

## **IN SEARCH OF COHERENCE**

### *Why the EU and Member States Hardly Fostered Resilience in Mali*

Léonard Colomba-Petteng



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## ABSTRACT

This paper capitalizes on EU-LISTCO's analytical framework to assess the preparedness of the European Union and Member States in addressing situations of limited statehood and contested orders in Mali. The first part of the working paper contextualizes the risks and challenges in Mali prior to the military coup which occurred in 2012. It identifies the fall of President Amadou Toumani Touré as the tipping point which led to the dramatic deterioration of the situation in Northern Mali. This part also unravels the components of resilience in Mali according to the typology suggested by Thomas Risse and Tanja Börzel (social trust, legitimacy of governance actors and institutional design). The second part focuses on the policies undertaken by the EU and three Member States (France, Germany, Italy). It shows that France, and to a lesser extent Germany, demonstrated a genuine capacity and willingness to engage in the crisis resolution process and foster resilience, even though some divergences have appeared. Other Member States, such as Italy, however, proved to be far less enthusiastic until the 2014 migration crisis which involved their national territory. The third part of the working paper identifies the persistent deficit of policy coordination and the existence of local rent-seeking mechanisms as spoiling factors which affect the efforts shown by EU and selected Member States to foster resilience in Mali.

## INTRODUCTION

As early as 2009, the European Union (EU) forecast major risks for international security and European interests emanating from the Sahel. In March 2011, the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS) released a joint Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel (EC and EEAS 2011). This framework was elaborated in a context characterized by a surge of kidnappings targeting Western nationals in Northern Mali, political unrest from Tunisia to Egypt, emerging violent extremism in Mauritania, and a military transition in Niger. European institutions promoted a comprehensive, regional, and integrated approach in the region. The impetus of 2011 was seriously undermined, however, after the military coup against Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré in March 2012. In the face of mushrooming non-state armed groups, the EU failed to activate rapid response mechanisms. It took Brussels a full year to deploy a military training mission in the location of Koulikoro (EUTM Mali) and two additional years to launch a civilian mission in support of police forces in Bamako (EUCAP Sahel).

The 2011 Strategy for Sahel was also updated in 2015 with a Regional Action Plan in the context of the migration crisis. High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini insisted on the need to foster societal resilience and develop the capacities of Malian administration in core governmental



activities. In terms of policy objectives, both the EC and EEAS stressed the need to facilitate the return of basic social services over the whole Malian territory. As of 2021, the security situation in Mali remains extremely concerning in spite of the substantial efforts made by the EU to promote resilience-building initiatives.

Understanding the factors of resilience in Mali is of paramount importance in order to gauge the preparedness of the EU and Member States to engage in contexts characterised by areas of limited statehood (ALS) and contested orders (CO). According to Börzel and Risse, ALS are areas where “central government authorities and institutions are too weak to set and enforce rules and/or do not control the monopoly over the means of violence” while CO are spaces where “state and non-state actors challenge the norms, principles, and rules according to which societies and political systems are or should be organized” (Börzel and Risse 2018: 4). The analysis of ALS and CO in Mali is especially interesting as the root causes of the conflicts remain disputed within the literature (Balduino 2018).

Resilience itself can be defined as the “ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises” (EEAS 2016: 23). Resilience determines how a society reacts to a sudden shock or a governance breakdown. It decreases the likelihood that existing factors of risk will deteriorate into a violent conflict (Stollenwerk, Börzel and Risse forthcoming). Börzel and Risse identified three fundamental dimensions that underpin resilience: the level of social trust, the legitimacy of governance actors, and the institutional design of governance arrangements (Börzel and Risse 2018). This paper takes the situation in Mali as an empirical case study and capitalizes on this analytical framework to assess the preparedness of the EU and selected Member States (France, Germany, Italy) in engaging in situations characterised by ALS and CO. Preparedness is understood as the capacity, willingness and record of success of the EU and Member States to anticipate, prevent and respond to governance breakdown and violent conflicts (Cadier and Huber 2019).

The methodology builds on the existing literature on the Malian crisis and original data collected through fieldwork research in Bamako in August 2019, for which the author realised sixteen semi-directive interviews (see Appendix 1). In the interviews with EU staff working at the EU Delegation, at the civilian mission (EUCAP Sahel) and the military training mission (EUTM), respondents were asked to both provide factual details of EU action in Mali and encouraged to identify any strengths or weaknesses that they could observe within their own institution. Additional interviews were conducted with actors in the field of diplomacy (French embassy, Norwegian embassy), humanitarian action (OCHA), development (AFD, GIZ), and research (University of Bamako).



The paper is structured in three sections. The first contextualizes and characterizes the risks and challenges in Mali prior to the military coup which occurred in 2012. It identifies the fall of President Touré as a tipping point of the Malian crisis. A tipping point is here understood as the moment when risks become threats and trigger violent conflicts (Magen et al. 2019). This part also unravels the components of resilience in Mali in accordance with the variables identified by Börzel and Risse (2018): social trust, empirical legitimacy of governance actors and flexible institutional design. The second part of the working paper focuses on the policies undertaken by the EU and Member States in areas where orders are contested. It shows that France, and to a lesser extent Germany, have demonstrated a decisive capacity and willingness to engage in crisis resolution and resilience building policies. Other Member States, such as Italy, however, proved to be far less enthusiastic, at least prior to the 2014 migration crisis. The third part of the working paper identifies the persistent deficit of coordination and the existence of local rent-seeking mechanisms as spoiling factors which affect EU and Member States efforts to foster resilience in Mali. Despite a coherent discourse on the need to foster societal resilience, the EU and Member States have not been able to coherently or systematically tackle the local challenges with which their policies have been confronted in Mali.

## **1. CONTESTED ORDERS AND AREAS OF LIMITED STATEHOOD IN MALI**

### **1.1 The 2012 Military Coup as the Tipping Point of a Multidimensional Crisis**

The military coup against President Touré in March 2012 was a tipping point into a governance breakdown and resulted from both external and internal dynamics. In Libya, the fall of Muammar Gaddafi under international pressure led to the sudden and uncontrolled return to Mali of Malian Tuaregs who had enlisted in the Armed Forces of the Jamahiriya. A majority of these combatants, mostly aged between 20 and 35 years old, had experienced exile, exclusion, and violence in Mali prior to their departure to Libya (Chebli 2014). Their return to the cities of Kidal, Ménaka, Timbuktu, and Gao exacerbated underlying social grievances with the government (Chebli 2019). Tensions escalated between the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) led by Bilal Ag Acherif and Moussa Ag Acharatoumane and Bamako after President Touré decided to repress the group.

