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BRINGING THE DESERT TOGETHER: HOW TO ADVANCE SAHELO-MAGHREB INTEGRATION

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SUMMARY

- Global interest in the Sahel has expanded significantly in recent years. The growth of regional terrorism, the collapse of the Malian State in 2012, and the migration crisis after 2014 all mean that world must think about the Sahel. Yet despite the newfound attention to the region, regional and international efforts to resolve these crises remain inadequate.
- Region-wide strategies remain security-focused despite emphasising the need for improved governance. Informal economies and corruption continue to sap states of needed resources. And overly securitised efforts by the European Union to reduce migration to Europe damage border communities, undermine regional populations, and fail to adequately address the reasons why migration occurs.
- A more holistic approach to regional stabilisation is needed. To stabilise the region the EU and member states should create a joint migration framework for the Sahel, West Africa, and the Maghreb, manage informal economies, focus on long-term security sector reform, and harmonise and strengthen regional coordinating bodies to help reduce dependence on international support.

Global interest in the Sahel has expanded significantly in recent years. The growth of regional terrorism, the collapse of the Malian State in 2012, and the migration crisis after 2014 all mean that world must think about the Sahel. Yet despite the newfound attention to the region, regional and international efforts to resolve these crises remain inadequate.

Region-wide strategies and coordination forums have proliferated, and international money has poured into the region. But these strategies remain security-focused despite emphasising the need for improved governance. Informal economies and corruption continue to sap states of needed resources. And overly securitised efforts by the European Union to reduce migration to Europe damage border communities, undermine regional populations, and fail to adequately address the reasons why migration occurs.

This paper proposes a more holistic approach to regional stabilisation, one that acknowledges the need for better security capacity and coordination while also emphasising the need for greater regional integration between North Africa and the Sahel. This approach can help limit the appeal of operating in the informal sector while providing opportunities for legal work in the Sahel. The formalisation of some previously illicit or clandestine economic activity can, in turn, improve development and economic diversification in the Maghreb while providing labour opportunities for the region.

To accomplish these goals, the paper proposes that French and international efforts to improve intra-Sahel and

Sahel-Maghreb integration focus on migration, economic reform, security coordination, and regional institutional frameworks.

- Addressing migration issues involves creating a joint migration framework for the Sahel, West Africa, and the Maghreb. The EU should assist these countries to regularise and legalise population flows. The EU should also provide financing for regional economic projects, leave room for some legal migration to Europe and reduce pressure on local governments to crackdown on border communities.
- Regional economic reform requires developing an approach to migration and informal economies that encompasses the Sahel and the Maghreb, while also encouraging outside investment by regional states as well as the international community.
- Better security coordination involves a focus on long-term security sector reform beyond basic training for troops in countries like Mali and a better integration of security and governance initiatives to make security gains durable and sustainable.
- Finally, improving regional institutions entails harmonising and strengthening regional coordinating bodies to help reduce dependence on international support.

Introduction

The Sahel remains one of the world's poorest regions, buffeted by climate change, population growth, food insecurity, corruption, crime, and terrorism. Linked by these challenges, and the flow of people and goods across their porous borders, the countries of the Sahel have struggled to develop coordinated approaches to their numerous challenges. This paper examines security, economic, and migration challenges across the Sahel, and proposes recommendations for France and for the international community to foster regional coordination.

The international community increased its presence in the Sahel after 2012, when the jihadist takeover of northern Mali focused international attention on a country previously regarded as stable. Though the jihadist threat was not new – insecurity had been on the rise since the middle of the last decade, fed by smuggling networks and corruption – the collapse of Mali's government following the January 2012 Tuareg rebellion and the rapid advance of forces aligned with Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) came as a shock to many.

Prior national efforts focused on terrorism, such as France's 2008 Saharo-Sahelian Strategy, as well as prior regional and international frameworks, such as the U.S.-supported Pan-Sahel Initiative and Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) failed to contain jihadist activity or to

promote more effective governance in Mali in particular, the EU's effort to propose a more comprehensive Sahel strategy in 2011 arrived too late to counter regional instability.

European attention again focused on the Sahel and North Africa in 2015, triggered this time by the flood of migrants crossing the Mediterranean to Europe. In response, an international conference in November 2015 in the Maltese capital of Valetta brought European and African governments together to address the migration challenge. The focus was on reducing migrant flows from the Sahel, particularly those passing through Morocco as well as Niger, Algeria, and Libya.

By late 2015, European and international attention had generated at least 16 different national or multilateral strategies for addressing instability in the Sahel.¹ These European and international efforts have often focused on boosting security and counter-terror cooperation – a priority for both Europe and regional states. More recently, migration has also been a major concern of those international efforts.

But even more comprehensive and balanced initiatives have so far achieved little. Long-standing political and historical impediments to regional cooperation, a lack of coordination among the multitude of actors involved in the region, and overly security-focused approaches to complex socio-economic and political challenges have all limited the efficacy of international initiatives. At the same time, traditional development aid approaches are simply reinforcing regional dependence on international financial and technical support.² In Niger, for example, the international community provides up to 50 percent of direct budget support (30 percent of the total budget coming from the EU); in Mali, international aid comprises at least 40 percent of the country's budget.³

A multi-layered approach is needed to address the challenges facing the Sahel and needs to move beyond security assistance and traditional approaches to development aid. This paper lays out a comprehensive approach to address migration and security challenges while also advancing regional economic growth and development. It focuses on options for improving security coordination, increasing trade, and normalising labour and migration flows between the Maghreb (here understood as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya) and the Western Sahel (here defined as Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, and Niger). The approach begins with the premise that north-south integration offers the best prospects for strengthening regional stability and resilience to internal and external shocks.

1 Grégory Chauzal, "Fix the unfixable: Dealing with full-blown crises and instability: How to bring greater stability to the Sahel?" *Clingendael*, December 2015.

2 Henri de Raincourt and Hélène Conway-Mouret, "Sahel: Repenser l'aide publique au développement," *Rapport d'Information fait au nom de la commission des affaires étrangères, de la défense et des forces armées*, 29 June 2016.

3 Interviews with EU and Western diplomats and analysts in Niamey and Bamako, January-February 2017.

The paper also highlights the potential role of neighboring Maghreb countries, especially Algeria, in providing economic opportunity for workers from the Sahel and West Africa. Legal migration between the Sahel and the Maghreb would diminish illegal migration flows into Europe by creating a larger and more effective internal African labour market. This migration and expanded economic opportunities would also advance North Africa's economic diversification.

Regional rivalries and the challenges to integration

Regional integration in Africa has been hindered by multiple factors. Colonial rule separated what foreign powers saw as 'black' sub-Saharan Africa from the ostensibly 'white' Arab Maghreb, disrupting some of the traditional movements of goods and people across the Sahara.⁴

After independence, connections between these regions grew only slowly, as the Maghreb and the Sahelian West African states remained economically, politically, and socially tied to Europe. Among former colonial powers, France played the biggest role in shaping the economies of the West African Sahel through trade and monetary policy, at least through the 1990s.⁵

The political rivalries and competing interests among the Maghreb states has also greatly hindered coordination between North and West Africa. Political and to an extent economic integration in the Maghreb has been a common goal since before these countries' independence.⁶ However, no consensus exists on how to reach this objective, and attempts thus far have faltered. Commentators widely consider the Arab-Maghreb Union, established in 1988, moribund, even if it has made progress in recent years on trade agreements.⁷

Amid Maghreb disunity, north-west African integration has been piecemeal and determined largely by national interests. Sahelian and other West African states have pursued economic and political cooperation and integration within the framework of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), but it does not for the moment

4 Although trade and other forms of connections across and within the Sahara were never interrupted fully and in some limited cases expanded with the introduction of trucks to the Sahara, colonial territorial divisions, the outlawing of the slave trade and the slower interdiction of the trade itself, as well as the creation of new colonial centres all helped reduce the importance of the trade over time. The efforts to create racial and ethnic separations were particularly prevalent in colonial conceptions of Islam that drew distinctions between an ostensible "black Islam" south of the Sahara and "Arab Islam" in the Maghreb. For more on different aspects of these changes, see Benjamin Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France's Colonial Empire in the Algerian Sahara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Judith Scheele and James McDougall, eds, *Saharan Frontiers: Space and Mobility in Northwest Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012); Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Baz Lecocq, "Distant Shores: A Historiographic View on Trans-Saharan Space," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 56: 1 (March 2015), pp. 23-36; and Ghislaine Lydon, "Saharan Oceans and Bridges, Barriers, and Divides in Africa's Historiographical Landscape," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 56:1 (March 2015), pp. 3-22.

