Europe in the Sahel: An Analysis of the European Counter-Terrorism Structure Between Past and Present to Understand its Actions

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March 2024

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the link between organized crime and jihadist terrorism in the Sahel area and the wider Mediterranean in the light of European intervention. To this end, several examples, case studies, and data on the phenomenon will be offered to highlight how this link is marked and essential, as well as the need to understand it in depth and address it transnationally in a coordinated manner to deal with it effectively. This paper is mainly based on draft work, which is essential, as well as critical research work on primary and secondary sources. In particular, the author wants to highlight some critical issues of European action in different structural and operational areas concerning the terrorist threat and European missions in the Sahel.

In the course of the discussion, several problems and shortcomings emerged regarding EU intervention in the Sahelian area, especially in the management of migratory flows, the rights of migrants, and the way development programs are implemented in African partner countries. The limitations encountered relate primarily to the difficulty of analyzing and synthesizing a wide variety of sources and data and to the author's specific knowledge that does not allow for the analysis of significant dynamics relevant to the area under study (e.g., gender dynamics). In conclusion, there is a need for international actors to reconsider some of their strategies so that a new strategic plan for the area can be put in place to address the real causes of its underdevelopment and its social problems concerning the proliferation of armed militias, criminal networks, and jihadist groups.

Introduction

"One of the hardest parts of my job is to connect Iraq to the war on terror."[1]

- G. W. Bush

"This hearing will be titled Africa and the War on Global Terrorism. […] It is clear that in the fight against terrorism no region can be ignored, and that is especially true of Africa."

- Hon. Edward R. Royce[2]

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1   Johnson, C. (2006, 6 September). Transcript: President Bush, Part 2. Retrieved July 2022, from CBS NEWS.

2   Presiding the House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Africa, Committee on International Relations, Washing-

1.1 For Twenty Years and Even More

On 11 September 2001, the world's news outlets broadcast live extraordinary and terrifying images of the burning North Tower, already hit by the first hijacked plane, followed shortly after that by the South Tower and the Pentagon. Few historical moments have marked the Western collective consciousness for the following decades in such a short time and in such a traumatic way.

Nine days after those terrible images, in front of the US Congress, President G. W. Bush stated: "Our war on terror begins with Al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated"[3], giving rise to what is referred to by various international scholars as the "War on Terror" period. Within two decades, six terms, and four presidential changes in the Oval Office, the world witnessed, in order: the invasion of Afghanistan, the invasion of Iraq, the terrorist attacks in Europe (Madrid in 2004, London in 2005, Paris in 2015, Brussels, Nice, and Berlin in 2016, Manchester, London and Barcelona in 2017), the killing of Saddam, the end of operations in Iraq, the killing of Bin Laden, the emergence and (partial) destruction of ISIS/ISIL/DAESH, the killing of al-Baghdadi, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, until President Biden's recent speech (1 August 2022) in which the killing of al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's number two and US target since the Bush presidency.[4], was announced.

1.2 The American Way

American reaction to the deadliest terrorist attacks in history was immediate and relentless, and, interestingly, the salient points of US actions over the next two decades could almost all be traced to Bush's speech to Congress:

> **"Tonight, we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done. […] Al-Qaeda is to terror what the Mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money, its goal is remaking the world and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere[5]. "[…] We will direct every resource at our command--every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war--to the destruction and to the defeat of the global terror network. […] Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign unlike any other we have ever seen. It may include dramatic strikes visible on TV and covert operations secret even in success. […] We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place until there is no refuge or no rest. And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists. […] This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and**

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ton, DC, 15 November, 2001.

3   The Washington Post (2001, 20 September). Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation. Retrieved July 2022, from The Washington Post.

4   Transcript: President Bush, Part 2.

5   This interesting passage already highlights the substantial differences between the operations of criminal and terrorist organizations that will be discussed later on.

pluralism, tolerance and freedom. We ask every nation to join us. We will ask and we will need the help of police forces, intelligence services and banking systems around the world. […] We will come together to improve air safety, […] we will come together to give law enforcement the additional tools it needs to track down terror here at home, […] we will come together to strengthen our intelligence capabilities to know the plans of terrorists before they act and to find them before they strike."[6]

Any measure put into practice in the following years by the US government and the United Nations, immediately implemented by other states around the world, is already provided for in the speech only nine days after the terrorist attack: the need to do justice by all means, the war on terror to be fought globally, the polarization of the fronts between "us" and "them", the type of war to be fought (asymmetrical) and its duration (twenty years, for Afghanistan), even the first practical measures such as improving air security, countering the financing of terrorism, or the preventive measures at the police and intelligence levels.

Deliberately or not, several concepts expressed that distant September 2001 were echoed in August 2022 by President Biden during the announcement of the killing of al-Zawahiri by a precision airstrike in Kabul. During the briefing, the President stated:

"[…] al-Zawahiri was bin Laden's leader. He was with him all the — the whole time. He was his number-two man, his deputy at the time of the terrorist attack of 9/11. […] Now justice has been delivered, and this terrorist leader is no more. […] As Commander-in-Chief, it is my solemn responsibility to make America safe in a dangerous world. The United States did not seek this war against terror. It came to us, and we answered with the same principles and resolve that have shaped us for generation upon generation: to protect the innocent, defend liberty, and we keep the light of freedom burning — a beacon for the rest of the entire world. […] it is my hope that this decisive action will bring one more measure of closure."[7]

1.3 Countering Terrorism Globally…

The day after the World Trade Center bombing, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1368 (voted unanimously by the five permanent members and the ten nonpermanent members), in which it condemned the dramatic events of the previous day and also called "on the international community to redouble their efforts to prevent and suppress terrorist acts including by increased cooperation and full implementation of the relevant international anti-terrorist conventions and Security Council resolutions".[8], notions already mentioned earlier in Resolution 2625 (XXV), pertaining to the "Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States".[9],

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6   Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation.

7   The White House. (2022, 1 August). Remarks by President Biden on a Successful Counterterrorism Operation in Afghanistan. Retrieved August 2022, from The White House.

8   UN Security Council. (2001, 12 September). Resolution 1368 (2001) / adopted by the Security Council at its 4370th meeting, on 12 September 2001. Retrieved August 2022, from the United Nations Digital Library.

9   UN General Assembly. (1970, 24 October). Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. Retrieved August 2022, from United Nations Digital Library.

in Resolution 1189 (1998) regarding the 7 August 1998 terrorist attacks in Kenya and Tanzania[10], and, in particular, in the Resolution 1269 (1999) of 19 October 1999 on international cooperation in the fight against terrorism.[11]

Resolution 1368 was broadened in the same month by Resolution 1373, which called on states to implement a long list of actions, including countering terrorist financing (criminalizing financial support of terrorist operations, freezing funds or other financial instruments, denying "safe haven to those who finance, plan, support, or commit terrorist acts".[12]), cooperating and exchanging information between states, collaborating in border control, preventing radicalization and enhancing coordination of efforts on national, subregional, regional, and international levels, countering the phenomena related to "international terrorism and transnational organized crime, illicit drugs, money-laundering, illegal arms trafficking, and illegal movement of nuclear, chemical, biological and other potentially deadly materials".[13]; furthermore, a "dedicated Counterterrorism Committee (CTC) of the Council [was established], assisted by an Executive Directorate".[14] (CTED, later composed of 50 security and terrorism experts) to monitor the implementation of the committee.

Eventually, probably the most important act is the adoption (by consensus) by the UN General Assembly of the UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy (A/RES/60/288) in the form of a resolution and an annexed Plan of Action which founded the action of the United Nations at the international level on four pillars:

1. Addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.

2. Measures to prevent and combat terrorism.

3. Measures to build states' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and strengthen the role of the United Nations system.

4. Measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism.[15]

The General Assembly has been reviewing the strategy every two years and, after a delay due to the global COVID pandemic, adopted its seventh revision in June 2021.

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10   UN Security Council. (1998, 13 August). Resolution 1189 (1998) / adopted by the Security Council at its 3915th meeting, on 13 August 1998. Retrieved August 2022, from United Nations Digital Library.

11   UN Security Council. (1999, 19 October). Resolution 1269 (1999) / adopted by the Security Council at its 4053rd meeting, on 19 October 1999, on 13 August 1998. Retrieved August 2022, from United Nations Digital Library.

12   UN Security Council. (2001, 28 September). Resolution 1373 (2001) / adopted by the Security Council at its 4385th meeting, on 28 September 2001. Retrieved August 2022, from United Nations Digital Library.

13   Ibidem.

14   Ibid.

15   UN Office of Counterterrorism. (2006). UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy. Retrieved August 2022, from UN Office of Counterterrorism website.

1.4 …And Regionally

One can roughly distinguish five major geopolitical macro-regions (European, Arab, African, Asian, and American), which, over time, have been adopting different response apparatuses and measures to combat international terrorism in two distinct phases: the first phase is roughly between the 1970s and 1990s and is characterized by measures that are more or less targeted to the different attacks and moments in which they occur, thus measures that are particular and related more to the individual area than to a broader context, therefore causing temporal differences in the implementation of countermeasures among states. The second phase unfolded itself as a result of the intense emotional impact caused internationally by the September 11th attacks and witnessed the implementation of measures that were more internationally coordinated as well as closer in time to each other.[16]

The analysis of the evolution of counterterrorism measures implemented among the states that are part of each of the geopolitical macro-regions is something that is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this paper, which aims, instead, to deal exclusively with the trajectory of the European one to highlight its structure and characteristics, especially concerning the measures that have been enforced to counter international terrorism in the sensitive geopolitical region represented by the Sahel. The subsequent chapters, in particular, will be devoted to describing the evolution of the European counterterrorism structure from a legislative, judicial, police cooperation, and countering illegal financing point of view to provide a more in-depth theoretical framework of its strengths, limitations, and problems.

Subsequently, the analysis will focus on the policies implemented by the European Union in the primary geostrategic interest area represented by the Sahel, which, concerning the problem of terrorism and illicit trafficking, over the years, has proved to be a critical global hub from multiple perspectives: economic, military, political, migratory, and financial. The Sahel, in fact, in the broader context of West Africa, stands midway between the economic flows that come from South Africa, Latin America, and the Indian Ocean, both licit and illicit: most of the cocaine traffic destined for Europe passes through here and is the fertile ground to which many of the trafficking operations of Middle Eastern, South American, and European criminal organizations and mafias are destined. From a demographic point of view, it is the inescapable crossroads of the massive migrations that have affected Europe since the 2000s. This issue is linked to the illegal trafficking mentioned above and to the dynamics of violence, extremism, and radicalization that characterize this still politically very fragile area.

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16   Bettati, M. (2013). Le Terrorisme - Les voies de la coopération internationale. Odile Jacob. p. 181.

2. The European Counterterrorism Framework

"Les hommes n'acceptent le changement que dans la nécessité et ils ne voient la nécessité que dans la crise."[17]

- Jean Monnet

"La coopération entre les nations, si importante soit-elle, ne résout rien. Ce qu'il faut rechercher, c'est une fusion des intérêts des peuples européens, et non pas seulement le maintien de l'équilibre de ces intérêts."[18]

- Jean Monnet

"Mais il y a aujourd'hui une série de phénomènes qui nous mettent dans une situation de bord du précipice. D'abord, l'Europe a perdu le fil de son histoire. L'Europe a oublié qu'elle était une communauté, en se pensant progressivement comme un marché, avec une téléologie qui était l'expansion. C'est une faute profonde parce qu'elle a réduit la portée politique de son projet, à partir des années 90. Un marché n'est pas une communauté. La communauté est plus forte : elle comporte des éléments de solidarité, de convergence, qu'on a perdus, et de pensée politique."[19]

- President Emmanuel Macron

2.1 The Foundations of the Structure

Despite some significant difficulties and regressive phenomena (e.g., Brexit), the extraordinary and, at the moment, unique political, social, and economic experiment represented by the European Union continues in its work seventy years after the formation of the first intergovernmental organization - with economic objectives - among the founding countries of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Following the developments and its transformation into a supranational organization initially with the European Economic Community (EEC, Treaty of Rome, 1957) and then with the European Union (EU, Treaty of Maastricht, 1992), it became clear that special attention had to be paid to the crucial area represented by the common security of the member states of the Union.

It was during the 1970s, characterized in particular by the phenomenon of political terrorism (one event above all that has become sadly well-known: the Munich massacre during the 1972 Olympics), that the first formal structure of cooperation between police forces of different European states was created with the formation, in 1976, of the TREVI group (Terrorisme, Radicalisme, Extrémisme et Violence Internationale), an intergovernmental network of representatives of the justice and interior ministers.[20]

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17   Monnet, J. (1976), Mémoires, Paris: Éditions Fayard.

18   Ibidem.

19   The Economist (2019, 7 November). Emmanuel Macron in his own words (French). Retrieved August 2022, from The Economist.

20   Voronova, S. (2021, January). Understanding EU counterterrorism policy. EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service, Members' Research Service, European Parliament.

("home affairs") of the then nine members of the EEC plus the partner states.

Although the group was not structured on any Community legal charter, it had three main tasks: to foster police cooperation on a European scale, to prevent transnational crime, and to ensure better repression of crimes on a European level. TREVI was divided into five working groups with the following competencies: TREVI I, with tasks of information exchange about terrorist activities; TREVI II, which worked at the level of public order disruption and training of police officers; TREVI III, which had as its objective the fight against organized crime; TREVI IV, which focused on the issue of nuclear security; TREVI V, for compensatory measures to the free movement of people[21]; and, finally, created in 1989, TREVI 92 working group was established to coordinate "the `policing and security implications of the Single European Market and to improve cooperation to compensate for the consequent losses to security and law enforcement' in the EC."[22]

With the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, the powers and policies of the European Union became structured on the so-called "three pillars": the first pillar concerning the "European Communities" (i.e., ECSC, EEC, and EAEC); the second pillar, concerning the Common Foreign and Security Policy (Politique étrangère et de sécurité commune, PESC, whose High Representative in 2003 adopted the first European Security Strategy, ESS) in which a key role was played by the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP, Politique européenne de sécurité et de défense, PESD, which later on became Politique de sécurité et de défense commune, PSDC); and the third pillar, designed for the collaboration in the field of Justice and Home Affairs (Justice et affaires intérieures, JAI) to create, in the following years, what would be termed as the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ).[23] Under the third pillar, great emphasis was placed on developing the EU's operational capabilities by structuring a European police office (Europol) that would become fully operational as of 1 July 1999.[24] Europol is initially envisioned as an "organization of a Union-wide system for exchanging information" within the framework of the "police cooperation for the purposes of preventing and combatting terrorism, unlawful drug trafficking and other serious forms of international crime, including if necessary certain aspects of customs cooperation".[25] so its direct operational responsibilities *per se* did not include counterterrorism action[26], but rather the task of mediating and sharing information between European police bodies. Over time, Europol would come to consist of twenty-five *Unités Nationales Europol* (UNE, i.e., national desks) - or liaison officers - seconded to the headquarters in The Hague, while

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21   Mahieu, R. (2005). La défense européenne contre le terrorisme. *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP* (2005/21 n° 1886) , p. 34.

22   Bunyan, T. (1993). Trevi, Europol and the European state. In T. Bunayan, *Statewatching the new Europe* (p.2), London: Statewatch.

23   *Treaty on European Union*. (1992, 29 July). Retrieved August 2022, from EUR-Lex.

24   Blanc, D. (2014). Les agences européennes Europol et Eurojust et la lutte contre le terrorisme. Entre coopération et...coopérations. In Emmanuelle Saulnier-Cassia (Ed.), *La lutte contre le terrorisme dans le droit et la jurisprudence de l'Union Européenne* (p. 106). Issy-les-Moulineaux: Lextenso éditions, LGDJ.

25   Treaty on the European Union.

26   *La défense européenne contre le terrorisme*, p. 6.

in terms of the support offered to member states in addition to cooperation with other European and international bodies and institutions or states (ECB, Eurojust, Interpol, FBI, US, Russia), Europol has been involved in the production of threat assessments, the provision of expertise for operations and investigations within the Union, and for the production of the so-called *Analytical Work Files* (AWF), aimed at the creation and development of a global database with a perspective of operational analysis.[27]

Like in the rest of the world, the 9/11 attacks forced a rethinking of the Community's counterterrorism measures and the necessity of addressing the threat by improving and expanding existing institutions (CFSP, ESDP, and JAI). Following an extraordinary Council meeting held on 21 September 2001, the European Union rather quickly developed a five-point strategic vision: "I) enhancing police and judicial cooperation, II) developing international legal instruments, III) putting an end to the funding of terrorism, IV) strengthening air security and V) coordinating the EU's global action."[28] Perhaps, however, the year that witnessed the most critical set of interventions was 2002: in February, in fact, the European Union's Judicial Cooperation Unit (Eurojust)[29] was established, which became the reference body for the promotion, improvement, cooperation, and coordination[30] as well as for the circulation of information between member states and European institutions in matters of justice[31] On 13 June, the *Council Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism*[32] The *Council Framework Decision on the European Arrest Warrant* came into force while in November, the *Additional Protocol to the Europol Convention* was introduced (which essentially made the Office's anti-terrorist action one of its main activities, emphasized and completed a second time with an Additional Protocol in 2003).[33]

Of the four interventions, the most important, for several reasons, are undoubtedly the two Council Framework Decisions: first of all, the one on terrorism finally gave an official definition of an act of terrorism, i.e., all those acts are to be considered as such,

"which, given their nature or context, may seriously damage a country or an international organization were committed with the aim of: (I) seriously intimidating a population, or (II) unduly compelling a Government or international organization to perform or abstain from performing any act, or (III) seriously destabilizing or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organization."[34]

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27   Ibidem, pp. 6-7.