Touré's crisis management was considered too conciliatory by one faction within the Malian Armed Forces and in spite of a mediation mechanism which was tasked by the African Union to identify crisis resolution mechanisms (Gavelle et al. 2013). A





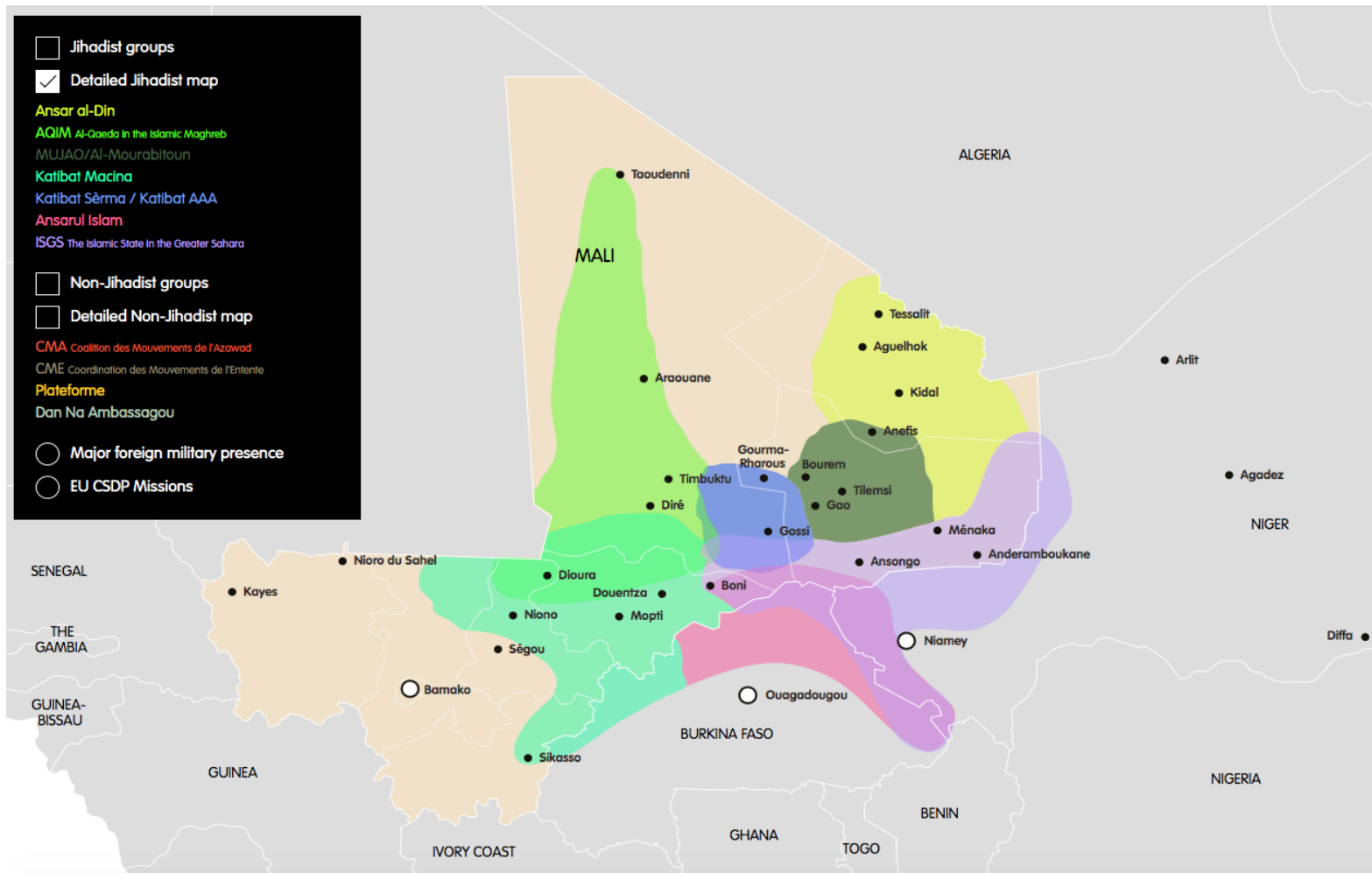
group of mutineers based in the military camp of Kati (a few kilometres away from Bamako) commanded by Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo and Lieutenant Amadou Konaré defeated the close protection guards (*bérêts rouges*) of the Koulouba palace and instituted the National Committee for the Recovery of Democracy Restoration of the State (CNRDRE). The military junta overthrew President Touré on 22 March 2012 and promptly intended to repeal the Constitution of 1992.

In the meantime, the MNLA continued its war against Bamako and declared the independence of the Azawad region (the historical local designation of Northern Mali) in early April 2012. The group denied the Malian government control over this vast territorial area, achieving *de facto* partition of the country. Such a governance breakdown was the consequence of long-term political decisions made by governing elites (Balduino 2018). The social and economic demands of Tuareg minorities have been met with repressive policy measures. The deafness of central government authorities led to order contestation and the rejection of the norms, principles, and rules according to which Tuareg populations were governed. Indeed, both the separatist (MNLA) and jihadist groups (including Ansar Eddine and Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, see Figure 1) promoted radically different visions of governance based on decentralisation for the former and religious law for the latter.

Moving beyond the binary and subordinating categorization of Mali as a failed or fragile state and making an effort to characterize the situation in terms of limited statehood and order contestation leads to more profound sociological insight. The failed state model has been much disputed in the literature (Nay 2013). One of the main reasons is that the concept places in the same category a great variety of empirical situations, rarely characterizing the peculiarities of governance dynamics. In Mali, central government authorities are denied access in the same way across all regions, and the magnitude of violence varies in time and place (Nomikos 2020). Studies have shown that central authorities are seen as distant and uninvolved in rural areas which did not experience sequential violence comparable to the Tuareg rebellions (Craven-Matthews and Englebert 2018: 25). Second, statehood should not be reduced to a set of institutions which have only an objective existence. Statehood is also determined by the social representation, allegiance, and perception of citizens vis-à-vis central government authorities and administrations.



Figure 1: Mapping jihadist groups in Mali and the Sahel



Source: Lebovich (n.d.)

## 1.2. From Risk Factors to the Outbreak of Violence

Even though the first section identified the fall of President Touré as a tipping point of governance breakdown, many authors have emphasized the long-term dynamics of the erosion of state authority (Bergamaschi 2014; Craven-Matthews and Englebert 2018). Prior to the 2012 military coup, the situation in Mali was characterised by severe social tensions between communities, a clear deficit of empirical legitimacy of the ruling elite, and a rigid institutional-setting, offering few powers and resources to regional authorities. An EU official working at the EU Delegation on development projects cited the lack of infrastructure and roads connecting Bamako to Timbuktu as empirical evidence of the marginalisation of Northern populations (Interview #5). In this period, poor investment in the education system, basic social services, and the agricultural sector combined with instances of corruption to seriously undermine the empirical legitimacy of political leaders. Kalilou Sidibé, who teaches International Relations and Political Science at the University of Bamako recalled that the marginalisation of Northerners by the Bambara elite is not only material and has been a reality since the early days of independence:

The first political authorities who conducted the decolonisation process, their vision of state construction, their perception of power are the root causes of what came after ... We considered that the country belongs to Southerners. There are striking elements: Bamana language is used everywhere. When you watch national television you have just one language, one culture in cinema production; everything is focused on the culture of the south. Why is there no real military institution with Tuaregs? Because in the marching band they only praise Samori Touré and Southern heroic figures. Soldiers themselves don't figure this out. The nation stops at Mopti. (Interview #14)

Even if the claims for the independence of Azawad were shortly abandoned, the crisis management process under President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (2013–2020) led to the aggravation of social tensions between communities (Baudais and Chauzal 2015). The deficit of horizontal trust between communities and individuals (a key component of societal resilience) facilitated the emergence of communitarian armed groups. After the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s, the government supported the creation of vigilantes groups such as the well-known Ganda Koy and Ganda Izo to contain future uprisings. In 2006, Bamako supported two loyal figures from the North, El Hadj Ag Gamou (of Tuareg origin) and Mohamed Abderrahmane Ould Meydou (of Arab origin) in the creation of communitarian-based militias. Such armed groups multiplied between 2012 and 2021. The lack of control of the central government activity over their activity has become a vital concern (Human Rights Watch 2018).



