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From a Fragmented Cooperation to an Integrated Approach – The Emergence of the Maghreb and Sahel Region and its Consequences for the European Union

Erzsébet N. Rózsa

Professor, National University of Public Service,
and Advisor, Institute of World Economy

Viktor Marsai

Director of Research, Migration Institute, and Associate
Professor, National University of Public Service, Budapest

Introduction

The history of the European Union (EU)'s foreign and security policy has been characterised by a continuous development and a process of adaptation to the realities on the ground and the experiences gained. This was manifest in the gradual change from bilateral relations to regional/multilateral structures, from trade through three-basket/three-pillar structured relations to the integrated approach as introduced by the 2016 EU Global Strategy, and the institutionalisation thereof. "Internal and external security are ever more intertwined: our security at home entails a parallel interest in peace in our neighbouring and surrounding regions. It implies a broader interest in preventing conflict, promoting human security, addressing the root causes of instability and working towards a safer world" (EEAS, 2016). The present paper argues that, in order to be able to halt the increasingly complex threats facing the EU and maintain its global actor status, the EU should introduce further – sectorial and regional – flexibility, including, among others, definitions of the widening geographical scope underlying its strategic vision.

Therefore, this paper first asks how the EU and its member states should reconsider their regional approach. How can the EU implement the existing frameworks and/or develop a more effective and adaptive strategy towards its southern neighbourhood fitting the new realities on the ground better?

The paper seeks to identify – based mainly on the threats and challenges – the already existing structures, practices and potential for establishing common ground. It aims to prove that the separation of the two regions (the Maghreb and the Sahel), as in the EU's Common

Foreign and Security Policy, is not only outdated but also counter-productive: their interconnectedness provides ample ground to establish a new framework for cooperation both within the thus newly drawn up Maghreb and the Sahel (MAS) security sub-complex, and between the MAS and the EU.

On the basis of the examination of EU history and institutions, as well as the relevant EU documents, the paper aims to analyse the expansion of the EU's south. It identifies the multi-institutionalised partnership with a widening geographical scope but with the same geographical definitions. The paper consists of five parts: part one focuses on the role "regions" play in the EU's development and perception of its surroundings. Part two presents the Regional Security Complex theory providing the academic basis for the analysis. Part three presents the concept of a MAS regional security complex, while part four presents the main elements ("glues" = human smuggling and irregular migration, regional conflicts, the rise of Jihadist groups) justifying the drawing up of the new region. The final part argues that, based on the developments within the EU and its neighbourhood, the EU should re-adjust its terminology and re-define the borders of the regions with which it aims to cooperate.

Regionalism in transition

European thinking in terms of "regions" has been manifest practically since the inception of the EU. The "Europe of regions" ideal (Borrás-Alomar et al., 1994) was the starting point for the evolution of the Schengen system, but the regional concept was very much present in the EU enlargement process, too: e. g. the formation of the Visegrad Group (1991)

was supported strongly by the European Community (EC), and later by the EU (Garton Ash, 2006; Batory, 2002). At the same time, with the development of the EC into the EU the direct neighbourhood was also perceived in a regionalised form: partly for geographical and historical reasons (Europe/non-Europe; Maghreb/Mashreq; French/British/Italian colonial powers/mandates), partly due to the Cold War realities (western/socialist).

The end of the Cold War gave a new impetus to regionalism: the EU established a new region in its direct southern neighbourhood, the Euro-Mediterranean space, which became the basis of the new institutionalised cooperation, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). Its three-basket (later pillar) structure aimed at comprehensively addressing political and security, economic and financial, and social and cultural issues. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) went one step further when it introduced conditionality among the three pillars, and added another region, the ENP eastern neighbourhood, while the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) re-strengthened and expanded the southern neighbourhood both by adding further participants and a new "pillar" consisting of six priority projects (business development and employment; higher education and research; social and civil affairs; energy and climate action; transport and urban development; water, environment and blue energy) (Union for the Mediterranean). The "integrated approach" of the Global Strategy, while it establishes an even more integral correlation between the pillars, reflects the re-emerging prominence of hard security (conflicts and crises) at the expense of the economic and financial, as well as social and cultural relations. This is further reflected in the EU's Sahel Strategy and the Sahel Regional Action Plan.

