public opinion. If Senegal's participation to the conflict is generally seen as a positive sign of African solidarity, a recent survey on religious radicalism in the country shows that up to 40% of Dakar people are opposed to the French intervention in Mali, and blame their country for being "a defender of French interests in the sub-region".³⁰

The French and European pro-activeness may have had a counter-effect on self-esteem of ECOWAS and West Africa in general on being able to provide solutions themselves³¹, while until recently the sub-regional organisation was depicted as the most advanced experience in the African Peace and Security Architecture. Scholar Achille Mbembé, while being theoretically opposed to the very idea of foreign interventions in Africa, states that "Africans cannot commend French troops in Mali without recognising at the same time that this intervention reminds their powerlessness and their inability to self-determination".³² For Marxist economist Samir Amin, "not much is to be expected from the countries of the ECOWAS", with unpredictable Nigerian forces and small capacities in Senegal.³³

These doubts however are not shared by everyone in Africa. High-level political figures like the Africa Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group Secretary General Mumuni actually state the opposite. For him, the way ECOWAS performed (with the deployment of troops from a number of countries like Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Guinea, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo) is the indicator of a new era in which Africans and Europeans are able to act jointly in partnership against transnational threats. Other African voices reinforce this line. For them, the French intervention "accelerated the deployment of ECOWAS which was delayed because this time there was no strong leadership from Nigeria – busy with internal issues in its North – or Ivory Coast – still in difficulty". The slow reaction of ECOWAS, which "perhaps was hoping for funding from Europe or elsewhere" in taking action would thus just be "temporary".³⁴

1.4. Northern African dynamics and Mali

While ECOWAS's crisis response mechanisms were activated and some troops mobilised, none of that was done by Northern African security cooperation structures. The Joint Operational General Staff Committee (CEMOC, gathering Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) "does not work".³⁵ Other structures like the Unité de Fusion et de Liaison (UFL) in Algiers, as well as the AU Centre on Counter Terrorism³⁶, have not been at the forefront of crisis prevention and management in the Sahel. Yet, as put by the International Crisis Group, "the clear failure of these arrangements does not mean the idea of creating regional security mechanisms should be forgotten."³⁷ Recent terrorist attacks in Libya, violence in Tunisia, political uncertainty in Algeria and military moves to secure the country's border recall the volatile situation in the region. Because of the cross-border nature of threats, the challenge is to use appropriate and effective

²⁸ President Deby initially was not keen to intervene and sought for UN and AU mandates to do so. Interview with an African diplomat, 17 May 2013.

²⁹ Phone interview with an African expert working in Northern, Central and Western Africa, April 2013.

³⁰ ISS Africa, Overview of religious radicalism and the terrorist threat in Senegal, ECOWAS Peace and Security Report Issue 3 May 2013.

³¹ Conversations with agricultural experts in Burkina Faso, April 2013, and with SAIIA researcher Alfredo Tijurimo Hengari, 21 May 2013.

³² Mbembé: le temps de l'Afrique viendra, Le Point, 12 February 2013, translated by the authors of this note.

³³ Znet, Mali: Analysis by Samir Amin, 4 February 2013.

³⁴ Interview with an African diplomat from the Sahel region, Brussels, 28 May 2013.

³⁵ Colonel Ndiawar N'Diaye, presentation made at the IHEDN-DAS seminar on the securisation of flows in Africa, Paris, 3 April 2013.

