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SPAIN, EUROPE AND WEST AFRICA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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West Africa matters a great deal to the security and economic prosperity of Spain and the European Union.² The region provides an increasingly important source of illegal immigration into Spain and Europe and harbours terrorist, drug-trafficking and other international criminal networks whose activities pose a direct threat to Europe. The Sahel area in particular has over the last few years been subject to an increasing pattern of penetration by Al-Qaida of the Islamic Maghreb. This has directly threatened the lives of European citizens in the region and poses a long-term threat to European security. On the flip side, geographical proximity and abundance in energy and other mineral resources make West Africa a natural area for Spanish and European economic projection. Aside from energy and mineral supply, the security and further economic development of the region offers Europeans other great enormous economic opportunities.

MAP 1



In a world characterised by the rise of huge powers (i.e. China, India, Russia, Brazil, Turkey, etc.) and increasing economic and geopolitical competition, the stability and economic development of West Africa would, given its geographical proximity, constitute an important geopolitical asset for Spain and the EU. West Africa's stability and economic development would not only help alleviate immediate threats to Spanish and European security. It would also, crucially, contribute to propping up the wealth of a broader Atlantic Basin whose development is a pre-requisite for Spanish and European power in the twenty-first century.

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² We define West Africa as the region encompassing the Economic Co-operation of West African States (ECOWAS) plus Mauritania and Tchad. See map 1.

Political stability and the strengthening of governance structures are essential if the region's security and economic development are to be enhanced. For Spanish and other Europeans, the most effective way to bring about security, stability and development in West Africa is through a concerted and comprehensive approach through the EU. At the political level, this requires strengthening bilateral and multilateral links with key partners in the region. Particularly important is deepening links with the Economic Co-operation of West African States (ECOWAS) and progressing towards a strategic partnership with Nigeria, a key interlocutor and vehicle for the EU's influence in the region. At the operational level, efforts must be undertaken to build up the region's indigenous capabilities for providing security and guaranteeing the rule of law. This means promoting inclusive governments and free economies and, crucially, providing training and assistance in support of security sector reform (military, police) and rule of law (i.e. justice) in the region assistance. It is in the context of a broader strategy, premised upon a strengthening of governance structures and an improvement of the region's security, where development policy can bring a positive transformational effect. If unbounded, development policy will only serve to reproduce and perpetuate the existing balances that have led to instability and poverty in the first place. This would lead to a 'lose-lose' dynamic, meaning that the region's population will not experience a betterment of economic conditions and Spain and the EU will waste their 'euros' with no 'bang' (i.e. political influence) in return.

This paper builds upon a **seminar organised by Fundación Alternativas and the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies (IEEE)**, celebrated at the representation of the European Commission in Madrid on 23rd February 2011. In this paper, two of Europe's greatest experts on West Africa give us an insight into the region's politics and offer some general policy recommendations for Spain and the EU. In the first contribution, **Alex Vines** offers a brief overview of the evolving political dynamics in West Africa, paying particular attention to Nigeria and the Ivory Coast. He identifies Nigeria as the region's key player and suggests the creation of an EU-Nigeria strategic partnership. He concludes that any European efforts to promote regional stability must take into account the specificities of each country and combine regional (through ECOWAS) and bilateral initiatives. In the second contribution, **Manuel López Blanco** maps out the different conflicts that define West Africa. He concentrates on the challenges emanating from the Sahel region and assesses their impact upon European security. These include, chiefly, the expansion of Al Qaida of the Islamic Maghreb and the presence of drug-trafficking and other international criminal networks, whose activities bear important negative consequences for Europe. He contends that the eradication of terrorist and other criminal networks and the consolidation of governance structures are prerequisites for both security and economic development and that it should be the EU's main regional priority to contribute to that enterprise.