This institutionalised regionalism set the example. Thus, EU thinking in regional terms came to be reflected in such sub-regional cooperation formats in the EU's direct and indirect neighbourhood as the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Agadir Agreement or, to a certain extent, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), later on the African Union (AU), and other different sub-regional organisations in Africa (Economic Community of West African States, Intergovernmental Authority on Development). While the formation of regional cooperative institutions may not have been the *direct* result of European regionalism, the regional organisations have increasingly appeared on the EU's foreign and security agenda, even in the form of institutionalised "EU-to-a-region dialogues" (EU-AU, EU-Organisation of African Caribbean and Pacific States, EU-AMU, EU-GCC).

As the EU realised that threats and challenges do not stop at borders, the concept of the "neighbours of the neighbours" was put forward in the 2006 Communication from the Commission on strengthening the ENP (EC, 2006). This aimed to "look beyond the Union's immediate neighbourhood" and proposed enhanced relations between the southern/eastern neighbourhoods of the ENP, on the one hand, and Africa, Central Asia and the Gulf, on the other (Lannon, 2016). The Global Strategy (EEAS, 2016) went one step further when it promoted the "building bridges to other regions" concept into "cooperative regional orders". In support of this aim, the EU set a "new Level of Ambition with three overarching objectives: crisis management; building the security and defence capacities of our partners; and protecting the EU itself," complemented by joint actions, defence cooperation projects and missions. As such, "the Union has continued to act as a global security pro-

vider, with its sixteen civilian and military missions and operations...” and has maintained its role as “a global maritime security provider” (EEAS, 2019).

Although the “toolkit” of EU foreign policy-making has gone a long way and reflected most of these changes, it has still maintained the former concept of regions in its documents, even when new region-based “strategies” were issued (EEAS, 2016; EEAS, 2011; Council of the EU, 2021; EC, 2021), and even when “thematic” ones were published that could create the “glue” in a wider region (EC, 2019; EC, 2020a; EC, 2020b).

Thus, in the promotion of cooperation among the regions – closer and farther away: the Maghreb, the Middle East, the Gulf, the Sahel and Africa (and others) – the EU has kept to the so far “rigid” terminology and definition of the regions irrespective of the shifts in its southern neighbourhood. Neither the revisions of the ENP (in 2011 and 2015), nor the later issued EU documents mentioned above, reflect the fact that the threats and challenges arising and aggravating in the last decade have significantly re-constructed the framework of the different, formerly outlined regions. New regions are emerging and old ones are fusing or splitting, often without any institutionalisation of the structure. The underlying causes of such transitions may be different and “different types of cascades give rise to different forms of interdependence” (in the MAS irregular migration, smuggling, trafficking, terrorism, etc., in the Nile Valley – mostly Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia – water-sharing) (Rosenau, 1990). Moreover, “actions relevant to issues on the agendas of two or more whole systems or subsystems in the multicentric world are likely to cascade across and through all systems via diverse routes and with

varying intensities” (Rosenau, 1990). Thus, the very same regions may be both the emanators and the targets, as well as the transit routes through which the same threats eventually reach the EU. Thus, while themselves posing challenges, Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya may be/are as exposed to the threats coming from the Sahel (irregular migration, organised crime, violent extremist organisations) as the EU.