³⁶ www.caert.org.dz

³⁷ Crisis Group, Sécuriser, dialoguer et réformer en profondeur, 11 avril 2013, note 142 p. 42. Observatoire de l'Afrique, Nigeria and constitutional reform TBK. See International Crisis Group (2013).

regional cooperation formats. This is precisely the focus of AU efforts to make stronger connections between Northern and Western African cooperation frameworks.³⁸

The crisis in Mali has confirmed the need for strong regional cooperation frameworks, seriously and genuinely backed up by their Member States, able to find common solutions to transnational and cross border challenges. At the same time, it has also deepened a crack existing in the APSA, by separating Western and Northern African dynamics from Eastern and Southern ones. Secondly, it has re-affirmed an old policy template according to which France is playing an essential military and political role in this part of Africa. Finally, it has confirmed the acute need for de-radicalisation and the need for dialogue and research on the role of transnational radical Islam in Mali³⁹, Western and Northern African societies, in relation with pro-development public policies, beyond security interventions.⁴⁰ This issue is addressed in the EU Sahel strategy⁴¹ with a strong focus on the necessary comprehensiveness of the EU's external action.

2. Mali and EU comprehensive approach

Despite the announced plans, the EU's strategic paper on the "[comprehensive approach](#)" in its external action is still, in May 2013, at the drafting stage. It is therefore hard to use a commonly adopted definition of the concept. One may see it as an updated wording of previous attempts to improve the coherence of EU's external action through successive conceptual/strategic documents: some articles of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Consensus on Development, the Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) concept, the Action Plan on Fragility, Council Conclusions on Policy Coherence for Development (PCD), and more recently the EU strategic framework for the Horn of Africa and the strategy for Sahel. All these documents share a common objective of using the whole range of EU instruments in a coherent way to ensure the effectiveness of EU's external policies.

Coherence and comprehensiveness may sometimes lead to negative impact: several years before the crisis erupted in Mali, the EU and its Member States collectively turned a blind eye on the fact that Mali was definitely not a development success story.⁴² This experience means that a "comprehensive approach", even when applied to the letter, can mask fundamental political distortions (usually because of the positions of certain Member States that have specific national interests) and incoherencies in supposedly development-friendly European policies.

There is little doubt that France has been the leading European actor attempting to manage the crisis in Mali. EU positions and policies have been agreed according to a political line that has more often than not been defined in, or strongly inspired by, Paris or inside the French decision-making system. This is true for the EU Sahel strategy, but also for the response to the coup in Bamako and to the territorial conquer of jihadist groups as well as for the decisive French military intervention Serval. It is now still true for the conduct of donor's conferences, the political accompaniment of political processes as much as for security sector reform. In other words, when one reads EU's comprehensive approach in Mali, one should understand 'comprehensiveness between France's line and other EU member states in the use of EU

³⁸ Nouakchott declaration, March 2013. See African Union 2013. See Assemblée Nationale 2013.

³⁹ Crisis Group, *Sécuriser, dialoguer et réformer en profondeur*, 11 avril 2013, note 142 op. cit. p. 28-29. See International Crisis Group (2013).

⁴⁰ The existence of dormant terrorist cells in Bamako and in other countries of Western Africa, Islamist terrorist attacks in Algeria, Niger attacks are reported in the draft report on the implementation of the EU Sahel strategy, as well as in the media.

⁴¹ http://www.eeas.europa.eu/africa/docs/sahel_strategy_en.pdf

⁴² French diplomat Laurent Bigot made it very clear in a broadcasted speech initially given under the Chatham House rule but leaked on YouTube. It is also reported that the Head of the EU delegation in Mali repeatedly unsuccessfully warned the HQ and Member States about serious governance issues in the country. Phone interview with a European researcher studying EU's comprehensive approach, 22 May 2013.

instruments'. In the case of Mali, there is no comprehensiveness without the recognition that France has been the most relevant level of EU action to re-establish physical security. What the crisis tells us about the EU's comprehensive approach in external action is that it has to include the Member States in its scope.