5 For instance, Kenneth B. Noble, "French Devaluation of African Currency Brings Wide Unrest," *The New York Times*, 23 February 1994.

6 Unity of action among North African nationalist movements was, for instance, a central idea in Allal Al-Fasi, *The Independence Movements in Arab North Africa* (New York: American Council of Learned Societies, 1954).

7 See Michele Bigoni, "The Union of the Arab Maghreb and Regional Integration," European Parliamentary Service Research Blog, 16 January 2014.

link them to their neighbors to the north.

Morocco's recent efforts to expand trade and investment links in sub-Saharan Africa are focused on countries with which Morocco has strong political bonds (such as Senegal and Gabon) and countries seen as sympathetic to Moroccan claims to the Western Sahara.⁸ However, Moroccan King Mohamed VI has also emphasised political as well as economic integration into regional and continent-wide institutions; Morocco officially joined the African Union (AU) in January 2017,⁹ and has formally requested to join ECOWAS, although a number of potential stumbling blocks may limit the impact of this move.¹⁰

Algeria historically advocates for resolving African political and economic issues within the institutional structures of the AU and appears to be increasingly interested in expanding economic ties with the Sahel. The government, for example, held a large-scale African business forum in Algiers in December 2016. But Algeria's bilateral relationships in the Sahel continue to centre on security and, to a lesser extent, migration concerns. Tunisia has some economic and security investments in the region but remains focused on domestic politics and reform and on its security problems along its borders with Libya and Algeria.

The political rivalries among Maghreb states, and their competing interests in the Sahel, has fueled the growth of competing and sometimes redundant regional institutions. The Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), established in 1998 to further economic unity and the free movement of commerce and populations, became, under former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, a tool for Libya to exert financial and political influence in the Sahel and West Africa. It is now led by Morocco, but does not include Algeria.

Meanwhile, an Algerian-led security-focused regional body, the *Comité d'État-Major Opérationnel Conjoint* (CEMOC), has struggled to improve security coordination. This failure has prompted the creation of new structures in the wake of the Mali crisis, including the 11-nation, Algerian-led (but African Union-coordinated) Nouakchott Process¹¹ and most importantly, the G5 Sahel – an EU-backed, Sahel-led regional coordination body aimed at circumventing Maghreb rivalries. At the same time, the G5 has revealed some intra-West African differences, with Senegal increasingly involved in peacekeeping in Mali but left out of this pan-Sahelian security arrangement.¹² As always, the proliferation of

8 Charlotte Bozonnet, "Nasser Bourita: 'Le Maroc est chez lui en Afrique'," *Le Monde*, 11 November 2016.

9 Morocco withdrew from the AU's predecessor the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1984. For an analysis of the politics behind Morocco's admission into the AU, see Hannah Armstrong, "Morocco just joined the African Union. Here's why that matters," *The Washington Post*, 20 February 2017.

10 Nadia Lamli, "Le Maroc demande son adhésion à la CEDEAO," *Jeune Afrique*, 25 February 2017; also see Gilles Olakounlé Yabi, "Le Maroc et la Cedeao : une adhésion et beaucoup de questions," *Jeune Afrique*, 20 June 2017.

11 "Nouakchott Declaration of the 1st summit of the countries participating in the Nouakchott process on the enhancement of security cooperation and the operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture in the Sahelo-Saharan Region," African Union Peace and Security Commission, Updated 19 December 2014, available at <http://www.peaceau.org/en/article/nouakchott-declaration-of-the-1st-summit-of-the-countries-participating-in-the-nouakchott-process-on-the-enhancement-of-security-cooperation-and-the-operationalization-of-the-african-peace-and-security-architecture-in-the-sahelo-saharan-region>.

12 Interview with senior French diplomat, Bamako, Mali, February 2017.

regional institutions dealing with the same issues further complicates regional cooperation and raises questions about the scope and purpose of each body and the allocation of roles and resources.

The recent security vacuum in the region has prompted a brief thaw in Morocco-Algeria relations. Alas, that improvement was offset by the construction of a wall along their shared border, continued accusations of interference in each other's affairs, and ongoing jockeying for economic advantage and influence among the Sahel's religious communities. Both Morocco and Algeria, for instance, have used religious ties to the Sahel and West Africa as a way of conducting informal diplomacy through soft power. This is particularly true with the Tijaniyya Sufi order, whose founder Sidi Ahmed Tijani was born in Ain Madhi, Algeria, but died in Fes, Morocco. The Tijaniyya has a vast membership in West Africa, and its members make regular pilgrimages to the centres honouring the order's founder in Algeria and Morocco. Both governments sponsor conferences inviting West African religious scholars to discuss the order's heritage and offer other benefits and inducements for their travel in order to win sympathy within the sub-region and bolster their own images for international audiences as bastions of 'moderate' Islam.¹³

The EU will need to navigate these developments carefully as it seeks to deepen relations with both Algeria and Morocco. One senior EU official in Niamey noted that EU relationships with both countries enhance its ability to encourage their constructive engagement within multilateral institutions in the Sahel.¹⁴ There is a risk, still, that Morocco's increased involvement in African institutions could potentially exacerbate tensions over the Western Sahara. For the moment, Morocco's inclusion has sparked tension without much evidence of improving regional dialogue. A March meeting in Dakar, for instance, was halted after Morocco demanded that Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic officials be refused from participating.¹⁵

Separately, the anarchy in Libya continues to create new political and security challenges. The spread of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) into Libya introduced a new element of instability. The movement of its fighters to other parts of North Africa and the Sahel, especially after its defeat in Libya, may further fuel regional instability. Libya's chaos is also exacerbating lawlessness and crime. Smuggling is thriving, fed by the continuation of Gaddafi-era subsidies. Smugglers, for example, capitalise on illicit sales of subsidised petrol to generate seed money for a broader trade in weapons, drugs, and people.¹⁶

¹³ For historical background and contemporary context, see Jean-Louis Triaud, "La Tidjaniyya, une confrérie musulmane internationale," *Politique Etrangère*, Winter 2010, pp. 831-842.

¹⁴ Interview with senior EU official, Niamey, Niger, January 2017.

¹⁵ Malek Bachir, "Morocco provokes crisis by blocking Western Saharan from AU meeting," *Middle East Eye*, March 28, 2017.

¹⁶ On the dynamics of smuggling in Libya, see Mark Shaw and Fiona Mangan, "Illicit Trafficking and Libya's Transition: Profits and Losses", US Institute of Peace, 2014, available at <http://www.usip.org/publications/illicit-trafficking-and-libya-s-transition-profits-and-losses>.