28   Matera, C. (2014). The external dimension of EU counterterrorism policy: an overview of existing agreements and initiatives. (E. Herlin-Karnell & C. Matera eds.), CLEER Working Papers (2014/2), p. 15.

29   Ibidem, p. 61.

30   Les agences européennes Europol et Eurojust et la lutte contre le terrorisme, p. 107.

31   La défense européenne contre le terrorisme, p. 14.

32   The Council of the European Union. (2014, 22 June). Council Framework Decision of 13 June 2002 on combating terrorism. Retrieved August 2022, from EUR-Lex.

33   La défense européenne contre le terrorisme, p. 7.

34   Council Framework Decision of 13 June 2002 on combating terrorism.

The *Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism*, moreover, provided a standard minimum threshold for applicable sentences and penalties (eight years for participation and fifteen years for directing a terrorist group) and set the rules regarding the jurisdiction of member states.[35] The *Council Framework Decision on the European Arrest Warrant*, on the other hand, considerably changed the relationship between the members of the Union in the area of the arrest warrant (the basis of which dates back to the 1999 Tampere European Council).[36]) and extradition by establishing four significant rules: (I) the principle of double incrimination (according to which the facts on which the prosecution or conviction was based had to be constitutive of an offense in both the executing and the issuing member state of the warrant) was abolished for a list of thirty-two serious crimes[37], including terrorism,; (II) member states had to consent to the surrender of their nationals; (III) the political and administrative phase of extradition procedures was abolished, the procedure being entirely jurisdictional, with warrants from judge to judge; (IV) an imperative deadline of 90 days from arrest had to be observed.[38]

Following the attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005), the EU adopted the first comprehensive Counterterrorism Strategy based on four pillars:

5. "Prevent: To prevent people turning to terrorism by tackling the factor or root causes which can lead to radicalization and recruitment, in Europe and internationally.

6. Protect: Top protect citizens and infrastructure and reduce [EU] vulnerability to attack, including through improved security of borders, transport, and critical infrastructure.

7. Pursue: To pursue and investigate terrorists across [EU] borders and globally; to impede planning, travel, and communications; to disrupt support networks; to cut off funding and access to attack materials, and bring terrorists to justice.

8. Respond: To prepare [EU], in the spirit of solidarity, to manage and minimize the consequences of a terrorist attack, by improving capabilities to deal with: the aftermath; the coordination of the response; and the needs of victims."[39]

In addition, it was stipulated that the European Agency for the Management of

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35   Le Terrorisme - Les voies de la coopération internationale, p. 181.

36   La défense européenne contre le terrorisme, p. 16.

37   "Participation in a criminal organization; terrorism; trafficking in human beings; illicit trafficking in arms, ammunition and explosives; corruption, fraud, including fraud affecting the financial interests of the European Communities within the meaning of the Convention of 26 July 1995 on the protection of the financial interests of the European Communities; counterfeiting and counterfeiting of the euro; cybercrime; assistance with irregular entry and residence; willful homicide, aggravated assault and battery; kidnapping, kidnapping and hostage taking; racism and xenophobia; organized or armed robbery; illicit trafficking in nuclear and radioactive materials; arson; crimes under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court; hijacking of aircraft/ship; sabotage.", ibidem.

38   Le Terrorisme - Les voies de la coopération internationale, p. 182.

39   European Commission. Counter terrorism and radicalisation. Retrieved August 2022, from European Commission Migrationa and Home Affairs website.

Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex), created in 2004, provided situational reports on the security of the Union's borders and also, eventually, a Counterterrorism Coordinator is elected who is responsible for the implementation and implementation of the strategy.[40]

The "final" step in the legislative evolution of the Union and the structuring of its contemporary foundations can rightly be considered the 2007 Lisbon Treaty, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), one of the two fundamental treaties of the EU, along with the aforementioned Maastricht Treaty (Treaty on European Union, TEU). The European legislative scenario presented significant operational constraints, limitations faced by the European Parliament in its oversight of the institutions, and difficulties encountered in the distribution of competencies among them; in essence, the pre-Lisbon Treaty legislative framework was "institutionally too fragmented (the former pillar system), legally a bit complicated and to some extent incomplete (legal bases issue and judicial remedies questions)."[41] The Treaty systematizes and unifies the previous legislative framework (the "three pillars") into a single document divided into seven parts.[42] And it is crucial because it tackles many of the problems highlighted above:

> **"[…] providing more legal clarity in terms of distribution of competences; […] establishing a more coherent, better structured and more concentrated set of legal norms; […] defining better the powers, conferred on the EU; […] underlining the related reformed role of the EU High Representative for the CFSP with the other characterizing functions as President of the Foreign Affairs Council and as Vice-President of the Commission; [and] strengthening even more the role of the Council especially in designing and implementing the EU counterterrorism policy within the context of EU external action thus assuring more consistency, efficiency, and unity in institutional terms while at the same time increasing the powers of the European Parliament."[43]**

This analysis has momentarily left aside an essential aspect of European counterterrorism action, namely the fight against the financing of terrorism, which will be dealt with in a separate section later; in addition, the continuation of this paper will analyze the forms of collaboration and integration of the leading European instruments within the European security strategy.

40　Understanding EU counterterrorism policy, p. 4.

41　Czuczai, J. (2014, February). The development of a single counterterrorism policy in the external action of the EU: the role of the Council - Some legal aspects after Lisbon, (E. Herlin-Karnell & C. Matera eds.), CLEER Working Papers (2014/2), p. 49.

42　Part I: principles; Part II: non-discrimination and citizenship of the Union; Part III: internal policies and actions of the Union; Part IV: association of the Overseas Countries and Territories; Part V: external action of the Union (with the creation of the European External Action Service - EEAS); Part VI: institutional and financial provisions; Part VII: general and final provisions.

43　The development of a single counterterrorism policy in the external action of the EU, pp. 49 - 50.

2.2 Countering Terrorist Financing

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Western states experienced a level of globalization and social, economic, and political interconnectedness never touched before in human history. The economic possibilities of this new globally interconnected development model seemed to know no limits but rather to be aided and abetted by the financial instruments of generalized deregulation and ever-increasing dematerialization. Similarly, this provided international criminal networks with new ways of accessing markets and financial instruments to profit from them and carry on their illicit trafficking generally aimed at money laundering (these were the years of the US administrations' "war on drugs", especially against Colombian cocaine).[44]

In terms of historical record, European countries were the first to react with the adoption of the Council of Europe's recommendation on 27 June 1980[45], followed by the United States which, in 1986, was the first country to criminalize money laundering through the *Money Laundering Control Act[46]*; finally, in 1989, during the Paris summit, the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF, French: Groupe d'action financière sur le blanchiment des capitaux, GAFI) was created. The group, established on a Franco-American initiative - which at the time of its creation brought together the most industrialized countries (G7), seven other countries, and two international organizations (the Council of European Communities and the Gulf Cooperation Council[47]) - was initially charged with editing a framework with a universal vocation (role of "standard setter") to give momentum to the fight against money laundering[48]Although, legally, it could be described as a non-institution since it had no statute, no delegation of authority, or transfer of sovereignty from member states.[49] In February 1990, the body proposed 40 recommendations (later revised in 2003[50]), i.e., a list of actions to be taken by states to advance the fight against money laundering[51], followed over the years by a "blacklist" of uncooperative countries, according to the "name and shame" strategy.[52]

The turning point, needless to say, was represented once again by 9/11; we recall in this regard the words of President Bush, who at his address to Congress on 20 September had said, "Al-Qaeda is to terror what the Mafia is to crime". Following this, in October 2001, the President enacted the *International Money Laundering Abatement and Anti-*

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44   Fort, J. (2017). Lutte contre le blanchiment d'argent et le financement du terrorisme - L'affirmation du GAFI. In Michel Hunault (Ed.), La lutte contre la corruption, le blanchiment, la fraude fiscale (p. 74). Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

45   La lutte contre le terrorisme, p. 170.

46   Warde, I. A. (2007). Propagande impériale et guerre financière contre le terrorisme, (F. Cotton trans.) Agone, p. 91.

47   Lutte contre le blanchiment d'argent et le financement du terrorisme , p. 74.

48   Amicelle, A. (2008). La lutte contre le financement du terrorisme. In Didier Bigo, Laurent Bonelli, & Thomas Deltombe (eds.), Au nom du 11 septembre...Les démocraties à l'épreuve de l'antiterrorisme (p. 132). La Découverte.

49   Lutte contre le blanchiment d'argent et le financement du terrorisme, p. 74.

50   Ibidem, p. 77.

51   Calothy C. (2016, March). Face au terrorisme, progrès et limite d'une coopération internationale tous azimut, Pouvoirs (n° 158), p. 132.

52   Propagande impériale & guerre financière contre le terrorisme, p. 91.

Terrorist Financing Act under Title III of the *USA Patriot Act*, by which the fight against illegal financing was reinvigorated with a focus on terrorist financing, followed closely by the FAFT, which, at a summit in Washington later that month, extended its jurisdiction to the fight against terrorist financing.[53]

The EC, for its part, had already adopted in June 1991 a directive on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purpose of money laundering (Directive 91/308/EC), which remained limited to the financial professions and required them to identify their clients, adopt anti-money laundering programs and move past banking secrecy to inform the authorities. In 2001, this directive was expanded to a range of non-financial activities and professions (Directive 2001/97/EC), later being further reinforced in 2005 at the level of strictness of controls by the European Parliament and Council (Directive 2005/60/EC). The latter, moreover, defined the crime of terrorist financing concerning funds and activities aimed at financing the acts referred to in the Framework Decision of 13 June, 2002 (i.e., acts of terrorism) and also broadened the scope of financial crimes considered "severe", i.e., punishable by more than one year in prison.[54] Still in 2001, the EU also equipped itself with a system for asset freezing (Common Position 2001/931) independent of the United Nations.[55]

Jumping forward through the years for the sake of simplicity of analysis, the latest directive adopted by the European Parliament and Council has been Directive 2018/843, amending Directive (EU) 2015/849 on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering or terrorist financing, which requires, among other things, to improve transparency regarding the ownership of companies and trusts, strengthen monitoring of third countries considered at risk, address risks related to prepaid cards and virtual currencies, strengthen cooperation between national financial control units, and improve cooperation and information exchange between anti-money laundering authorities and the ECB.[56] In addition, in late 2020, the Council approved the formation of a strategic plan to further strengthen the EU anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing framework with the plan for the creation of an EU supervisory authority with direct oversight powers, a single code to harmonize relevant EU rules, and an improved coordination mechanism between national units.[57]

The limits of the fight against terrorist financing are inherent in the system itself, in the sense that, as FATF's initial reticence in extending its powers to counter terrorism had shown at the time.[58], it is difficult to frame the fight against terrorist financing in

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53   Favarel-Garrigues G. (2003, March). L'évolution de la lutte antiblanchiment depuis le 11 septembre 2001, Critique internationale (n° 20), p. 32.

54   La lutte contre le terrorisme, pp. 171-173.

55   Face au terrorisme, progrès et limite d'une coopération internationale tous azimut, p. 134.

56   The European Parliament and the European Council. (2018, 19 June). Directive (EU) 2018/843 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018. Retrieved August 2022, from EUR-Lex.

57   European Council. Fight against money laundering and terrorist financing. Retrieved August 2022, from the Official website of the Council of the EU and the European Council.

58   Amicelle, A. (2003, March). Etat des lieux de la lutte contre le fincnement du terrorisme: entre critiques et recom-

the context of the fight against the illicit trafficking of organized crime and money laundering. The reason is soon explained: the two types of organizations have different purposes: while organized crime has the goal of getting rich and hiding large sums of dirty money in legal activities (money laundering, precisely), for terrorist organizations, enrichment is not the ultimate goal but only a mean.[59], besides the fact that they do not need to move large amounts of money. To give a measure, the first World Trade Center attack in 1993 cost $20,000, the 9/11 attack $200,000[60] (other scholars say between $400,000 and $500,000), those in Madrid in 2004, around $10,000, and those in Nice in 2016, around $500[61]: by way of comparison, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, in 2019, a kilogram of cocaine in the United States cost $69,000, while a year later, in Germany, a kilogram of heroin could reach the maximum price of $49,000.[62] Ultimately, despite the presentation in May 2015 of the *Report of the Secretary General on the Threat of Terrorists Benefiting from Transnational Organized Crime*[63], in which it is pointed out that there may be a link between organized crime and terrorist organizations, especially when the latter benefit from the proceeds of illegal activities entertained with the former; this link remains under-studied, especially in the light of the fact that it is argued (with good reason) that criminal organizations have no interest in "going into business" with terrorists so as not to draw the attention of law enforcement agencies to their trafficking.

Essentially, except for the parenthesis represented by Daesh with its banking system based on the central bank in Mosul and its financial control of raw materials (oil and cotton)[64], the tools of anti-money laundering are inadequate to combat the financing of terrorism[65]: the members of criminal organizations are part of extensive networks that use complex financial instruments to hide their illegal revenues, whereas terrorist organizations, on the other hand, often operate by relying on individuals (the notorious "lone wolves") who have no interest whatsoever in hiding their income (which frequently comes from "clean money" from followers, NGOs or other types of organizations), and simplify money transfer methods to the extreme, up to "medieval" standards with honor-based instruments such as the *hawala*, the *hundi*, and the *fei-Chien*.[66]

It is also for this reason that employing the latest directives and policy decisions, the EU

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mandations, Cultures & Conflits (n° 71), p. 172.

59   La lutte contre le financement du terrorisme , p. 134.

60   Compin, F. (2016, January). Financement du terrorisme et blanchiment de capitaux: liaisons dangereuses ou manipulations d'État?, L'Homme & La Société (n° 199), pp. 161 – 162.

61   Schippa, C. (2017, November 15). How terrorists fund their attacks - and how to stop them. Retrieved August 2022 from World Economic Forum.

62   United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Drug Trafficking & Cultivation. Retrieved August 2022 from dataUNODC.

63   UN Secretary General. Report of the Secretary-General on the threat of terrorists benefiting from transnational organized crime. Retrieved August 2022 from United Nations Digital Library.

64   Face au terrorisme, progrès et limite d'une coopération internationale tous azimut, p. 132.

65   Financement du terrorisme et blanchiment de capitaux, p. 167.

66   Le Terrorisme - Les voies de la coopération internationale, p. 184.

is trying to shift the confrontation and raise awareness of the need for the fight against the financing of terrorism through transparency in the control of people's data and their transmission to the competent authorities. The difficulties encountered in proceeding in this direction, however, involve the reaction of civil society to possible violations of citizens' rights to the protection of privacy, as happened in Belgium where, in 2004, the Bar Association sought the annulment of some provisions of Belgian law resulting from the transposition of one of the directives cited above on the ground that it unjustifiably violated professional secrecy and the independence of lawyers, indispensable elements of the right to a fair trial and the respect for the rights of the defense.[67] In this regard, two crucial measures were introduced in 2018: the *General Data Protection Regulation* (GDPR) and the *Data Protection Police Directive*, which set standards for protecting individuals when their data are processed in connection with a crime. In addition, member states must abide by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the European Court of Human Rights regulation in counterterrorism.[68]

These and other challenges constantly test the EU's work in terms of efficiency and consistency with itself and with the legislative and operational framework it has built over the years: the development of inter-state collaboration, the use of standard working methodologies, the development of a typical working language, and the advent of new technologies and ways of transferring funds are all challenges that Europe must constantly interface within the ongoing implementation of its security and counterterrorism strategy both internally and externally. This latter, in particular, will be addressed in the next section.

2.3 The External Dimension of European Action and Security

At the same time as developing cooperation within their borders, the various "European Communities" were faced with the need to coordinate and implement an effective, coherent, and all-inclusive external policy to be able to project Europe on the international stage and achieve specific geopolitical and geostrategic goals, while overcoming the paradox of having to structure a standard and at the same time intergovernmental foreign policy. The type of international relations that the EC had inherited from its member states were mainly post-colonial and Atlanticist, consequently influencing the direction of its strategic axis. The EC's international policy started to be developed more incisively in the 1970s when the member states began to harmonize their foreign policies through the European Political Cooperation. Subsequent enlargements, encompassing the period from 1973 to 1995, saw the entry of the United Kingdom, Denmark, Ireland, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Austria, Finland, and Sweden, which, together with the six founding members (France, German Federal Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands) went on to form the so-called "Europe of 15." Developing hand in hand with its enlargement, Europe nurtured and consolidated its base while simultaneously

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67 La lutte contre le terrorisme, p. 175.