One EU official suspected the existence of collusion between central government authorities and armed groups such as the Dogon militia Dan Na Ambassagou, which was held responsible for the massacre of 134 Fulanis in Ogossagou in March 2019 (anonymised interview). Levels of violence between communities culminated between 2018 and 2019 and extended to areas which were previously not subject to conflicts. Climatologist Hartmut Behrend maintains that:

The essential conflict constellation in the Sahel is a conflict for the utilization of agricultural land between nomads and the sedentary farmers further to the south. Due to land degradation, the nomads on the southern border of the Sahara have to move ever further to the south in winter in order to ensure their livelihoods. (Behrend 2015: 74)

Land degradation has exacerbated competition between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers (Benjaminsen and Ba 2019). At least 600 people were found dead and 66,000 left their homes within one year in the central regions (Carayol 2019). In April 2020, the corpses of three Tuaregs from the Imghad tribe were found burnt. This event provoked emotional reactions amongst citizens from the north but very few responses by military authorities. The perception of impunity has aggravated bitterness and triggered escalations of interpersonal, if not communitarian, violence. In Mali, existing risks such as the lack of societal trust, the poorly flexible institutional design, and the weak legitimacy of political leaders led to violent conflicts after the fall of President Touré in a context where central government authority is contested and has proved unable to settle disputes.

## **2. EU AND MEMBER STATES IN MALI: POLICIES AND DRIVERS**

### **2.1. Fostering Resilience in a Conflictual Environment**

Even if Brussels became involved in various security policies towards the Sahel, EU officials in Bamako like to recall that the relations between the EU and Mali are ancient, extensive, and multi-sectoral. The country was still under colonial administration when the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community was signed in 1957. From this period, the Convention of Yaoundé (1963), the Convention of Lomé (1975–2000) and the Cotonou Agreement (2000–2020) have been the major mechanisms organising the relationship between the EU and African countries (Marchetti 2020). The preparedness of the EU and Member States in addressing situations of ALS and CO in Mali should therefore be understood as continuity in a long-term process of integration of Africa-EU relations (Marchetti 2020).



A perusal of the initiatives and political discourse on the Sahel prior to the 2012 military coup clearly shows that there were instances of anticipations as well as attempts to prevent the risks of governance breakdown. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the EC has sought to foster resilience in Mali through a myriad of instruments including, among other things, the African Peace Facility, the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, budget support mechanisms, and the European Development Fund which amounted to €30.5 billion from 2014 to 2020. Since 2012, the EC has settled an Emergency Trust Fund, State-Building Contracts, and an External Investment Plan. In total, the EU and Member States remain the most important donors in Africa (€74 billion in 2018). The policies directly conducted or financed by the EC focus essentially on institutional reforms.

Despite a political discourse insisting on the need to foster societal resilience, after military coup against President Touré the focus has essentially been on more conservative institutional capacity building. The EU's approach aimed at enhancing the capacity of central government authority to recover core prerogatives, which is perceived as a prerequisite for societal resilience. The EU's intervention is thus:

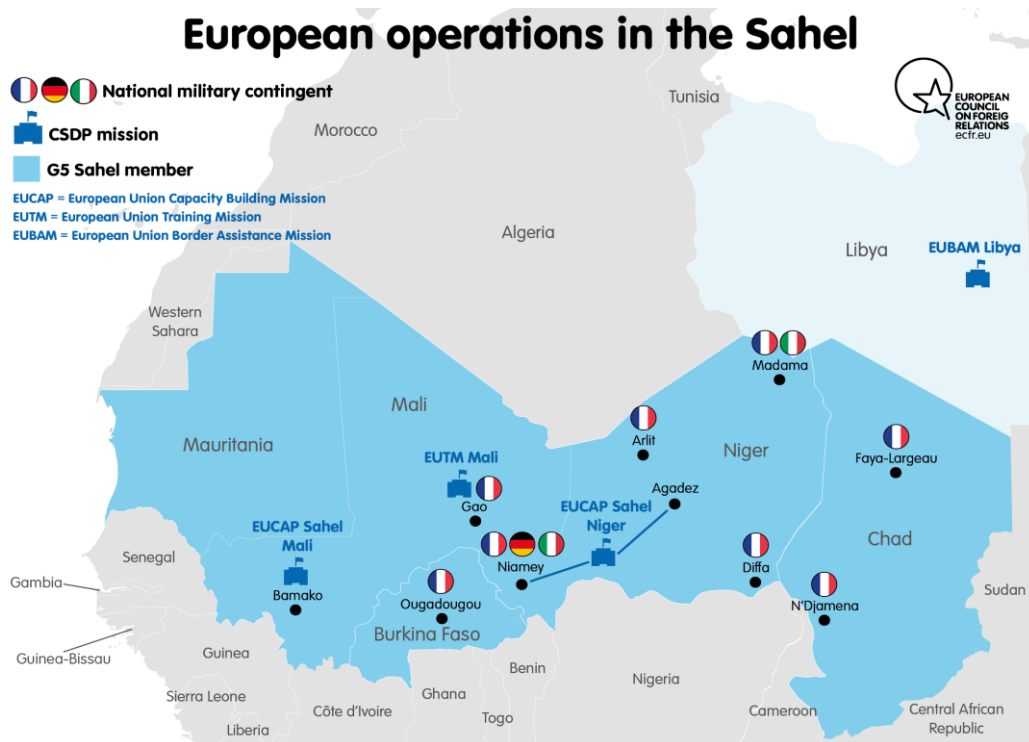
... based on shared ideas about liberal interventionism in which attempts are made to establish a particular kind of political authority and monopoly on violence through formal bureaucratic institutions and security forces, to enforce the will of state institutions across the state's territory. (Cold-Ravnkilde and Jacobsen 2020: 857)

To this end, two missions were deployed under the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (Figure 2). The European Union Training Mission (EUTM) was established in February 2013 on the basis of a request by the Malian Government and supported by the resolution 2085 of the United Nations Security Council. The mission aims at consolidating the operational and strategic organisation of the Malian Army (through advice, training, military education, and improvement of the human resources system). In 2019, the EUTM mission accommodated 620 personnel from 22 European countries and 5 other troop contributing nations, with a budget of €59.7 million.