The threats emanating from Libya propelled improved security coordination between Algeria and Tunisia, including the establishment of a joint operations centre to respond to regional violence and jihadist infiltration.¹⁷ If the situation in Libya stabilises, opportunities exist to improve its integration within the Maghreb and the Sahel. Libyans already are working – albeit through competing government structures in Tripoli and Beyda – to strengthen their ties with the Sahel. General Khalifa Haftar, for example, is seeking closer political cooperation with both Chad and Niger. A reasonably stable Libya could use its \$67 billion sovereign wealth fund for investments in the region.

In the meantime, shared regional concern over the spread of jihadist militants could help revive organisations like CEMOC. To be effective, however, regional coordination should combine the high-level strategic dialogues now occurring within the G5 Sahel and the Nouakchott Process, with ground-level security coordination, along the lines of the tactical security cooperation between Algeria and Tunisia.¹⁸ The proposed G5 Sahel joint force has the potential to bridge the divide between different kinds of regional coordination, although, as we will see, many questions about the G5 remain.

The G5 sahel, an opportunity for change?

The G5 Sahel offers a potential starting point for streamlining regional cooperation. It has already proven somewhat more effective than past efforts at regional institutional structures. The G5 can help advance Maghreb-Sahel integration by avoiding some of the issues that have bedeviled similar efforts in the past, and enabling coordinated European support of regional security, economic, and development initiatives. But making this nascent coordination body effective will require member states and the EU to increase their investment to create openings for enhanced interaction with Maghreb states.

The G5 Sahel was launched in February 2014 by the five countries in the region most affected by jihadist violence – Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, and Burkina Faso – and is given political, financial, and technical support by France and the EU.¹⁹ Headquartered in Mauritania, the organisation's members view the initiative as grounded in their shared history, demographics, and geography, as well as their shared security and socio-economic challenges. Shortly after its founding, G5 Permanent Secretary El Hajj Najim Mohamed described it as "an economically integrated, socially prosperous, culturally rich space, where security and peace reign, founded on the rule of law, good governance and democracy."²⁰

¹⁷ Author's interviews with Tunisian officials in London and Tunis, October 2016.

¹⁸ To understand these complicated regional relationships, see "Algeria and its Neighbours", International Crisis Group, Middle East and North Africa Report, N°164, 13 October 2015.

¹⁹ Interviews with senior EU and French diplomats, Niamey and Bamako, January-February 2017.

²⁰ "Mot du Secrétaire Permanent," Secrétaire Permanent du G5 Sahel, 20 October 2015, available at <http://www.g5sahel.org/index.php/homepage/mot-du-secretaire-permanent>.

Part of the reason to create a Sahel-focused framework was to circumvent the politics and rivalries of the Maghreb, according to a French diplomat involved with the organisation.²¹ It was also intended to overcome some of the ineffectiveness of regional organisations like the CEN-SAD and CEMOC. Nonetheless, the G5 Sahel efforts remain subject to Morocco-Algeria tensions – given their influence on the Sahel through their bilateral relationships – as well as Algerian mistrust of what it views as a French-led initiative.²²

Another important aspect of the G5's mission is its dual emphasis on security and development – an approach that is a staple of counter-insurgency strategies around the world. Development specialists have long shunned this approach, and it has only recently gained acceptance within the EU. Regardless, G5 efforts to date have primarily focused on military and security coordination, matching the counter-terrorism priorities of its international partners. Unfortunately, the G5's drift away from economic and development cooperation risks losing momentum on broader efforts to address the social, environmental, and economic challenges that underpin sustained stability and security.

The new G5-supported program for enhanced security in Mali's Mopti and Gao regions and for the management of border areas in central and northern Mali referred to in French as the *Programme d'Appui au Renforcement de la Sécurité*, or PARSEC, is a test case for the EU's approach. The EU intends it to show how security, development, and governance initiatives can be integrated to try to stabilise a deteriorating situation.²³

PARSEC is one of many similar projects trying to integrate security and development, although PARSEC remains a key point of focus.²⁴ Unfortunately, this integrated approach receives uneven support among key European and US officials, who are concerned about diluting security imperatives. One senior EU official in Niamey, the capital of Niger, repeatedly stressed security over development priorities in discussions of the issue. Another cited the apparent disconnect between regional officials, who prioritise economic integration and infrastructure construction among G5 member states, and European and US officials, who are fixated on counter-terrorism and security coordination.²⁵ Other French, US, and EU officials in Niger and Mali more generally questioned the effectiveness of the G5.²⁶

21 Interview with senior French diplomat, Bamako, Mali, February 2017.

22 Interviews with European and Sahelian officials and experts in London, Paris, Niamey, and Bamako, December 2016–February 2017.

23 Interview with senior EU official, Niamey, January 2017.

24 Interview with French security official, Paris, France, June 2017.

25 Interview with EU Political Officer, Bamako, Mali, February 2017. Also see Seidek Abba, "La sécurité au Sahel se construit sans l'Algérie: jusqu'à quand?" *Le Monde*, 24 March 2016.

26 Interviews with American, French, and EU officials in Niamey, Niger and Bamako, Mali, January–February 2017.

Security concerns propelled the G5 states to hold an extraordinary summit in Bamako in February 2017, where they announced the operationalisation of a joint military force to confront rising violence and terrorist threats, though the idea of the force was first introduced in November 2015.²⁷ Sahel states also announced in February joint patrols and operations in the tri-border region between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, as part of the Liptako-Gourma initiative, which will be a "component force" of the G5 joint military force.²⁸ In April 2017, the African Union Peace and Security Commission approved a concept of operations for this joint force composed of some 5,000 troops and police officers.²⁹ A resolution approving the force stalled in the UN Security Council despite French pressure and the urgings of the G5 countries, while the UN Security Council eventually approved a watered-down resolution that praises the force but withholds Chapter VII authorisation from the council.³⁰

The EU has already promised €50 million for the joint force,³¹ and during a G5 summit that also included French President Emmanuel Macron in early July 2017 France pledged to give 70 tactical vehicles to the force in addition to other operational support.³² This aid will be part of a broader initiative announced on 13 July, the Alliance for the Sahel, which will include support from France, the EU, and Germany among others, and development aid from the *Agence Française de Développement* that will reportedly amount to €200 million.³³ However, the force will reportedly need a budget as high as €423 million, requiring additional support from European and international partners to finance the initiative.³⁴ The force will reportedly be headquartered at the Malian military base in Sévaré under the command of Malian General Didier Dacko, although its operations will, for the moment, be focused on border areas where the component armies of the G5 are already operating, with an initial focus on the border areas of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.³⁵

It remains to be seen, however, how operations previously under the Liptako-Gourma initiative will be effectively linked with those launched through the G5 Sahel joint force, and how both operations will be equipped and organised.

27 Emma Farge, "EXCLUSIVE: African Union considers Mali counter-terrorism force," *Reuters*, 9 March 2016; Andrew Lebovich, "Serious questions remain over G5 Sahel military force," the European Council on Foreign Relations, 16 June 2017. (hereafter, Andrew Lebovich, "Serious questions remain over G5 Sahel military force.")

28 "Deuxième Session Extraordinaire de la Conférence des Chefs d'Etat," Autorité de Développement Intégrée de la Région du Liptako-Gourma, 24 January 2017; "Le Mali, Niger et Burkina créent une force commune pour le Liptako-Gourma," *RFI*, 25 January 2017.

29 "Communiqué de la 679ème réunion du CPS sur le projet de Concept d'opérations (CONOPS) stratégique de la Force conjointe du G5 Sahel," African Union Peace and Security Commission, April 21, 2017.

30 Benjamin Roger, "Mali: quoi de neuf pour le futur mandat de la Minusma?," *Jeune Afrique*, 29 May 2017; Marie Bourreau, "G5 Sahel: vote à l'arraché sur le déploiement d'une force africaine," *Le Monde*, 21 June 2017.

31 On the challenges and risks from the joint force, see Andrew Lebovich, "Serious questions remain over G5 Sahel military force."