A theoretical framework – Regional security complexes

The theory of regionalisation on the basis of “security” was put forward by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver of the Copenhagen School, who in their Regional Security Complexes (RSC) theory (Buzan & Wæver, 2003) analyse the dynamics of the post-Cold War world order: “The central idea in RSC theory is that, since most threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones, security interdependence is normally patterned into regionally based clusters: security complexes.” As they state, “the region (...) refers to the level where states or other units link together sufficiently closely that their securities cannot be considered separate from each other” (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). According to the authors, “RSC theory is useful for three reasons. First, it tells us something about the appropriate level of analysis in security studies; second, it can organise empirical studies, and, third, theory-based scenarios can be established on the basis of the known possible forms of, and alternatives to, RSCs” (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

On the basis of the RSC theory, Astrid Boeing proved that the Euro-Mediterra-

near space is one regional security complex (Boening, 2009). If we go one step further and implement the RSC theory on the EU's neighbourhood policy, the analysis of the two – eastern and southern – neighbourhoods will reveal that apart from the EU-centric approach (i.e. what matters is the neighbourhood position on the EU) the two neighbourhoods have very little in common historically, politically, culturally or security-wise. Consequently, the ENP has been separated into two sets of *regional* policies with different priorities, substance and structures. Schumacher notes a “north-south divide” among the EU member states; namely, “the continuously existing protective attitude of mainly eastern and southern EU member states vis-à-vis their respective neighbourhoods.” However, “as they increasingly share a growing number of threat perceptions and security concerns in regard to the southern Mediterranean, (...) they unite seemingly more easily behind corresponding EU responses” (Schumacher, 2019).

The structures of the relations with the two neighbourhoods have also developed differently: the EMP was a set of bilateral and multilateral relationships, while the ENP started on a bilateral level only, causing some practical confusion when the EMP and the southern dimension of the ENP were declared to be joined. Yet, it set the example to the eastern neighbourhood relations to be complemented by a multilateral dimension later (Eastern Partnership).

In a further point of difference, the RSC theory also defines the two separately: the southern neighbourhood (institutionalised first in the EMP) coincides with Buzan's Middle Eastern RSC, while the eastern neighbourhood with Buzan's post-Soviet great power RSC.

Besides the debates on the differentiation between the eastern and southern neighbourhoods, there was a relatively broad understanding on the “geographical scope of the ENP”; thus, the south could/should be extended further south, towards the Sahel (Lannon, 2016; Schumacher, 2016). According to the RSC theory, however, the Sahel, partly belonging to the West African proto-complex, is mostly an insulator, with “significant interregional security interaction” both to the Maghreb sub-complex of the Middle Eastern RSC, and to the other parts of the West African proto-complex (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). This insulator character and the “significant interregional security interaction” clearly reflect (or reflected already at the beginning of the 2000s) that the Maghreb and the Sahel are closely related. The threats and challenges originating from these regions since, such as primarily irregular migration, human smuggling, violent extremist organisations and terrorism, which have impacted on the EU's security, have drawn the MAS region even closer, and could/should be perceived as one RSC from the EU's perspective. Yet, the farthest the EU documents go is to enlist both among the regions participating in the “cooperative regional orders” but the Maghreb is still considered to be part of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and the Sahel belongs to Africa (EEAS, 2019).

Adapting to the new realities – The underlying causes of a MAS region perspective

The integrated approach and the cooperative regional orders in the Global Strategy were, on the one hand, consequential outcomes of the EU's thinking about its

neighbourhood. On the other, while they clearly reflected a development on the basis of past experiences, they could still be considered as the continuation of former thinking: the *south-to-south cooperation* (foreseen in the EMP) has been expanded to a *region-to-region cooperation* (the Global Strategy). Further, the development-security nexus can be understood as a more sublime articulation of the EMP's three baskets/pillars.

Thus, in the Global Strategy's more comprehensive approach "global" is not just meant in a geographical sense: it also refers to the wide array of policies and instruments" including visions. "We will keep deepening the transatlantic bond and our partnership with NATO, while we will also connect to new players and explore new formats. We will invest in regional orders, and in cooperation among and within regions" (EEAS, 2016). With our focus on the south, three different and so far separated developments in the EU's relations should be noted: 1. the elaboration and then broadening of a Sahel strategy (EEAS, 2011; Council of the EU, 2021), 2. the reviews of the ENP (EC, 2015; EC, 2021), and 3. the Global Strategy, its "three years on" assessment, and the Regulation on Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI – Global Europe) adopted on 11 June 2021.