The main political dynamics in West Africa: Entry Points for the EU and Spain

Alex Vines³

West Africa has great economic potential and compared with a decade ago has enjoyed economic growth and greater stability. Political and economic co-operation in the region are organised around the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which is made up of fifteen countries⁴. West Africa is a region of contrast with democrats and despots, such as Cape Verde which is a middle income country with regular elections, and Guinea Bissau which is defined by political instability interspersed with military coups. Despite its potential, the dominant countries of the ECOWAS, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, evince the debilitating effects of corruption, identity-based exclusion and violence. This region demonstrates that although a broad regional policy framework is important for Spain and the European Union (EU), sub-regional and country specific nuance is important. The April elections in Nigeria and the post-election crisis in Cote d'Ivoire will both impact on the future stability and prosperity of ECOWAS.

This contribution starts with an examination of the evolving political situation in two countries critical to the region, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire, then offers a brief overview of recent developments in the Mano River Union (Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia), the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger), and key anchor states of Ghana, Senegal and the fragile state of Guinea Bissau. It finishes identifying some entry points for Spanish and EU influence into the politics of the region.

Nigeria

Nigeria's size and diversity make it as varied as West Africa itself, and therefore generalisations are difficult. Western countries want to strengthen ties with Africa's second largest economy and are keen to secure oil and gas supplies from sub-Saharan Africa's biggest oil and gas producer. Nigeria is the regional giant in West Africa but in the last few years has been much less active in regional issues, due to the failing health and death of President Yar'Adua. When Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was elected president of the Fourth Republic in April 2007 and formally assumed power in May there was international hope that in addition to efforts at internal reform he would play a prominent role in continental politics. His predecessor Olusegun Obasanjo had played a prominent international role as civilian president from 1999 to 2007.

On its election the Yar'Adua administration signalled that it was committed to maintaining Nigeria's vanguard role in the promotion of regional peace and security, especially in West Africa. Nigeria is the regional superpower and was instrumental in the creation of ECOWAS. It was also the driving force behind regional peacekeeping efforts in Chad, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau and has played a role in mediation efforts for Darfur, Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo and

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⁴ Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Niger has observer status pending the completed transition to democracy. Côte d'Ivoire is currently suspended.

Niger. Nigeria has also exerted its leadership through 'oil diplomacy' by providing economic assistance to its poorer neighbours. Nigeria has the largest army in Sub-Saharan Africa and this has contributed to successive Nigerian governments seeing themselves as a continental power.

Nigeria aspires to continental leadership, on account of its population of over 150 million, geographical size and relatively large economic and human resources. It has also aspired openly since 1991 to a permanent seat of the UN Security Council and is in direct competition with South Africa and Egypt over this. Nigeria argues that its contribution to conflict resolution, its leadership in efforts to eradicate colonialism and its overall support for international peace and security, including UN peacekeeping operations distinguish itself from its competitors.

Since independence over 50 years ago, Nigeria has shown leadership such as breaking relations with France in 1961 over nuclear testing in the Sahara, the creation of ECOWAS in 1975, fighting apartheid in South Africa for example through its long-time chairing of the UN's Special Committee against Apartheid and leading peacekeeping missions in Chad, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Domestic issues have resulted in Nigeria's international focus being largely on bilateral relations, especially oil and gas diplomacy, aimed at increasing foreign investment to build up its inadequate infrastructure. There is no doubt that West Africa could benefit from Nigerian leadership but Adebayo Adedeji writes in *Gulliver's Troubles: Nigeria's Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, that 'Nigeria urgently needs a new foreign policy architecture, both for intra-African as well as for global relations'. To achieve this, Nigeria needs to first ensure its domestic challenges are remedied.

The death of Yar'Adua in 2010 was significant in that it marked the end of zoning – two terms for a southerner as president and two terms for a northerner. Yar'Adua was from the north and was serving his first term when he died, resulting in northern candidates arguing that they should get the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) nomination. Yar'Adua's vice president Goodluck Jonathan succeeded him after a power struggle, and following the failure of the PDP to find a consensus candidate from the north, has obtained the PDP nomination and hopes to be re-elected as president.

