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The Common Foreign and Security Policy tested in Niger

Léonard COLOMBA-PETTENG

Since 2011 the European Union has been trying to assert itself as a credible political player in the Sahel. The relative stability of Niger's political institutions has turned Niamey into a cornerstone of the overall approach to the region. This tendency gathered spectacular pace following the migration crisis of 2014-2015. Brussels' clear goal is to strengthen the capabilities of Niger's internal security forces, and at the same time foster the country's economic development. But the effective implementation of the development-security nexus does not stand up well to the study of local dynamics and deserves to be reviewed by the next Commission[1].

[1] This article is based on around fifty interviews with European experts based in Niamey and Agadez between January and June 2019.

[2] The total is 1.6 billion € between 2014 and 2020, European Commission, information sheet, MEMO/18/6670 - 6th December 2018.

[3] Florence Boyer and Pascaline Chappart, « Les frontières européennes au Niger », *Les Cahiers d'Outre-Mer*, 2018, vol. 83, no 2, p. 92-98.

[4] Abdoussalam Hamani and Abdou Bontiant, « Agadez, un nœud de la migration internationale au Niger », *Les Cahiers d'Outre-Mer*, 2015, vol. 270, no 2, p. 189-206.

[5] Article 42 of the TEU states: "The common security and defence policy shall be an integral part of the common foreign and security policy. It shall provide the Union with an operational capacity drawing on civilian and military assets. The Union may use them on missions outside the Union for peace-keeping, conflict prevention and strengthening international security in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter. The performance of these tasks shall be undertaken using capabilities provided by the Member States".

[6] The mission has a budget of 63.4 million € for the period 2018-2020 and involves nearly 200 experts in Niamey and Agadez.

[7] Philippe Lavigne Delville, *Aide internationale et sociétés civiles au Niger*, Paris, Karthala, 2015, vol. 339/.

[8] Decision 2014/482/CFSP of the Council dated 22nd July 2014.

[9] Mahamadou Diallo, *Le Sahel* n°9715, 3 May 2019, p.5

THE EUROPEAN UNION IN QUEST OF POLITICAL CREDIBILITY IN THE SAHEL

Although Niger is still a country whose human development index is the lowest in the world, the relative stability of its political institutions since Mahamadou Issoufou came to office in 2011 contrasts sharply with the situation amongst its Burkinabe, Libyan and Malian neighbours. This situation has turned Niger into a choice interlocutor for Europe in a part of the world where the overlapping of players and issues at stake make dynamics rather difficult to interpret. In this context the European chancelleries are also trying to reassert their bilateral relations with Niger: the planned airbase in Niamey is vital for operation Barkhane; Italy and Germany are working towards strengthening military cooperation; Spain wants Niger to establish an embassy in Madrid; and the UK, which is not highly present in French-speaking Sahel, has announced that it intends to establish an embassy in Niamey.

For its part the European Union has been committing significant financial means since the migration crisis of 2014-2015[2]. The introduction of an [Emergency Trust Fund](#) after the La Valette Summit helped Niamey attract 247.5 million € between 2016 and 2018. In this several observers perceive a strategy to externalise the management of migratory flows far from the borders of the Schengen Area[3], whilst the region of Agadez is a nodal area of sub-Saharan migration towards Europe[4]. But we should remember that the [jointly defined strategy](#) by the Commission and the

European External Action Service (EEAS) precedes this. The tabling of the migratory issue in Europe in 2014 simply accelerated a change in direction that had already started.

THE START OF A SECURITY MISSION AS OF 2012

In July 2012, the European Union launched a civilian mission to strengthen the capabilities of the internal security forces ([EUCAP Sahel](#))[5] which is still the heaviest security cooperation measure in Niger[6]. Initially designed to be deployed in three border countries (Niger, Mali and Mauritania) the initiative firstly encountered procrastination on the part of Nouakchott, then came the coup against the Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré. Conversely, the Prime Minister of Niger, Brigi Rafini was in favour of taking all of the outside support he could get to help relieve the State budget and in turn refocus on the ambitious programme of "Renaissance for Niger" promoted by Mahamadou Issoufou.