32 Baba Ahmed, "France Pledges to Bolster African Antiterrorism Force," *Associated Press*, 2 July 2017.

33 Elena Blum, "Nous voulons montrer aux populations du Sahel qu'une action publique est entreprise pour eux," *Le Monde*, 14 July 2017.

34 "Le financement, nerf de la guerre du sommet G5 Sahel," *TV5 Monde*, July 2, 2017.

35 See "Bilan du G5 Sahel: des annonces concrètes mais un manque de financement," *RFI*, 3 July 2017; "G5 Sahel: le projet de force conjointe antijihadiste en quête de fonds," *Jeune Afrique*, 2 July 2017.

The overlap no doubt reflects pressure to address rising insecurity due to a spate of deadly attacks in Tillabéry, Niger in October 2016. It also reflects the evolution of the G5 security mandate, which had been some time in development, according to interviews with French, EU, and American officials, as well as local activists and observers in Niamey. The G5 has conducted an extensive series of coordination meetings on security and development issues. It has also organised several joint border patrols and operations around Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, and Niger since late 2015 under the auspices of the G5.³⁶

Even as they press for a more assertive G5 approach on security, European officials cite uneven cooperation and priorities across the G5.³⁷ In addition, while the G5 framework has enabled security solutions targeted to the common needs of its members, cooperation in other areas – notably in the field of development – continues to be organised around the traditional divisions of North, West, and Central Africa.³⁸ Donors are also struggling to find the balance between regional assistance programs that maximise efficiencies and bilateral assistance that improves government-to-government relations.

International coordination also lags behind the proliferation of internationally supported initiatives and programmes.³⁹ A UN expert noted that donor coordination is so cumbersome in Mali (where over 50 donors are implementing programs on security only) that the very process of coordination threatens the ability to implement the programs if the process cannot be streamlined.⁴⁰ As the delays and complications with the implementation of the UN Sahel Strategy suggest, the challenge in the Sahel is not to devise new initiatives, but to improve the effectiveness and complementarity of programmes already underway.

For example, French officials who have worked closely with the G5 Sahel suggest that the organisation could take on an effective role as a coordinating body for development and investment issues in addition to its security role.⁴¹ This presents a potentially significant avenue for streamlining regional investment in the Sahel, although it would need to overcome some of the current institutional weaknesses of the G5 as well as the sometimes-divergent interests of G5 partner nations and the various international donors.

Migration and the smuggling sector

Migration is one of the key issues that straddles economic, security, and political fault lines. Alongside terrorism, it is the most important issue guiding European interactions with the Sahel. However, it remains politically fraught, and

even efforts to track migration flows can be controversial.⁴² In one example, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) set up – with EU support – monitoring centres in the northern Nigerien towns of Agadez and Siguedine to monitor and assist West Africans passing through to Algeria and Libya.⁴³ The IOM reported a steep rise in migrants passing through Agadez in early 2016 compared to 2015.⁴⁴ Following Nigerien government action against smugglers, which altered smuggling patterns around the city and in other key transit nodes, the IOM reported that migration through Niger to Libya fell significantly after September 2016, with fewer migrants transiting both monitoring points.⁴⁵ The IOM also reported in April that migration through their monitoring points had significantly decreased compared to last year.⁴⁶

But the reductions in flows achieved by these crackdowns is unlikely to be sustained in the long-term. Many observers believe such crackdowns are in part intended to keep European money flowing while only temporarily inhibiting smuggling. Others believe that that the authorities in Niger will have to relent in response to pressure from northern communities and from security forces that rely on money and bribes from migrants to supplement their meagre salaries.⁴⁷

There is little evidence that the crackdowns can halt all overall migration anyway. Although the numbers of migrants has declined considerably from the May 2016 high of 70,000 per month, 11,000–12,000 migrants were still transiting these centres monthly in late 2016, and this figure only includes those migrants who pass through the centres in which the IOM conducts research.⁴⁸ Moreover, these numbers also include circular and seasonal migration to Algeria and Libya; as insecurity has made Libya in particular less safe for work, the numbers of regional migrants may have decreased, or shifted elsewhere. A drop in these numbers does not, then, necessarily indicate that fewer migrants are trying to reach Europe. Moreover, regional observers believe the peak from May 2016 was a fluke, with subsequent reductions not necessarily reflecting an impact of EU policy as much as a natural movement toward more ‘normal’ migration patterns.⁴⁹

Overall, migration statistics from Niger should be taken with a grain of salt as the traditional measurement mechanism by the IOM was based on a system in which people smuggling took place in the open, often in bus stations. But as a result of the crackdown people smuggling has now gone underground and often outside of begins outside main city

42 Interview with senior IOM official, Niamey, Niger, January 2017

43 “Turning the Tide” op. cit.

44 “IOM Records Over 60,000 Migrants Passing Through Agadez, Niger Between February and April 2016,” IOM Press releases, 27 May, 2016.

45 Steve Scherer, “Fewer migrants are crossing Niger for Libya: IOM,” *Reuters*, 21 April 2017. (hereafter, Steve Scherer, “Fewer migrants are crossing Niger for Libya: IOM”.)

46 Steve Scherer, “Fewer migrants are crossing Niger for Libya: IOM”.

47 Interviews with NGO, civil society representatives, and northern Nigerien intermediaries, Niamey, Niger, January 2017; also see Ibrahim Manza Diallo, “Niger-Agadez: les anciens acteurs de la migration expriment leur colère face aux autorités,” *Sahelien.com*, 8 May 2017.