These elections therefore could be significantly different and Nigerian democracy is entering a period of change as the dominant PDP has been weakened by the death of Yar'Adua and infighting over the zoning issue. This change could mean the rise of identity politics or a levelling of the playing field and could herald a period of uncertainty. Opposition parties may also strengthen and political figures outside the PDP may also become more nationally significant, although godfatherism and patronage will continue to play a strong role.

As a southerner, if Goodluck Jonathan is elected as president, there is a real risk of the north being left behind: the sense of exclusion in the north and disparities in economic activity and developed compared with the south could foster tensions based on ethnic, religious and geographical divisions. Militancy in the Niger Delta and violence and radicalism in northern Nigeria has resulted in growing international unease and will be priorities for the newly elected government in Abuja.

Ivory Coast

Côte d'Ivoire has been a major crisis for ECOWAS and needed Nigeria's leadership. Following the arrest of Laurent Gbagbo on 11 April in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire has the opportunity to finally unite after ten years of separation and two civil wars. Alassane Ouattara won the presidential election in November 2010 - an election aimed at bringing stability with 54.1 percent against 45.9 percent for President Laurent Gbagbo. Since then, a dangerous power struggle occurred with Mr Gbagbo refusing to accept the election results.

There are important lessons to draw for West Africa from what has happened in Côte d'Ivoire. Independent electoral oversight of elections is critical and united international endorsement of the legitimate winner from regional and continental bodies is essential. Visionary leadership and the ability to except electoral defeat with dignity, rather than dragging a country back to civil war as Laurent Gbagbo has achieved, is key.

This crisis was not just about the election, but has much deeper roots. Following the death of former president Félix Houphouët-Boigny in 1993, the country succumbed to coups, chaos and ethnic division. The current fighting is the latest chapter since civil war erupted in 2002 and split the country. In March 2007, a deal mediated by neighbouring Burkina Faso and approved by the African Union (AU) stipulated fresh elections, although these were several times delayed. Finally, two election rounds took place in 2010, with a run-off in November 2010.

In April support for Mr Gbagbo has deteriorated, helped in part by the UN finally using its airpower, backed by French forces, to knock out Mr Gbagbo's remaining key military assets. The presence of UN forces in Côte d'Ivoire acting to defend civilians from indiscriminate shelling by pro-Gbagbo forces, was effective.

Prior to the UN's action, the European Union (EU) imposed sanctions on Gbagbo, his wife Simone and seventeen others (which grew by February 2011 to 91 individuals and 13 economic entities). The US slapped on its own sanctions.

Côte d'Ivoire is the world's largest cocoa exporter and in January 2011 the EU barred all EU companies from doing business with Ivorian institutions seen backing Mr Gbagbo following Mr Ouattara's call for cocoa sanctions. This resulted in some 400,000 tonnes of cocoa worth over \$ 1billion left in storage facilities, stopping payments to Mr Gbagbo and his supporters.

Côte d'Ivoire also defaulted in early February on its \$ 2.3 billion Eurobond leaving the country effectively sequestered from the international debt markets. International markets reacted quickly to the crisis. The regional bank also cut off the government's access to state accounts in late December, putting them at the disposal of Mr Ouattara's government-in-waiting. The deteriorating banking environment resulted in western and regional banks in Abidjan suspending their Ivorian operations, resulting in a cash crisis. Cash flow problems piled pressure on Mr Gbagbo making it difficult for him to continue paying for loyalty.

African institutions have also played their role. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the AU suspended Côte d'Ivoire and threatened sanctions last December. ECOWAS, led by Nigeria, also threatened to use 'legitimate force' to depose Mr Gbagbo. The UN Security Council caught up on 30 March by imposing sanctions on Mr Gbagbo and his inner circle through a resolution drafted by France and Nigeria.