68 Understanding EU counterterrorism policy, p. 4.

making its external policies more complex, which did not slow down but accompanied the growth of its international ambitions.[69]

The turning point came with the so-called "eastward enlargement" of 2004 and the admission of ten new members: the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. For the first time, Europe expanded to include states that did not have post-colonial ties overseas or a great tradition of cooperation with developing countries: indicative in this regard is a 2004 Eurobarometer survey of the 25 member states, according to which among the citizens of the EU-15 countries 55 percent believed that Europe was in the best position to help in the development of Africa's needy populations, while in the ten newly admitted states only 31 percent of the population shared the same opinion.[70] It was precisely this period that saw the implementation by the EU of the so-called "neighborhood policy" towards the countries bordering the Union, framed to be able to stabilize its borders and peripheries without the need to resort to a new wave of enlargement. This type of policy brought several ambiguities and uncertainties mainly related to problems of geographical coherence among the very different countries it encompassed.[71]

Europe's challenge over time has been to be able to harmonize different states' volitions and interests to build a consensus for a collective EU responsibility in crisis management: to do this, it first began by developing a flexible and variable-geometry EU policy (i.e., with more economically and politically advanced countries that decide to cooperate more closely) by implementing tools such as the "constructive abstention" or the "enhanced cooperation".[72] Secondly, the EU has built and strengthened a legal personality, first *de facto*, by having various European institutions participate in international summits, then *de jure*, with the creation of the Office of High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy in 1997 (Treaty of Amsterdam) later consolidated and expanded with the Lisbon Treaty (2009) and the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the role of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice President of the European Commission.[73] (a sort of proper European Foreign and Defense Minister). Over the past ten to fifteen years, then, the European Union has been able to build and project an identity as an actor in international relations that can be defined as such according to four criteria: an effective recognition of its status by third-party actors (attested by the acceptance of those actors to interact with the EU); a legal authority to act within the international order; a certain degree of decision-making autonomy of the EU concerning its constituent parts (i.e., the member states); and a

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69   Petiteville, F. (2006). La politique internationale de l'Union européenne. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po., pp. 182 – 183.

70   Ibidem, p. 176.

71   Ibid., p. 178.

72   Ibid., p. 182.

73   European External Action Service. (2021, 19 August). Creation of the European External Action Service. Retrieved August 2022 from European Union External Action.

minimum of coherence in the management of its external relations.[74]

As highlighted, the process has been taking a long time and, especially within the sensitive issue represented by counterterrorism, has required the implementation of a precise mode of action in "harmonizing the wills" of member states, evident, especially since the early 2000s: the "collective securitization". The concept can be defined as "securitization within a regional arrangement [Europe as a whole, in this case] as involving one or more securitizing actors within that arrangement identifying a particular development or issue as an existential threat to a security referent, making relevant validity claims, and finding a receptive audience among other regional actors."[75]   A model comprising six steps can be used to analyze the process of collective securitization:

"(I) the [initial] status quo security discourse and policies; (II) a single precipitating event or a cascade of events [which disrupts the status quo discourse]; (III) the securitizing move; (IV) the response of the audience; (V) the formulation and execution of policies to address the securitized threat; and (VI) routinization and the emergence of a new status quo."[76]

In the case of the EU, therefore, since 9/11, European policy actors and individual states have begun to collectively securitize terrorism as a single common threat that the Union has to deal with united; this has led to the development of a standard counterterrorism policy that has been little by little institutionalized and routinized within European counterterrorism practices.[77] For the sake of completeness, it is worth pointing out that, of course, before 9/11, there were already sporadic collaborative partnerships among European states in the field of counterterrorism, not least because several of them had experienced different types of terrorism within their borders: the IRA in the United Kingdom, ETA in Spain, the Red and Black Brigades in Italy (extreme left and right-wing political formations also engaged in terrorist acts), and the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria in France. All these groups had forced European states to take legislative, judicial, and operational countermeasures that were conceptualized as internal dynamics to be dealt with by the states themselves and in light of their national sovereignty as a "domestic affair," ultimately. The significance of 9/11, then, lies there: the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center were the "set of cascading events" that "disrupted the status quo discourse" of terrorism previously conceptualized as a threat to be addressed solely at the national level by individual states. This "set of cascading events", to which the Madrid and London terrorist attacks were added, has led to the collective securitization of terrorism as an international threat that affects the whole of Europe and thus requires Europe to formulate standard counterterrorism policies

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74   La politique internationale de l'Union européenne, p. 195.

75   Christian Kaunert & Sarah Léonard (2021) Collective securitization and crisification of EU policy change: two decades of EU counterterrorism policy, Global Affairs, 7:5, p. 689.

76   Ibidem.

77   Alistair J.K. Shepherd (2021) EU counterterrorism, collective securitization, and the internal-external security nexus, Global Affairs, 7:5, p. 735.

and practices.[78] within the framework of "supranational governance". The European response to the attacks and the routinization of the new political discourse and practices eventually became the new status quo.

Then again, this trend is quite evident "since the adoption of the ESS [European Security Strategy, December 2003]", with which "the EU has promoted a holistic understanding of security that requires the use of all powers available to the Union in an integrated way so as to develop a single external policy in relation to its safety."[79] The concept is emphasized in the aforementioned 2003 European Union Counterterrorism strategy in which it is stated that

> **"the European Union is an area of increasing openness, in which the internal and external aspects of security are intimately linked. […] The four pillars of the EU's Counterterrorism Strategy – prevent, protect, pursue, and respond – constitute a comprehensive and proportionate response to the international terrorist threat. The strategy requires work at national, European, and international levels to reduce the threat from terrorism and our vulnerability to attack."[80]**

Sixteen years after the first one, in 2020, the European Commission presented the new *Counterterrorism Agenda for the EU*, again based on four pillars: "(I) anticipate existing and emerging threats in Europe […] sharing and a culture of cooperation that is multi-disciplinary and multi-level; […] (II) prevent attacks from occurring, by addressing and better countering radicalization and extremist ideologies; […] (III) protect Europeans; […] respond to attacks when they do occur."[81] What is interesting to note is that at the end, we read that "international engagement across all four pillars of this Agenda, facilitating cooperation and promoting capacity building, is essential to improve security inside the EU."[82] Lastly, in March 2022, the EEAS produced *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defense*, a strategic document on present and future geopolitical objectives as well as the main threats to the Union's security, which states that the EU must face "transnational threats and complex security dynamics" among which, in the first place are listed

> **"terrorism and violent extremism [which] continue to constantly evolve and pose a serious threat to peace and security, inside the EU and beyond. These include a combination of home-grown terrorists, foreign fighter returnees, attacks directed, encouraged or inspired from abroad, as well as the propagation of ideologies and beliefs that lead to radicalization and violent extremism."[83]**

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78   Ibidem, p. 736.

79   External dimension of the EU counterterrorism policy, p. 19.

80   Council of the European Union (2005, 30 November). The European Union Counterterrorism Strategy 14469/3/05 REV 4. Retrieved August 2022 from European Council Official Website, p. 6.

81   European Commission. (2020, 9 December). A Counterterrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond COM(2020) 795 final. Retrieved August 2022, from EUR-Lex.
A Counterterrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond COM(2020) 795 final, p. 2.

82   Ibidem.

83   Council of the European Union. (2022, 21 March). A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence - For a European Union that protects its citizens, values, and interests and contributes to international peace and security. Retrieved August 2022 from EEAS Official Website, pp. 20 – 23.

The biggest challenges the EU will have to face in the years ahead are in successfully carrying out its geostrategic and securitarian design in compliance with its self-imposed goal, which, according to the Strategic Compass, is "to develop an open rules-based international order, based on human rights and fundamental freedoms, universal values and international law."[84] Indeed, at the international level, the EU presents itself primarily as a "norm setter," as a "normative power," or, again, as a civilian power, exerting influence through trade and diplomacy rather than traditional military force.[85] The imperative for the EU is to exert an attractive power that prompts third-party actors to interact with its culture, political values, and foreign policies, at this point perceived as legitimate and endowed with "moral authority".[86] The EU's challenge is thus played out on two directives: firstly, on being able to harmonize the volitions and actions of the various member states, therefore remaining an "action-oriented institution" and not degenerating into a mere "framework institution," even and especially in the face of the obstacle represented by the historical paradigm of national sovereignty as the founding principle of the political order on which modern states are always very reluctant to bargain.[87] Secondly, on being able to respond to the transnationalism[88] of the terrorist phenomenon by applying, in contrast, a "legal transnationalism" that implies, among other things, "the establishment of universal jurisdiction, the empowerment of transnational and supranational courts, the more powerful consideration of treaty obligations in the national jurisprudence as well as the fidelity shown to the law of nations, including customary international law."[89] In the end, all this is to assess "whether the EU has done enough to advance the protection of fundamental rights or – more generally – to exhibit the values it claims to uphold while meeting the challenges posed by, for instance, terrorism and the counterterrorism imperative."[90]

After attempting to describe the European counterterrorism structure, its evolution, ways of countering illegal financing, the tools of external action, and the strategic design that drives it, the next chapter will analyze the EU's intervention in the sensitive geopolitical area represented by the Sahel.

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84   Ibidem. p. 17.

85   La politique internationale de l'Union européenne, p. 210.

86   Ibidem, p. 215.

87   Ibid,, p. 202.

88   Transnationalism here is defined as "multiple ties and interactions linking people, organizations or institutions across the borders of nation-states", Silvia D'Amato & Athina Sachoulidou (2021): European transnationalism between successes and shortcomings: threats, strategies, and actors under the microscope, Journal of Contemporary European Studies, p. 3.

89   Ibidem.

90   Ibid.

3. Europe in the Sahel

"During the last decade, Europeans learnt the importance of a stable neighborhood. From Ukraine to the shores of the Mediterranean, from the Western Balkans to the Sahel. We have learnt the importance to invest more in long-term stability and to prevent crises. This is where Europe can make a real difference."

President Ursula von der Leyen[91]

"Deviant flows move through cities—in a de facto archipelago that runs from the inner metropolitan cities of the United States to the favelas of Rio de Janeiro to the banlieues of Paris to the almost continuous urban slum belt that girds the Gulf of Guinea from Abidjan to Lagos. They move through towns and villages—along the cocaine supply route that links the mountains of Colombia to São Paulo and the waterways of West Africa to noses in the Netherlands."

Nils Gilman, Jesse Goldhammer, and Steven Weber[92]

"You may think that black-markets are negative. On The contrary. As far as we are concerned as revolutionaries, they show that the people spontaneously take a decision and without government make something which they need: they establish a black market because they need it…What are black markets? They are people's markets."

Muammar al-Qaddafi[93]

3.1 Defining the Area

The Encyclopedia Britannica defines the Sahel as a

"semiarid region of western and north-central Africa extending from Senegal eastward to Sudan. […] The Sahel stretches from the Atlantic Ocean eastward through northern Senegal, southern Mauritania, the great bend of the Niger River in Mali, Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta), southern Niger, northeastern Nigeria, south-central Chad, and into Sudan."[94]

The definition immediately introduces the first of the area's inherent characteristics, environmental difficulties, and the first issue (both in terms of timing and severity) of a region plagued by economic, political, and social challenges. Internationally, there is no commonly accepted unified definition for the area; for convenience of analysis, the various international actors (states or international organizations) tend to give their definitions from time to time, depending on their particular strategic objectives. For example, the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UNDPPA) in the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel applies a "flexible definition

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91   At the World Economic Forum, Davos, on January 22nd, 2020.

92   Gilman, N., Goldhammer, J. and Weber, S. (2013). Deviant Globalization. In M. Miklaucic & J. Brewer (eds.), Convergence – Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization (p. 5). Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press.

93   Shaw, M., Reitano, T. (2014 December). The Political Economy of Trafficking and Trade in the Sahara: Instability and Opportunities. Sahara Knowledge Exchange, World Bank, p. 18.

94   Encyclopaedia Britannica Official Webpage.

of the broader Sahelo-Saharan region, encompassing West, Central and North African countries, while placing a particular emphasis on five core Sahel countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger".[95]. The U.S., in the context of counterterrorism, takes into consideration Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal.[96].

The E.U. External Action Service defined this more narrowly in the 2011 Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, where it listed Mauritania, Mali, and Niger as "core Sahelian states" (with the possibility of including Burkina Faso as well), while the E.U. has broadened the scope of operations first with the 2021 E.U.'s Integrated Strategy in the Sahel that focuses specifically on Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger (without neglecting to indicate the transnational and cross-border context that also involves Libya, the Gulf of Guinea, up to East Africa.[97]) and later in the Strategic Compass for Security and Defense, the E.U.'s strategic focus in the African area is represented by the "wider Sahel region and Central Africa.[98]"

For the purposes of this paper, for the Sahelian area strictly understood, case studies and examples will be proposed related primarily to the countries of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger since, in fact, E.U. action is focused on them. From time to time, however, transnational dynamics (especially at the level of migration and trafficking) involving the broader regional context may be presented, which will then be referred to as "West Africa" and include the countries bordering the Gulf of Guinea.

As already said, the area has always been characterized by an intense situation of insecurity from multiple points of view, with the various states struggling to assert their control: Burkina Faso, for example, after 27 years of Blaise Compaore's rule (which ended in 2014) saw its first legislative elections in 2015, during which Roch Marc Christian Kabore was elected (subsequently reappointed in 2020[99]). In the face of the Islamist threat and accusations from the military of not doing enough against it, however, he was deposed in January 2022 by a coup led by Lt-Col Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba.[100] The state, among the poorest in the world, sees several terrorist organizations operating on its territory: Ansarul Islam.[101], the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham in the Greater

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95   The Sahel. Retrieved August 2022, from UNDPPA.

96   Stephen Osaherumwen Idahosa, Denis Andreevich Degterev & Solomon Ijeweimen Ikhidero (2021) Securitisation initiatives and the lingering security challenges in Sub-Saharan Sahel region: An appraisal, African Security Review, 30:3, 338-367, p. 340.

97   Council of the European Union (2021, April 16th). The European Union's Integrated Strategy in the Sahel – Council Conclusions, p. 5.

98   T Council of the European Union (2022, March 21st). A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence – For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security, p. 19.

99   C.I.A. World Factbook.

100 United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. The Sahel. Retrieved August 2022, from UNDPPA Official Website.

101 "Ansarul Islam is composed largely of Peul fighters, and it conducts attacks across northern and eastern Burkina Faso, as well as operating on the other side of the Malian border. […] It also operates increasingly along Burkina Faso's border with Niger.". Mapping Armed Groups in Mali and the Sahel (2019). Retrieved August 2022, from European Council on Foreign Relations.

Sahara (ISIS-GS)[102], al-Mulathamun Battalion (al-Mourabitoun)[103], and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM).[104]

Chad, after becoming independent in 1960, fought a civil war and an invasion by Libyan forces until their final ouster in 1987. In 1990, General Idriss Deby led a rebellion against President Habre, subsequently leading the country until his death in April 2021 at the hands of rebels. A military coup led by Deby's son, Mahamat Idriss Deby, took control of the country, dissolved the National Assembly, suspended the Constitution, and formed a Transitional Military Council, promising to hold democratic elections in October 2022.[105] Chad ranks third to last in the UNDP Human Development Report.[106] The terrorist group Boko Haram[107] And the Islamic State of Iraq, and ash-Sham - West Africa (ISIS-WA) operate on its territory.[108]

After gaining independence from France in 1960 and having witnessed 31 years of dictatorship, a military coup in Mali in 1991 drove out the government, establishing a new constitution and a multiparty democratic system that was considered a model of transparency and stability until 2012. Later, ethnic tensions and the flow of fighters from Libya (some linked to Al-Qaeda) led to a rebellion in the Azawad region and a military coup. Thanks to French military intervention, the Malian government was able to recover much of the territory and sign some peace agreements with the rebels,

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102 "[The group] emerged in May 2015 when Adnan Abu Walid al-SAHRAWI and his followers split from the Al-Qaeda-affiliated group al-Murabitoun and pledged allegiance to ISIS; ISIS acknowledged the group in October 2016. […] since February 2018, has clashed repeatedly with French military forces and allied local militias operating under the French-sponsored counterterrorism operation known as Operation Barkhane, as well as Nigerien, Malian, and Burkinabe troops.", C.I.A. World Factbook.

103 "[al-Mourabitoun] was part of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) but split from AQIM in 2012 over leadership disputes; […] in late 2015, al-Mulathamun/al-Mourabitoun announced a re-merger with AQIM and in 2017, joined a coalition of Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups operating in the Sahel region known as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM); the group remained active in 2022 under the JNIM banner.", C.I.A. World Factbook.

104 "[JNIM] formed in 2017 when the Mali Branch of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Murabitoun, Ansar al-Dine, and the Macina Liberation Front (F.L.M.; aka Katiba Macina or Macina Battalion/Brigade) agreed to work together as a coalition. […] the group continued to conduct attacks against local, regional, and international security forces into 2022, despite losses in fighters and leadership personnel to counterterrorism operations, as well as its conflict with ISIS; JNIM is one of Al-Qaeda's most active affiliates", C.I.A. World Factbook.

105 C.I.A. World Factbook.

106 United Nations Development Programme. Human Development Insights. Retrieved August 2022 from UNDP Human Development Reports.

107 "[The group] formed in 2002 under the late Muslim cleric Mohammed YUSUF. […] by 2015, it had captured territory roughly the size of Belgium in northeastern Nigeria; since 2015, the Nigerian military has dislodged B.H. from almost all of the territory it previously controlled, although the group continues to operate and conduct attacks in Nigeria, as well as in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger; in 2015, the group declared allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and began calling itself ISIS-West Africa. […] between 2009 and 2022, jihadist violence associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP has killed an estimated 40,000 people, mostly civilians, and displaced more than 2 million." C.I.A. World Factbook.