Despite encouragement from the European Parliament⁴³ to go alongside Paris, EU Member States seem to have let France go mostly alone in handling the situation in Mali in terms of an offensive security response⁴⁴. With other EU member-states providing support 'from behind'⁴⁵ to Serval. Germany and the UK both excluded a priori any boots-on-the-ground option, and limited their contributions respectively to refuelling components⁴⁶, and to airlift and transport⁴⁷. Belgium and Denmark volunteered needed support.⁴⁸ Southern European countries such as Italy and Spain, directly concerned by the consequences of instability in the Sahel, did not opt for any major involvement, apart from some logistics.⁴⁹

As to the support from EU member states to European Union's Training Mission (EUTM) Mali, the picture is more positive despite sarcastic comments on the actual size and cost of the mission's protection force in Bamako.⁵⁰ France is in the lead concerning the number of men deployed, and in total 22⁵¹ out of 27 EU member states currently contribute to the training mission. For the first time, Mali saw Irish and UK units been deployed under the same battalion⁵². Moreover, it was the first time in Africa for a North-Baltic contingent⁵³. In the past months high-level representatives of member states and EU institutions paid visits to EUTM in Koulikoro and Bamako, such as Ministries of Defence from Germany,⁵⁴ Sweden,⁵⁵ Spain⁵⁶, the UK Defence Secretary⁵⁷ as well as civil and military authorities of the EU.⁵⁸

In terms of division of labour between the various components of EU's external action, France and the EU institutions (the European Commission, the Council and the European External Action Service – EEAS) found a compromise on a division of labour which suited them all. Because they have more or less been stuck with this division of labour up until now, there is some sense of coherence in this geometry of the EU's external action. At the administrative level, the bureaucratic nature of the EU system is such that inter-departments tensions within the EEAS or between the EEAS and the Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DEVCO)⁵⁹ are almost unavoidable, and policies towards Mali are not an exception. This being said, some coordination has been made at various levels and in several circumstances, to feed into the work of the Council, which discusses Mali on a monthly basis: an inter-service mission was sent to Mali as early as February 2013 in the view to planning post-crisis interventions, and a another one in May on reconciliation issues, to mention but a few. The deep involvement and strong leadership of France (with an efficient network of seconded national experts or French civil servants in EU structures), supported in the Council, has perhaps also boosted the efficiency of action.

⁴³ See European Parliament (2013).

⁴⁴ See Le Monde (2013).

⁴⁵ Policy Insight: see Friends of Europe and SDA (2013).

⁴⁶ See German Federal Government (2013).

⁴⁷ See UK Ministry of defence (2013a).

⁴⁸ See Amoda (2013).

⁴⁹ See Tisdall (2013).

⁵⁰ Interview an African ambassador from the region and with EU Institutions staff, Brussels, 31 May 2013.

⁵¹ France 207, Germany 71, Spain 54, UK 40, Czech Republic 34, Belgium 25, Poland 20, Italy 19, Sweden 14, Finland 12, Hungary 10, Ireland 8, Austria 7, Greece 4, Bulgaria 4, Latvia 2, Slovenia 4, Estonia 2, Lithuania 2, Portugal 1, Romania 1 et Luxemburg 1. <http://www.eutmmali.eu/?p=211>, <http://www.eutmmali.eu/?p=951>.

⁵² <http://www.maliweb.net/news/armee/2013/05/28/article,148943.html>

⁵³ <http://www.maliweb.net/news/armee/2013/05/28/article,148943.html>

⁵⁴ <http://www.eutmmali.eu/?p=282>

⁵⁵ <http://www.eutmmali.eu/?p=821>

⁵⁶ <http://www.eutmmali.eu/?p=837>

⁵⁷ See UK Ministry of Defence (2013b).

⁵⁸ <http://www.eutmmali.eu/?p=906>

⁵⁹ Although the EEAS is supposedly in charge of strategic planning, the Commission's desks of DEVCO still hold significant power in the subsequent planning phases.