The EU's Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel (EEAS, 2011) demonstrated a more focused approach towards a certain region not directly neighbouring the EU. Although the Sahel was not originally part of the EU's neighbourhood policy, the document looked at the Sahel in a much wider framework and realised its interconnection with other regions, namely the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa (EEAS, 2011). The strategy emphasised that many of the challenges

of the Sahel "impact neighbouring countries, including Algeria, Libya, Morocco and even Nigeria, whose engagement is necessary to help resolve them" (EEAS, 2011). In addition, the document also emphasised that "the current political developments in the Maghreb have consequences for the situation in the Sahel, taking into account the close relations between the countries of the two regions, a significant presence of citizens of Sahel countries in the Maghreb and the risks that arise from the proliferation of arms in the region" (EEAS, 2011). The Sahel Regional Action Plan 2015-2020 went even further when it "emphasised the *development security nexus* as well as the four pillars for its implementation" and proposed "to explore further a common space for dialogue and cooperation between the Sahel, the Maghreb and the EU in relevant sectors such as security and migration" (Council of the EU, 2015).

The consequences of the Arab Spring on the Sahel demonstrated not only the close relations between the two regions but also the fact that threats and challenges, including terrorism, organised crime, human smuggling and irregular migration, etc. emerging in one region "cascade" to the others, thus giving rise to different forms of interdependence (Rosenau, 1990). The collapse of Libya is a case in point. While the collapse and the prolonged crisis of Mali did not depend on only one factor, the last impetus was definitely given by the Libyan civil war and the return of well-armed and trained Tuareg Idnan militias to the country. The flood of illicit weapons fuelled tensions from Somalia to the Central African Republic and gave a new impetus to the trans-Saharan smuggling of weapons and drugs, as well as human-trafficking, and also contributed to the rise of new violent extremist organisations

(the EU's agreement with Niger on the strengthening of the security sector was also a direct result) (International Crisis Group, 2015). The Maghreb countries directly threatened by the spillover from the "arch of instability" in the Sahel (UN, 2013) have become increasingly involved in the political and security developments of their southern neighbours (International Crisis Group, 2014). At the same time, some Sahel countries – or some of their armed groups – have become active players in the security and political environment of their Maghreb neighbours (Cafiero, 2019). The interconnectedness of the Maghreb and the Sahel, therefore, has been increasing not just on the security but also on the political level, with state, non-state actor – military or religious –, and even the public, people-to-people participation (Sanchez et al., 2021, Emirates Policy Center, 2020; Lebovich, 2017).

Though the EU's new Sahel strategy (Council of the EU, 2021) thematically follows a more integrated approach, geographically the understanding of the interconnected nature of the Sahel with the Maghreb is still missing. Despite being more detailed and twice as long as the previous Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, its geographical focus is more limited. There is not a single mention in it about the Maghreb and its countries, only Libya appears once, and only a short reference is made to the "formal and informal political, cultural and commercial links" between the Sahel and North Africa, without any concrete topic named (Council of the EU, 2021). This is even more surprising as the strategy takes a more flexible view on the southern borders of the Sahel, opening it towards the Gulf of Guinea. Nevertheless, it does not reflect the interconnection between the Maghreb and the

Sahel and does not examine the factors strengthening this connection. It is all the more regrettable as the developments of the last decade from the peace process in Mali through the Libyan civil war to the irregular migration crisis of Morocco and the Canary Islands clearly prove that there is no solution to the insecurity in the Sahel without the cooperation/involvement of the Maghreb countries – even if the new EU strategy tries to lean on new regional initiatives such as the G5 Sahel, the Sahel Alliance and the Coalition for the Sahel (Council of the EU, 2021). Sub-Saharan Africa as a region separate from the "neighbourhood" is further maintained in the Regulation on Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, NDICI – Global Europe, in its "geographic pillar" (EP & Council of the EU, 2021).