108 "[ISIS-WA] was created in 2016 when a faction of Boko Haram broke off and pledged allegiance to ISIS. […] by 2019, it reportedly controlled hundreds of square miles of territory in the Lake Chad region where it governed according to a strict interpretation of Islamic law. In 2022; it has reportedly outstripped Boko Haram in size and capacity", C.I.A. World Factbook.

agreements later rejected by the extremists. In 2020, a military coup removed President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (elected in 2018), establishing a military junta called the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP). In May 2021, Colonel Assimi Goita, vice president of the junta, led a coup that resulted in his swearing-in as the new president. In January 2022, following the new president's decision to delay democratic elections, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)[109] It has imposed severe economic sanctions on the transitional government while closing its borders with Mali.[110] Ansar al-Dine[111], the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham in the Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS), Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), and al-Mulathamun Battalion (al-Mourabitoun) operate on its territory.

Mauritania gained independence in 1960, then experienced 49 years of dictatorship, sham elections, failed attempts to institute a democratic regime, and military coups. The last military coup was led by Ould Abdel Aziz in 2008, later elected president in 2009 and 2014. The 2019 elections, which saw the victory of Mohamed Ould Cheikh Ghazouani, are the first peaceful transition of power in the country. Between 2005 and 2011, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)[112] They have launched several attacks in the country, killing tourists and foreign workers and storming some diplomatic and government facilities. Although Mauritania has not seen any more attacks since 2011, AQIM remains active in the Sahelian region.[113]

After gaining independence from France in 1960, Niger was militarily led until 1991, when General Ali Saibou was forced by political pressure to grant multiparty elections. Following this, the country saw alternating military coups and democratic regimes in 1996, 1999, and 2010. In April 2011, Mahamadou Issoufou was elected, then reappointed in 2016 and replaced by Mohammed Bazoum through a regular electoral process, the country's first democratic transition from one president to another. Niger figures as the last country on the UNDP Human Development Report list.[114] Boko Haram, Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham in the Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS), Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham - West Africa (ISIS-WA), Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), al-Mulathamun

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109 The International organization comprises 16 West African States that aim to foster interstate economic and political cooperation.

110 C.I.A. World Factbook.

111 "It was among the terrorist groups (including Al-Qaeda) to take over northern Mali following the March 2012 coup that toppled the Malian government; in 2017, joined Jama'ah Nusrah al-Islam wal-Muslimin (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, JNIM), a coalition of Al-Qaeda-linked groups in Mali that formed the same year.", C.I.A. World Factbook.

112 "Formed in 1998 in Algeria, it was known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) until rebranding itself as AQIM in September 2006; has since undergone various schisms and rapprochements. [...] In 2017, the Mali Branch of AQIM and al-Murabitoun joined the Mali-based Al-Qaeda coalition Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM); continued to be active in 2022 despite heavy pressure from regional and international counterterrorism operations, particularly in using North Africa as a support zone for assisting JNIM operations in Mali and the Sahel, including operating transnational financial networks to move and share funds.", C.I.A. World Factbook.

113 C.I.A. World Factbook.

114 United Nations Development Programme. Human Development Insights.

Battalion (al-Mourabitoun) operate in its territory.[115] Its territory, moreover, is plagued by increasingly frequent periods of drought, which, while tragic, are suitable for analyzing the dynamics of conflict in the Sahel in light of desertification and displacement of people.

Environmental fragility is a founding characteristic of this particular transitional eco-region, midway between the Sahara's absolute aridity and the tropical belt's abundant rainfall. The people who inhabit the Sahel are still largely tied to a rural lifestyle, with the main economic opportunities that, for vast endless expanses, narrow down to agriculture and pastoralism. According to the World Bank, for example, between 60 and 75 percent of the population of Mali and Niger is still tied to this way of life, which is highly dependent on crop rotation, and transhumance of livestock and is severely threatened by climate change.[116] It is precisely the effect of the latter, in conjunction with the strategic position of the Sahel in Africa and its connective and projective potential towards the Mediterranean and Europe, that has given rise to a new area of research that aims to establish whether there may be a direct link between climate change affecting the region and the combination of destabilizing activities for security and peace in the area: illicit trafficking, the presence of jihadist groups, migratory flows, and violent inter-ethnic and inter-community conflicts.

> **"The so-called climate-conflict nexus hypothesis argues that climate change, in combination with population growth, leads to environmental degradation and dwindling natural resources, which in turn fuel increased competition and conflict escalation. The prominence of climatic stress and conflict dynamics makes the Sahel a quintessential case to test this hypothesis and explore its scope-conditions."[117]**

Several studies in recent years have attempted to investigate this causal link, lacking, however, in one fundamental aspect from a methodological point of view: that of temporal correlation; that is, in analyzing environmental issues and resource-based conflicts very close together, when in fact the effects of any ecological shocks occur over the long term, "resource conflicts are less akin to sudden outbursts of violence than to protracted processes of political contention intercepting long-term socio-political struggles."[118] This led scholars to reevaluate the approach and implement a more bottom-up one, employing interviews with local people and experts. As a result of this, four possible theories have developed that can, in part, link climate change and conflict events as we move away from temporal boundaries: (I) the Malthusian Mechanism, according to which worsening climatic conditions, in combination with population growth, contribute to the depletion of natural resources, exacerbating competition for them in the pursuit of survival; (II) the Greed Mechanism, similar to the previous one,

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115 C.I.A. World Factbook.

116 Raineri, L. (2022, March). Drought, Desertification and Displacement: Re-politicising the Climate-conflict Nexus in the Sahel, I.A.I. Papers, p. 4.

117 Ibidem.

118 Ibid., p. 5.

where, however, in this case, it is more the economic opportunity that motivates the actors involved; (III) the Sons-of-the-Soil Mechanism, which occurs when the strategy for dealing with lack of resources is the mobility of a social group that then goes into conflict with indigenous/host communities in other territories, increasing friction and consequently violence; (IV) the Political Ecology Mechanism, according to which climate change disrupts normal relations of production at the social and economic levels, also shaking up normal relations of social integration and conflict resolution thereby risking to cause various degrees of violence in the long run.[119]

Whatever model one decides to apply, the debate is vivid and ongoing, to the extent that Niger itself recently adopted a climate security narrative in conjunction with internal security. The European Union, for its part, has welcomed the latter, as it allows it to employ "a coherent framework to reconcile its diverse (divergent?) ambitions: fighting climate change, stabilizing the (extended) neighborhood, fostering green development and undercutting irregular migration. The Commission's emphasis on Africa has made the Sahel a laboratory to devise and test new foreign policy approaches combining the security-development nexus with the climate-conflict nexus in the name of climate security and green development."[120]

As if the problems ashore were not enough, the West African region (in which the Sahel, in part, is embedded) is also one of the most exploited from a maritime point of view: Chinese investment in immense port infrastructure.[121], the exponential increase in maritime traffic - within which the Gulf of Guinea is a strategic crossroads - and the greed of various regional and international players, combined with the weakness of local governments, have disrupted the maritime economy of coastal countries. West Africa, for example, is considered one of the world's most overfished regions, as well as the region where illegal fishing is considered to reach its highest levels, at 37 percent.[122] Small-scale local fishermen who can no longer support themselves are forced to leave the fishing profession and, as a result, often become migrant smugglers (especially to the Canary Islands.[123]).

Finally, some words should be spent briefly sketching the influence of various international actors in the African area in light of their strategic interests. The United States immediately highlighted the centrality of the African continent in the war on terror in the aftermath of 9/11. One can easily find several reports highlighting the link between underdevelopment and terrorism and the need to respond to these issues:

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119 Ibid., p. 7.

120 Ibid., p. 18.

121 Yang, Z., He, Y., Zhu, H., Notteboom, T. (2020, December). China's Investment in African Ports: Spatial Distribution, Entry Modes and Investor Profile. Retrieved August 2020, from ScienceDirect.

122 Ibidem.

123 Shelley, Louise I. Dark Commerce: How a New Illicit Economy Is Threatening Our Future. Princeton University Press, 2018, p. 168.

"Just two months after 9/11, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP) held a briefing on 'Africa, Islam, and Terrorism'. The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) issued a special report on 'Terrorism in the Horn of Africa'. The Council on Foreign Relations (C.F.R.) promptly produced a series on the national security implications of the rising importance of Africa in the war on terror. Furthermore, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) reported on the need for a comprehensive security-development approach to underdevelopment in Africa."[124]

Russia began its penetration into Africa (particularly in the Sahel) primarily to appropriate underground resources, especially in countries such as Mali (rich in gold and uranium). Through the Wagner Group agency's contractors[125], Russia has been able to exploit the Sahelian populations' aversion to French troops and take control of several gold mining sites[126], which, in the face of severe Western sanctions following the war in Ukraine, are proving to be a significant funding factor. In the meantime, on the one hand, China has turned the African continent into a terrain of economic colonization, becoming, among other things, one of the major indirect causes of instability for the area due to massive loans to African states.[127] (which they then struggle to repay, having to resort to the forced export of raw materials) and the sale of arms to them in exchange for trade contracts that are not subject to restrictive conditions regarding governance[128]. On the other hand, Turkey has chiseled its diplomatic relations with all African states through development programs, bilateral agreements, and the opening of Turkish cultural institutions, followed by diplomatic representations from 10 in 2008 to 37 in 2021.[129] Last but not least, both through bilateral relations of member states and by resorting to a unified supranational strategy, the E.U. in the previous decade has increasingly sought to establish itself as a significant player in the African context, particularly in the Sahelian area concerning the massive migration flows that have struck the old continent since the 2000s: its operations will be the subject of the last section of this chapter.

Given the particularity of the Sahelian context and the underlying dynamics of security problems, the following paragraphs will go on to analyze some types of illicit trafficking conducted in the area under consideration, also attempting to highlight the causal and relational links between these, the criminal and terrorist organizations in the region and the migration phenomenon. From a strictly definitional point of view, all those traffics that are formalized as illegal by national legislation will be considered illicit trafficking; specifically, the trafficking of human beings and drugs and the smuggling of human

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124 Stephen Osaherumwen Idahosa, Denis Andreevich Degterev & Solomon Ijeweimen Ikhidero. (2021). Securitisation initiatives and the lingering security challenges in Sub-Saharan Sahel region: An appraisal, African Security Review, 30:3, 338-367, p. 346.

125 Giovanni Carbone, (2022, February 17th). Via dal Mali. Retrieved August 2022, from ISPI.

126 Global Initiative Against International Organized Crime (2022, March). Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa. Retrieved August 2022, from Global Initiative Website.

127 Massimiliano Frenza Maxia, Aldo Pigoli (2022, July 29). Cina: da donatore a banchiere. Retrieved August 2022, from ISPI.

128 Garth Le Pere, Brendan Vickers. (2011). The African connection. In Jorge Heine & Ramesh Thakur (eds.) The Dark Side of Globalization, United Nations University Press, p. 64.

129 Serhat Orakçi. (2022, January 09th). The Rise of Turkey in Africa. Retrieved August 2022, from Aljazeera Centre for Studies.

beings or other goods will be primarily analyzed.

3.2 Arms Trafficking

While for several types of illicit trafficking, it is roughly possible to estimate the quantities traded based on requisitions and production studies, the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW) is different in that these are generally very durable (e.g., the approximately 175 million Kalashnikovs produced since 1947 are for the most part still in circulation, distributed among all continents and in the possession of armies, official police, terrorists, liberation fronts and criminal organizations.[130]), they undergo many changes of hands (even in large quantities), and the supply routes are multiple. The aforementioned characteristics of the illegal arms market make it very difficult to assess its extent and the number of them in circulation in the Sahelian area; however, several field research conducted by international centers mainly through interviews with the military, police officers, security agents, local communities, members of armed groups, traffickers and smugglers have tried to give a magnitude of the phenomenon, outlining its main characteristics. The purpose of this section is to summarize some of these studies. For the sake of completeness, from a terminological point of view, by small arms/personal weapons, we mean those weapons a person can easily carry alone (pistols, rifles, assault rifles, light machine guns), and by light weapons those that can be carried by two or more people or animals (heavy machine guns, grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft/anti-tank weapons, small missile systems).[131]

From a historical perspective, the Sahel has been the crossroads of trade, caravan routes, the meeting place of different ethnicities and peoples, and large movements of people for centuries. The contemporary environmental, economic, political, and social situation of the states that are part of this area has fueled the proliferation of armed groups and militias, rebel armies, and jihadists. The prevalence of these groups and the various links between illicit arms trafficking and other cross-border trafficking have gradually led to the militarization of traditional trade routes. A direct link between the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and different types of illicit trafficking, such as narco-trafficking, human trafficking and smuggling, trafficking in counterfeit goods, artisanal gold, and wildlife trade, has been evidenced. It has also been found that SALW trafficking is structured on established trade directives and cross-border linkages.[132] The countries that see the most significant volume of trafficking taking place within their territories are Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso. According to several studies, Niger is primarily a transit country for traffickers: arms cross the border with Libya in both north-south directions in an area known as the Salvador Pass. In contrast, Mali is primarily an arrival country

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130 Fondazione ICSA (2019), Terrorismo, Criminalità e Contrabbando – Gli affari dei jihadisti tra Medio Oriente, Africa ed Europa. C. De Stefano, E. Santori, I. S. Trento (eds.), Rubettino, p. 148.

131 Fiona Mangan, Matthias Nowak (2019, December). The West Africa–Sahel Connection: Mapping Cross-border Arms Trafficking, Small Arms Survey, p. 4.

132 Ibidem.

for arms (given the strong presence of rebel and jihadist groups). Demand remains high despite two French military operations (Serval, 2013 – 2014; Barkhane, 2014 – 2022) and the U.N.'s Operation MINUSMA. Arms to Mali come mainly from Mauritania, Senegal (a central hub), and Guinea. Mali itself is dotted with cities that serve as hubs, such as: "Foïta, Koygma, Ber, Lerneb, Raz El Ma, and Gossi in the Timbuktu and Taoudeni regions; In Khalil, I-n-Afarak, Talhandak, Tin-Essako, and Anefif in the Kidal region; and Ménaka and Gao (the capitals of the Malian regions of the same names)."[133]

Eventually, another sensitive area is the tri-border area of Burkina Faso-Côte d'Ivoire-Mali and Ghana-Côte d'Ivoire-Burkina Faso;. However, the traffic volume here is smaller; the area proves to be strategic from the point of view of connections between the different states. Interestingly, the Organized Crime Index Africa 2021 shows that the countries that exhibit the highest levels of crime are those that, at the same time, experience the most extended periods of conflict: "West Africa and the Sahel face a high threat from criminal markets, with over three-quarters (77.6%) of citizens residing in countries with high rates of criminality, according to the Index."[134] The index also sheds light on the relationship between criminal networks and instability/conflict, highlighting how particular illicit trades (primarily cocaine and arms trafficking) fuel situations of instability and conflict between armed militias and ethnic groups, which, combined with the deficits in development and political power typical of these areas, perpetuate the cycle of crime and conflict.[135]

The trafficking of arms and ammunition between armed groups, therefore, exacerbates and fuels conflicts in the Sahel, threatening the security of various communities, especially in the countries mentioned above (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger). In 2015 in Mali, in the Mopti region, arms trafficking appeared to be directly linked to the worsening of relations and subsequent bloody conflict between the traditional hunting militia and the Fulani tribal community, just as in 2018, the circulation of arms in Koro and Bankass seemed to have fueled violence between the Dogon community and, again, the Fulani. The arrival in northern Niger of jihadist groups driven out of Mali during Operation Serval (2013) has fueled the fear and insecurity of local populations, increasing the demand for weapons and fomenting inter-communal tensions, especially between Fulani herders and rural communities or Tuareg tribes. A very similar pattern occurred in Burkina Faso, where extremist elements spread south and west between 2014 and 2016, sowing violence, widespread resentment, and inter-communal conflict in addition to ramping up arms trafficking.[136]

Different types of responses have been employed to cope with the problem: at the international level, the U.N. has tried to address this type of illicit trafficking (and, in general, other security issues in the area) through the MINUSMA mission, and so has

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133 Ibid. p. 7.

134 Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa, p. 16.

135 Ibidem, p. 17.

136 The West Africa-Sahel Connection – Mapping Cross-border Arms Trafficking, p. 13.

France with Operation Serval (2013 - 2014) and Barkhane (2014 - 2022). At the regional level, ECOWAS's West African Police Chiefs Committee (WAPCCO) has been tasked with identifying criminal patterns and trends concerning trafficking in the area; in addition, various forms of collaboration, often sponsored by the Africa Union, have been established among the states involved in the phenomenon. Finally, for the purposes of this paper, mention should be made of the work of the G5 Sahel, on which much of the international support, mainly European and United Nations, is focused. Recently (2017), security forces have been established among the states of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger (G5 Sahel Joint Force, Force conjointe du G5 Sahel "FC-G5S"[137]) to address cross-border threats derived from trafficking. FC-G5S's mandate in combating organized crime and traffickers in the Sahel includes the ability to conduct operations in a 50-km strip of land on both sides of the border of participating states, giving it the ability to attack and destroy trafficker forces and/or compel them to change directives, avoiding G5 countries.[138] Future improvements to the system could include greater integration at the police corps level and joint training programs between Western and FC-G5S forces. Indeed, no policy can be decisive and fruitful without a state and governmental apparatus that instills security and maintains stability in the area.