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The AU also united behind Alassane Ouattara in March and called for an inclusive government to re-unite the country following recommendations made by an AU high-level panel. This signalled to Mr Gbagbo's supporters that their efforts to have the election results recounted had failed and that Mr Gbagbo's days as president were numbered. These developments and events in north Africa also convinced Ouattara and his supporters that they could not rely on external intervention, but would need to launch military action against Mr Gbagbo, supported by AU and UN.

International policy increasingly needs the lead of regional and continental bodies. As we saw over Libya, Arab League endorsement for a no-fly zone was instrumental in getting approval by the UN Security Council. In a multi-polar world, P-5 Security Council members do not automatically call the shots: Russia was forced to moderate from a pro-Gbagbo position because of the African common position supporting Mr Ouattara.

Mr Gbagbo has shown poor leadership, but Mr Ouattara, will need to demonstrate quickly wise and visionary leadership, including ensuring his forces do not commit human rights abuses - especially as 45.9 percent of Ivorians did not vote for him. Hopefully a reconciliation and reconstruction process in Côte d'Ivoire can now start which can assist one of Africa's leading economies to realize its potential.

Mano River Union (Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia)

Beyond Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, there are positive and negative trends. The Mano-River Union countries (Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia) continue to show greater signs of progress. Guinea held its first-ever elections at the end of 2010 and despite violence ahead of the elections and around the announcement of the election results, the long-standing opposition leader Alpha Condé, was sworn in as president in December 2010 and a government of national-unity has been formed. In Sierra Leone, a strong reform programme and a recovering economy may help Ernest Koroma to be elected for a second term in 2012. While in Liberia, support for the president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and the ruling Unity Party has declined. Johnson-Sirleaf will face a tough contest to be re-elected in October 2011 but a return to civil war is unlikely.

The Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger)

There have also been some positive political trends in the Sahel. In Niger, the early 2011 legislative and presidential elections mark a transition from military rule. In February 2010 a military junta overthrew the president Mamadou Tandja and took power, but kept to its promise and returned Niger to constitutional civilian rule. Veteran opposition leader Mahamadou Issoufou was elected in March 2011 as the new President of Niger after beating his rival Seini Oumarou, who is an ally of the deposed president Mamadou Tandja. In neighbouring Mali, constitutional reform and the 2012 presidential contest already dominate domestic politics as President Amadou Toumani Touré plans to retire after serving the two terms allowed under the constitution. Contrasting this is Burkina Faso, where Blaise Compaoré has retained his political hegemony through his victory in the November 2010 presidential election in 2010, securing 80.2 percent of the vote although falling living standards may erode support for his ruling Congrès pour la démocratie et le progress.

In the north of Niger and Mali, al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) pose a threat although a new regional strategy against it and change in North Africa could

reduce its impact and support. In 2011, the French embassy in Bamako was attacked by a Tunisian terrorist whom claims links to AQIM and abductions of foreign nationals have continued.

Ghana and Senegal

Ghana and Senegal have international reputations for being successful African democracies. Ghana started oil production in late 2010, and president John Atta Mills is trying to honour election pledges made during the closely fought electoral battle for power in 2008, as the two main political parties prepare for new elections in 2012. In Senegal, president Abdoulaye Wade is also preparing for elections in February 2012. Events in north Africa may make efforts to run for a third term more difficult for Wade, and the impacts of high food and fuel prices will put extra pressure on him. The 30-year insurgency in the Casamance region continues.

Guinea Bissau

Guinea Bissau, remains one of ECOWAS' most unstable members following a mutiny in April 2010 in which the deputy chief of staff, António Indjai overthrew the head of the armed forces, General José Zamora Induto. International alarm has grown further following the reappointment in October 2010 of former navy chief, Rear-Admiral José Américo Bubo Na Tchuto, designated in April 2010 as a "drug kingpin" by the US Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control. It appears that the army has secured its grip on power as president Malam Bacai Sanhá remains weak, suffering from ill-health although relations with his prime minister, Carlos Gomes Júnior have improved. Plans for an ECOWAS stabilization mission have been shelved although Angola is investing in security-sector reform, aid and economic efforts. In 2010 the EU ended its security-sector reform programme due to the deteriorating political environment and is considering whether to impose EU sanctions on key individuals.