Since January 2015, the EU has also conducted a civilian capacity-building mission (EUCAP) mandated to foster the implementation of Security Sector Reform and improve the operational efficiency of security forces (i.e., the Gendarmerie Nationale, Police Nationale, and Garde Nationale). The reforms were designed to enable effective administration of territory and contribute to enhance the empirical legitimacy of security forces, with particular attention to respect for gender and human rights. The strategy of EUCAP Sahel is to foster resilience through the

relocation of legitimacy from non-state armed groups to legal institutions, including at the level of regional authority. Such a “monopoly of legitimacy is primarily sought by applying a plethora of liberal normative principles: human rights, democracy, and rule of law, good governance, local ownership, human security, inclusivity and gender equality” (Jayasundara-Smiths 2018: 236). The respect of human rights standards is indeed an important aspect of the mandate of the EU’s civilian CSDP mission. The budget for the year 2018 was €28 million, and the mission was constituted of around 140 European experts and 54 Malian experts working on forensics, communication and information systems, counter-terrorism, intelligence, border control, gender, and human rights.

Figure 2: Mapping EU and Member States’ interventions in the Sahel



Source: Lebovich (2018).

In 2018, the EEAS sought to advance further its integrated approach through the regionalisation of CSDP missions. Brussels decided the establishment of a Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell (RACC) with a staff of 22 civilian and military staff to be deployed in EU Delegations and CSDP missions in Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad (EEAS 2021). One of its missions is to support the institutionalisation of the G5 Sahel organisation. Together with the diplomatic engagement of the EU Special Representative in the Sahel (EUSR), the RACC should also facilitate the coordination of CSDP instruments on the ground. Even though some observers have argued that the EU has not been reactive enough after the 2012 governance





breakdown (Petit 2013), Brussels-based institutions have funded a considerable number of programmes under the EU Trust Fund since 2014 (see Appendix 2).

In July 2015, a trilateral peace agreement was reached, under the mediation of Algeria, between the government, rebel movements (*Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad*) and loyalist armed groups (Government of the Republic of Mali and Signatory Movements 2015; see also International Crisis Group 2020). The agreement draws a sharp distinction between “signatory” armed groups (both independentists and pro-government) and “terrorist” armed groups refusing to cease fire for various reasons (Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, *Groupe de Soutien à l'Islam et aux Musulmans*). For two years, Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, elected in 2013, closed the door to negotiations with jihadist factions. However, the absence of an overt political dialogue with these actors made the Algiers peace agreement extremely difficult to implement in places characterised by heavily contested orders, such as Kidal. Dialogue with all stakeholders, including violent actors, is paramount for the implementation of peace agreements (Stollenwerk, Börzel, and Risse forthcoming) but is still not being pursued in Mali at the time of writing. In 2021, the 2015 Algiers peace agreement remains the political framework supported by the EU and Member States in Mali, thus excluding the most radical armed groups from the conflict management process.

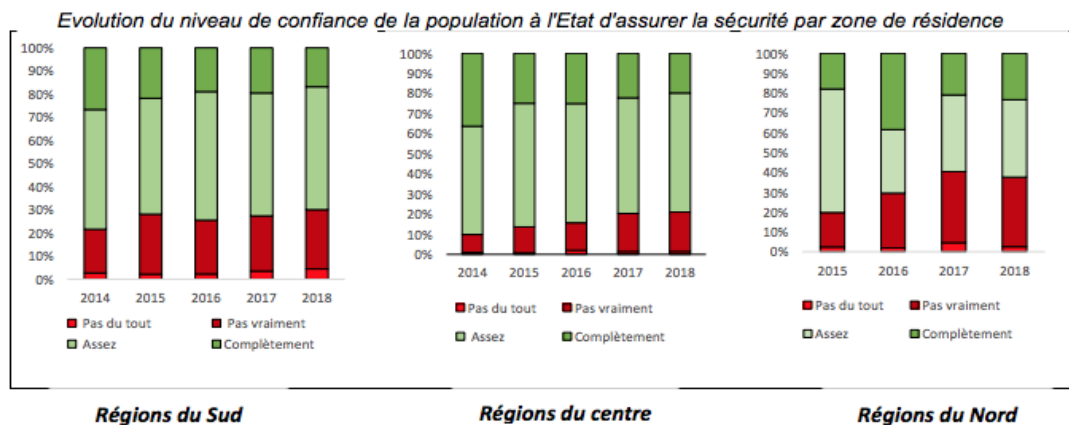
The position of central government authorities on the possibility of a dialogue with armed groups has experienced several inflection points. At the occasion of a *Conférence d'Entente Nationale* (2017) and a *Dialogue National et Inclusif* (2019) many voices pressured the government to engage a dialogue with Iyad Ag Ghali and Amadou Koufa, the two central figures of Malian jihadism. Tiebilé Dramé, a prominent political personality in the national sphere and Minister for Foreign Affairs was himself an ardent defender of a dialogue for the sake of reconciliation. Other influential actors ranging from religious authorities (Mahmoud Dicko) to civil society organisations (*Association Faso Dambe Ton*) and scholars supported the idea. An EU official confirms that unofficial channels and intermediaries have always existed, but talking overtly to jihadists would be unacceptable for European actors (Interview #8).

A few months prior to the military coup that overthrew his presidency, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta declared on TV that he was ready to open a dialogue with Amadou Koufa and Iyad Ag Ghali (Boisbouvier and Perelman 2020). It is worth mentioning that a policy of social appeasement was attempted by Bamako with the establishment of a Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, and the proposition of an amnesty law (*Loi d'Entente Nationale*) for certain crimes. The mechanisms of reconciliation have been strongly opposed by families of victims who demanded justice on the basis of

Article 46 of the Algiers peace agreement against impunity. These critical voices have been defended through a joint project funded by the EU (€2 million) and initiated by Lawyers without Borders Canada (ASFC), the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), the Malian Association for Human Rights (AMDH), and Amnesty International on this matter (FIDH 2021).

At the diplomatic level, the EU promoted flexible, fair and transparent institutions. Brussels-based institutions consistently supported free and fair election processes and encouraged an administrative decentralisation process which would empower regional authorities. Institutional design, understood as the extent to which institutions are “fit for purpose” and able to guarantee effective governance (Börzel, and Risse 2018: 24–26) is indeed a vital component of resilience. Nevertheless, the results of the 2016 municipal elections and the 2018 presidential elections were both highly contentious. Many irregularities were reported and voting procedures could not be guaranteed in locations in areas of order contestation. Between 2018 and 2019, the leader of the opposition, Soumaïla Cissé, denied the victory of Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, undermining the legitimacy of the latter. In response, President Keïta attempted, in vain, to constitute a coalition government including key figures from the opposition parties. He notably announced that his government would work on a constitutional reform which would consecrate the legal dispositions of the 2015 Algiers agreement, although the first draft of the reform also extended in a significant way the Presidential prerogatives.