3.3 "After the Gold Rush"

Another significant percentage of the illicit trade is represented by the gold market, especially gold extracted from so-called "artisanal mines," as opposed to industrial mining. Gold mining has always been an essential activity in the area, which had shaped the economies of powerful states (such as the Malian empire) and prompted European colonizers to penetrate the area (it is revealing that the first Portuguese colony in Africa was named precisely *Elmina*, the mine.[139]). Starting in 2012, a combination of price growth and availability of low-cost technologies caused a new wave of search for deposits in the so-called Sahara-Sahel area: in 2012, the first deposits were discovered in Sudan, in the Jebel Amir area, followed by those in northern Chad, in the center of the Tibesti region, between 2013 and 2016; those in Niger, in the areas of Djado, Tchibarakaten, and Air, in 2014, and finally, by those in Mali, in the Kidal region, in 2016.[140] As far as the "Central Sahel" space is concerned, the economies of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger alone (those of which the most data are possessed) are estimated to produce approximately 150 tons of gold per year, two-thirds industrially, one-third through artisanal mining.[141] According to other data, artisanal production is believed to amount to about 20-50 tons per year

137 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. Project supporting the G5 Sahel Joint Force with Implementation of the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Compliance Framework. H.R. Website.

138 The West Africa-Sahel Connection – Mapping Cross-border Arms Trafficking, p. 17.

139 Luca Raineri (2020). Gold Mining in the Sahara-Sahel: The Political Geography of State-making and Unmaking, The International Spectator (Vol. 55, n° 4, 100 – 117), p. 103.

140 International Crisis Group (2019, November 13th). Getting a Grip on Central Sahel's Gold Rush, Africa Report n° 282, p. 1.

141 Gold Mining in the Sahara-Sahel, p. 103.

for Mali, 10-30 tons for Burkina Faso, and 10-15 tons for Niger, with an estimated market value of between $1.9 and $4.5 billion per year.[142]   Concerning the labor market, it has been estimated that between 2 and 3 million people are currently employed in artisanal gold mining, with about 6 million partially dependent on the industry: if one takes into account that the population of the above three countries is around 60 to 70 million, estimates seem to suggest that 10 percent of it would be directly or indirectly dependent on the industry.[143]

Depending on the distance of the mines from the governmental center and how they are exploited and controlled by interest groups (private companies, government-backed companies, jihadists, smugglers, criminal networks, specific ethnic groups), one can roughly distinguish three macro-areas ("proximity clusters") concerning artisanal gold mining. The first is the Sahel, which includes the regions of Sikasso, Koulikoro, and Kayes in Mali, the whole of Burkina Faso, and the Tillabéri region in Niger. Here, the distance of the sites from the capital or other major cities is relatively short, cultural characteristics among the population are pretty homogeneous, and central governments have been able to establish direct or indirect control over the mines through contracts with private or public companies. Generalizing, it is possible to say that in this area, the possibilities for illegal exploitation of mines are smaller; the mines represent a significant economic opportunity for people and private companies (security or mine exploitation) and a source of consolidation of political position for the regimes. Of course, cronyism, corruption, and smuggling are commonplace.[144] The second area is the so-called Sahara area, which includes the regions of Tchibarakaten and Tabelot in the Niger region of Agadez and Kidal in Mali. These regions are characterized by a significant distance from their respective capitals and the country's major centers, difficult climatic and environmental conditions, and little central government control. Here, exploration and exploitation permits have been allocated virtually without control, mainly following the logic of "first come, first served," thus presenting a situation of almost complete anarchy. Control of sites and mines tends to be concentrated in the hands of charismatic leaders who control both the means of production/extraction and the logistics and security. Various attempts by central governments to establish state control or curb artisanal mining have failed one after another for several reasons: first, governments have realized that the issue of artisanal gold mining is susceptible to local populations, who are highly dependent on the income (legal or otherwise) generated by the activity; second, artisanal mining involves large numbers of young people, who are thus diverted from other "more criminal/criminalizable" activities such as associating with rebel groups, criminal or terrorist networks, drug and/or migrant traffickers. Finally, the financial flow generated by artisanal mining activities is greatly reabsorbed into regional economies, allowing local governments to reinvest some of it and provide

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142 Getting a grip on Central Sahel's Gold Rush, p. 1.

143 Gold mining in the Sahara-Sahel, p. 104.

144 Ibidem, p. 107.

essential services for the population.[145] The last area is the Tibesti, a mountainous region that stretches between northern Chad, Niger, and southern Libya. Here the leading ethnic group is the Tubu (known for their claims of independence and statelessness vis-à-vis the central government), who mainly exploit the Miski and Kouri Bougoudi deposits in Chad, Kilinje in Libya, and Djado in Niger. The exploitation of the deposits developed from the beginning without formal state control, which, over time, led to harsh repression by the central governments of Niger and Chad and violent escalations with the local population. Given its proximity to Libya, most exports pass through there: in 2016, Libya exported 81.5 tons of gold to the U.A.E., worth about $2.8 billion.[146]

The export issue is significant: in areas controlled by rebel groups, armed militias, jihadists, or criminal networks, gold is exported through informal networks with links to neighboring states such as Ghana and Togo, Guinea, Algeria, and Libya. There is a significant mismatch in the data between the number of exports declared by the various producing countries and the imports declared by the importing countries. To measure the problem, in 2016, "the U.A.E. imported US$1.52 billion in gold from Mali, while Bamako recorded only US$216 million in exports. Likewise, in 2014, Mali declared a gold production of 45.8 tonnes against the U.A.E.'s import from Mali of 59.9 tonnes."[147] The chart presented below, taken from a Reuters report, shows data only for the U.A.E. as an example, highlighting the differences between the aforementioned declarations for 2016 and should ring a big alarm bell regarding the legality of imports and, thus, the gold trade in the Sahel.[148] In light of this data and a mutual evaluation that found several gaps in the regulation of the gold trade with several money laundering risks, in March 2022, the FAFT added the U.A.E. to its "gray list," which will imply more controls on Dubai in the future.[149] Other significant importers of gold from the Sahel for which accurate data are unavailable are Switzerland and China.
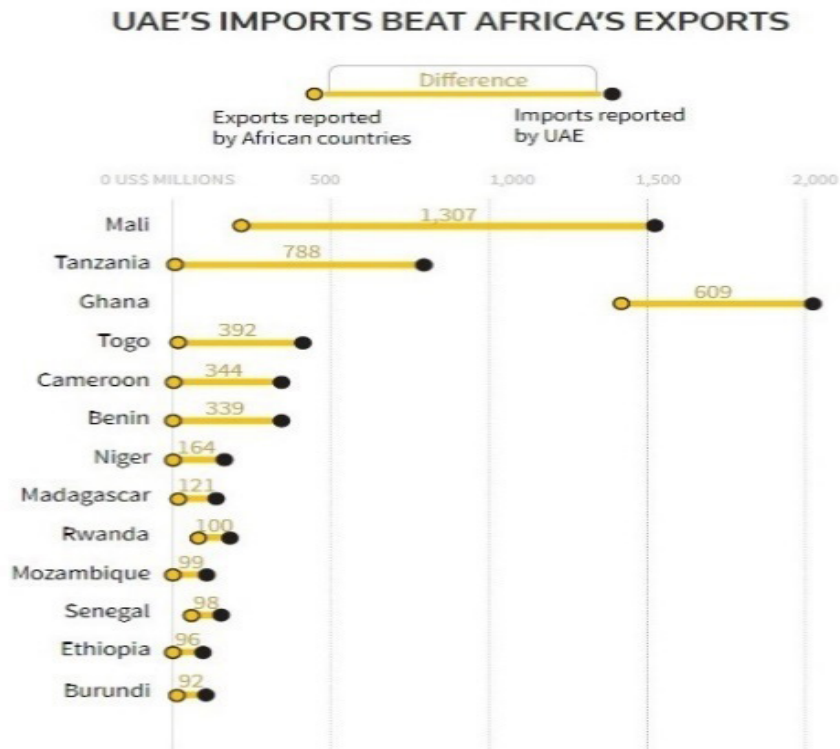
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145 Ibidem, p. 109.

146 Ibid., p. 111.

147 Abdelkader Abderrahmane (2022, March 11). Cross-border smuggling / Mali: West Africa's hub for illegal gold trade with Dubai. Retrieved August 2022, from enact Africa.

148 U.A.E. and Africa's gold. Retrieved August 2022, from Reuters Graphics.

149 Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa, p. 6.

UAE'S IMPORTS BEAT AFRICA'S EXPORTS

| | Difference |
| Exports reported by African countries | Imports reported by UAE |

0 US$ MILLIONS — 500 — 1,000 — 1,500 — 2,000

Country	Difference
Mali	1,307
Tanzania	788
Ghana	609
Togo	392
Cameroon	344
Benin	339
Niger	164
Madagascar	121
Rwanda	100
Mozambique	99
Senegal	98
Ethiopia	96
Burundi	92

The combination of weak or unstable governments, challenging economic and social conditions, large flow of illegal weapons, presence of jihadist groups, criminal networks, trafficking networks, private or rebel militias, and large gold deposits means that the issue of their exploitation takes on preponderant importance from the perspective of security in the area: in fact, the sites can represent a source of funding and/or recruitment for rebels, jihadist groups, or other armed groups, as well as contribute to the growth of international money laundering networks. For example, in northern Mali's Kidal region, several artisanal gold mining sites are under the control of the armed group Coordination of Azawad Movements (*Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad, C.M.A.*) affiliated with and progressively absorbed by Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (Group to Support Islam and Muslims, JNIM).[150] Acts of violence are continuously fueled by the various armed groups attacking sites (both industrial and artisanal) to take control of them. The Keyes region of Mali has been the target of numerous attacks by the Macina Liberation Front (Katibat Macina), including recently when a convoy of Malian military personnel was ambushed on the Bamako Kayes Road in September 2021.[151] In Burkina Faso, on the other hand, "around 2,200 possible informal gold mines were identified in a government survey of satellite imagery in 2018. About half of them are within 25 km (16 miles) of places where militants have carried out attacks."[152]

Also there, out of pragmatism rather than ideological conviction, miners in the Soum

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150 Ibidem, pg. 4.

151 Ibid.

152 (2020, November 26th). Gold as a resource base for jihadists in the Sahel. Retrieved August 2020, from Robert Lansing Institute.

region pay jihadists to secure sites. In contrast, in Mali's Tinzawaten, Intabzaz, and Talahandak regions of Kindal, the jihadist group Ansar Dine imposes zakat (religious tax) on miners and the rest of the population. So do some jihadist groups affiliated with the Islamic State of Greater Sahara, as well as the Group to Support Islam and Muslims in the eastern regions of Burkina Faso.[153] In 2018, the reaction of the governor of these regions to close the mines to cut off the terrorists' sources of funding caused anger among the population, who thus joined the jihadist militants, who later re-opened some of the mines, such as those in Kabonga.[154] Furthermore, mines can also become training camps, especially in the use of explosives (given their use in mining), as evidenced in several cases in Mali and Burkina Faso at the hands of the Khalid Ben Walid brigade, affiliated with Ansar Dine.[155] Ultimately, in specific areas, such as the aforementioned Tibesti region, the issue of artisanal gold mining and migration are likely to overlap in the face of the possible exploitation of migrants or the fact that the boom in mining activities may hide or fuel migration flows in the north-south directive between Sahel, Libya, and Europe. Fears, the latter, have prompted E.U. member states to pressure Chad's government for more "muscular" intervention in the closure of sites.[156]

The burst in the discoveries and exploitation of gold seams in the Sahel-Sahara region poses many questions, challenges, and problems from multiple perspectives (environmental, health, social, security level) to the actors involved in the area but, if wisely exploited, the mines can also represent opportunities to create new jobs and support state economies. The measures available to various governments to counter artisanal gold mining are neither many nor varied: the exclusive use of force, in the long run, proves counterproductive; states must, therefore, reestablish their authority first in terms of presence in areas where the central government is virtually absent; secondly in terms of border and export control; and ultimately in terms of regulation and imposition of national authority over sites. Positive examples have been collected of rebels or armed groups who faced with the economic opportunities offered by the mines, have decided to embrace the state's regulatory work and put down their arms: for example, "in the Agadez region of Niger, many mine owners are former rebels or traffickers; Saleh Ibrahim, formerly a rebel of the Niger Movement for Justice (M.N.J.) and criminal economy baron, has now taken up artisanal gold mining at the Tchibarakaten site and become a highly respected local figure."[157] In parallel, the various states should consider integrating worker communities into a legal framework that provides rights and protections while allowing the state to take advantage of economic opportunities from artisanal gold mining.

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153 Getting a grip on Central Sahel's Gold Rush, p. 7-8.

154 Gold as a resource base for jihadists in the Sahel.

155 Getting a grip on Central Sahel's Gold Rush, p. 7-8.

156 Gold Mining in the Sahara-Sahel, p. 112.

157 Getting a grip on Central Sahel's Gold Rush, p. 6.

3.4 Drug Trafficking

It is widely known that one of the most lucrative illegal markets in the world is the one related to the sale of drugs: opiates (opium, morphine, heroin), stimulants (cocaine, amphetamines, crack), antidepressants (barbiturates, tranquilizers), hallucinogens (Mescaline, L.S.D., Ecstasy), cannabis and its derivatives (Marijuana, Hashish, Hashish Oil), move billion-dollar rings annually, funding criminal and/or terrorist networks that gravitate around the sector. During the 1970s - 1980s, according to Interpol reports, four main trafficking routes developed[158]: the first one is known as the Southern Route and stretches from South America (Uruguay and Brazil) to Spain and Portugal; the second route is the Caribbean Route, which from the Caribbean reaches, again, Portugal and Spain via the Azores (in the late 1990s it was believed that 40 percent of the cocaine arriving in Europe passed through this route) and which exploits post-colonial ties with European countries; the third route is the West Africa/Sahel route, initially explored by Colombian drug traffickers, which runs from the countries of the Gulf of Guinea to the Mediterranean coast and the Iberian Peninsula; and finally the fourth and final route, known as the Southeastern Europe Route, which stretches along the Balkans via the Adriatic and Black Sea ports and sees Bulgaria as a central hub where cocaine shipments flowing through both Turkey and West Africa converge.[159]

With the "war on drugs" waged by the United States on South American drug traffickers, however, the flows that passed through the Caribbean and Central America headed for Europe and North America suffered several setbacks, forcing drug traffickers (in the 1990s) to use other routes to sell their products (mainly cocaine). The choice fell largely on West Africa.[160], in the face of several favorable factors: exponential growth of the maritime trade, weak governments, ample availability of arms, economic and social problems, poor if not absent border controls, high levels of endemic corruption, and the presence of already established trafficking routes for other drugs - primarily marijuana and hashish, Morocco being the world's largest producer; all factors that allowed for the establishment of relatively safe and stable "drug corridors".[161] to the Iberian Peninsula or Italy.[162]

Guinea-Bissau is one of the leading countries of entry for this trade, a nation characterized by significant instability after its independence in 1974. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Colombian drug traffickers began redirecting vast quantities of cocaine through West Africa starting in 2004. Countries such as Guinea-Bissau and Mali stood out as ideal arrival points and disposal hubs to Europe due to poorly controlled ports and airports and the weakness of the state repressive sector: "by

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158 Mario Bettati (2015). Le Trafic de drogue - Pour un contrôle international des stupéfiants, Odile Jacob, p. 83.

159 OECD (2016), Illicit Trade: Converging Criminal Networks, OECD Reviews of Risk Management Policies, OECD Publishing, Paris, p. 186.

160 Ibidem, p. 192.

161 The Political Economy of Trafficking and Trade in the Sahara, pp. 4, 5.

162 Le trafic de drogue, p. 42.

2008, Western officials estimated that $300 million worth of cocaine, the equivalent of Guinea-Bissau's entire G.D.P., was moving through the country each month."[163] Again, according to UNODC, in Europe, between 1998 and 2008, users of cocaine doubled from 2 million to 4.1 million. In 2008, the European market value ($34 billion) was virtually the same as the North American market value ($37 billion).[164] Based on several studies, it was estimated that the cocaine trade transiting through West Africa had increased from 18 to 25 tons in 2010 alone. In less than fifteen years, West Africa has become one of the major transit and disposal platforms for cocaine and, after that, heroin coming from the production areas of Latin America and Asia heading towards Europe, so much so that, according to UNODC, this has become not only a problem merely related to drugs as such but also a security problem for the Sahelian, North African and European areas.[165]

In recent years, another type of trafficking has also reached alarming levels in West Africa: that of pharmaceutical opioids and their nonmedical use. In 2017, In Nigeria, one particular drug, tramadol, turned out to be the second most abused drug after cannabis: "Tramadol is a synthetic opioid analgesic that is primarily prescribed to treat mild to severe pain in both acute and chronic cases. In addition to being a painkiller, tramadol also has mood enhancement properties."[166] Tramadol reached West Africa via the informal market in the mid-2000s (produced primarily in India) and quickly ignited a very lucrative market for several reasons: the existing base of abuse of drugs of the benzodiazepine family, the stereotypes and misconceptions that it is not particularly harmful, the low cost of the pills, and the many effects its intake causes (calming and analgesic effects, enhanced work, intellectual and sexual performances, reduced sleep and appetite, endurance of extreme conditions - which is why farmers in rural areas take it).[167] Hundreds of tons of tramadol have been seized in West Africa in recent years:

"In 2012, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) reported that under the UNODC/World Customs Organization Container Control Program, a total of 24 containers with a total of more than 132 tons of tramadol preparations were seized between February and October 2012 [...]. Of those, 16 containers were intercepted in Lomé, 7 containers in Cotonou, Benin, and 1 container in Dakar. [...] The largest annual seizures reported by national authorities occurred in Nigeria, with about 54 tons seized in 2016, 92 tons in 2017, and 22562 kg in 2018. [...] In February 2019, after several years without reporting any seizure, the Port Control Unit of Cotonou seaport seized four containers with more than 59 tons of tramadol in transit to Niger and Nigeria."[168]

The damage of the narcotics trade does not merely affect a state from a health point of view but also, more importantly, in terms of the financing to those criminal networks

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163 Patrick Radden Keefe (2013). The Geography of Badness: Mapping the Hubs of the Illicit Global Economy. Michael Miklaucic & Jacqueline Brewer (eds.), Convergence – Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, p. 102.