Whilst Brussels previously privileged support to "organisations from civil society" and market structures rather than security systems[7], the launch of the EUCAP Sahel Niger mission confirmed a change in Europe's approach to the Sahel[8].

In May 2019, German Chancellor [Angela Merkel](#), said how satisfied she was regarding the mission's achievements[9].

The effectiveness and achievements made by EUCAP Sahel are in fact particularly difficult to gauge. The only existing assessment document is a [report by the European Court of Auditors](#) in 2018 which points to “slow and limited” success. It is impossible to understand the difference in perception between what the German Chancellor said and the audit report by the ECA without analysing in-depth the local dynamics and by questioning those directly involved in the implementation of the European mission in Niger itself.

A PRIVILEGED AREA OF DIALOGUE BETWEEN THOSE INVOLVED IN SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Since its launch EUCAP Sahel has managed to assert itself as a visible, well-identified player amongst technical and financial partners in Niger, enjoying significant means and a permanent presence in Agadez. The mission regularly organises work meetings to which most of those involved are invited. Although it is difficult to speak of any true “coordination role”, since the players and their agenda are plural, the mission represents an area of dialogue where humanitarian, development and security players meet around the same table.

But this *forum*, which was invested unequally, is sometimes of little interest for some of the well-established local players who watch mistrustfully the inflation of actions plans, consultation workshops and strategic road maps that are rarely followed by results. Because beyond the declarations, the assertion of a “development-security” nexus cannot comprise an operational action programme.

DIFFA, TAHOUA, TILLABÉRY: COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE SECURITY MEASURES

In the most exposed regions of Niger it is becoming particularly difficult to undertake development programmes. As of 2018 the increase in violence on the borders with Mali (Tillabery) made it practically impossible to continue the programmes launched by many donors^[10]. Given the rise in attacks by armed groups Niamey said it wanted to respond quickly and

firmly. The authorities introduced exceptional measures in February 2015 in the Lake Chad basin where Boko Haram was at work and in certain areas bordering Mali. But the measures introduced by constantly extended states of emergency, are harsh (systematisation of curfews, closure of marketplaces, healthcare centres and schools; the forced displacement of populations in their tens of thousands; the ban on the use of motorised forms of transport; the ban in using farm inputs and certain branches of agricultural activities). An inhabitant of the region of Diffa explained that the sudden obligation to quit the shores of the river Komadugu in February 2015 led to scenes of panic. Some 200,000 inhabitants were forced to leave their property behind and were never allowed to return to their home villages.

Despite the state of emergency, the activities of some armed groups continue whilst the socio-economic fabric is crumbling. Reports published by the [Bureau for the coordination of humanitarian affairs](#) (ONU) are increasingly alarming: around 1.5 million displaced from Niger and 175,000 refugees from Mali and Nigeria are presently living in “critical” conditions and require humanitarian assistance^[11]. In the region of Tahoua, 75% of the displaced population no longer has regular access to drinking water.

The state of emergency is crystallising tension and grievances which are directed both at the government and visible external players (particularly France and the USA which have the biggest military bases in the country). In Diffa a monitoring committee comprising all of the local political authorities has expressed its lassitude with the exceptional, and now permanent measures. Inhabitants are challenging by all legal means possible the continuation of these measures, deemed to be as restrictive, as they are ineffective. In April 2019, the governor of the region of Diffa, Mohamed Mouddour, agreed to relax the curfew hours given the anger of his constituents. For his predecessor, Dan Dano Mahamadou Laouali the durable end of the state of emergency is impossible without “offering his hand” to those involved in Boko Haram.

^[10] Operators responding to calls for tender offer conditions which incur extra charges that are too high to interest donors.

^[11] OCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin, Niger, January-February 2019

THE LIMITED IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMMES TO RECONVERT SMUGGLERS

In the region of Agadez, security problems focus on illegal migration and on the movement of illicit products (arms, munition, drugs, counterfeit medicines). Measures financed by the EU's emergency trust fund brought the migratory flows towards Libya to a halt. Many of those involved in migration witnessed the seizure of their vehicles and found themselves without any means of survival. Reconversion programmes were planned in 2016 under the pressure of the Interior Minister Mohamed Bazoum. Three years on we can but deplore the limited effects: it only led to the reconversion of 10% of those involved. The mayor of Chirozerine regrets that these programmes were introduced by the [High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace](#) which excluded the local authorities.