The increasing breakaway of the Maghreb from the Mashreq has probably been the most noteworthy regional shift in the EU's direct neighbourhood, partly in consequence of it getting closer to and even merging with the Sahel. Thus, the special connection between the EU's direct and indirect neighbourhoods has been embodied by the emergence of the new regional security sub-complex, the MAS. This has gone in parallel to the Maghreb losing (or at least relaxing) political connections to the Mashreq. (From the political perspective it also means that the problems of the Levant – the Palestinians, the Israeli nuclear capability or Iran included – are much less relevant for the Maghreb, as reflected, for example, in Morocco's Abraham Agreement with Israel.) Though this process is driven mainly by security, political and economic factors, it does not affect the general sense of the "Arab world" and its cultural and identity sense of belonging together.

The “glues” for a new regional security sub-complex

In this transformation of the MAS region into a new regional security complex, century-old phenomena like ethnic tensions and competition for resources have not only prevailed but have been strengthened. The fact that all the partners are Muslim and all have colonial pasts results in a culturally similar political space and a cooperative context to jointly face common threats such as terrorism, organised crime, the rise of Jihadist groups, human smuggling and irregular migration, as well as regional conflicts in the Mali-Burkina Faso-Niger border region and Libya. With its interconnectedness to all sides – the north (the EU), the south (Sub-Saharan Africa) and the east (Egypt and Sudan) – the emerging new security complex of the MAS is not just the target but also the emanator of all such threats.

Human smuggling and irregular migration

Connectivity in Africa goes back for more than a millennium: while the limes of the Roman Empire provided a state-organised political and economic space, the trade routes connecting Sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel to the Mediterranean reach back to the medieval African kingdoms in and south of the present-day Sahel. Interestingly, these trade routes were leading mostly northwards, to the southern shore of the Mediterranean (with very few to the Atlantic coast just outside the Strait of Gibraltar, and some to the Red Sea): trade went where there were trading activities. These routes served, even then, not just as paths of mobility for goods, but also for people: the security of travelling (road, food, wa-

ter and shelter) was provided by alliances pledged typically by children sent to the house of the partners, and/or marriage. Slave trade was a different matter, especially after the European colonisers appeared along the western coast of Africa and picked up the trade.

The Sahel has been an important trade and transit route for legal and illegal items for centuries, connected to the Mediterranean mostly through the Maghreb. Colonisation and more modern times have not changed this character much. However, the Maghreb states themselves have undergone a shift from being mainly the destination of goods and people to trade with Europe, and – especially with the end of the colonial era – movement from the former French colonies to France and Europe in general. Although different waves of re-settlement in and migration to France (and later on to the EU) can be distinguished, the Maghreb has become both a transit route to the EU and/or a destination for migrants, as well as such items as drugs and weapons.

Trafficking routes nowadays are usually mentioned in the context of the Sahara (there are no real figures as to how many people die along the road) and/or Libya, while there is much less discussion about illegal networks and criminal organisations across Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. In this regard, the late Colonel Qaddafi’s threat (“we shall open the gates of Hell”) provides the answer to the difference: where the state authority has failed, as in Libya, irregular migration, human smuggling, organised crime, and so on, may flourish. State authorities in the other Maghreb states make tremendous efforts to combat such challenges. Yet, although the states mentioned definitely maintain stronger security apparatuses than the Sahel countries, even they can-

not stop the flow of illicit goods or human smuggling across their territory – only limit it. Therefore, human smuggling and irregular migration are common problems for the whole of the MAS region, for example, Moroccan authorities stopped 32,000 illegal crossings towards Europe in 2020 (Reuters, 2020). Similar trends can be detected in drug trafficking: cannabis grown in the Rif Mountains became an important source of drugs both for Europe and the Sahel (Eljehtimi, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2018). Yet, to demonstrate the aforementioned two-way nature of such threats, the arrival of hashish from the Maghreb to the Sahel significantly fuels local tensions and political competition which jeopardise state authority and stability (International Crisis Group, 2018).