48 Kristy Siegfried, “EXCLUSIVE: EU migrant policy in Africa built on incorrect data,” *IRIN News*, 31 January 2017.

49 Interview with senior IOM official, Niamey, Niger, January 2017.

36 Interview with French security official, Paris, France, June 2017.

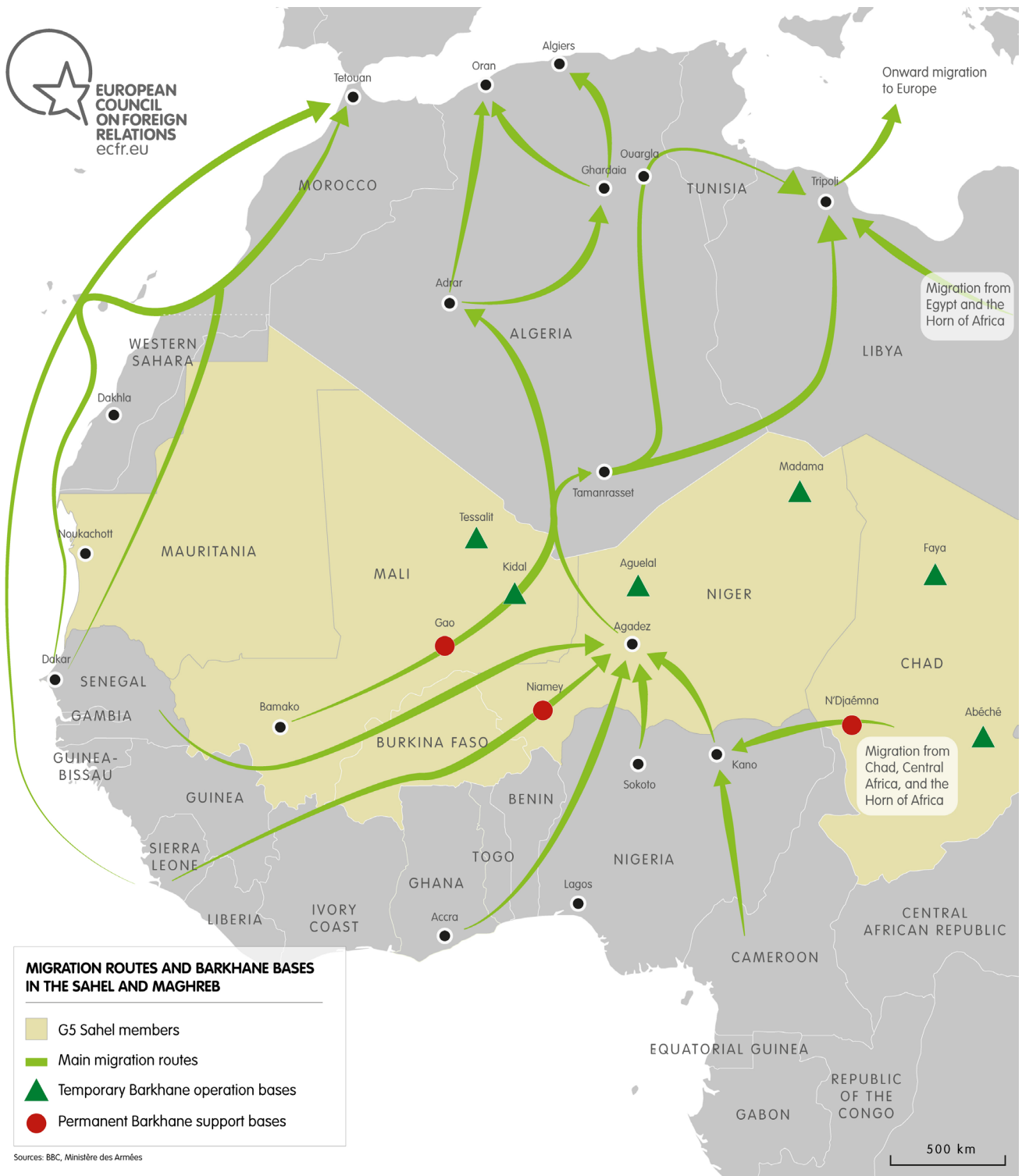
37 Interview with French foreign ministry officials, Paris, France, December 2016.

38 Conversations with Algerian healthcare professional involved in international and regional medical cooperation, Oran and Algiers, Algeria, April 2017.

39 Grégory Chauzal, “Fix the unfixable: Dealing with full-blown crises and instability: How to bring greater stability to the Sahel?,” *Clingendael*, December 2015.

40 Interview with senior UN official, Dakar, Senegal, October 2016.

41 Interview with French security official, Paris, France, June 2017.



centres, making measurements of flows, and the consequent predictions of future flows, more difficult to ascertain. In interviews, the IOM and other officials acknowledged these difficulties in monitoring migrant flows.⁵⁰

Still, Niger remains a central focus for EU efforts, and since the 2015 Valletta Summit that country has received the most EU funding of any country in the region to deal with

migration.⁵¹ The EUCAP Sahel-Niger mission, a EU civilian operation meant for local capacity building, has provided training, equipment, and coordination assistance. The French and American military presence in Niger seeks to further push smugglers to change routes and challenge their ability to operate with impunity.⁵² Increased EU efforts for identifying,

⁵¹ Interviews with senior EU officials in Niamey, January 2017. Also see Mattia Toaldo and Luca Barana, "The EU's migration policy in Africa: five ways forward," the European Council on Foreign Relations, 8 December 2016.

⁵² On the people smuggling networks, particularly in the Sahel and West Africa, see Peter Tinti and Tuesday Reitano, *Migrant, Refugee, Smuggler, Saviour* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2016).

⁵⁰ Interviews with senior IOM official, EU and Western diplomats, and Niger civil society representatives, Niamey, January 2017.

measuring, and helping repatriate foreign migrants stuck in Niger will also help alleviate some problems.

But the political and social cost of pushing individual countries to crack down too heavily on migrant networks means that one country cannot bear the whole burden. A regional framework and better regional cooperation are necessary to deal with Niger's migration problem and the larger regional problem.

Tackling the 'root causes' problem

EU programmes in Niger and international aid related to migration are often framed in terms of going after the 'root causes' of migration. The implication is that better economic opportunity in places like northern Niger will dissuade migrants from traversing the desert to seek passage north.

These descriptions fail to note the historical and contemporary manifestations of trans-Saharan migrations. As result, EU programmes pour money into solutions that may benefit some populations (especially in Niger), but do little to reduce migration or provide for healthier regional economies.

These programmes face a material challenge; despite being advertised as rapid responses to the migration crisis, their real impact will not be felt for several years. According to EU officials in Niamey, for instance, a joint Franco-Spanish police training mission is planned, but only the French component is currently in place.⁵³

Another issue is the misplaced focus of training and equipment efforts and development initiatives. The city of Agadez, for example, has become a focus of Nigerien and international development efforts.⁵⁴ But, however well intentioned they may be, programmes in Agadez do little to actually deal with the 'root causes' of migration.

Agadez is a point of transit, rather than a destination for migrants. Although international programs would be able to create some employment in Agadez and the surrounding region, it would be insufficient to absorb the number of immigrants still trying to reach Europe. Moreover, such programs would do little to address seasonal migration, which accounts for a significant portion of the migrants from Niger and Mali.

Local specialists and residents have also noted that aid projects in Agadez would do little to curb the impetus to smuggle. It may even allow for continued investment and specialisation within the industry as migrant ghetto managers and traffickers alike could use the money to further invest in the development of their business networks.

International observers and locals agree that migration has

⁵³ Interview with senior EU official, Niamey, Niger, January 2017.

⁵⁴ European External Action Service, "EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa," EEAS Factsheet; Interviews with senior EU official, Niamey, Niger, January 2017.

dropped over the past year. That said, both note that the spike in May could have been related to seasonal patterns as well as wanting to travel before Ramadan, and there has been no drop in the numbers of migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean.⁵⁵

Although Mali is a transit point for many fewer migrants, they continue to pass through Gao in Mali and other towns on their way north or as part of the journey to Niger and then to Libya.⁵⁶ Observers in northern Niger and northern Mali noted a small but still important increase in migrant trafficking through Mali, an indication of the continued passage of migrants and the willingness of migrants and traffickers alike to risk travel through politically unstable areas in order to reach North Africa.⁵⁷

Beyond the short-term questions of migration flows, however, there is a deeper issue. Communities on the edge of the desert and those in areas with variable growing seasons have for centuries engaged in different forms of seasonal labour migration.⁵⁸ Within the Sahara itself, migration and transnational commerce are necessary for the very survival of both sedentary and nomadic populations. Indeed, they have always been part of regional networks of trade and communication.⁵⁹ This connectivity and dependence on trade – with connections and income supporting populations far beyond just the edge of the desert – mean that any efforts to rein in illicit trade should think beyond mere suppression to consider broader economic effects.

Policing and integrating border communities

The existence of transnational commerce, the vast distance between states, and the often limited resources of Sahelian and North African states make border security a major challenge. It is not, however, an insurmountable one. Algeria has, for instance, deployed tens of thousands of troops to its borders with Libya, Niger, and Mali, and Algeria's government regularly announces seizures of weapons and the discovery of weapons caches in these areas.

Niger's government has also increased efforts at border security with the help of the EUCAP Sahel Niger mission, although basic issues of capacity, such as access to fuel and intelligence, remain. Migrants and traffickers also continue to pass through Mali, where French and local forces remain the only obstacles to traffickers, aside from criminality and rivalries between armed groups.

⁵⁵ Interviews with EU and IOM officials, as well as Agadez- and Niamey-based Nigerien journalists and civil society representatives, Niamey, Niger, January 2017. Also see "Turning the Tide" op. cit.

⁵⁶ Skype interview with European researcher specialized in migration in the Sahel, 23 November 2016.

⁵⁷ Interviews conducted with local and international actors in Niamey and Bamako, January-February 2017.