164 Le trafic de drogue, p. 40.

165 Ibidem, p. 84.

166 UNODC (2021). At the Crossroads of Licit and Illicit - Tramadol and other pharmaceutical opioids trafficking in West Africa, UNODC Research, p. 1.

167 Ibidem, p. 4 - 5.

168 Ibid., p. 11.

that, to maintain their business, penetrate and infiltrate state organs and structures at multiple levels to corrupt them. In this regard, the case of the ten people convicted in Chad in June 2020 raised a scandal because high-ranking intelligence and security officers appeared among them, an unprecedented event precisely because of the presence of the officers.[169] Chad's strategic location on Libya's southern border, thus at the center of all significant trafficking routes to the Mediterranean and subsequently to Europe, places it as a critical player (along with Niger) in the fight to prevent various illicit trafficking and thus as a particular target of European investments in the area.

The European Union has established several action plans to combat drug trafficking in cooperation with numerous countries, contributes to a large number of drug-related projects in Latin America, the Caribbean, and, of course, West Africa, and helps partner countries in the European neighborhood in the fight against drug trafficking.[170] In addition to this, through its prearranged bodies (usually Europol), it conducts concerted international operations with various law enforcement agencies; for example, when in December 2016, a multinational team (the Spanish Guardia Civil, supported by Europol, the French Direction Nationale du Renseignement et des Enquêtes Douanières and the Italian Guardia di Finanza) located and intercepted a Panama-flagged merchant vessel - later escorted to the port of Almeria - carrying 19. 6 tons of cannabis resin being part of a network operated by a Moroccan drug kingpin. The investigation also revealed a link between transnational criminal networks engaged in the joint trafficking of cocaine and migrant smuggling.[171]

3. 5 Human Trafficking and Migrants Smuggling

The last "commodity" that will be briefly considered (due to the sheer volume of studies and data there are on the phenomenon and the impossibility of covering it in depth here) is people: in this section, an attempt will be made to briefly set out some trends regarding human trafficking and migrant smuggling concerning the West African and Sahel area. An initial note of terminology is necessary before addressing the topic; specifically, the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, defines trafficking in persons as

"the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation"[172] (the article right after further specifies the absence of consent by the person).

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169 Remadji Hoinathy (2020, August 25th). Drug trafficking / Chad's illegal drug trade contributes to regional insecurity. Retrieved August 2022, from enact Africa.

170 Le trafic de drogue, p. 92.

171 Europol (2017). EU SOCTA 2017 - European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment: Crime in the age of technology, p. 35.

172 Illicit trade – Covering Criminal Networks, p. 38.

The United Nations' Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air, supplementing the U.N. Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, on the other hand, defines smuggling of migrants as "the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefits, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident."[173] According to the 2021 European Union Serious and Organized Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA 2021), "approximately 50 percent of the criminal groups involved in migrant smuggling were exclusively active in migrant smuggling. Migrant smugglers are on occasion also involved in the trafficking in human beings, drug trafficking, excise fraud, firearms trafficking, and money laundering."[174] Although there may be links between migrant smugglers and human traffickers (when the latter exploit migrants in economic straits, generally), and there may be a tendency to regard them as similar crimes, in reality, they are conceptualized and formalized by law as two fundamentally distinct crimes: the former as a crime against a person, the latter as a crime against a state.[175]

Over the past two decades, Europe has experienced some of history's largest and most deadly migrations. According to the International Organization for Migration's (I.O.M.) 2022 World Migration Report, there are 86.7 million migrants in Europe (which is the world's largest receiver and the continent that has seen the most significant growth in immigration along with Asia), or about 12 percent of E.U.'s total population.[176] Frontex recognizes four main migration routes to Europe: the Eastern Mediterranean and Eastern European routes (which for the purposes of this paper will not be dealt with); the Central Mediterranean route, which, between January and October 2021, saw approximately 55,000 migrants arrive and is at the center of several controversies due to the containment policies implemented by various European governments (mainly the Italian ones) that have turned Libya into a transit and blockade country where several migrants are blackmailed and suffer abuse.[177] (this topic will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter). The last route is the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic, where migrants attempt to reach Spain by crossing the sea or trying to penetrate the two Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Two words also need to be spent addressing the Canary subroute, which is crucial for migrants from the Sahel. Several Malian and Mauritanian networks, with the collaboration of Senegalese smugglers, organize the boats that allow migrants to leave, especially from the beaches of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou.[178] With more than 23000 arrivals in 2020[179], the route is among the busiest, and the reception of migrants on the islands is a serious problem from the point of view of guaranteeing

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173 Ibidem.

174 Europol (2021). EU SOCTA 2021 - European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment: A Corrupting Influence: The Infiltration and Undermining of Europe's Economy and Society by Organised Crime, p. 69.

175 Ibidem, pg. 72.

176 Interactive World Migration Report (2022). Retrieved August 2022, from I.O.M.

177 ANSA (2021, November 11). The main migration routes to the European Union. Retrieved August 2022, from Info-Migrants.

178 Peter Tinti (2022, July). Mali: Human-smuggling Revival After Pandemic-linked Slumps. Global Initiative.

179 María Martín (2021, December 03). Canarias, un año después. Retrieved August 2022, from El País.

abasic sanitary conditions, which the authorities struggle to manage (the episode of the 2600 migrants crowded ashore due to lack of infrastructure has become infamous in this regard[180]). Flows dropped slightly in 2021, with 20700 arrivals (4% less[181]) but, as of now, would appear to have grown again in 2022, with 9300 arrivals as of July 15, 27% more than last year.[182] Overall, the southwest Mediterranean route still proves to be among the busiest and deadliest, with a negative record of 2126 people losing their lives in 2021 (a 24 percent increase over the previous year), according to the Andalusian Human Rights Association's (APDHA) assessment. In these statistics, unfortunately, the Canary route itself holds the record, with 1332 people who lost their lives there.[183]

A large proportion of the people who (willingly or unwillingly) flock to the southern coast of the Mediterranean have passed through or come from the Sahel and West Africa, where both human trafficking and migrant smuggling represent real economic enterprises complementary to other illicit trafficking (as mentioned earlier in a few paragraphs): what Europe is witnessing is only the tip of the iceberg of an entire economic system. In West Africa, for example, it is estimated that between 200,000 and 300,000 children are trafficked each year for forced labor or sexual exploitation, a trade that yields 5 to 20 times the initial investment; a merchant may receive between $10,000 and $20,000 for a child and $12,000 to $50,000 for a woman.[184] In Nigeria:

"women and girls from the southwest of the country are usually trafficked to Europe (notably the Schengen states: Italy, Spain, Germany and the Netherlands) and the United States for prostitution. In one estimate, in Italy, 60 percent of women trafficked for commercial sex are Nigerians. By contrast, in eastern Nigeria, boys are mainly sold into agricultural, domestic, trading, and apprenticeship jobs."[185]

Regarding migrant smuggling, studies report that some smuggling hubs (such as the Agadez region of Niger) see up to 5,000 migrants a month attempting to take the route north. It is evident how such a volume of people who need to move generates a lucrative market appealing to many smugglers and criminal groups. According to Europol, 80 percent of irregular immigration to Europe is allegedly supported by these "facilitators" who are paid "to provide services such as transportation, fraudulent identification, corruption of border officials, and settlement services."[186] That particular route is controlled by the previously mentioned Tubu ethnic group, which, from the

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180 Ibidem.

181 Antonio Sempere (2022, January 01st). Más de 20.700 migrantes llegaron de forma irregular a Canarias en 2021, un 4% menos que en 2020. Retrieved August 2022, from Europa Press.

182 Cope (2022, July 15th). Unos 9.308 migrantes llegan a Canarias por vías irregulares en lo que va de 2022, un 27,49% más que en 2021. Retrieved August 2022, from Cope.

183 Noemi Cucinotta (2022, Febbraio 11). Spagna – Record storico "crudele" alla frontiera sud con un aumento del 24% delle morti. Retrieved August 2022, from Melting Pot Europa.

184 The African Connection, pp. 62 - 63.

185 Ibidem.

186 The Political Economy of Trafficking and Trade in the Sahara, p. 23.

migrant trade, is estimated to make $10,000 to $15,000 a week.[187] By charging prices that in the latest period seem to be rising despite an increasing supply of migrants, a fact that may indicate a monopolistic attitude by the tribe.[188]

While the fight against human traffickers is being conducted relatively consistently and firmly by the E.U., some issues arise concerning migration control, a much more sensitive and politicized topic in the European dialogue. One of the major problems encountered in analyzing European action on migration control concerns the set of policies and institutional discourses that fall under the umbrella of countering so-called "root causes". First of all, the problem arises from a linguistic/semantic point of view: as soon as the basis of action is to intervene on "root causes", the whole phenomenon is problematized as unfavorable and as something to be prevented rather than properly managed; an attitude that, in the case of migration, in addition to being dangerous is also wrong, in the face of various economic and demographic theories that point out several positive aspects in migration, if properly managed, precisely.[189]

Secondly, the sedimentation of Western actors' historical, economic, and political actions over the years causes intense contradictions and inconsistencies between the discourse addressing "root causes" and the practice that shows how often those same actors exacerbate them. The most apparent cases involve the effects of U.S. sanctions on Iran on the Afghan migrant population and the consequent increase of the latter in Turkey or, again, as a 2019 study by the N.G.O. Stop Wapenhandel shows, the activities of several Western multinationals that produce the weapons used in conflicts around the world that, as a result, displace millions of people and exacerbate migration flows.[190] On the strictly European side,

> "a recent Quartz article explained how E.U. subsidies for European fishing companies cause overfishing in West Africa and fuel irregular migration since African fishermen cannot compete and the seas off the West African coast are increasingly empty. In a similar example described in an earlier article, Italy is subsidizing its tomato industry to export cheap tomato products to African countries. This puts local tomato businesses in African countries out of business. Many migrants working irregularly in Italy's agricultural sector could have worked for local tomato producers without fair competition."[191]

Examples would be numerous, but the study of the many cases is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper; it is essential to note how the narrative of "root causes" and the politics of externalization affect the allocation of European development funding. In particular, two critical issues are pointed out: the first is that development funding is shifted from countries that are irrelevant from a migration perspective to countries

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187 Ibidem.

188 Ibid., p. 34.

189 Bram Frouws (2020, March 18). Op-Ed: Mistaken metaphor: the 'root causes' approach to migration is dishonest and ineffective. Retrieved August 2022, from Mixed Migration Centre.

190 Ibidem.

191 Ibid.

considered important as points of origin or transit, without regard for the actual development needs of the various beneficiaries. Second, a problem arises in measuring the success of a project; that is, the question arises as to whether reducing the migration volume is a success criterion appropriate to a specific policy and resource allocation.[192]

Starting somewhat from afar to deal with the history of European development funds, in 1957, to combat poverty in former colonies, Europe created the European Development Fund from which, following the Valletta summit in 2015, E.U. member states, in collaboration with several African partners.[193], established the "European Union Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa (EUTF)"[194], initially allocating 2.8 billion euros[195] (2,668 European funds, of which 80 percent came from the European Development Fund and 152 million in additional funds from member states[196]), later to become 4.7 in 2020[197]. The criticism this fund has been receiving stems mainly from the fact that the European Parliament has no say in the fund - which is under the control of the Commission, that the African countries taken into consideration (23 in total) are mainly countries of transit or origin of migrants (as mentioned above), and from the fact that the fund, in addition to financing the creation of new jobs and to support the population (as it should be), is primarily used to finance facilities and projects for migration control, migrant repatriation, and training and financing various police and military bodies in the target countries.[198] Three cases, in particular, highlight the failure to use the fund to address the migration problem: funding to Niger, Mali, and Civipol.

At the launch of the partnership agreements, one year after the establishment of the fund, Mali and Niger were identified as priority countries to which the funds should be allocated. Mali as a country of origin for migrants, and Niger as an important transit country. Niger was allocated approximately 150 million euros from the EUTF, 92 of which were specifically designated to counter illegal migration and forced displacement. A similar sum was allocated to the government of Mali, but with a specific project of 40 million for the integration of migrants expelled from the E.U. On the one hand, Niger reacted proactively, quickly implementing Brussels' requests, not least because most of the migrants Niger was dealing with were not originally from the country. One of the primary directives for action by the project and the government in Niamey had been to counter the *passeur* phenomenon in Agadez, the "gateway to the desert," a longtime key hub of trade and people movement in the Sahel. The activity of Niger's *passeurs* (young drivers of the most disparate vehicles, expert *connoisseurs* of the Teneré, and

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192 Ibid.

193 Sara Prestianni (2017, May 24). Parola d'ordine esternalizzare: soldi europei agli Stati africani per fermare il flusso dei migrant. Retrieved August 2022, from La Stampa.

194 Op-Ed: Mistaken metaphor.

195 Parola d'ordine esternalizzare.

196 Video: Diverted Aid. Retrieved August 2022, from Journalism Grants Development reporting.

197 Op-Ed: Mistaken metaphor.

198 Diverted Aid.

the routes to the border with Libya and Algeria) is one of the critical components of the region's economy, as lamented by Agadez regional council president Mohamed Anacko, who had to deal with central government decisions that, in just a few months, criminalized the activity as a result of European pressure. This does not stop migration but only has the effect of pushing *passeurs* and migrants to seek new (and more dangerous) routes while, again, according to Anacko, their criminalization risks bringing them closer ideologically or forcing them to make deals with Islamists and human traffickers.[199]

Mali, on the other hand, has been slower to react and more resistant to European demands, in the face of the fact that in 2016 alone, from the economic remittances of the 4 million Malians abroad, the country had earned $800 million.[200] (not counting informal channels, which are not countable). This is why, while remaining open to dialogue, Bamako refuses to sign a readmission agreement, preferring to resort to measures that are more conservative of the Malian diaspora and more time-consuming and resource-intensive, such as biometrics on the identity documents of Malians.[201], the usefulness of which, along with other biometric authentication tools, has been and continues to be subject to much criticism in the face of actual effectiveness and the inherent risks to the system in the case of cyber-attacks or loss of personal data.[202]

Finally, the last case concerns the fourth most EUTF-funded organization after the U.N. migration agency I.O.M., the German public cooperation agencies Giz, and the Spanish Fiapp, namely Civipol: a major French company, founded in 2001 as a service provider (consulting, technical support and training) for the French Ministry of the Interior. In 2006, the company began expanding its scope internationally, contracting projects outside France and acquiring the Belgian company Transtec, specializing in humanitarian and development cooperation projects, in 2016. According to the European Commission Report, the value of the projects awarded to Civipol was 44 million euros (of which those collected at the moment are 27), which must be added 46 million that EUTF allocated for Border Migration Management (a project for the Horn of Africa). In addition, Civipol has Michelin as a client, the shipping company Cma-Cgm, and the communications company Data4. Shareholders (the company is 40 percent public) include Airbus D.S. and Thales, with more than 12 percent; then Morpho, Défense Conseil International (Dci-group linked to the Ministry of Defense) with about 10 percent; and, as minor shareholders, Allianz France, and the French Airports company, with just over 1 percent. At the beginning of 2016, it had 59 ongoing projects for contracts worth a total of €94 million. Nearly two-thirds of its revenues come from the "internal security" sector, where Civipol works with law enforcement agencies. Various criticisms were made regarding the compatibility of Civipol's action in the sphere of development cooperation, especially if one takes into account its involvement in the organization of Milipol - an arms and armaments fair whose brand Civipol holds 40 percent - whose 2016 edition

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199 Parola d'ordine esternalizzare.

200 Ibidem.

201 Ibid.

202 (2018). Invisible Borders. Retrieved August 2022, from Investigative Journalism for Europe.

had been criticized by Amnesty International for the presence of torture weapons at two exhibitors' stands. Finally, several criticisms were also made concerning the French state's sponsorship of Civipol's action in Libya, in collaboration with local police forces, as well as in Sudan, with several allegations of human rights violations.[203]

Ultimately, extreme caution should be used to assess the effectiveness of development funds to address the "root causes" of migration. It is necessary to implement more coherent and more harmonized policies across sectors, taking into consideration not only the immediate peculiarities of the migration phenomenon (visa, recognition, repatriation, labor, etc.) but also working on critical issues in the countries of origin, peacebuilding efforts, implementation of agricultural and urban development policies, reduction of trafficking in arms and other illicit products, and resolution of endemic conflicts.