While in Europe there are endless debates about the challenges of irregular migration and drug trafficking, it is often forgotten that they cause similar – if not more – problems in the MAS region. Interviews by the authors in Tripoli (March 2019) showed that Libyan politicians, authorities and peoples are quite upset about the attitude of their European partners who do not realise that thanks to irregular migration the Libyan society suffered from similar problems in the case of integration as European countries, including increasing pressure on social services in a war-torn country, the problems of unemployment and illegal employment among migrants, and, its consequences, raising criminal activities – not to mention the infiltration of foreign fighters (Zelin, 2018).

Furthermore, because of the fragile nature of the government, the sporadic fights and the disintegration of the public administration, it has more limited resources to cope with these challenges and take the necessary measures.

Similar challenges can be mentioned for Algeria, which has been fighting for decades against different violent extremist organisations in the Sahara and the Sahel (Hansen, 2019). But, on another scale, besides the increasing debate as to their legal status, the Spanish enclaves (thus EU territories) of Ceuta and Melilla raise specific concerns for the Moroccan authorities when irregular migrants caught within the cities are pushed outside, i. e. to Moroccan territory (Abdelhadi, 2021; Nagy Rózsa & Belhaj, 2008).

Regional conflicts

Regional conflicts have hindered regional cooperation (the AMU, the AU) and relations with the EU. The Morocco-Algeria-Western Sahara controversy is a case in point, but Libya has also been almost always problematic in both the regional and the EU context. In the past few years, however, regional conflict zones in Libya, in the Mali-Niger-Burkina Faso border region and in the Lake Chad Basin have come to be among the main organising forces for the MAS regional security sub-complex. These conflicts have become sources of such problems shared by all, such as refugees, irregular migrants, violent extremist organisations and criminal networks, and have thus significantly increased the interconnections within and among the regions. All countries of the MAS region are threatened by and involved in at least one of these conflicts fueling instabilities. The Libyan crisis has significant effects in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Niger, Chad, Mali and Sudan; the Mali war has destabilised and/or involved actors from Algeria, Libya, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and the Gulf of Guinea; while the insurgency / insurgencies in the Lake Chad Basin has/have destabilised parts of Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon.

Regional conflicts are important also because they have organised the MAS not only horizontally (geographically) but also vertically: they have forced state authorities and governments, local and traditional powerbrokers, other non-state actors, and international partners and organisations – and the EU as well – to focus their attention on the crises. While the involvement of some fragile state authorities in the combat against illegal criminal networks often poses challenges, the mitigation of armed conflicts is the most common goal for most actors, because full-scale war is not favourable to either illicit trade or to local politics and economy (International Crisis Group, 2018). The EU missions in the Sahel – the EU's training mission in Mali (EUTM Mali)/ crisis management, EU Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP) in Mali, EUCAP in Niger and EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) in Libya – typically aim at peace-keeping and crisis management, training of local armed forces, political stabilisation, and development.

Conflict zones also provide opportunities for competition and hidden agendas. Perhaps the weakest point of the EU's new Sahel strategy is that it does not reflect real power politics on the ground: namely, that conflict and turmoil provide possibilities for both local and foreign actors to pursue their own interests and follow their own agenda. This is clearly proved by the sometimes harsh competition between Algeria and France in the case of the Mali crisis (International Crisis Group, 2014), or by the presence of Russian mercenaries, which make a significant contribution to the prolongation of the crisis in Libya. Turkey also pursues an assertive Sahel strategy (Ramani, 2020), which through the establishment of a robust Turkish presence in Libya's al-Watiyya air base (Ali, 2020) has received a strong military background.