Planning wise, the EU has made efforts to communicate that things look good (sometimes overshadowing the work of some African states also supporting Mali⁶⁰) and are done in consultation with the African side: the EU have so far mixed short⁶¹ (peace enforcement through combat operations by one Member State, actions and packages funded by the Instrument for Stability - IFS), medium (Common Security and Defence Policy – CSDP operations like EUTM, EUCAP Sahel and possibly another Rule of Law mission in Mali, IFS counter terrorism projects in the Sahel) and long (resumption of European Development Fund (EDF) funding with the state building contract based on a supposedly more sophisticated approach to budget support, along the lines of the EU Sahel strategy) term actions. Yet the idea that there is a coherent and comprehensive and harmonious EU approach rather than a collection of different EU efforts is still fanciful. The EU's comprehensive approach, to be real, has to be more than a repackaging of existing and new initiatives under one rhetorical umbrella and in Mali the evidence is not yet convincing.

As far as the implementation is concerned, the question remains: how effective and coherent (both internally and vis-à-vis African regional and continental priorities) the European and African post-conflict engagement in Mali and Sahel will be, once (if ever) the region disappears from the Elysée's and the French Ministry of Defence's (and therefore the Council of the EU) political radars?

3. The impact on Africa-Europe relations

The crisis in Mali and the Sahel is not over. For instance, tensions remain high in Kidal. The main challenge for Africa-Europe relations in the months to come will be to ensure that all stakeholders from both continents support jointly an enduring resolution of conflicts and tensions in the country and the region.⁶²

The strong implication of EU and French planning structures (including French staff members of the EEAS who frequently visit the region) has opened the doors to new forms of cooperation between EU's external action representatives and the ECOWAS.⁶³ Instead of relying on a direct channel of cooperation and communication between the ECOWAS and the EU, the response to the crisis was largely orchestrated from Paris. The French diplomatic and security apparatus used the EU (and the UN) as a platform to push political, diplomatic and security options and actions.

Some may think though this approach is not entirely new. In the past, France has acted by initiating multilateral organisations to pursue its interests and honour its responsibilities as UN Security Council permanent member. What is noticeable this year is that France, contrary to what it did in Chad in 2007, has decided to engage militarily independently from a EU security and defence framework. Neither has it acted in a NATO framework (used in Libya in 2011) but has chosen to act in a UN framework whereby it obtained a strong individual mandate. This format of action, from a French military perspective, is quite similar to the one used in Ivory Coast in 2010.

The last years' military interventions in Ivory Coast, Libya and Chad show that neither the EU nor the AU or the African RECs have individually emerged as the main security actors in this part of Africa. What is at play instead are the conditions under which African organisations and states are ready to tolerate interventions and initiatives from former colonial powers like France but also the UK and Italy (in the Libyan

⁶⁰ For instance one African ambassador stresses the fact that his country has fully (including with light weapons) equipped several battalions of the Malian army, in contrast with EUTM which only delivers training.

⁶¹ The EU, via its humanitarian office (ECHO), has also responded to emergencies, but humanitarian action as such is not part of the EU's external action, given the autonomy of the humanitarian space.

⁶² Interview with an African diplomat from the region, Brussels, 28 May 2013.

⁶³ The modalities of this cooperation would require more detailed research. One African ambassador admitted that France "twisted the arm" of ECOWAS states to accelerate their military involvement. Interview with an African ambassador of the region, Brussels, 30 May 2013.

case), somehow implying several new realities: first, the insecurity in these regions, at least in the particular case of Mali, was not only an African problem requiring an exclusively African solution, but rather a transnational threat and a joint challenge for some Europeans and Northern and/or Western Africans.⁶⁴ Since the Arab spring, Europe is indeed (re)discovering a 'stretching Southern neighbourhood'. The second new reality is that there can still be effective partnership on peace and security between Europeans and Africans outside of the African Peace and Security Architecture – at least in the short-term, according to a pragmatic and ad hoc division of labour. As ACP Secretary General Mumuni states, "We see France as representing the EU" and the "French intervention was post facto welcome by ECOWAS and the AU". This gave a new face to Africa-Europe relations.