*Figure 3: Trust of the population in the state’s capacity to provide security by region of residence*



Source: INSTAT Mali (2018)

Between Keïta’s first election in 2013 and his ouster in 2020, the confidence of Malian citizens towards their President plunged. In December 2019, he was credited with only 26.5% of favourable opinions while the religious leader M’Bouillé Haidara (also





known as the Chérif de Nioro du Sahel) was credited with 75.2% (Maliweb 2019). This gap is an indicator of the lack in empirical legitimacy of the governance actors responsible for finding a political solution to the crisis. According to one opinion survey, close to 60% of Malian interviewees have no confidence in their judicial system and more than 90% consider that there is a high level of corruption (Mali 24 Info 2019a). Fostering vertical trust (towards institutions) and transparency in Mali remains a long term and crucial challenge for the EU and Member States.

Support to local administrations by the EU and Member States should be avoided in situations where central government authorities may use it in ways which are incompatible with societal resilience, such as political repression. A few weeks prior to this coup, a study of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) warned as follows:

Domestically, the current regime is increasingly contested. Its inability to restore security, the protracted implementation of the 2015 peace agreement (which refers to the crisis in northern Mali and does not reflect the current situation in the country), the extension of the crisis to other Malian regions, the contested legislative elections held during the ...COVID-19 ... pandemic and the abduction of the main opponent to the president, Soumaïla Cissé, have fuelled recent discontent. (Baudais 2020)

In Spring 2020, an unprecedented wave of contestation brought thousands of citizens in the streets of Bamako under the banner of the *Mouvement du 5 Juin-Rassemblement des Forces Patriotiques* (M5-RFP). This heterogeneous movement responded to a call by a figure associated with radical Islam, Salafi imam Mahmoud Dicko. Tensions eventually culminated when a special forces unit devoted to counterterrorism (FORSAT) was ordered by the Minister of Interior to contain the protesters. The use of force by the FORSAT led to the death of at least eleven civilians. The FORSAT had been trained and equipped by various programmes conducted by, among others, the EU and Member States. This constitutes one of the major challenges, if not the most important when it comes to building the capacity of security forces. President Keïta was eventually toppled by a military junta on 18 August 2020, which opened a new sequence of uncertainties and demonstrated that since 2012, the EU and Member States have not succeeded in fostering societal resilience.

## 2.2. The Drivers of Policy Responses: Three Contrasted Examples

This part proposes to focus on the policy choices of three selected Member States which have responded in highly contrasting ways to the challenges of ALS and CO in Mali: France, Germany, and Italy. France has made the most significant efforts to

respond to order contestation in Mali since the 2012 military coup, both at the bilateral level and through EU policies (it has sent the largest number of experts to the EUCAP mission since 2015). French involvement in Mali results from the decision of national policy-makers to make counterterrorism a top priority in the foreign policy agenda (Henke 2017). It is also the expression of a deeply rooted “security imaginary” (Weldes 1999: 10) in which Mali, like other French former colonies, is considered as part of a traditional sphere of influence well-known as the “*pré carré*” (Erforth 2016).

This security imaginary creates shared expectations and is reproduced by African actors. After the 2012 military coup against President Touré and the short period of military transition, Dioncounda Traoré, who was then recognized as the legitimate Head of State in virtue of a constitutional provision, requested a military intervention by the EU and Member States to contain jihadist groups which threatened to enter Bamako. France was then the only country which proved to be willing and able to intervene swiftly (Petit 2013). If the French military intervention, known as *Opération Serval*, was lauded as an operational success by policymakers, the expansion of the intervention theatre in the Sahel from August 2014 (*Opération Barkhane*) has been questioned. In many Malian locations, an unfriendly discourse flourished and revived the usual accusations of neo-imperialism (Charbonneau 2008). According to one opinion survey, 80% of citizens developed a negative opinion towards France (*Mali 24 Info* 2019b).

France has been described as responsible for the destabilization of Libya and is sometimes suspected of pursuing a hidden agenda in the region by various actors (Guichaoua 2020). These allegations have been made by actors ranging from influential Malian artist Salif Keïta to nationalist movements such as the *Groupe des Patriotes du Mali* (GPM). The latter called on President Keïta to oust French soldiers and build a military alliance with Russia (Figure 4). In January 2020, President Emmanuel Macron gathered leaders from the G5 Sahel (Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad) in Southern France at the occasion of a diplomatic summit held in Pau intended to ‘clarify’ the political position of all stakeholders. President Macron accused Moscow of facilitating the anti-French discourse and conspiracy theories within Malian public opinion (Lutaud 2020).

*Figure 4: Poster of a meeting organised by activist groups showing hostility to Opération Barkhane and calling for an alliance with Russia*



Source: GPM (2019).

One response to these allegations has been active lobbying by French diplomats to seek more active involvement by other European countries in Mali. In March 2020, Paris deployed the Task Force Takuba, whose mission consists in the active monitoring of Malian Armed Forces by European special forces during operations against terrorist organisations. The mission reached an initial operational capacity in July 2020 after the deployment of special forces from Estonia and Czech Republic. Sweden, Italy, Denmark, Portugal, and the Netherlands committed to send troops and/or senior military officials while Greece, Belgium, Hungary, Ukraine, Slovakia, and Norway expressed an interest in the initiative (Gros-Verheyde 2021).

Although Germany sought to stand aside from Task Force Takuba (and any active engagement which would go beyond military training), Berlin developed a strong interest in the Sahel region after the formation of the political coalition between CDU/CSU and Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) parties and, above all, in the context of the migration crisis of 2014–2015 (Tull 2020). Germany has increasingly undertaken initiatives such as the elaboration of a comprehensive strategic framework (Federal Government of Germany 2014, 2019). The German Foreign Affairs Ministry established a division on crisis prevention, stabilisation, and post-conflict with a €300 million annual budget and 130 agents. For German policy-makers, military tools should only be deployed in support of an integrated approach

which would focus on development and good governance. In addition, Germany provides a regular contribution to the EU military training mission (EUTM). Foreign Affairs Minister Heiko Maas has declared as follows:

I regard Germany's engagement in EUTM Mali as a concrete example of how responsibility can be taken on. We are doing this within the structures of the European Union's common security and defence policy. That too is an important aspect. In this way, we are also showing how much importance we attach to a common European approach, particularly in security and defence policy (Maas 2019).