Entry points for EU and Spain

ECOWAS is strategic to Europe, and especially Spain, for human, physical and energy security. ECOWAS is a region of contrasts and the EU will need to decide on those issues and priorities that should be addressed regionally and what is best dealt with bilaterally. Nigeria is so important that its merits a Strategic Partnership with the EU (as South Africa already has). It is likely that Nigeria will become more assertive following its April elections and the EU should be ready to engage. Spain and its ECOWAS high-level summit planned in September 2011 can assist this process.

The Côte d'Ivoire crisis is having a regional impact and undermines gains in the sub-region in recent years. External partners like the EU, will also need to be clear about what its values and interests are regarding Côte d'Ivoire as the solution may ultimately become one of negotiated settlement. Encouraging Nigeria to be more actively engaged on the Ivorian question is also important.

Proximity to Europe makes the politics and prosperity of Senegal and Cape Verde important for Spain. Mali and Niger are also important because of counter-terrorism and counter-organized crime efforts. The European Foreign Affairs Council's new Sahel strategy needs to ensure that it is comprehensive and not just threat focused on illicit migration and terrorism. The EU also needs to reflect on how to move forward on Guinea Bissau. Its public and principled response following the mutiny of April 2010 contributed to marginalizing the EU further at a time when

it needed to have influence with the Bissau security elite. Whether to impose sanctions on the Bissau military elite should be carefully considered and targeted. Spain has an important role to play in this regard, having invested in EU and bilateral security sector reform efforts in Guinea Bissau.

SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT: THE EU, WEST AFRICA AND THE SAHEL.

Manuel Lopez Blanco⁵

For obvious historical, geographical, economic and migration reasons, West Africa is a priority for the EU.⁶ Europeans have engaged in a long pattern of co-operation with West Africa, presently enshrined in the Cotonou Agreement, which aims at the social and economic development of the region in accordance with democratic values, the rule of law and human rights.

The EU and West Africa face common transnational threats, particularly the expansion of international criminal networks in West Africa, including drug trafficking networks and Islamic terrorist groups (some of which are linked to Al-Qaida). Conflict in WA also generates a number of security challenges that spill into Europe in different ways. Conflicts in West Africa arises from many causes: intra-state civil strife, the Christian-Muslim divide, internal rebellions, strained civil-military relations, state fragility and weakness, local banditry, intra-community and ethnically-based conflicts, social and ethnic exclusions, etc. These dynamics interact with transnational threats, what leads to a further aggravation of state fragility and the vulnerability of populations.

Like the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa, West Africa is failing to achieve the economic and employment creation growth rates that would make serious indents into current Human Development Indicators (HDI) levels and Millennium Development Goals targets. Since decolonisation, West African countries have engaged in entangled efforts of nation-building, state-building and institutional-building. These have included, chiefly, an attempt to improve political stability via increased democratisation and a furthering of economic growth and social cohesion. West Africans take on these enormous challenges while overlaid and penetrated culturally, socially and economically by a globalised international system that creates for them more challenges than opportunities.

This contribution starts with a brief overview of the main conflict sub-systems that make up West Africa to the concentrate on the challenges that the Sahel region poses to European security. It finishes with some general policy recommendations for the EU.

Conflict subsystems in West Africa.

