FACT SHEET

The European Union and the Sahel

Background and context

The Sahel region is one of the poorest in the world. Countries of the Sahel face considerable challenges related to extreme poverty, internal tensions, institutional weaknesses, a growing demography, frequent food crises, fragile governance, illegal trafficking, radicalization and violent extremism.

The EU has been concerned by the deteriorating political, security, humanitarian and human rights situation in the Sahel region since the early 2000s. This situation predated the Libyan crisis, but was further exacerbated by its consequences.

In March 2011, the EU adopted a comprehensive approach to the Sahel region, using as reference an EU Strategy for Security and Development based on the assumptions that development and security are mutually supportive and that the issues faced in the Sahel require a regional answer. This strategy includes four lines of actions:

- Development, good governance and internal conflict resolution;
- Political and diplomatic action;
- Security and the rule of law;
- Countering violent extremism and radicalisation.
Since the beginning of the crisis in Mali, the Council has reiterated the EU’s resolve to accelerate and enhance the implementation of this Strategy in order to help tackle the regional consequences of the crisis. This Strategy has proven indeed a crucial tool to enhance the coherence of the EU approach and to mobilise considerable additional European efforts, with a particular focus on Mauritania, Niger and Mali.

Under the 10th European Development Fund (2007-2013) alone, more than € 1.5 billion were allocated to these three countries to mainly support good governance, rule of law, justice, decentralisation process, agriculture and rural development, social sectors, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), economic development and infrastructures.

Two CSDP missions were launched in Niger (EUCAP SAHEL Niger) and Mali (European Union Training Mission - EUTM) in order to support respectively Nigerien internal security forces and the Malian army.

Mr Reveyrand de Menthon was appointed EU Special Representative in March 2013 in order to help guide the EU action in support of regional and international efforts to restore peace, security and sustainable development in the Sahel. He is also mandated to help coordinate the EU global approach to the crisis, using the EU Sahel Strategy as a basis.

The EU Sahel Strategy today

Today, this Strategy continues to provide the key framework for EU action at both individual and collective levels to help countries in the wider Sahel-Sahara region to address key security and development challenges. But he EU is committed to interpret it dynamically in order to extend the scope of implementation to countries other than Mali, Mauritania and Niger while developing a new approach to the links between Sahel and Maghreb within the Sahel-Sahara wide region.

The EU is committed to enhance coordination with other regional and international actors in order to ensure the effectiveness of the international collective action in the Sahel. In the framework of the joint United Nations – African Union – EU – World Bank – African Development Bank mission of November 2013, Commissioner Piebalgs pledged 5 Bn EUR for 2014-2020. In the framework of the same mission, the EU supported the establishment of an international coordination platform for the Sahel under Malian chairmanship for the two coming years.

In order to follow up on this mission and help establish this coordination platform more firmly, the EU is hosting a high level meeting on the Sahel on 6 February 2014 under the auspices of the Prime Minister of Mali.

Two missions under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

The EU launched a civilian CSDP mission EUCAP SAHEL in Niger in July 2012 with the objective to fight terrorism and organised crime. Over its initial two years mandate, the mission aims at:
• advising and assisting in the implementation of the security dimension of the Nigerien Strategy for Security and Development at national level, with other actors
• supporting regional and international coordination in the fight against terrorism and organised crime
• strengthening the rule of law through the development of the criminal investigation capacities and adequate training programmes
• enhancing the sustainability of Nigerien Security Forces (Gendarmerie, Garde Nationale and Police Nationale)
• contributing to the identification, planning and implementation of projects in the security field

With an annual budget of € 8.7 million, the mission relies on 50 international police and military experts. Liaison Officers are deployed in Bamako and Nouakchott, to foster regional cooperation between the security forces of Niger, Mali and Mauritania in their fight against terrorism and organised crime, as well as to explore the opportunity to propose future actions at the request of relevant national authorities.

At the request of Mali and in line with relevant international decisions including UNSC Resolution 2085 (2012), the EU launched an EU military Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) on 18 February 2013, for an initial 15-month mandate.

The aim of the mission is to support the rebuilding of the Malian armed forces and to meet their operational needs by:

• providing expertise and advice, in particular as regards command and control, logistical chains, human resources and international humanitarian law;
• training combat units at the Koulikoro training camp. The mission is not involved in combat operations.