⁵⁸ See for instance A.I. Asiwaju, "Migrations as Revolt: The Example of the Ivory Coast and the Upper Volta before 1945," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 17:4 (October 1976), pp. 57-594; on regional economies over a longer period in the Sahel and deserts' edge, see Benedetta Rossi, *From Slavery to Aid: Politics, Labour, and Ecology in the Nigerien Sahel, 1800-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁵⁹ See for instance Judith Scheele, "Circulations marchandes au Sahara: entre licite et illicite," *Hérodote*, 2011/3 (n°142), pp. 143-162.

Capacity building with the assistance of the EU, France, and United States as well as better intelligence and security coordination can help limit certain types of trafficking and informal trade. But continued conflict in Mali as well as growing insecurity in northern Niger will continue to inhibit these efforts.⁶⁰

However, the challenges of illicit trade are not simply issues of security. Indeed, discussions of smuggling and illicit gains also raise the complicated issue of the drug trade in the Sahel. Measuring the size and contours of the drug trade is remarkably difficult in an area where there is limited information, pervasive rumour, and where there are incentives to slander and defame rival parties.

But we can say that as armed groups in Mali and in the broader region have fragmented and become intertwined with internal and communal conflicts, financing from suspected drug and other traffickers to armed groups has begun to affect regional security. This proliferation of armed groups and the confluence of trafficking and political interests, for example, has contributed to ongoing delays in the placement of interim authorities in Mali's northern regions as stipulated in the 2015 Algiers Accords.⁶¹

In Mali, smuggling is a key source of funds for pro- as well as ostensibly anti-government armed groups. Interviews there suggested that if the presence of international forces in Mali has reduced the number of available routes for smuggling through Mali, it has also fueled conflict over which groups and communities will predominate in those areas.⁶²

In Niger, meanwhile, French forces have come across drug shipments on multiple occasions, and interviews with security sources indicate that other seizures have taken place without being publicly reported.⁶³ Northern Nigerien residents tell stories of a continuing narcotics trade that has become more specialised and professionalised in the past year, not unlike the migrant trade.⁶⁴

Cracking down on smuggling in the Maghreb or Sahel also poses a potential security risk. Border communities are frequently allowed to continue smuggling not just because local officials benefit, but also because cooperation with these communities can be essential in border policing, intelligence collection and even the physical expulsion of militants. This reality means

60 Andrew Lebovich, "Stabilising Mali - why Europe must look beyond technicalities", the European Council on Foreign Relations, May 2017, available at http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_stabilising_mali_why_europe_must_look_beyond_7293.

61 Electronic communications with Timbuktu- and Gao-based analysts as well as MINUSMA political officers and analysts, Bamako, Mali, February and March 2017. "Mali: l'installation des autorités intérimaires dans le Nord est enfin terminée," *Jeune Afrique*, 21 April 2017.

62 Interviews with northern Customs official and Timbuktu-area Arab notable, Bamako, Mali, January-February 2017. On the return of drug trafficking to Mali after the French intervention, see Boris Thioly, "Cocaïne: Révélation sur la poudrière Malienne," *L'Express*, 28 May 2015; also see Andrew Lebovich, "The Risks of Deeper Engagement in Mali," the European Council on Foreign Relations, 3 August 2016.

63 "Niger: Accrochage entre des soldats français et un groupe armé à la frontière libyenne," *Le Parisien*, 18 May 2015. Interview with French security sources, Bamako, Mali, November 2016 and February 2017.

64 Interviews with journalists, NGO officials, and notables from northern Niger, Niamey, Niger, January 2017.

that, as regional governments work toward better border policing, intelligence sharing, and joint security patrols, they will also need to focus on the integration of semi-licit commerce into the formal economy and the development of alternative livelihoods. They will need an in-depth understanding of how different communities trade and the ability to distinguish between those who smuggle products like petrol and foodstuffs from those who traffick weapons and drugs.

Currently though, in Niger, the authorities are cracking down on smuggling in the absence of a viable alternative for border communities. Moreover, allegations from Nigerien officials including President Issoufou that migrant traffickers also traffic in weapons leads to the stigmatisation of all communities involved in trafficking and makes economic integration much more difficult.⁶⁵

For the moment, it is impossible to say whether a replacement of the informal economy is durable, desirable, or even possible in Niger. Nigerien officials including President Issoufou have mastered the art of presenting themselves as cooperative and capable partners in counter-terrorism operations. It is true that Niger's security forces remain more experienced and capable than Malian forces and even Nigerian forces in some cases.

Still, the country stands to benefit enormously from continued European assistance. It is dependent on that aid and on the intervention of foreign military forces to deal with evolving threats along its borders. French and reportedly American forces maintain operational bases in the country. The American government is also currently engaged in large-scale modernisation and expansion efforts at the country's air base in Agadez.⁶⁶ However, this activity and aid cannot provide a livelihood for traffickers and more importantly for those communities they support.

Meanwhile, official corruption remains rife. Since the Valletta summit, Nigerien authorities have arrested a certain number of gendarmes and other security forces accused of corruption, as well as impounded more than 100 4x4 vehicles.⁶⁷ However, given that regional security forces are deeply involved in taxing smuggling activities and taking money from migrants, this number appears very low. Indeed, one senior Niger official charged with mediation in the north indicated that the impounded trucks would likely be released to their owners soon. The seizures served more as a warning than anything else to dissuade migrant smugglers from engaging in the trade as openly as they had been.⁶⁸

A more regional approach to migration and semi-licit trade

65 For example, see "Message à la Nation de SEM Issoufou Mahamadou, Président de la République, Chef de l'Etat à l'occasion du 58^e anniversaire de la proclamation de la République," Présidence de la République du Niger, 18 December 2016.

66 Interviews with Agadez residents, Niamey, Niger, January 2017; Aboubacar Yacouba Barma, "Terrorisme au Sahel: à quoi servent les forces étrangères?" *La Tribune Afrique*, 6 March 2017; Georges Berghezan, "Militaires Occidentaux au Niger: présence contestée, utilité à démontrer," GRIP, 7 November 2016; Antonin Tisseron, "Regards locaux sur le terrorisme. Quelques remarques à propos du Niger," *Dynamiques Internationales*, January 2017.

67 Interview with Nigerien judicial official, Niamey, Niger, January 2017.

68 Interview with senior Nigerien mediation official, Niamey, Niger, January 2017.

is warranted and necessary. Regional countries should also consider the possibility of legalising parts of the informal trade beyond the tax amnesties currently offered, though this clearly cannot and should not extend to trade in some illicit substances, particularly weapons and narcotics. Similar actions could be undertaken in Libya, where the Government of National Accord is reforming the subsidy system for many key goods, particularly petrol, and replacing it with cash handouts.⁶⁹

A more flexible regional strategy on subsidies and smuggling, aimed at formalising the informal, could help better integrate border communities and assuage concerns that the state may eventually try to disrupt their trading networks for licit goods. It may also help leverage these communities to better ensure border security through cooperation with security forces.

Regularising semi-licit trade could also help with the problem of labour migration. Currently tens of thousands of migrants from the Sahel and West Africa as well as Central Africa pass through Mali and Niger on their way to Europe. These migrants benefit from free circulation within ECOWAS countries, travelling to jumping-off points in the Maghreb. Some endure tragic circumstances along the way, getting stuck in legal limbo in Algeria or Morocco, or staying in these countries to work while they wait for the opportunity to cross the Mediterranean.⁷⁰

Better security cooperation and increased patrols in the Mediterranean may be able to save lives during the dangerous crossing, but continued and expanding migration as well as the precarious legal and economic status of migrants in Morocco and Algeria remain a pressing concern, although both Algeria and Morocco have announced plans to regularise the status of at least some migrants and refugees.⁷¹ With better coordination, legal changes, and financing for business and agricultural projects, migrants could be encouraged to seek work in the Maghreb.