3.6 The Destabilizing Relationship Between Illegal Trafficking, Crime, and Terrorism

While some examples concerning the link between trafficking, criminal organizations, and terrorist organizations have already been given in the previous sections, this section will attempt to deal with the same from a more theoretical point of view, summarizing contemporary studies on the phenomenon of the conjunction between organized crime and terrorism and bringing some examples of investigations and concluded operations that have highlighted the aforementioned link. From a securitarian point of view, it is essential to analyze these types of relations in the face of their transversality and transnationality. Thus, in light of the instability they create in the area under consideration and, therefore, the threat they pose to Europe.

Evidence of the links between drug trafficking and terrorism is incomplete, focusing on a small number of groups or relying on sources with an interest in emphasizing or downplaying these links. Most information on terrorism is collected by intelligence agencies and is covered by state secrecy. Open-source information comes mainly from media reports and studies by nongovernmental organizations and think tanks. Only in rare cases is there institutional intelligence.[204] However, it is possible to say that, in general, revenue from illicit trafficking is a significant source of funding for terrorist groups. These organizations behave as investors who differentiate their package of activities, thus reducing the risk of failure.[205] Regarding the possible convergence between terrorism and transnational organized crime, it is possible to say that, at least in the short term, the most immediate risks involve the use of crime by terrorists (particularly drug trafficking) to finance terrorist attacks in Europe and elsewhere. This is because of the structural transformations of terrorist groups, which are increasingly decentralized and less set

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203 Lorenzo Bagnoli (2017, May 24). Civipol, la multinazionale francese che vende sicurezza in Africa. Retrieved August 2022, from La Stampa.

204 Terrorismo, Criminalità e Contrabbando, p. 84

205 Ibidem, p. 85.

on a top-down vertical hierarchy. A study published in 2015 by the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment (FFI), which examined the sources of funding of 40 jihadist cells that organized attacks against European targets between 1994 and 2013, found that the second most used method of financing for preparing attacks (in 28 percent of cases) was illicit trade (in drugs, cars, counterfeit documents, and weapons).[206] Ultimately, the nexus between organized crime and terrorism can be traced to the mutual convenience of developing illicit activities that have a functional purpose for both organizations. In recent years, criminal and terrorist organizations have diversified their activities and, in addition to traditional illicit trafficking, have begun to use the same means and routes to traffic in human beings. This is evident from the recent seizures of cigarettes made by the Italian Guardia di Finanza, in which the presence of migrants in the boats used by the traffickers was also reported.[207]

The connection between different types of trafficking is increasingly pronounced. For example, as discussed in the section on drug trafficking, given the operational difficulties related to the new financial regulations, Colombian traffickers, to send cocaine to Europe, decided to ally themselves with the Italian 'ndrangheta. So, the route that brings cocaine to Europe today no longer passes through the United States. Still, it arrives in Venezuela from Colombia, where it is shipped to reach West Africa, specifically Guinea-Bissau. From Guinea, the drugs cross the Sahel to Tunisia and Libya, traveling the same routes as the migrants. Within the Sahel region, jihadist groups participating in the cocaine business found themselves managing profits that they later invested in various ways. One of them, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (*Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat*, GSPC), invested the proceeds of drug trafficking in kidnapping foreign tourists for ransom demands. The operation led, in 2003, to the kidnapping of 32 Europeans for whom 6 million euros were paid in ransom. With the proceeds of this criminal operation, the al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb group was formed (2007). Other jihadist groups would successfully follow GSCP's example.[208] In 2007, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb decided to invest in migrant trafficking, which was increasing exponentially as wars and unrest in the region intensified.

Human trafficking, particularly in prostitution, fosters contacts and agreements with Italian mafias. The fact that there are relations between jihadist-type criminal organizations and Italian organized crime is also confirmed by the National Anti-Mafia Directorate, whose 2016 report states that the evolution of international terrorism and the investigations carried out so far on the criminal activities of the Islamic State and its affiliates (or aspiring martyrs) in our country confirm the intertwining of mafia-type organized crime and international terrorism—more than an intertwining, a total interpenetration.[209] And if it is not interpenetration, it is the terrorist organization reinventing itself as a criminal organization. The case of the kidnapping of more than 250 young women by the Boko

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206 Ibid., p. 86.

207 Ibid., p. 97.

208 Ibid., pp. 98 - 99.

209 Ibid., p. 100.

Haram group in 2014 is infamous, a revealing fact of an actual trade in women, linking Islamist-motivated terrorism and the exploitation of prostitution.[210] It is, therefore, crucial to better understand how and why jihadist-inspired terrorist groups must be connected to organized crime both in other countries (including Italy, as would appear from the aforementioned investigations) and to those located in the territory. This necessity is because trafficking routes cross territories controlled by other criminal organizations with which terrorists inevitably have to bargain, and the actors involved in this traffic are many and varied.

In the context of the transnationality of the phenomenon and the dense network of connections affecting Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Sahel, one of the most interesting operations in recent years against arms trafficking linked to jihadist militias dates back to 2016 and was carried out by the security forces of Spain, Italy, France, and Greece, coordinated by the Europol police bureau and assisted by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency. The operation led to the arrest of 109 people and the seizure of a massive shipment of weapons and drugs (100 tons of hashish, 11,400 firearms, more than a million bullets, and 10 tons of explosives) in which a network of traffickers run by Syrian nationals, was involved, selling drugs to arm jihadist groups in the Mediterranean basin. During the international operation, seven boats were stopped, five of which carried drugs (hashish), the other two weapons. The boats were all from Turkey, where the network had its headquarters. One of the two boats carried 5,000 rifles and 500,000 rounds of ammunition; the other contained 6,400 rifles, 570,000 rounds of ammunition, and 10 tons of ammonium nitrate destined for the terrorist stronghold of Misrata, Libya. The arrests involved 11 Ukrainian nationals and one Uzbek, 34 Syrians, 26 Moroccans, 14 Spaniards, Turks, Indians, and other nationalities. Most of the detainees were crew members aboard the ships, aiming to make a profit from trafficking rather than jihad adherents. The operation also led to the discovery of overland trafficking routes through which hashish would be transported by land through Mauritania, Mali, and Nigeria to Libya, where much of the goods were sold in Egypt. With the help of Moroccan police, Spanish police were able to make several interventions on North African smuggling routes and arrest a vital member of the smuggling group in Spain.[211]

Based on what has been said throughout the paragraphs on illicit trafficking and the latter, it is, therefore, possible to broadly sketch trends of various terrorist groups concerning illegal trafficking in the Sahel. Human trafficking tends to be a bit of economic activity exploited by jihadist groups in the area for reasons of geography - because the vital crossing point is between the Sahel and the countries of North Africa, which would require significant relocation and dispersion of forces - and because of competition from criminal networks, which would force terrorists to compete in an economic sector in which, except for a few rare cases (e.g., Boko Haram), they have little interest, devoting themselves instead more to kidnapping (as already mentioned above). Groups such as AQIM, on the other hand, are more interested in providing

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210 Ibid., p. 110.

211 Ibid., pp. 161 - 162.

protection services or imposing taxation on the flows of the aforementioned trafficking, deriving more significant revenues from it.[212] A different case is made concerning arms and drug trafficking. Indeed, suppose jihadist groups manage to limit their logistical costs by operating in the territory and directly exploiting its resources to carry on their armed struggle. In that case, they need to maintain the supply of arms and ammunition, to which most of their income is devoted. It is, therefore, typical for jihadist groups to be engaged in arms trafficking and to be in good contact with criminal networks in this sector. The aforementioned income, precisely, comes mainly from the lucrative narcotics market and the transportation, protection, and taxation services that jihadist groups offer.[213]

One area where the relationship between illicit activities and violent extremist groups has been mainly studied is Liptako-Gourma, a region situated astride Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Here, extremist groups have begun to exploit a wide range of illicit activities to finance themselves:

> **"[They] have developed strategies for mobilizing financial resources locally, from cattle rustling and artisanal gold mining. [...] In some of the areas where they have settled, extremist groups have instituted the levy of 'zakat', in the form of a livestock tax that farmers must pay them in exchange for protection. [...] Artisanal gold mining also plays a significant role in financing extremist groups. [...] The financial resources generated through these different activities enable the groups to acquire operational capabilities, notably weapons, motorcycles, and fuel. [...] These groups eventually end up fuelling arms trafficking by themselves becoming arms providers. However, this role is limited to the 'jihadist' movement that skims the border areas of Liptako-Gourma. It is in this context that arms transfers have occurred at the border between Mali and Burkina between 'jihadists' operating on both sides of the border, in Central Mali and in the Burkina regions of the Sahel and North. [...] The same dynamics apply to fuel contraband, which comes from Nigeria and supplies the northern region of Tillabéry in Niger, as well as northern Mali (the Ménaka and Gao regions) and Burkina (Sahel region). [...] Terror groups also use illegal activities to gain support, active or passive, from communities in the areas where they operate and where they seek to establish and recruit. [...] But these groups are not the only actors playing a role in illegal activities in the Liptako-Gourma region. All armed groups operating in this area, no matter their nature, are involved in one way or another in the economy of illicit trafficking."[214]**

Such relationships are quite transversal between Sunni and Shiite jihadist organizations, where the latter have as their authoritative and well-known representative Hizballah. The "Party of God" has been exploiting ties with the Lebanese diaspora around the world for years and has managed to build a dense network of illegal funding that extends from South America, West, and Central Africa to Asian countries and has Lebanon (port of Beirut) as its fulcrum. Since the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, massive migratory flows of Lebanese Maronite Christians (initially) and other religious confessions (later) began to leave the Country of the Cedars in search of better living conditions. One of the most welcoming destinations regarding religious and communal acceptance turned

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212 Djallil Lounnas (2018, November 25). The Links Between Jihadi Organizations and Illegal Trafficking in the Sahel. MENARA Working Papers, p. 4.

213 Ibidem, pp. 5-9.

214 William Assanvo (2019, December 10). Is organised crime fuelling terror groups in Liptako-Gourma?. Retrieved August 2022, from Institute for Security Studies.

out to be South America (contrary to cultural stereotypes and difficulties in integrating the Lebanese community in North America). According to some estimates, nowadays, the population of Lebanese descent residing in Brazil outnumbers the current Lebanese population; about one million Lebanese live in Argentina, another 400000 in Venezuela, and the border between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay would be the area of the world with the highest concentration of Syrian-Lebanese immigrants.[215] Over time, Lebanese and later Hezbollah criminal networks began to exploit their contacts with the diaspora to establish their private routes within the framework of the cocaine trafficking dealt with earlier. In 2009, U.S. authorities arrested seventeen people on Curaçao Island for involvement in a cocaine trafficking run by Hezbollah. Containers of cocaine were being shipped from Venezuela to West Africa and from there to the Netherlands, Lebanon, and Spain.[216] A large number of Lebanese migrants had settled in African countries already during the French colonial period for several reasons: the fewer visa restrictions between the colonial domains and Lebanon (under French mandate), the possibility of recycling themselves as middlemen between the local population and the colonial government, and, above all, for the business opportunities in several sectors, mainly in the diamond sector, a prerogative of the Lebanese community in Africa.[217] In recent years, several studies, inquiries, and investigations have been trying to bring to light the links between Hezbollah, illegal trafficking in the area, and African and European organized crime; for example, in 2011, U.S. authorities announced that $483 million had been laundered through Africa on behalf of Hezbollah, mainly in connection with drug trafficking.[218] In 2015, there was the Araba Fenice investigation in Tuscany, in which the FBI and Europol also collaborated, which revealed a €70 million money laundering ring between Piedmont, Liguria, and Tuscany, contextualized in the context of possible contacts between 'ndrangheta and the Party of God.[219] More recently, moreover, articles in investigative journalism have intercepted relevant testimonies from members of the Lebanese community in the Ivory Coast: they not only confirm Hezbollah's involvement with local crime but also speak of contacts with the Camorra and the Italian 'Ndrangheta in the context of cocaine trafficking to Europe and money laundering in the real estate sector in the country.[220]

How, then, is it possible to formalize in a coherent theoretical framework the relationships between trafficking, organized crime, and jihadist organizations in the Sahelian context in the face of the high degree of hybridization and contamination of the various

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215 Warren Bratter (2020, July 6). The Lebanese in Latin America. Retrieved August 2022, from Un Poco de Todo.

216 Matthew Levitt (2013). Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God, Georgetown University Press, p. 152.

217 Ibidem, p. 326.

218 Samir Moukheiber (2021 November 29). L'inventivité débordante du Hezbollah pour renflouer ses caisses (2/5). Retrieved August 2022, from Ici Beyrouth.

219 Gabriele Carrer (2020, September 27). Droga, armi e 'ndrangheta. Ecco l'Hezbollah-connection in Italia. They were retrieved August 2022, from formiche.net.

220 Daan Bauwens; Nicholas Ibekwe (2021, July 31). Hezbollah in Africa: Forgotten link in cocaine trafficking to Antwerp, Rotterdam. Retrieved August 2022, from Premium Times.

actors? Policymakers' concerns generally focus on the *convergence* between terrorist groups and criminal networks, in which the former integrates the former's strategies, operations, or aims within their organizational structures or vice versa. Recent studies, however, have sought to analyze other forms of linkage, formalized in the *cooperation* one, where the two structures (terrorist and criminal) remain separate and collaborate. The *coexistence* is where sharing the same space does not necessarily lead to contact, and there is little mutual interest.[221] It is also necessary to add two other variations within the categories of cooperation and convergence that need to be taken into account: "(I) the extent to which cooperation occurs organizationally versus individually, and (II) the extent to which convergence happens in multiple criminal markets (whether drug trafficking, human trafficking, cattle rustling, arms dealing, or otherwise)."[222] This is so because policies, strategies, and tactics to counter criminal and terrorist networks may vary depending on whether the target of action is "merely individuals within violent extremist organizations (VEOs) who are motivated to conduct organized crime" or "VEO leaders structuring incentives across the entire organization for group members to pursue organized criminal activities."[223] The case studies show high degrees of variance between cooperation and convergence in Africa, taken as a whole. In contrast, terrorist and criminal networks show a stronger tendency for cooperation and coexistence in the Sahel and Lake Chad areas.[224]

To conclude, this long digression has looked at illicit trafficking in the Sahel and the links between transnational criminal networks and extremists because, as the 2015 Report of the Secretary General on the Threat of Terrorists Benefiting from Transnational Organized Crime reports:

"Terrorists benefiting from transnational organized crime can also undermine state legitimacy at a slower pace, which could ultimately have consequences for international peace and security. Proceeds from crimes are frequently used to corrupt government officials, which weakens the rule of law and paves the way for further criminal activities, creating a vicious circle of impunity. This, in turn, weakens government institutions, undermines sustainable economic development, and delegitimizes the state."[225]

The following section will be devoted to a more precise analysis of European work in the area from the perspective of policies that manage the nexus of security, migration, and development.

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221 Anouar Boukhars & Catherine Lena Kelly (2022) Comparative Perspectives on Linkages between Violent Extremism and Organized Crime in Africa, African Security, 15:1, 26-50, p. 26.

222 Ibidem, p. 28.

223 Ibid., p. 29.

224 Ibid., p. 32.

225 2015 Report of the Secretary General on the Threat of Terrorists Benefiting from Transnational Organized Crime, p. 9.

3.7 E.U.'s Operations in the Sahel

Over the past few years, the inextricable bond that unites Europe and the Sahel has been entering its fourth phase: after the era of colonization, the era of post-colonialism, and the era of the implementation of collaborative and development partnerships, the Sahel (willingly or unwillingly) finds itself escorted by Europe into the era of securitization as well. As extensively covered by now, the E.U.'s structured intervention in the area has been taking place since the publication of the 2011 Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, which was structured around four primary directives:

"(I) Development, good governance and internal conflict resolution to contribute to the general economic and social development in the Sahel […]; (II) Politics and diplomacy to promote a common vision and a strategy by the relevant countries, to tackle cross-border security threats and address development challenges through a sustained dialogue at the highest level […]; (III) Security and the rule of law, to strengthen the capacities of the security, law enforcement and the rule of law sectors to fight threats and handle terrorism and organized crime in a more efficient and specialized manner and link them to measures of good governance in order to ensure state control; (IV) Fight against and prevention of violent extremism and radicalization, to help enhance the resilience of societies to counter extremism."[226]

Initially limited only to Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, the strategy was later extended to Burkina Faso and Chad and was based on the idea that decades-old European development efforts in the region should be supported by a new focus that also promoted security. In this way, the first conceptual core of what would become the "laboratory of experimentation" of the security-migration-counterterrorism nexus in the following years evolved into security-migration-development.[227]

Parallel to these developments, in January 2012, Tuareg rebels of the *Mouvement de libération de l'Azawad* (MNLA), supported by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine and the *Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* (MUJAO), expelled the Malian army from the north of the country, claiming autonomy for the entire region. Saying that the country's capital, Bamako, was at risk and that the country's territorial integrity was compromised, in January 2013, French President François Hollande launched Operation Serval - which, in a few months, succeeded in achieving its tactical objectives and driving the rebel groups back north, restoring the country's territorial integrity and democratic legitimacy.[228] This was followed in April by the U.N. Security Council-authorized peacekeeping mission MINUSMA (Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation au Mali).[229]

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226 EEAS, 2011 Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, pg. 7.

227 Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, Christine Nissen, Schizophrenic agendas in the E.U.'s external actions in Mali, International Affairs, Volume 96, Issue 4, July 2020, Pages 935–953, pp. 936 – 940.

228 Bruno Charbonneau (2017) Intervention in Mali: building peace between peacekeeping and counterterrorism, Journal of Contemporary African Studies, 35:4, 415-431, p. 417.