West Africa is currently characterised by various interlocking conflicts that find themselves at different stages (i.e. prevention, polarisation, open war, settlement, post-conflict rehabilitation and recovery). These include:

i) The Mano River Union (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Conakry) sub regional system. In this area there are two countries (Liberia and Sierra Leone) exiting open and extremely violent civil wars and in a protracted stage of post-conflict rehabilitation. The international community is still heavily present in both, via

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⁶ For the purposes of this paper we will define West Africa as the ECOWAS region, Mauritania and Chad.

peacekeeping missions (UNMIL in Liberia) and the Peace Building Commission. In these two countries (and particularly so in Liberia) a fragile state is incapable of ensuring providing security, guaranteeing the rule of law, economic regulation and social services. Guinea Conakry is transitioning from an autocratic regime, following the death of Lansana Conte and the takeover from the military, to a more democratic regime. It is doing so under conditions of weakness, fragility and extensive corruption. Because of ethnic overlapping, instability in any of these countries easily crosses borders impacting into the political and social stability of the two others

ii) Due to its size and ethnic and religious diversity, Nigeria faces three main sets of conflicts that result in extreme violence and challenge its very unity and cohesion. The Niger Delta insurgency in the South has led to a drastic reduction in Nigeria's oil supply capacity, thereby assuming energy security in consumer countries (in particular the EU and US) and generating insecurity around the Gulf of Guinea's littoral (i.e. piracy and banditry in coastal waters). There are violent religious clashes around the middle belt region. These are energised by two conflicting forces: an Islamist insurgency, led by Hoko Baram, in Northern Nigeria that attempts to impose the Sharia and attempts of proselytising Christian fundamentalism. Finally, there is an attempt to build a legitimate democratic system based on fair and free elections and consolidate the federal system upon which Nigeria's very cohesion and existence depends.

iii) Democratic transitions in most of the countries in the regions are troublesome. Incumbent presidents, whose political basis is generally markedly ethnic, periodically resist constitutionally fixed term limits and engage in illegal or illegitimate constitutional changes that allow them to stay indefinitely in power, denying any possibility of political change. Dynastic politics are also a rooted problem in the region, as presidents often lay the ground for their sons to succeed them in power. These processes often result in ethnic or regional polarisation and high instability, followed by military takeover, repression of civilians, and can sometimes lead to open civil war. Countries that have recently gone through processes of highly unstable democratic transitions include Mauritania, Togo, Guinea Conakry, Niger or Ivory Coast.

iv) Civil-military tensions play a major role in fuelling political instability in West Africa. If under a democratic cloak, in most West African countries, political power is underpinned by the military -itself dominated by a particular ethnic group who is the real depository of power. Military forces in the region are very vulnerable to corruption and infiltration by international drug-trafficking networks. As the upper echelons of the military get entangled in drug-trafficking, states drift from fragile into narco-states status. Security Sector Reform must therefore be a major and necessary component of democratisation, state building, and a precondition for effectively fighting against international crime.

v) West Africa plays a key role in the international criminal drug-trafficking economy, particular in the cocaine segment. Latin-American cartels increasingly use the region as a transit hub to their European markets (via sea, air and land). State fragility and the complicity of WA power elites provide a fertile ground for this.

vi) The Sahel countries are among the poorest and most fragile in WA, particularly Mauritania, Mali and Niger. They confront an interlocking set of threats and challenges, many of which are linked to exogenous factors. These include, most notably, a strong presence in the region of Al-Qaida through Al-Qaida in Islamic

Maghreb (AQIM), international drug-trafficking networks, radical islamist movements, or endogenous unresolved conflicts such as the recurring *Touareg* rebellions.

Given its importance to the EU, the remainder of this paper concentrates on the question of instability in the Sahel area and how the EU can contribute to fostering stability to the region through an active Security and Development agenda.

The Sahel Security and Development agenda.