A coordinated plan, combined with increased investment for agricultural and industrial projects in the region, is necessary. If well-implemented, it could provide a path to regulate the status of these migrants in the Maghreb and help create circular regional labour migration that provides income for migrants, labour for projects, and a path to work that lessens the risks of travel and decreases the strain of migration in Europe.

Is economic integration possible?

The colonial occupation and post-independence politics

69 On the role of subsidies in Libya's smuggling system and in migration flows, see Mattia Toaldo, "Libya's migrant-smuggling highway. Lessons for Europe", the European Council on Foreign Relations, 10 November 2015, available at http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/libyas_migrant_smuggling_highway_lessons_for_europe5002.

70 For instance Tuesday Reitano and Peter Tinti, "Survive and Advance: The Economics of Smuggling Refugees and Migrants Into Europe," Institute for Security Studies Paper 289, November 2015.

71 Hadjer Guenefa, "Hommes d'affaires, privatisation, migrants: Tebboune affiche ses différences avec Sellal et Ouyahia," *Tout sur l'Algérie*, 24 June 2017; "Maroc: poursuite de la politique de régularisation des migrants clandestins," *RFI*, 3 March 2017.

in the region disrupted many pre-colonial patterns of trans-Saharan, inter-Saharan, and Sahelian commerce and movement. Only in more recent years have the countries of the Maghreb begun focusing on investment and trade in the rest of the continent. ECOWAS could provide an effective vehicle for better regional economic coordination, reduced trade restrictions, and the construction and expansion of infrastructure projects like the trans-Saharan route meant to link Nigeria to Algeria.⁷² The latter is particularly important given the free movement of people within ECOWAS and the potential to coordinate similar visa-free travel with Algeria.⁷³

Security issues present a serious challenge but improved and expanded roads could help ease travel and commerce, and encourage informal trade through areas more easily regulated and secured by regional states. This informal trade currently makes up a significant portion of intra-Saharan commerce, particularly between Algeria (the source of heavily subsidised goods like petrol and foodstuffs), Mali, and Niger.⁷⁴ Improved infrastructure and decreased trade barriers will not eliminate informal trade, nor will it necessarily reduce trafficking in illicit goods or human smuggling. But it may help create conditions to bring local populations further into more regulated trade, and increase the ease of transport and sale of licit goods.

Although Tunisia is involved in some trade and financing in the Sahel through entities like the *Banque Tunisienne de Solidarité* and other initiatives, Morocco and Algeria have the most potential when it comes to commercial investment. Particularly under Mohammed VI, Morocco has invested heavily in the Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa in fields such as telecommunications, mining, air transportation, and banking. The latter field has been particularly fruitful for Moroccan investments, and these banks have more financial presence in ECOWAS countries than French banks.⁷⁵ Moroccan merchants are also very active in Sahelian countries. Royal diplomacy with Mali and Senegal has provided high-level impetus for greater investment and economic ties.

Algeria has similarly maintained a strong diplomatic presence in the Sahel. Algerian merchants (particularly those with family connections in Mauritania, Mali, and Niger) remain active in licit, illicit, and semi-licit trade in these countries.⁷⁶ In recent years, the Algerian government has quietly given sanction to businesses and investors to operate more actively in West Africa and the Sahel. But a lack of clarity over changing Algerian investment laws, ongoing insecurity in Mali, continued confusion over government priorities, and the succession

72 On Trans-Saharan Route (RTS in French) see Aabla Jounaidi, "Algérie-Nigeria: où on est le projet de route transsaharienne?" *RFI*, 5 December 2016; "La Route Transsaharienne: un projet d'environ 10,000 km pour la stabilité et la croissance inclusive au Maghreb et au Sahel," African Development Bank Group, 14 May 2015.

73 At the moment, Algeria only has a visa-free travel regime in place with Mali.

74 For trade between Algeria and Mali, see Sami Bensassi, Anne Brockmeyer, Matthieu Pellerin, and Gael Rabelland, "Algeria-Mali Trade: the Normality of Informality," World Bank Working Paper, 22 March, 2015.

75 Frédéric Maury, "Dans l'UEMOA, les banques marocaines pèsent deux fois plus que les françaises," *Jeune Afrique*, 26 October 2015.

76 See Judith Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

to President Bouteflika have all contributed to slowing down the rate of investment.⁷⁷

The December 2016 forum on Algerian investments in Africa convened by Algeria's *Forum des Chefs d'Entreprise* (FCE) was meant to provide the opportunity for closer business ties and more official encouragement for Algerian merchants to trade and invest in the Sahel. News coverage of the Forum, which brought more than 2,000 businessmen and women to Algiers, focused instead on a protocol flap.⁷⁸ But, according to some Algerian observers, the Forum still provided the chance for increased business and personal contacts that could pay off in the long-term.

Algerian government and business leaders have been increasingly vocal in public about the opportunities on the African continent for trade and the necessity of increasing this trade as a means of diversifying Algeria's economy. This issue has taken on increased importance with Morocco's return to the African Union this year.⁷⁹ A relaxation of Algeria's banking and cash transfer laws may also help increase this trade somewhat, as would an ability to change money more easily in Algeria and abroad. These changes remain too slow and too gradual to make a significant difference in the short term, but should be a focus of international cooperation efforts moving forward.

Smuggling, fueled by large Algerian subsidies on basic goods, is rife among Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia.⁸⁰ An eventual recalibration of Algerian and Libyan subsidies may make smuggling in subsidised products less attractive. But especially in desert border regions, there is little likelihood that the structures would change enough to seriously reduce smuggling. Temporary tax amnesties meant to encourage integration of the informal economy have so far largely failed, mostly due to fears that authorities will crack down on any money brought back into the formal banking system.⁸¹ Similarly, efforts to float bonds that can be purchased anonymously have brought only limited resources into the system.⁸²

These problems are more likely to be solved with a combination of enforcement and better institutional coordination to promote free trade. Algeria and ECOWAS have been in free trade negotiations for several years, but so far to no avail. The EU and other partners should encourage and broaden this effort to reduce barriers to trade and decrease the benefits of illicit trade. Moreover, international partners and investors can link labour flexibility and new pathways to legal labour migration to Algeria's self-described need for economic diversification and the expansion of manufacturing and agricultural enterprises. Algerian

⁷⁷ Interviews with Algerian journalists and merchants, Algiers, Algeria, July 2015.

⁷⁸ Riyad Hammadi, "Scandale du Forum Africain: Lamamra et Haddad gravement mis en cause," *Tout sur l'Algérie*, 7 December 2016. Sellal and Lamamra were both replaced in a change of government in late-May 2017.

⁷⁹ See for instance Lakhdar Benchiba, "L'Algérie bat en retraite en Afrique," *Orient XXI*, 2 March 2017; also see International Crisis Group, "Algeria and its neighbors," *Middle East and North Africa Report N. 164*, 13 October 2015.

⁸⁰ For an overview of this, see Matthew Herbert and Querine Hanlon, "Border Security Challenges in the Grand Maghreb" United States Institute of Peace, May 2015.

⁸¹ Telephone interview with Algerian business leader, July 2016.

⁸² Riccardo Fabiani, "Algeria, still avoiding austerity," *Sada*, 27 February 2017.

agricultural expansion has been a subject of interest in the country for years, but with little to show for those efforts. According to an Algiers-based agricultural expert, Algeria uses roughly 12 percent of arable land for agriculture, and of that land a majority is under-utilised.⁸³

Policy recommendations

Europe wants to reduce migration and improve stability in its southern neighbourhood. But as the foregoing makes clear, overly-securitised EU efforts to reduce migration damage border communities and fail to adequately address the reasons why migration occurs and its complex local context.