Any – eventual – withdrawal of the EU from the region, therefore, is not only problematic because it weakens the EU's global image, but also because it leaves space to the expansion of rival powers in the Union's direct neighbourhood, i. e. the EU's direct sphere of interest, which often fuels (further) local conflicts. In many aspects, Moscow, Beijing and Ankara are strategic challengers of Europe and its power in the very geographical area where the EU and its member states – for historical and strategic reasons – have maintained their “global actor” status. Therefore, the efforts of Russia, China and Turkey to build bridgeheads in the geographical area of the ENP and/or in regions directly adjacent to them are jeopardising the EU's interests and the realisation thereof. This is well demonstrated, among others, in Libya with the deployment of Russian mercenaries and Turkish troops, Turkey's agreements with Niger – among others – on military and counterterrorist cooperation (Bir, 2020), as well as by China expanding its Belt and Road Initiative into the Sahel.

The rise of violent extremist organisations

The presence of violent extremist organisations in the Maghreb and the Sahel is not new: the “Afghans”, i. e. the Muslim/Islamist fighters who went to fight against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and following the Russian withdrawal returned back home, have been building their cells since the early 1990s (Hansen, 2019). While at the beginning they most typically challenged the local governments, the last decade demonstrated a basic transformation: the originally local movements have come to build cross-border networks, implementing increasingly sophisticated technologies (small drones, vehicle-born improvised explosive devices) and methods (human

intelligence, more successful strategic communication by the professional utilisation of social media and videos; recruitment; providing basic services) (Hansen, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2020; Mahmoud & Ani, 2018).

In spite of the increasing military pressure on them and temporary successes to push them back, the Jihadists were able to continuously increase their operation area and have come to threaten even the states of the Gulf of Guinea (Hansen, 2019). The failure of local and international forces to eliminate the threat posed by Jihadist organisations in the Sahel was attested to by the report of the United States (US) Lead Inspector General for East Africa and North and West Africa, which stated that West African Jihadist groups could not even be contained and “violence continued at high levels and expanded to new territories” (DoD, 2020). General Stephen J. Townsend, the head of US Africa Command spoke about a “wildfire of terrorism” which is sweeping across a band of Africa and needs the world’s attention (Eishamy, 2021). Emmanuel Macron’s decision to transform the mandate of Operation Barkhane and significantly reduce its troop numbers (from 5,100 to 3,000) reflects another symptom of the problem (Charlton & Petesch, 2021). And although the Maghreb has managed to contain the rapid expansion of violent extremist organisations, terrorist attacks and cells are still present in their territories and represent the potential for further escalation, requiring huge efforts and resources to fight and eventually eliminate them.

The success and achievements of Jihadists can be attributed to three reasons. First, they are extremely successful in

utilising the political, historical, social and economic grievances of the local population and have demonstrated themselves as the protectors of (certain) marginalised groups. In many cases, the Fulani in Central Mali and Burkina Faso consider Jihadists as their potential allies against the Bambara, the Dozon, the Tuareg and/or the Mossi governmental forces. Similar tendencies can be observed in the relations between the Kanuri and the Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. Second, radicals have realised that filling in the vacuum provided by the lack of state services – basic jurisdiction, education, healthcare –, even if in a very rudimentary way, ensures a broad local support for them, or, at least, acceptance. While many groups on the peripheries encounter central government only through taxation, the corruption of the administrative staff and the repression of security forces, the establishment of a “health centre” or a *madrasa* by Jihadists seems a huge development. Last but not least, in spite of the fragmented nature of the violent extremist movements in the Maghreb and the Sahel, they have managed to establish umbrella organisations (the Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin [JNIM] and al-Qaeda affiliate in Mali and West Africa and the Islamic State in Greater Sahara [ISGS] in Mali and Burkina Faso), which help the coordination and the transfer of know-how and practices between different groups. This has helped to increase the tempo and the scale of operation even if there are regular clashes between Islamic State (ISIS) and al-Qaeda affiliated groups; and, as we have seen previously, there is no end in sight as regards Jihadist insurgencies in the MAS region (Hansen, 2019; Mahmoud & Ani, 2018).