The headquarters of the mission is located in Bamako and the training is carried out at Koulikoro (60 km north-east of Bamako). Initially, the mission's mandate is 15 months. More than 200 instructors have been deployed, as well as support staff and a protection force, making a total of around 550 persons. The joint costs of the operation are €23 million for its initial mandate of 15 months.

In both missions, particular attention is given to synergies with other EU and bilateral projects funded through the European Development Fund, the European Commission Instrument for Stability or by EU member states.

Response to the food crisis and long-term food insecurity in the Sahel region

The Western Sahel region suffers from chronic food insecurity, linked to national under-production, increase of food prices on international markets or local agricultural over-production which causes rapid price fluctuations. An additional burden is that currently over 5 million children are stunted representing about 40% of the children under five. On top of the distressing human and social costs, the economic cost of malnutrition is estimated between 2% to 8% of GDP.

Some specific areas are constantly suffering from food and nutrition insecurity. The difficulties to secure adequate food supply and decent income in the Sahel region are due to:
• Climate change and ecosystem degradation increase the unpredictability of rainfall.
• Population growth is among the highest in the world (on average, the population of the Sahel doubles every 25 years). This increases pressure on natural resources and food supply.
• Chronic poverty - the Sahel states rank at the bottom of the 2011 UN Human Development Index (Niger ranks 186, Burkina Faso 181, Chad 183, Mali 175 and Mauritania 159 out of the 187 countries listed).
• Regional economic disparity (between Sahel countries and coastal countries) and low resistance to external economic shocks (e.g. the food price crisis of 2008) contribute significantly to the fragility of the Sahel. Food insecurity in the Sahel is primarily a matter of income and not production. For example, Senegal, despite the fact that it imports nearly half of its food consumption needs, is less food insecure than Niger because it has a higher income. As another example, widespread lack of economic access to basic healthcare contributes substantially to malnutrition among children under five and pregnant and breastfeeding women.
• Weakness of public finances and national institutions in some countries makes it more difficult to respond to the frequent crises that affect the region. However, some countries have adopted national response strategies and have been supported by large-scale funding, including the European Commission.

Humanitarian aid

In the countries of the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) acute malnutrition rates are persistently above the internationally recognised alert threshold of 10% Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rate. An estimated 226,000 children on average die because of malnutrition or directly related causes every year, whether or not there is a crisis.

In 2014, the European Commission will give €142 million in humanitarian aid to the Sahel region. This funding will provide €57 million in emergency relief for people affected by the overall Sahel food and nutrition crisis, €28 million to assist victims of the Mali crisis, €7.5 million for the food crisis situation in Nigeria, where the North is experiencing the most challenging situation; €29.5 million for Chad, which is in a complex crisis with an increasing number of refugees; and €2 million for North Cameroon. An additional €18 million is planned in EU development funding to provide relief and rehabilitation assistance to build resilience in northern Mali.

The on-going emergency and the recurrent nature of the crisis in the Sahel call for both an immediate response to help the people in need and a long-term strategy to reduce the chronic risks of food security and strengthen people's resilience.

Long-term EU development response to the food crisis: building Resilience

In addition to humanitarian support, the EU is implementing development programmes aimed at strengthening resilience, helping address the root causes of malnutrition, improving the functioning of regional markets and increase the regional and national capacity to reduce the risks of disasters.
Moreover, the European Commission has launched in 2012 together with regional organisations an international partnership for resilience in West Africa including Sahel region (Alliance Globale pour l'Initiative Résilience - AGIR). The EU intends to allocate approximately €1.5 billion for resilience in West Africa for 2014-2020, playing a catalysing role by encouraging regional and national authorities to define their resilience priorities. A € 56 million regional project on food security reserves funded by the 10th EDF will start in 2014, helping West African countries plan and build their necessary systems of resilience.

To address the root causes of the crisis, the AGIR Regional Roadmap adopted in April 2013 by all members of the Alliance including partner countries, international donors, NGOs and civil society focuses on 4 key specific objectives and will be translated by partner countries in national resilience strategies:

- Improve social protection for the most vulnerable households and communities in order to secure their livelihoods
- Strengthen the nutrition of vulnerable households
- Sustainably improve agricultural and food production, the incomes of vulnerable households and their access to food
- Strengthen governance in food and nutritional security

More Information:
EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel
CSDP civilian mission "EUCAP SAHEL Niger"
European Union Training Mission (EUTM)
Response to the food crisis and long-term food insecurity in the Sahel region of Africa