Europe needs a more holistic approach to regional stabilisation that acknowledges the need for better security capacity and coordination while also fostering intra-Sahelian and Sahel-Maghreb integration. Toward this end, the policies of the international community should focus on four baskets of efforts: migration, economic reform, security, and regional institutional frameworks.

Migration

Develop a joint framework on migration among the countries of the Sahel, the broader West African region, and the Maghreb.

The goal of this integration effort would be to better manage migration flows and provide opportunities for Sahelian and sub-Saharan African migrants to find legal work in the Maghreb without having to risk abuse and human rights violations. Helping to create frameworks to regulate trade between Algeria and Mali, for instance, could be one step towards improving prospects for local commerce and industry. In institutional terms, there is probably no need to reinvent the wheel but rather assess whether the existing Rabat process or other existing formats on migration could work.⁸⁴

Help countries in the region to regularise population flows.

The EU and international community should help efforts to regularise the status of migrants in the Maghreb – such as those announced by the Moroccan government – as a way of providing stability and legal protection for migrants. Similar efforts would help protect migrants in Algeria and Libya from abuse, while also encouraging the kinds of seasonal labor migration that are common and have deep historical roots, particularly from Mali and Niger. This could be part of a wider framework of regional integration and reform including some of the following: regularised immigration status; better-integrated and liberalised regional banking infrastructure; reductions in tariffs; and the slower reduction of subsidies. Integration and reform along these lines can help North African economies transition away from energy dependence (particularly Algeria and Libya) while also providing sustainable labour to diversify these economies

⁸³ Interview with international agriculture expert, Algiers, Algeria, March 2017.

⁸⁴ On the Rabat Process see International Organization of Migration, "Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development (Rabat Process)," available at <https://www.iom.int/euro-african-dialogue-migration-and-development-rabat-process>.

and encourage long-term growth across the region.

Regional Economic Reform

Increase investment in regional economic projects using the EU Trust Fund for Africa and the European External Investment Plan.

The EU can use new investment funds to finance industrial or agricultural projects, that will do more than just creating work for migrants. They will also provide a labour motor for economic growth in North Africa, which in turn can help create more sustainable regional economies and provide increased remittances for Sahelian and West Africa. While this will not eliminate migration to Europe, funding for projects like these – when combined with legalised labour migration and an easier movement of capital across borders – can help provide more sustainable growth that stays within the region, particularly within the Sahara and Sahel. The EU Trust Fund can and should also be used to help facilitate voluntary returns and the standardisation and provision of identity papers within the ECOWAS region.

Encourage increased investment in the Sahel, especially from the Maghreb.

New investment could go through the recently created Maghreb Bank for Investment and Foreign Trade. EU institutions like the EU investment bank, the IMF, and World Bank can also assist with capitalisation and technical coordination to assist financing of investments and other projects in the Sahara and Sahel. This can also include investment in transportation infrastructure, better regional air integration (something often mentioned by G5 nations),⁸⁵ and financial and technical assistance for the better implementation of the free movement of goods and people envisioned by ECOWAS, for example.⁸⁶

Avoid crackdowns on border communities involved in smuggling, but instead encourage longer-term tax relief and other benefits to ensure money gained from illicit or semi-licit trade can still benefit regional and local economies.

In addition to heavy subsidy structures in Algeria and Libya, the relative lack of formal trade structures between North Africa and Sahelian countries like Mali and Niger encourages smuggling operations. Uprooting the informal structures that, over the years, have grown up around smuggling will result in economic and social dislocation and make stability more difficult to obtain. A recent IMF report, for instance, noted the importance of informal economies in much of Sub-Saharan Africa.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Interview with senior EU official, Bamako, Mali, February 2017.

⁸⁶ “Tear down these walls,” the *Economist*, 27 February 2016.

⁸⁷ For a detailed assessment of the impact and possibilities for integration of informal economies in sub-Saharan Africa, see International Monetary Fund, “Sub-Saharan Africa Regional Economic Outlook: Restarting the Growth Engine,” May 2017, available at <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/REO/SSA/Issues/2017/05/03/sreo0517>.

Instead, regional governments, particularly in Algeria, Mali, and Niger, should seek to formalise the informal economy in various ways, depending on the distinct contexts. As part of gradual efforts to formalise these economies, however, policymakers must pay close attention to the transnational and cross-border dimension of this sector and its consequences for infrastructure, export capacity, and supply chains.

In Algeria, this could include further promotion of local bonds that can be purchased anonymously, an expansion of existing long-term tax abatements to some merchants, and a further opening of banking and currency exchange regulations that would allow for greater investment in economic activities in Sahelian and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The gradual decreases in subsidies in Algeria and Libya, if continued, may make cross-border smuggling of subsidised goods less attractive to merchants. However, other activities from trafficking migrants, drugs, and weapons, will continue, and the use of trafficking profits to finance political campaigns and local and national governance will likely continue. Regional and international governments and organisations must not ignore the close links between traffickers and government officials and institutions when providing funding and support to regional governments, especially given the tumultuous political and security situations in northern Niger as well as northern Mali.

Regional countries, and particularly Algeria, should also consider the possibility of legalising parts of the informal trade beyond the tax amnesties currently offered. A more flexible strategy on subsidies and smuggling, aimed at formalising the informal, could help better integrate border communities and assuage concerns that the state may eventually try to disrupt their trading networks for licit goods. It may also encourage these communities to cooperate with security forces. The long-term goal for border communities should still be a gradual reintegration of traders into formal economies, moves that could be aided through facilitating and providing greater incentives for formal trade and could improve their cooperation with local governments in other areas.

Security

Streamline regional security cooperation and encourage security sector reform.

France, the EU, and the United States should continue giving training and aid to regional security forces, especially those of Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad. These efforts should focus on streamlining regional security cooperation and encouraging security-sector reform in individual states, particularly Mali.

Military training and assistance has generally been ad-hoc and failed to spur broader security sector reform. There is a gap between high-level security coordination and tactical training of troops, something most apparent in Mali. Contributors to the EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) should adapt their rules of engagement and deployment to be able to send their soldiers with Malian trainees into the field, as the French currently do. This practice would reinforce training and impart best practices to reduce human rights abuses committed by Malian security forces.

Institutional frameworks

Harmonise regional coordinating bodies and formats.

The EU is well positioned to use connections in the Maghreb, particularly with Morocco and Algeria, to close financial and political involvement in the Sahel to encourage better north-south coordination. However, this effort should focus on practical cooperation, such as improved intelligence sharing, and strengthening functional working relationships on a local and regional level.

France and the EU should work to insulate the G5 from regional rivalries. This includes finding ways to assuage Algerian concerns about an increased European presence in the Sahel and bringing Algerian representatives into the body (beyond the participation of AU ambassador for Peace and Security Smail Chergui). France and the EU could support other regional bodies beyond the G5 with funding, training support, and intelligence cooperation. The goal should be to strengthen each body – whether the Nouakchott Process, the UFL, or CEN-SAAD – while working to reduce redundancies in regional coordination.

Rationalise international efforts

For countries that are dependent on outside assistance to be able coordinate better, international efforts themselves need to be streamlined and adjusted. This revision should be three-fold:

1. International priorities should be more in tune with local ones, both at the national states and at the local populations levels.
2. international actors need to ‘regionalise’ their efforts, rather than simply adding up bilateral projects with each country or remaining stuck in traditional geographic stovepipes that divide North, West, and Central Africa;
3. the EU and its member states need to improve coordination both at the strategic and the operational level, if only to give way to local ownership of the projects. For the most part, the region doesn’t need new projects. It just needs more effective and complementary ones.

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