As far as the AU is concerned, it got much less involved than in other conflicts on the continent. Unlike in Ivory Coast in 2010 when there were several attempts on behalf of the AU to mediate between Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Ouattara, the AU seemed to have stood on the backstage. While some comparisons have been made early in the crisis with the Somali conflict, they have not lasted as long as the model of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) – an AU-led operation funded mainly with EU money through the African Peace Facility (APF) – is not replicated per se in Mali. However, the APF is going to provide funds for the subsistence of Malian troops of up to 50 million euros.⁶⁵

In the absence of credible African-led or African-owned responses to a security threat partly originating in Europe (because of the indirect financing of terrorist networks by ransoms payments and the consequences of the 2011 NATO Libyan campaign), the remaining solutions led in a hybrid initiative pushed by France partly outside the templates of existing institutional frameworks of APSA (African Panel of the Wise, African Standby Force, ECOMOG) or the Africa-EU Partnership on Peace and Security (Africa Peace Facility). Yet, if the African security architecture was found wanting in Mali, so was the EU's CSDP and Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), as demonstrated by the missed deployment of EU Battlegroups.

At the end of the day, the case of Mali indicates that what seems to matter in the future is the existence of strong leadership on both European and African sides, lively diplomatic and security communication channels, and well prepared capabilities to react to unforeseen multidimensional, cross-border and cross-regional challenges. The fact that France's intervention was conceived as a temporary endeavour in coordination with Western African states indicates that Africa-Europe relations on peace and security in the Sahel have changed gear: it is not either/or (either European or African intervention, either a French, European or an African problem); it has become a joint challenge to be tackled together with available capabilities and resources reflecting the financial, military and technical asymmetry between both sides, in a "multilateral and inclusive" fashion.⁶⁶

Last but not least, it is likely that the experience of the Mali crises will lead to a strong emphasis in the future by the European side on peace and security issues in Western Africa and the Sahel-Sahara region. On the African side, the last AU summit conclusions, by deciding on the creation of an interim AU rapid intervention force, indicated that Mali's experience had a triggering effect. African experts go even further, suggesting that the question of African security capabilities (including not only expeditionary forces but also force enablers, strategic transportation and surveillance), enabled by European financial support, should be part of future Africa-EU discussions.⁶⁷ Focusing on peace and security priorities makes sense. However,

⁶⁴ This point was made clear most of the time during the dozen of interviews conducted for this note, emphasising in particular a) terrorism and organised crime as global threats, beyond Africa and Europe b) the triggering effect of the NATO-led campaign in Libya, implying therefore European responsibilities.

⁶⁵ Phone interview with a staff member of the French Ministry of Defence, 4 June 2013.

⁶⁶ These two words were used by Secretary General Mumuni on 28 May 2013.

⁶⁷ Phone interview with Africa Governance Institute Programme coordinator Maurice Enguéléguélé, based in Dakar, 29 May 2013.

the risk is that such a focus would hide other structural and fundamental development-related dimensions of the relationship between Africans and Europeans (like the questions of mutual economic return and joint influence in global governance⁶⁸), jeopardising the opportunity of the 2014 EU-Africa Summit to look for creative ways of rejuvenating other common agendas.

Looking forward

At first glance and in the short term, crises in Mali and the intervention of France and the EU may have paradoxically harmed the self-confidence of West African regional organisations and the African continent, renewing mistrust vis-à-vis France and Europeans, bringing back bad memories in Africa of the 2011 Libya campaign. This could be felt in the atmosphere of the summit celebrating the AU's 50th anniversary: France's president addressed an almost empty room mostly filled by journalists. His invitation to African leaders to a summit on security in France next December was received with contradictory reactions mixing irritation and satisfaction⁶⁹. Some gaps have temporarily reappeared between many Western African states and other regions of the continent, within the AU and between the AU and some RECs⁷⁰. Yet, at political level, the discourse is much more positive: the "multilateral and inclusive" way Africans (mainly via ECOWAS) and Europeans (mainly via France and EU institutions) have tackled threats in Mali indicate a reset of Africa-Europe relations on peace and security. It is "in contrast with Libya"; it allowed a timely intervention to avoid the repetition of "international neglect of Somalia" for decades⁷¹. The Mali crisis has also "reinforced quite vigorously the debate within Africa on how Africa can deal with these issues by itself", raising once more the question of a "meaningful application of the principle of ownership"⁷².