The reconversion programmes put forward were not deemed to be an incentive or to be attractive to the smugglers. But the main criticism lies in the low profitability of the reconversion programmes, which did not enable the smugglers to maintain revenues that were as high as before. Relatively poorly designed, because they were done so in haste, the programmes promised by the EU were ultimately the source of 'disappointment' on the part of the Interior Minister Mohamed Bazoum[12].

A LACK OF LEGIBILITY

Following the migratory crisis, the Emergency Trust Fund's operational committee validated the funding of several measures that aim to strengthen border management by the internal security forces. Their implementation over several years has been delegated to various European operators (Civipol, FIIAPP) and steered, at least in theory, by the European Union's Delegation in Niamey. This was the case in the project to create a [Rapid Action Groups Monitoring and Intervention in the Sahel](#) (GAR-SI) and of the [support project for justice, security and border management](#) (AJUSEN). But these programmes function like an "organ-pipe" and the multiplication of measures involves as many different contact points within the

Nigerian administrations. Although the manager of the AJUSEN programme is mainly in contact with the Ministry of the Interior, it is the Prime Minister who chairs the EUCAP Sahel steering committee.

The risk of the initiatives overlapping between the Fund's operational committee and the Diplomatic Service (EEAS) does not seem to have been adequately anticipated by Brussels. The programme leaders in the field find themselves forced to increase their coordination work in order to prevent duplication. Although every manager says he has a list of trained interns within his programme, these lists are practically never shared[13].

PINPOINTING NEW REQUIREMENTS

The idea of "training Nigerien instructors" is central to Europe's approach. It conditions the programmes' continuity and should lead to a reduction in the personnel deployed to the field. But the pinpointing of new requirements justifies yearly the creation of new posts, the extension of the mandates and the reconsideration of budgetary means[14]. EUCAP Sahel Niger's mandate, which initially focused on the fight to counter terrorism and organised trafficking, has been extended since the migratory crisis to the management of the borders. The phenomenon of rerouting the initial mandate – "mission creep" – makes the future difficult to foresee, likewise the end of the EUCAP Sahel mission.

Moreover, European experts overestimated the attractiveness of the post of instructor in the eyes of the Nigerien security force members. Given the lack of voluntary personnel, the mission inspired the Nigerien authorities to issue a draft decree establishing a harmonised inter-ministerial status to the benefit of permanent instructors, which would be linked to some financial compensation. But tension and misunderstanding emerged between the police, the gendarmerie, the national guard and the armed forces. Although the principle of an inter-ministerial status rapidly found consensus, disagreements centred around the planned amount of compensation. Negotiations prevented progress for the inter-ministerial draft decree for several years before the Nigerien government finally gave up on it.

[12] Seyni I., « Le coup de gueule de Bazoum contre l'Union européenne », *L'Enquêteur* n°2095, 8 May 2019 p. 6.

[13] Between January 28th and February 1st 2019, the EUCAP Sahel Mission organised training in techniques of judicial investigation in Niamey for 14 trainees from various Nigerien internal security forces.

Ten days later the AJUSEN programme organised a similar training session for 51 trainees.

[14] Between 2012 and 2019, the mission's budget increased by 368%.

THE TABOO OF THE PER DIEM

Whatever the European programme of which they are a part, the training programmes to the benefit of the internal security forces go together with financial compensation in the shape of *per diem*[15]. In Niger, where the monthly wage of a policeman is barely over 70 000 FCFA[16], the *per diem* can rise to 120 000 FCFA[17]. In this context training programmes attract just as many candidates for the associated additional revenue, as they do for their educational content. The question of the impact of the training programmes and the future of those who have been trained is never really taken into consideration. In the eyes of many European instructors in the field the *per diem* establish a considerable bias in their work. Although the principle of reimbursing the trainees is not shocking per se, the amount of that compensation is a problem[18]. The practice continues however because the granting of *per diem* has become an *acquis* for the trainees. Some do however adopt diversion strategies to take the focus off the financial attraction[19], whilst others use these incentives as a lever.