Towards an integrated EU policy in the MAS regional security complex

The development, extension and institutionalisation of the EU's foreign and security policy has been gradual and consequential. Its starting point was the EU itself, i. e. it was the combined function of the EU's inner development, both with regard to its geographical expansion through the several waves of enlargement and its deepening and widening and to the ongoing changes in its direct and indirect neighbourhood following the end of the Cold War. The consequent regional shifts caused by regional developments such as the Arab Spring or the emergence of transnational radical networks, as well as by the intervention of extraterritorial actors, made the EU readjust and adapt its policies several times. While in its eastern neighbourhood the EU for several reasons was only one among many actors and had no historical roots to rely on, in its immediate southern neighbourhood as well as farther to the south, the EU had the mixed heritage of the European colonisers to rely on. At the same time, in the south in the void of extraterritorial great power presence and interests, the EU realistically seemed and was able to act as a global power. Beside the EU's complex approach and relations to the south, the US "pivot to Asia", the sporadic (re-)appearance of Russia in some regional conflicts (Syria, Libya) and the Chinese reluctance to step up as "security provider" and get involved in regional conflicts have contributed to this perception.

The perception of the Mediterranean as one broader security complex first appeared in the Helsinki Final Act of the Commission on Security and Coopera-

tion in Europe (CSCE) in 1975; however, it could only be realised after the end of the Cold War, when the EU – based on the complex interpretation of "security" – established its EMP on the three pillars of political/security, economic-financial and cultural/social issues. The expansion of the EU's foreign and security policy was later developed along these lines: building bilateral and multilateral relations with closer and more distant regions, the nexus between development and security, and the integrated approach to conflicts and crises.

The Global Strategy when it aimed at the support of "cooperative regional orders" understood the necessity of building bridges between different geographical and historical regions in order to promote its own stability. Yet, it failed to realise that the borders of regions, and security complexes, may change under the pressure of newly-arising threats and challenges. (The failure to recognise this change was all the more difficult to understand as the EU itself drew up a new region when it established the Euro-Mediterranean space. It could also be argued that the eastern neighbourhood was also such a case.)

The quiet disintegration of the "Arab world" in the political sense increasingly manifest in the Arab Spring and its aftermath, the emergence of new factors influencing different regions differently (irregular migration, human smuggling, extremism and terrorism, organised crime, climate change, and water issues) should make the EU realise that new security sub-complexes are emerging. Thus, the EU should readjust its terminology and *redefine the borders of the regions* with which it aims to cooperate. Leaving decade – if not century – old regional frameworks and traditions, the Union should adapt to the facts on the

ground and examine the regions not according to the organograms of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the member states but based on the level of interconnections and political and security integrations.

Therefore, we argue that the division between the Sahel and the Maghreb can no longer be maintained, and we propose drawing up the MAS regional security sub-complex. Partly because the security of Algeria or Libya cannot be understood without understanding the security and political processes of Mali or Niger, and vice versa, and partly because threats targeting the regions to the south from the EU are the same as those emanating from and/or going through the same regions towards Europe.

It has long been realised that any policy aiming to eliminate or contain these

threats should be coordinated with the local partners. But the principle of co-ownership, introduced by the ENP, should not only be maintained and carefully observed (due to sensitivities still around about the colonial past of the local powers and the perception of the “normative” Europe) but should be further expanded. Especially so, as hard security/military measures and joint actions have proved to be and will be necessary in the territory of occasionally more than one partner state. Furthermore, in all probability such operations and joint actions will need the joint action of more actors and bigger forces.

Finally, it should also be born in mind that any programme, be it political, social, economic or military, will need time and may need the involvement of the participating actors for prolonged periods in order to produce lasting results.

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