The Malian experience has brought to the fore the fact that the Africa-Europe relationship requires effective geographical differentiation and tailored approaches, and not only in development aid, to be activated thanks to a common vision of perceived threats and interests. It represents the real world of EU-Africa relations and a reality check and challenge to processes such as the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES). Stakeholders involved in the JAES will have to show a clearer link between their work and the real world of EU-Africa relations in Mali if the JAES is to remain relevant. Yet this will not serve a purpose if it is relentlessly short-term and crisis and security focussed.

In other words, within the APSA, each African region, depending on the positions and interests of its Member States, will invent the modalities of cooperation with the EU depending on its specific needs and European specific interests. Due to their geographical proximity, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa stand out in terms of the human security-development-migration nexus. This focus will probably not be relevant for other parts of the continent where stability seems more enduring and growth prospects look brighter, posing a myriad of other questions related to inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Beyond the terrorist threat and short-termism, it is hoped that the donors' conference on 15th May in Mali will lead to long term and inclusive development-focused joint engagement from African regional powers together with international contributors (including Europe), to support Malian authorities in addressing structural development challenges: North-South imbalance in education, infrastructure, water, along the lines of the country's national development strategy.

⁶⁸ These themes are being considered as priorities for the EU by some officials in EU institutions.

⁶⁹ See Rumeurs d'Abidjan (2013). See Maliweb <http://www.maliweb.net/news/la-situation-politique-et-securitaire-au-nord/2013/05/29/article,149098.html>

⁷⁰ Phone interview with Addis-based ISS Africa researcher, Abdelkader Abderrahmane, 10 May 2013.

⁷¹ Interview with ACP Secretary General Mumuni, Brussels, 28 May 2013.

⁷² Phone interview with ISS Senior researcher, Solomon Ayeledersso, based in Addis, 31 May 2013.

The Mali crisis could indeed inspire Africans and Europeans to reflect on a geographically focused, evidence-based and differentiated way of identifying common interests, aspirations and objectives, in the framework of an overarching, permanently held continent-to-continent dialogue like the Joint Africa Europe Strategy (JAES). In particular, the role of influential states beyond the continental institutions must be singled out in the future of relations between Africans and Europeans, for they are the regional engines of African political integration as well as of EU's external action. In that respect, and in the case of the crises in Mali, the role of and the relationship with Algeria would require particular attention at EU level, beyond bilateral relations often tainted by ambiguous post-colonial ties. This is also true for Nigeria, Angola, Kenya, and Ethiopia, where enhanced and upgraded political dialogue will probably be the only way to lead to a web of revitalised relationships openly focused on long-term and inclusive development challenges, mutual economic interests, and regional integration. The organisation of specific regionally-focused sessions and bilateral meetings during or in the margins of the Africa-EU summit could be an option to be envisaged by both parties.

On the EU side, the main lesson of the Mali crises for the comprehensiveness of external action is that it is still work in progress and cannot be effective without the contribution of influential Member States. That was the case of France on Mali, but it can be other former colonial powers or other pro-active states in other parts of the continent. This is true if their role brings irreplaceable added value, to be assessed either on an ad hoc basis, or through the revisiting of the subsidiarity principle⁷³ applied to the EU's external action.

The other lesson is that the soon-to-be 28 Member States cannot rely anymore on the foreign policy line of a single former colonial power (France in that particular case) to conduct development-friendly European external action in Africa. In former European (and in that case francophone) colonies, more collective political engagement is necessary to not only act preventively ahead of crises but also to ensure that development policies themselves are coherent with a long term vision of EU's external action.

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