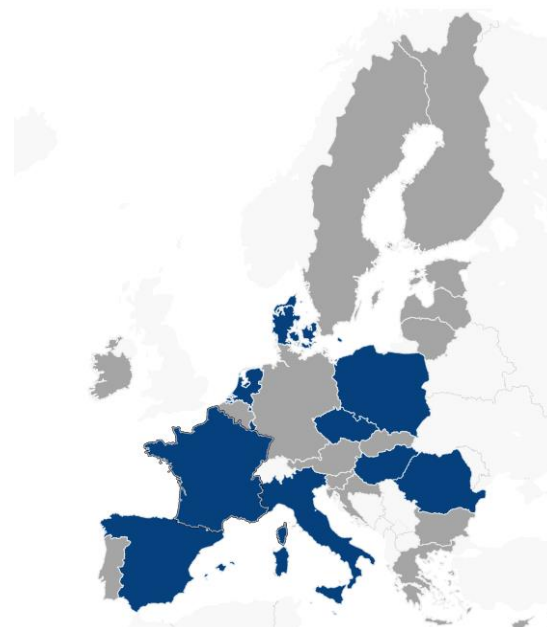
Due to linguistic difficulties, Berlin could not send many experts to the French-speaking EUCAP Sahel mission in Mali as acknowledged by a member of the organisation (Interview #4). According to the same source, French officials in Brussels insisted on the need to maintain high standards regarding linguistic proficiency. Generally speaking, French policy drivers have not been fully understood by German diplomats, even though officials at the highest level have continually emphasized the convergence of the two countries. Berlin was on the first line of the creation of different initiatives; the G20 African Compact, Stability and Security Pact for the Sahel, and Sahel Alliance. The latter initiative was launched in July 2017 after the German-French Council of Ministers decided to coordinate policies on education and youth employment, agriculture and food security, energy and climate, governance, decentralization, and internal security. The Sahel Alliance (2021) has announced 730 projects to be achieved by 2022 with total funding of €11 billion.

Surprisingly, Italy is almost absent from Mali. Rome contributes occasionally to EUCAP Sahel and EUTM but has seemed to show a preference for the UN mission (MINUSMA). One could note that former head of Italian government Romano Prodi served as UN Special Envoy for Sahel in 2012. Generally speaking, Italian policies in the Sahel focus on migration issues and are concentrated on Niger, where an embassy opened in 2018 and a military cooperation agreement was recently signed. In 2016, half of the migrants who reached the island of Lampedusa had transited through the city of Agadez (Boas 2021). In January 2019, Luigi Di Maio accused France of being responsible for the low development of African economies and ultimately for current migration dynamics (Le Monde 2019). This statement caused notable diplomatic tensions between Paris and Rome, and the Italian ambassador in Paris, Teresa Castaldo, was summoned by the French foreign affairs ministry.

The French, German, and Italian examples were selected here to emphasise the plurality of policy responses and interests among Member States. Other Member States have traditionally shown scepticism regarding the use of military instruments

(such as Finland) but would certainly be enthusiastic about promoting civilian crisis management (Interview #3). Other countries, such as Poland, initially considered that the Sahel was not a priority in their foreign policy agenda (Ibid). In this regard, the migration crisis of 2014–2015 had an unintended and significant effect on the reconfiguration of the political preferences of Member States. However, the proliferation of instruments established through the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa led to a “security traffic jam” (Cold-Ravnkilde and Jacobsen 2020) in which actors have been compelled to hold deconfliction meetings on a regular basis (Interview #1).

*Figure 5: EU government’s approach on whether Mali and the Sahel should be treated as a priority in the EU’s Africa Policy*



*Source: Busse et al. (2020)*

### 3. SHORTCOMINGS AND REMAINING CHALLENGES

#### 3.1. Improving the Coordination of Policy Responses

Since the fall of President Touré in 2012, Mali has experienced an inflation of both multilateral and bilateral policy responses (Lopez Lucia 2019). On the ground, the disjunction in the functioning of policy instruments in terms of planning, mandate, and duration has been identified as a major challenge by EU staff in Bamako (Interview #3). A better coordination of instruments is needed, alongside better political alignment among Member States on which priorities should top the agenda (security, governance, socio-economic opportunities, education, and health). A member of the EU Delegation in Bamako recognized: “to be honest, we don’t know





what to do. Should we work on structures? Infrastructures? Modernisation? Governance? Demography? Purchasing power? Nutrition? Everything seems to be a priority” (Interview #5).

Since 2020, the EU has been officially designated as responsible for the coordination of two essential pillars of the newly established International Coalition for Sahel (strengthening armed forces and redeploying state administration across the territory). This coordination role is channelled within the EEAS by a Secretary of the Partnership for Security and Stability in the Sahel (S-P3S). Member States have also acknowledged a need to better coordinate policy responses and realign short-term crisis management with long-term efforts to foster resilience. In June 2020, German Foreign Minister, Heiko Maas asserted:

Our common goal with the Sahel countries is to coordinate international efforts in the security sector in a more targeted manner. We want to train and equip the security forces of the Sahel countries in such a way that they can independently ensure the security of the population and that people’s confidence in the authority and presence of the state grows once again. The coalition is committed to a networked approach consisting of security, stabilisation, humanitarian and development policy measures, because we know that security and development go hand in hand (Maas 2020).

The deficit of coordination has undermined the efficiency of instruments and has made it difficult to gauge the isolated impact of EU and Member States’ policies. The impact of EUTM Mali could only be evaluated by its outputs (i.e., the number of trainings delivered) leaving aside the evaluation of outcomes. Since 2013, the military mission formed around 14,000 members of the Malian Armed Forces (8 Joint Tactical Groups, 7 Joint Tactical Elements, 18 Combined Mobile Advisory and Training Teams, 7 Company Commander Courses, and 3 G5 Sahel Staff Officers courses). In the meantime, EU officials are conscious of the limits of this quantitative methodology. In addition, military advisors working in the EUTM complained that they have no control over what the soldiers become after they receive the training or how they implement the knowledge they built. In a context of conflict, the Malian armed forces are still regularly held responsible for exactions on civilians such as summary executions, ill-treatment, and arbitrary arrests (Human Rights Watch 2017)

The EU and Member States should therefore develop tracking mechanisms specifically dedicated to both ex ante and ex post identification of the trainee. Media sources revealed for example that members of a non-state armed group supporting Bamako, the *Groupe d’autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés* (GATIA), had been trained by the EUTM mission (*Jeune Afrique* 2015) prior to the creation of the militia. To a

larger extent, the EU and Member States should maintain their efforts to produce clearer indicators in order to better track the evolution of institution-building in the long run. As one official working at the EU Delegation in Bamako explained:

EUTM exists and that is a good thing. But their work is systematically dissolved after a few months. There is cheating on the payroll volume which means that the Malians have no interest in keeping the trained battalions constituted. So ... projects [are signed off on] with EUTM, and once the training is over ... the unit [is disbanded]. It allows [cheating] on the traceability of the payroll and the size of the army. It's a very well-oiled machine. (Interview #5)

In addition, the EU and Member States should be more sensitive to the way EU staff on the ground are perceived and how they interact with Malian counterparts. As Korosteleva (2020: 257–258) puts it, “resilience cannot be engineered externally, and can only be internally nurtured with external assistance as and when necessary, drawing on existing resources”. Such logic can be observed on the ground and described by Boas (2021: 59) who relates that when he and his colleagues:

... in a meeting with EUCAP Mali in Bamako in October 2018, asked EUCAP Sahel Mali officials whether they had reflected on how local populations along the border would interpret the new policy of improved border management, we were met with bewilderment. The thinking seems to be both that what is good for Europe—improved border management—must also be good for local populations, and that what works in Europe (GAR-SI is based on a Spanish module) should also work in the Sahel. This seriously calls into question the context and conflict sensitivity that EU policies and programming in the Sahel supposedly have.