The Sahel refers to the Saharo-Sahelien belt that extends from Mauritania, Southern Algeria and Libya to Northern Mali and Niger.⁷ As argued above, the Sahel area is exposed to a variety of interlocking challenges, which include transnational terrorism, broader geopolitical tensions that overlay the Sahel domain, ideological contest between various streams of reformist Islam and between those and more traditional practices of Islam in West Africa, fragile state structures, etc. These challenges represent an important roadblock to the security, stability and development prospects of the region.

a) Among the transnational threats that affect the Sahel two stand out: AQIM and international drug-trafficking networks. These two phenomena make the Sahel part of a broader transnational threat structure. The region is plugged into a broader international drug-trafficking system that links it to producer countries in Latin America and consumer countries in North America and Europe. It is also becoming an increasingly important theatre in Al Qaida's global violent islamist insurgency. These two threats have developed a symbiotic relationship: AQIM guarantees the security of drug flows into the region, while benefitting financially from them.

b) Various external state actors intervene in various ways in the politics of the region. On the one hand, emerging powers (notably China) are brought into the region by heightened competition for raw materials and energy resources. On the other, neighbouring countries (particularly from the Maghreb) are keen to ensure their greatest influence in the region. External inference adds up to the Sahel countries' ability to consolidate their hold on the region –itself a prerequisite for stability.

c) Different strands of Islam coming from the Arab world (*Wahhabism, Salafism*) or Asia (*Tabligh/Dawa*) attempt to supplant or subvert the indigenous *Sufi (Maraboutist)* tradition that dominates the Sahel and broader West African region. Exposed to a fluid process of religious confrontation, the door is open to the expansion of distinctively violent and intolerant visions of Islam into the Sahel. These include the kind of jihad advocated by Al Qaida, which some have called *Takfirism* and directly targets Europe .

d) Internal security conflicts such as the recurring *Touareg* rebellions and strong social, ethnic and cultural cleavages, contribute to an unstable and insecure political and social environment. This cripples states' ability to tackle poverty and social exclusion and hinders democratisation. and development.

⁷ We consider the Touareg population settlements and the geographical reach of AQMI as the main criteria for delimiting the Sahel. Northern Chad could be considered to belong to this area. Ethnic, religious (Islam) and life-style factors (i.e. nomadic, cross desert trading) give the Sahel region an important degree of homogeneity, connecting the different countries and facilitating trans-border exchanges.

e) State fragility, and particularly difficulties to extend the reach of state structures into large spaces in the Sahel (particularly in Northern Mali and Northern Niger), opens up many opportunities for transnational criminal and terrorist networks.

f) State fragility and lack of means and capabilities become especially critical in the Sahara-Sahel belt, given a huge desert space that hinders communication, low population density, a poor natural resource base and environmental stresses.

The challenges that the Sahel countries confront in coping with the set of external threats, structural factors, and endogenous conflict drivers and the types of responses to those challenges can be grouped in four clusters:

1) Diplomatic/political level - challenges of coordination: Most of the security challenges Sahel countries are confronted with are of a transnational nature and therefore require coordinated solutions. However, diverging perceptions and differing views among the three Sahel countries and between them and their three Maghreb neighbours (Algeria, Libya and Morocco), the absence of a sub-regional organisation, and the African Union' (AU) ineffectiveness in the region result in lack of coordination and absence of credible regional initiatives. The EU can contribute to tackling this problem by promoting a common strategy that tackles cross-border security threats and address development challenges through a sustained dialogue at the highest level. Such an effort must integrate Sahel and Maghreb countries as well as key regional and international organisation.

2) Security and rule of law dimension: As argued above, Sahel countries lack the operational capabilities needed to ensure basic security functions, control of their territories and law enforcement. These lacks include, crucially, border management capabilities, modern investigation, gathering and communication techniques as well as obsolete equipment and infrastructure. This hinders stability and economic development, having notably destroyed an incipient tourist industry. Furthermore, it means the Sahel countries are unable to cope with the kidnapping tactics of AQIM, targeted at European and Western citizens. The EU should help palliate this problem by helping states in the region strengthen capabilities in the security, law enforcement and rule of law sectors. Any such move must necessarily include the effective redeployment, consented and accepted by the previously unattended populations, of state authority into the ungoverned spaces in the northern regions of Mali and Niger.⁸