In a context in which experts act under the pressure of the steering committees, which guide their work in the field, it seems urgent for the latter to be able to present a quantified report to match required demands. Donors tend to demand that experts in the field produce "visible" action, sometimes to the detriment of considerations that are more in line with the real issues that the Nigerien security forces are facing (lack of fuel, outdated infrastructures, lack of staff).

EUCAP SAHEL: A POORLY DIMENSIONED MISSION?

Due to its visibility at local level EUCAP Sahel draws criticism on the part of those involved in security. Some are frustrated by the communication methods deemed to be exaggerated and by an excessive propensity to "wave the European flag" as it takes ownership of the achievements of other cooperation programmes. Some go as far as considering that regular, dynamic communication on the part of EUCAP Sahel is leading Brussels to overestimate the mission's effectiveness and even its usefulness. Moreover, the distribution of the mission's staff raises

questions. Half of those deployed take on support posts (administrative, logistics or safety). Then instructors' or advisors' posts closest to the Nigerien authorities are taken by France, which causes tension. Finally, posts are frequently duplicated to ensure the continued presence of at least one member. The sum of these locally perceptible factors, cause frustration.

ILL ADAPTED SECURITY STANDARDS?

In Niamey and Agadez, danger levels for staff working for EUCAP Sahel is deemed "high"[20]. In virtue of this the latter must adhere to relatively restrictive measures: the respect of the curfew, sharing of lodgings; the pooling of armoured vehicles, the systematic wearing of radios, and even firearms. Moreover, it is strongly advised not to move around alone or to go to places that are not on the established internal list. In Agadez the situation is pushed to the extreme since experts are restricted to a vast compound of 14 000 m² built in 2017, and they cannot go out without an armed escort.

This way of life seems out of sync with the reality of the threat in the field and damages, according to some, the credibility of the mission for several reasons. Firstly, the safety briefings are different for the staff on the civilian mission from those for the delegation in Niamey. Secondly, the Nigerien staff who work for EUCAP Sahel are not subject to these safety measures, including in Agadez. Thirdly conditions like this mark a clear separation between the experts and the society in which they are working. If we are to believe several eye-witness accounts, it is common for some experts to leave the mission at the end of their contract with summary knowledge of the society in which they have lived sometimes for several years[21].

The European Union's claim about safety issues in Niger has contributed to the densification of security cooperation at local level, to the point that some programmes end up competing with each other. Since its launch in 2012 the EUCAP Sahel mission has managed to position itself as an area of dialogue and exchange of information bringing together most of

[15] See Valéry Ridde, "Réflexion sur les *per diem* dans les projets de développement en Afrique", *Bulletin de l'APAD*, 2012, vol. 34-36, p. 1-18.

[16] 110 €.

[17] 185 €.

[18] Many believe that it is up to the Nigerian administrations to take on this expenditure and not the institution offering the training.

[19] They grant *per diem* after the training and without having the total beforehand.

[20] In the CSDP mission nomenclature there are four warning levels: "negligible", "average", "high" and "critical" (the latter indicating the withdrawal of the mission).

[21] Although the mission employs Nigeriens in logistics posts, the circles of socialisation are restricted relatively clearly between "internationals" and "locals", even between European nationalities.

Niger's technical and financial partners. But beyond the establishment of some strategic roadmaps, the difficulties that the security forces in Niger are facing are of a logistic and operational nature. Many experts are aware of these challenges and berate the slowness and cumbersome nature of the procedures.

The pursuit of immediate, quantifiable results takes the focus away from overall thought about the long terms effects of external support and about the future of the programmes to strengthen the capabilities of the security forces. We might regret that debate over the situation of Niger's dependency on external players

is cast aside to the benefit of supposedly depoliticised considerations focused on the technicality of the measures in place[22].

The new European Commission cannot afford to neglect in-depth thought on this if it is to regain political credibility both in the Sahel and in the international arena.

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[22] Jean-David Naudet,
Trouver des problèmes aux solutions : Vingt ans d'aide au Sahel, OECD, Club du Sahel, 1999, 341 p.

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