In a research conducted on EUTM, Tull (2019: 11) has pointed out the dissonance between EU actors and Malian authorities and that the former “make claim to superior knowledge and expertise, denying their Malian counterparts’ professional values and expertise”. EU staff interviewed for this EU-LISTCO study acknowledged that capacity-building practices have not always been context-sensitive (Interview #12).

### 3.2. Engaging Local Stakeholders and Addressing Rent-seeking Mechanisms

Addressing rent-seeking mechanisms remains the most vital and difficult challenge for EU staff on the ground seeking to genuinely engage all Malian actors. The 2015 Algiers peace agreement established several peace resolution mechanisms designed to re-incorporate former combatants into Malian society. The programmes for demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration such as the “reconstituted armed



forces” encouraged by EUTM and MINUSMA have proved to be especially attractive to members of some armed groups (Chebli 2020). Eligible candidates were those able to prove that they were actual members of one signatory armed group and bring in person a functional weapon. This policy unintendedly enhanced the fragmentation of armed groups and a surge in the number of men who declared that they had surrendered (74,000 people declared that they were combatants in order to access the DDR process).

The entanglement of long-term resilience-building policies and short-term crisis resolution concerns generated similar rent-seeking incentives. In many instances, the distribution of per diem during military training and political symposia contributed to supporting the status quo instead of enhancing changes. The poor traceability and diversion of material donations has also been noted. These existing practices, also reported by Cold-Ravnkilde and Nissen (2020: 939) should be tackled in order to engage more consistently the signatory armed groups and Malian administration. For instance, some armed groups who signed the Algiers Agreement were allegedly reluctant to partake in the project of military rebuilding. Among the forces who coalesced in the *Coordination des Mouvements de l’Azawad* (CMA), key figures have been suspected by the United Nations Security Council of collusion with terrorist groups and maintaining control over illegal drug trafficking (i.e., Mohamed Ousmane Ag Mohamedoune, Ahmoudou Ag Asriw, and Mahamadou Ag Rhissa). These stakeholders with interests in the status quo act as spoilers of EU and Member States’ policies since they “have the potential to disturb, undermine, or completely truncate processes of post-conflict state building, leading to violence flare-ups” (Schneckener 2009: 7). As a member of the EUCAP Sahel mission explained:

In four years, we are close to zero. Working on human resources reform in a war context is a difficult job. We see very small results. We just received the staffing table for the Army. It’s the first time we see a document as such ... We don’t even know the exact number of agents in the security forces. All we know is that 25% of payroll is stolen. (Interview #3)

Short-term considerations have tended to undermine resilience-building efforts such as the investment in the education system and favour short-term arrangements. In 2019, the public budget amounted to 2,400 billion CFA francs, but only 926 billion were dedicated for investment, which represents €71 per inhabitant. The budget for defence and security (15.2%) was almost 3% higher than the budget for education (12.4%). Even though social trust has been identified as a key challenge, only 0.12% of the budget was allocated to the Ministry for Social Cohesion, Peace, and National Reconciliation.





A few months after the signature of the Algiers peace agreement, France and the OECD organised an international conference for the economic recovery and sustainable development of Mali (22 October 2015). The major financial and technical partners of Mali announced the allocation of €3.2 billion for the period 2015–2017 (including €605 million for Northern Mali regions). If these promises were understood by Malian authorities as additional amounts, they actually corresponded to the aggregation of already planned commitments (Interview #9). By the end of 2017, 99.5% of these commitments were actually disbursed. Yet central government authorities still lack resources, and the very capacity of Bamako to implement the dispositions of the Algiers peace agreement should be questioned (Ibid.). In 2019, net public spending was €71 per inhabitant. The ratio of civil servants is about 6 per 1,000 inhabitants, while it is 160 for 1,000 inhabitants in Denmark (Viart 2018). Recalling the scarcity of skilled human resources in administrations, these figures suggest a need to increase the number of civil servants.

As stated in the introduction, transparency of institutions and democratic governance is another key component of resilience. In the long run, building resilience requires a willingness to seriously engage efforts in two major directions. First, the lack of inclusion of Northerners in the national discourse and imaginary certainly remains a core obstacle (Interview #14), and a narrative of inclusivity and a shared sense of belonging should be encouraged. Second, rent dependence of Malian governments on external donors has to be solved. Several interviewees in Bamako confirmed that they had identified instances of corruption within the Malian administration. When they were asked about the appropriate means to tackle this problem, EU officials seemed to be divided. On the one hand, some pleaded for integrating the fight against corruption into the mandate of the civilian CSDP mission in Mali. On the other hand, those with a more pragmatic vision considered it essential to prioritise the action of the EU and Member States instead of pursuing too many objectives at once. To them, the question of the implementation of the peace agreement remains the immediate priority.

## CONCLUSION

Since 2012, the security environment has considerably worsened in Mali in spite of the multiple policy responses undertaken by the EU and selected Member States. Most of the EU officials located in Bamako who kindly accepted to contribute to this study shared a common perception that the efforts have certainly been needed but have so far failed to bring about their full potential. It is worth noting that a few interviewees were convinced that the situation could have been dramatically worse for Malian populations without the activism of EU institutions and Member States.



This paper reveals that overall the EU and Member States sought to facilitate the crisis resolution process in areas of CO (Northern and Central regions) and foster resilience in ALS (Southern regions). However, in a highly sensitive political context characterized by a severe deficit of social trust, a lack of empirical legitimacy of political leaders, and strong disagreements over the appropriate institutional setting, fostering resilience remains more than challenging.

The paper identified three dimensions of preparedness on the part of EU and Member States which could still be improved: (1) policy coordination between Member States and among EU institutions; (2) a more consistent and systematic tracing of the training and material equipment delivered, and; (3) closer attention to local rent-seeking and spoiling strategies, including within the Malian administration. Last but not least, the plethora of actors involved in Mali have undermined EU and Member States general efforts to foster resilience. The ‘security traffic jam’ in the Sahel has rather incentivized the fragmentation of non-state armed groups who competed to receive the material benefits of peace negotiations and who made the most out of the status quo.