229 Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, Katja Lindskov Jacobsen, Disentangling the security traffic jam in the Sahel: constitutive effects of contemporary interventionism, International Affairs, Volume 96, Issue 4, July 2020, Pages 855–874, p. 864.

However, one must contextualize the scope of Operation Serval in the Sahelian equilibria in the broader framework of French strategic interests. Indeed, France, in light of its colonial past in the area, sees itself as the only actual legitimate security provider in the former colonies based on three motivations (protection of French nationals, defense of strategic interests, and ex-colonial ties) well spelled out in the 2013 French White Paper on Defense and National Security published in support of French operations in Mali:

> **"The external intervention of our forces responds to a triple objective: protecting French nationals abroad, defending our strategic interests and those of our partners and allies, and exercising our international responsibilities. France intends to have military capabilities enabling it to act in priority areas to its defense and security: from the Sahel to Equatorial Africa."[230]**

It is precisely with this attitude that France has built its partnerships with African countries, on the one hand, and with European member states: "the quest for grandeur and a pro-European policy are part of the same project. Hence, rather than viewing French interests and multilateral ideas as distinct elements, we can interpret them as being part of the same phenomenon."[231] Specifically, French efforts toward the concept of Europeanisation have both pragmatic and political underpinnings: firstly, French politicians seek legitimacy at the state level through the use of European solutions; secondly, there is the idea that European intervention helps to reduce the costs of French foreign policy; and thirdly, there is a strong state projection of France in the European arena, also evident from the E.U.'s spasmodic quest for projection in Africa. "France seeks reincarnation as Europe. But one could add that it also seeks incarnation: it wants to embody Europe on the world stage, with the tendency of French leaders to speak in the name of Europe and also to shape Europe according to French ideas."[232]

Based on what has been said, it is possible to analyze the various moments of French manipulation of the Sahelian conflict in greater detail, with their harmful effects on subsequent European counterterrorism policies in the area. At first, the international reaction to the Malian crisis was not enthusiastic.

> **"In 2012, the initial international response was indecisive, largely because there was little consensus over whether Mali was a strict civil conflict, a counterterrorism crisis, or, more broadly, a democracy or state collapse issue. This was a key point of debate between the French and U.S. governments at the U.N., with the American government arguing that it was a crisis of Malian democratic institutions. The French could hardly convince anyone to act until, during the fall of 2012, they started emphasizing the terrorist threat to Mali's territory and integrity as a nation-state to West Africa, France, and Europe. As such, Mali gained international significance as the country was now perceived as at the center of the Islamic terrorist threat in Africa."[233]**

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230 Securitisation initiatives and the lingering security challenges in Sub-Saharan Sahel region, p. 350.

231 Benedikt Erforth (2020) Multilateralism as a tool: Exploring French military cooperation in the Sahel, Journal of Strategic Studies, 43:4, 560-582, p. 572.

232 Ibidem, p. 572.

233 Intervention in Mali: Building Peace Between Peacekeeping and Counterterrorism, p. 418.

Over time, Operation Serval, conceived as a " bridge" operation between U.N. forces and Malian forces, began to transform into a long-term deployment, and, in the face of the precarious results in terms of peace agreements and stabilization of the northern area of the country, the first strategic failures in achieving its objectives also began to emerge. For this reason, Serval was transformed into Operation Barkhane, which had a regional scope, expanding its purpose to the five countries of the G5 Sahel. Barkhane thus became Serval's "exit strategy" to preserve its supposed tactical success. Barkhane's regional character, its goal of countering a transnationally rooted phenomenon, its *longue durée*, and the call for military support from other European countries[234], allowed France to reshape the landscape of international policies in the area:

"In short, Barkhane allows the French government to claim that its military mission is essential to establish and execute the logic and activities of the security-development nexus. Moreover, its regional reach enables the French government to claim that it does not interfere in the internal affairs of Sahelian states, as it also redraws the regional map and the legitimate boundaries of modern politics."[235]

It is easier now to understand the development, the real reach, and the inherent limits of subsequent European interventions in the area: "Barkhane symbolizes the terrorism focus, but also points to the main concern of European engagement in the Sahel: the 'flows' of illegal immigration and illicit goods to Europe. [...] The European Union strategy is very clear in this regard, articulating a containment strategy based on the argument that Sahelian terrorism generates or exacerbates such flows."[236]

In the years following the publication of the 2011 Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel, the E.U., under the CSDP, deployed three missions to the Sahel: a capacity-building mission to Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger) in 2012; a military training mission to Mali (EUTM Mali) in 2013; and a capacity-building mission to Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali) in 2014. As such, the different missions were designed to provide for the implementation of security sector reforms over the medium to long term: supporting local governments with advisors, strengthening the operational capabilities of armed forces and police forces, improving their training, strengthening their institutional and security capacities, and ensuring constitutional and democratic order in compliance with the European Security and Development Strategy. The E.U. also had a wide range of policies and instruments under the umbrella of the European Commission, not least the humanitarian aid program, all coordinated by the EEAS delegation in Bamako.[237]

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234 "With Barkhane, any immediate exit strategy for France evaporated. As it struggles to sustain the 'financial conundrum' of counterterrorist operations, France is increasingly calling upon allies to share the burden of intervention endeavours in the Sahel, for example with the announcement in autumn 2019 of the Takuba initiative, which involved putting European partners' special forces under the command of Barkhane. [...] Indeed, over time and as the intervention theatre has expanded, many analysts and journalists have referred to the Sahel as 'Sahelistan' or the 'French Afghanistan'." Disentangling the Security Traffic Jam in the Sahel, pp. 864 – 874.

235 Bruno Charbonneau, Counter-insurgency governance in the Sahel, International Affairs, Volume 97, Issue 6, November 2021, Pages 1805–1823, p. 1813.

236 Intervention in Mali: Building Peace Between Peacekeeping and Counterterrorism, pg. 426.

237 Schizophrenic Agendas in the E.U.'s External Action in Mali, p. 941.

Right from the start, however, it was clear that European ways of declining security development in the area were aimed at countering terrorism and illicit trafficking ("the three CSDP missions in the Sahel have been adapted to the political priorities of the E.U., notably following the E.U. mobilization against irregular migration and related trafficking"[238]) and that this, in turn, translated into millions invested in migration control, border control, and closure.[239] The European project in the area, in essence, began to alienate the European presence itself as

> **"political pressures arising from the strong anti-immigration feelings in many E.U. countries had resulted in an overly narrow focus on discouraging migration and increasing returns of irregular migrants. Apart from the initiative's modest offer of financial assistance, the E.U. took the interests of its African partners nor the protection needs of vulnerable migrants and refugees adequately into account."[240]**

The E.U.'s migration policies toward the Sahel have been designed to serve the E.U.'s functional interests according to the "whatever works approach" to stop the flow of African migration. This has been accompanied by criticism of the sizeable European funding for the G5 Sahel and the development of the 5,000-man joint rapid response battalion in an area already strained mainly by the presence of UN, French, U.S., and European troops, all the more so if, as many note, the collaboration between the various commands has already not been as coordinated in countering terrorism as state propaganda would have it understood.[241]

More recently, the security landscape of the Sahel has undergone a new evolution: in the first six months of 2022, the area has been crossed by several interconnected armed conflicts and jihadist insurgencies that have as their epicenter the tri-border region between Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The attacks, in conjunction with the wave of coups in recent years (two in Mali between 2020 and 2022, one in Chad and Niger in 2022), have called into question the securitarian strategies and the entire system of intervention put in place over the past decade, which, according to detractors, would have favored a "technical, military-focused and quick-fix approach."[242] After ten years of intervention, securitarian efforts, and economic and institution-building investments, the recent political and diplomatic disagreements are challenging the military and counterterrorism initiatives in the Sahel. Six critical tension points can be identified in the area's current counterterrorism efforts: the clash between the current Malian government and France and the deterioration of diplomatic relations between the two

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238 Bernardo Venturi (2017 December). The E.U. and the Sahel: A Laboratory of Experimentation for the Security–Migration–Development Nexus, IAI Working Papers, pg. 8

239 Ibidem.

240 Ibid., p. 9.

241 Ibid., p. 13.

242 Silvia D'Amato, Edoardo Baldaro (2022, July 07). Counterterrorism in the Sahel: Increased Instability and Political Tensions. Retrieved August 2022, from ICCT.

countries.[243] Occurring at a time when anti-French and anti-European sentiments are at their peak in the area, which has led Malian authorities to

"terminate the Defense Cooperation Treaty between France and Mali, as well as the Status of Forces Agreement governing the French and European partner forces involved in the Takuba Task Force. This, in practice, means that the bilateral quarrel has become a multilateral one as both French and European forces can no longer operate within the country - a trend that is now also affecting the U.N. peacekeeping operation MINUSMA - and complete withdrawal is expected by the end of the summer. This also means that French and other European actors involved in the area have lost the main partner in the fight against terrorism. They have also lost the country representing the symbol of a multifaceted interventionism built through a counterinsurgency governance where challenges (i.e., insurgency and terrorism, development, political instability, and migration) pushed and allowed for the engagement of various governments with different priorities and interests."[244]

Secondly, tensions regarding cooperation among European partners have become apparent, with countries such as Estonia and Sweden pulling out of the field and others such as Denmark and Germany being explicitly asked not to operate in Mali or to do so with severe operational limitations, which prompted European Commission Vice-President Borrel to suspend all European training programs in April 2022. In general, however, European countries seem hesitant and reluctant to commit to counterterrorism programs abroad any longer in the face of the worldwide shock caused by the hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan. The third point concerns criticism of the military forces of the states in the region, which, in addition to being the leading proponents of the latest coups, are often accused of carrying out abuses, misconduct, and violence on civilians in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Chad. For example, a U.N. investigation regarding the events in Moura, Mali, in March 2022 reportedly revealed that

"during a five-days large scale military operation the Malian armed forces, with the support of foreign forces, have killed 203 and arrested fifty alleged fighters of armed groups, but also committed rape, arbitrary arrests, looting, and theft. This instance of violence against the population, together with an almost complete lack of accountability for the actions of these forces, is not only a serious problem in terms of respect for human rights, political governability, and stabilization of these countries, but it is also a concrete challenge for counterterrorism purposes. Indeed, literature on counter-insurgency has told us over and over that this type of indiscriminate violence is more likely to increase the support, recruitment capacity, and overall strength of terrorist organizations, rather than effectively fight them."[245]

This connects with the fourth point, which is the renewed territorial and political ambitions of the two main jihadist coalitions operating in the Sahel: Jama'a Nasrat ul-Islam wal-Muslimin (affiliated with al-Qaeda) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) who compete for control of different areas, especially in the tri-border region between Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. This, consequently, leads to renewed jihadist activism and increased violence and massacres against the population detected in

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243 Already in January 2020, President Emmanuel Macron had summoned the heads of state of Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad to attend a summit in south-western France, asking them to clarify their position concerning the French military intervention carried out in the region since 2013 to fight jihadist movements., Yvan Guichaoua, The bitter harvest of French interventionism in the Sahel, International Affairs, Volume 96, Issue 4, July 2020, Pages 895–911, p. 895.

244 Counterterrorism in the Sahel: Increased Instability and Political Tensions.

245 Ibidem.

recent months.[246] Renewed jihadist engagement dovetails nicely with internal discourse within the G5-fifth point of tension - in the face of crises that have seen Mali leave the organization following the other members' refusal to grant it rotating presidency leadership. In particular, the contrasts between Mali and Niger are jeopardizing the counterterrorism responses at the border.[247] All of the dynamics just listed open new outlets for international actors-the sixth point of tension - such as Russia and Turkey, which have long been active in West Africa and the Sahel with both military support and broader securitarian assistance, generally free of the constraints of humanitarianism and the imposition of democratic governance that characterizes Western engagement:

> **"European, and broadly speaking Western actors, might soon no longer be the exclusive nor necessarily the most important external security providers of the region. Both military and political cooperation is now likely to be discussed and re-negotiated by Sahelian countries that dispose of a more concrete possibility of diversifying their sources of support for their political and security necessities."[248]**

All in all, it is difficult to assess the possible future developments and political effects of the tensions listed above; what is clear for the future, however, is that the E.U. needs to seriously reconsider its role as a security actor and its priorities also and especially concerning the needs and requirements of the Sahel countries and people.

Ultimately, within the framework of European engagement in the area, several directives should be implemented to reorient its work and produce concrete and lasting effects: restore the link between the allocation of development funds and long-term development goals; prioritize the human rights of migrants; make efforts to integrate economic and development initiatives into border-security programming; explore the migration-development nexus, and keep support for military intervention as a last resort, and with a proportionate use of force.[249] The problem of securitization of underdevelopment in the Sahel, at the moment, suffers from the military and counterterrorist approach resulting from French intervention:

> **"The underdevelopment discourse should be constructed as a threat to the economic development and poverty eradication of the Sahel region. [...] The stability of Sahelian countries and the capacity of their governments to manage social change and resulting tensions have major security implications for migration flows, economic development both for local people and for the broader international community. Securitisation initiative should therefore among other things pay utmost attention to the intersecting and overlapping issues of poverty, security, and development of the Sahel. [...] Securitisation initiative should prioritize poverty/development issues as essential security concerns."[250]**

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246 Ibid.

247 Ibid.

248 Ibid.

249 The E.U. and the Sahel: a Laboratory of Experimentation, p. 15.

250 Securitisation Initiatives and the Lingering Security Challenges, p. 357.

In this light, the new 2021 European Union's Integrated Strategy in the Sahel seemed to be heading in the right direction. According to the document, the E.U. aimed to continue to provide emergency support and humanitarian assistance in response to crises affecting the most vulnerable population to address the immediate and root causes of insecurity and instability by targeting specific regions such as the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad region; to rely on decentralized authorities and civil society; to consider national and regional strategies for the Sahel by consulting with other organizations such as ECOWAS and the African Union; and to emphasize the strategic importance of the "civilian and political leap forwards" focused on short-term internal stabilization and sustainable social, environmental and economic development above and beyond military involvement.[251] The purpose of future research is to determine whether the E.U. will be able to live up to these intentions and overcome the political challenges that have become apparent over the past year.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to analyze the link between organized crime and jihadist terrorism in the Sahel area and the wider Mediterranean in the light of European intervention. To this end, several examples, case studies, and data on the phenomenon have been offered to highlight how this link is marked and essential, as well as the need to understand it in depth and address it transnationally in a coordinated manner to deal with it effectively.

In the course of the first chapter, the leading international normative instruments for combating the phenomenon of terrorism were introduced, broadly tracing their evolution over the last decades, in particular after the events related to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. From there, the second chapter analyzed the European counterterrorism structure concerning its evolution in the international context in light of its peculiarities, such as the progressive development of the Union's internal/external security nexus. Some sensitive points were also noted in the European work, particularly concerning the observance of citizens' fundamental rights (particularly the right to privacy) in managing personal data in counterterrorism action. The conclusions drawn invited the development of a reflection on the role of the EU not as a mere "framework institution" of states with particularistic interests but as a coherent and cohesive "action-oriented institution," capable of gaining recognition and exercising a norm-setting role at regional and global levels.

Subsequently, we moved on to analyze the role of the EU as a security actor, focusing on the sensitive geopolitical area represented by the Sahel and examining its geographical depth as a critical region for African and Mediterranean balances. The decision to specifically analyze this area was made based on several reasons: the Sahel stands out as a vital area in European strategic projects in the face of its position that makes it an unavoidable crossroads of migratory phenomena directed toward Europe and illicit trafficking linking the American, African, European and Asian continents. In this

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251 2021 European Union's Integrated Strategy in the Sahel.

regard, the connection between criminal networks (European and Sahelian) and jihadist groups operating in the area was analyzed in order to emphasize the link between terrorism and organized crime to better understand how European action to combat the phenomenon could be developed. Finally, the field operations conducted by Europe were analyzed, highlighting how, unfortunately, the type of repressive approach used so far risks producing more negative than positive effects in the long term. The migration-security-development nexus must be rethought with a view to the benefits brought to the states of the region in terms of the development of the economic possibilities of the population, the territory, and civil society, detaching itself from the militaristic securitarian conception implemented so far and from the granting of funds on a conditional basis in the face of the reduction of migratory flows and increased border control. These practices have proven to be wasteful and detrimental to local economies and societies, limiting the problem they are addressing without solving it and posing quite a few issues in the area of respect for human (migrants') rights, one of the foundations of the very essence of the European Union.

The limitations of this work relate mainly to the failure to analyze a variety of topics in the face of the very possibilities of the paper: for example, the discourse of the counterterrorist structure within the various states of the Union was not dealt with in the course of the analysis, certain types of illicit trafficking were not considered (e.g., cigarettes), little was said about the role of the U.S. and the UN in the Sahelian area, or even about the various ways in which France intervened. In addition, two of the most critical factors in analyzing conflicts in the African area nowadays are ethnicity and gender, which have not been analyzed due to the author's lack of knowledge and ability to structure a satisfactory analysis.

Possible further insights for future analysis might concern whether and how European strategy toward the Sahel will change in the face of the political problems regarding bilateral relations between France and the G5 countries and in light of Europe's energy needs arising from the conflict in Ukraine. Other areas of analysis may concern the further evolution needed for European policy to move forward in defense of human rights in migration and pertaining to the allocation of funds for development programs in African countries. In this regard, the 2021 New Strategy for the Sahel could provide a reasonable basis for future studies.

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