3) Governance, development and conflict resolution: Weak governance structures hinder economic development and basic social services (i.e. education and employment opportunities for the young). As a result, disenfranchised and unattended populations become vulnerable to recruitment or support of AQIM and other international criminal networks. This is further compounded by the penetration of extremist streams of Islam, which have turned the Sahel region into a theatre of ideological and religious confrontation. This is particularly worrying in Mauritania, which has experienced religious radicalisation and whose youth is especially vulnerable to AQIM. The EU must increase its efforts to help the Sahel states promote and implement home grown and grass-roots solutions to social, political and ethnic tensions. This includes helping open up the regions affected by insecurity through key transport and social infrastructures. This would contribute to

⁸ Such measures must avoid alienating indigenous nomadic population, for instance with poorly thought security measures that include the closure of borders.

creating economic opportunities for local communities and integrating excluded social groups (particularly the *Touaregs* and the northern Arab tribes) within the state, effectively turning them away from AQIM and other criminal networks.

Conclusions

Some of the Sahel states risk evolving into increasingly failed or narco states. Another major risk relates to the possibility that AQIM succeeds in establishing a symbiotic relationship with some tribal groups in the Sahel (as Al Qaida did in Afghanistan or Somalia). The *Touareg* and *Berebiche* tribes are AQIM's main targets in Northern Mali and Niger, and the *Toubous* and *Touaregs* in northern Chad. Any expansion of AQIM's reach would result in a weakening of regional security and development and have negative repercussions upon European security. Another negative scenario would be if AQIM were to succeed in developing its links with the *Boko Haram* in Northern Nigeria or established sanctuaries in Northern Niger and Northern Chad. This would allow AQIM (already well established in Somalia) to connect otherwise isolated theatres and expand the strategic influence of Al Qaida in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Developments in the Sahel and the broader West African region affect directly the security and economic prosperity of Europeans. Spain and the EU should make it a priority to prevent AQIM attacks and deny AQIM an expansion across the Sahel that might result in an enlargement of Al Qaida's overall strategic influence and area of operations in Sub-Saharan Africa. Such an expansion would strengthen the organisation's capability to plan and carry out attacks on EU territory. **Secondly, but relatedly, reducing and containing drug trafficking and other international criminal activities is a priority for both Spain and Europe.** This challenge transcends the Sahel proper, as it also implies the whole of West Africa as well as South America and the Caribbean, all parties of the "cocaine route". **Thirdly, but not least importantly, the Sahel and West Africa offer important economic opportunities for Spain and the EU, not least in what regards trade, the supply of energy and strategic minerals. We therefore should consolidate and improve the trade and communication infrastructure (i.e. roads, pipelines) across the Sahel, North-South and East-West.**

The EU has clear and longstanding political, social and economic interests in reducing insecurity and improving development in the Sahel region. It shall therefore make it a priority to strengthen governance structures and stability in the Sahel through the promotion of rule of law, human rights and socio-economic development. Security and development are indeed deeply intertwined concepts. However, any strategy aimed at their consecution must be premised upon the principle that the sequencing and combination of security and development initiatives must be subject to the specificities of each case. In the Sahel there can be no economic development without first bringing an increased level of security to the area. This means the EU should first and foremost concentrate on conflict resolution, security and rule of law.

Problems will just not be resolved by throwing money at them, that is, through traditional development cooperation procedures. Any effective strategy aimed at bringing stability, security and economic development to the Sahel must necessarily be premised upon a build-up of the region's indigenous capabilities. In this regard, the EU must contribute to security sector reform in the region, by providing assistance and training to indigenous military forces as well as in the areas of policing, justice and rule of law. Only in a context of a build-up of effective

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governance structures will traditional development policies (themselves a must for stability) bear a positive impact upon the region.

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