## **APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY THE AUTHOR (PER ORDER OF EXECUTION):**

- Interview #1: EUCAP Sahel Mali, Bamako, 07/08/2019
- Interview #2: EUCAP Sahel Mali, Bamako, 08/08/2019
- Interview #3: EUCAP Sahel Mali, Bamako, 08/08/2019
- Interview #4: EUCAP Sahel Mali, Bamako, 08/08/2019
- Interview #5: EU delegation, Bamako, 12/08/2019
- Interview #6: EU delegation, Bamako, 12/08/2019
- Interview #7: French embassy, Bamako, 15/08/2019
- Interview #8: EU delegation, Bamako, 16/08/2019
- Interview #9: EU delegation, Bamako, 19/08/2019
- Interview #10: UN OCHA, Bamako, 20/08/2019
- Interview #11: EUCAP Sahel Mali, Bamako, 22/08/2019
- Interview #12: EUTM Mali, Bamako, 23/08/2019
- Interview #13: Agence Française de Développement, Bamako, 23/08/2019
- Interview #14: Kalilou Sidibé, Université de Bamako, Bamako, 28/08/2019
- Interview #15: Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Bamako, 28/08/2019
- Interview #16: Norwegian embassy, Bamako, 29/08/2019



## APPENDIX 2: PROGRAMMES FUNDED BY THE EUTF FOR AFRICA TO FEBRUARY 2021<sup>1</sup>

Title of the programme	EUTF contribution	Implementation	Theme
Common Operational Partnership (COP) Mali	€2,850,000	Civipol and Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation	Improved migration management, Improved governance and conflict prevention
Programme de renforcement de la résilience des communautés, des ménages et des individus vulnérables à l'insécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle au Mali	€25,000,000	Humanity & Inclusion, SOS SAHEL, Oxford Committee for Famine Relief	Strengthening resilience
Création d'emplois par l'amélioration de la filière de l'anacarde, afin d'atténuer les causes de l'émigration, dans les régions de Sikasso, Kayes et Koulikoro	€13,576,233	Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation	Greater economic and employment opportunities
Relance de l'Economie et Appui aux Collectivités II (RELAC II)	€10,000,000	Luxembourg Development Cooperation Agency	Strengthening resilience
Sécurité et Développement au Nord du Mali – phase 2	€13,000,000	Agence Française de Développement	Improved governance and conflict prevention
Projet d'appui aux investissements de la diaspora malienne dans les régions d'origine	€6,000,000	Agence Française de Développement	Greater economic and employment opportunities
Programme d'Appui au Renforcement de la Sécurité dans les régions de Mopti et de Gao et à la gestion des zones frontalières (PARSEC Mopti-Gao)	€29,000,000	Expertise France	Improved governance and conflict prevention
Renforcement de la gestion et de la gouvernance des migrations et le retour et la réintégration durable au Mali	€15,000,000	Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation , International Organization for Migration	Improved migration management

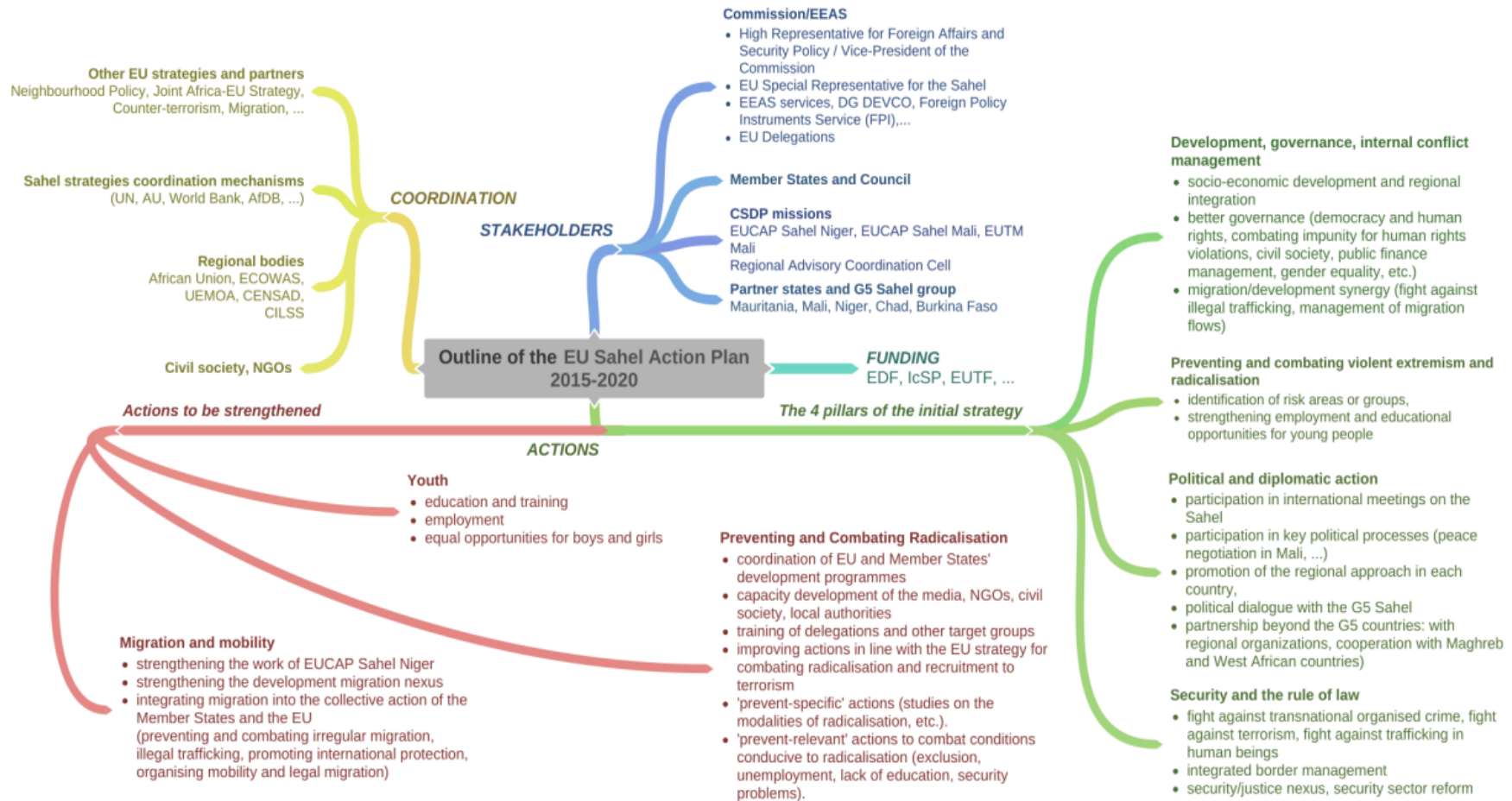
<sup>1</sup> Source: EC (n.d.)



Programme d'appui au fonctionnement de l'état civil au Mali: appui à la mise en place d'un système d'information sécurisé	€25,000,000	Civipol, ENABEL - Belgian Development Agency	Improved governance and conflict prevention
Youth Employment Creates Opportunities At Home in Mali	€20,000,000	SNV Netherlands Development Organisation	Greater economic and employment opportunities
Programme Jeunesse et Stabilisation – PROJES – régions du centre du Mali	€35,000,000	GIZ	Strengthening resilience
Programme d'actions à impact rapide pour la stabilisation des régions du Centre Mali	€10,000,000	EU Delegation Mali	Improved governance and conflict prevention
Appui au Développement Économique Local et à la prévention des conflits dans les régions de Tombouctou et Gao (ADEL)	€13,000,000	Luxembourg Development Cooperation Agency	Strengthening resilience



## APPENDIX 3: A MULTIPLICITY OF ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE SAHEL



Source: EPRS (2020)

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