The Sahel Crisis: Where do European and African perspectives meet?

On: 9:00 – 16:00, Wednesday 27 February 2013
At: Institute for European Studies – Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 5 Pleinlaan, B-1050, Brussels

The crisis in Mali has brought the Sahel to the center of international attention. This fragile region not only suffers from longstanding development challenges but also from an acute security vacuum that triggered military interventions. This conference encourages interaction between European and African perspectives on the Sahel crisis. It will shed light on the European decision-making process as well as the local political dynamics in the region.

Although the EU adopted a regional strategy for the Sahel already in 2011, many questions arise over its ability to cope with such a complex and dynamically evolving security environment. Also at the African level, divergent views on the political roadmap to be adopted and a lack of resources have had their effect. Can the different players involved agree on what are the most pertinent needs and challenges to be addressed? Are they ready for the essential long-term engagement? Can regional organizations effectively collaborate and are they able to successfully integrate different agendas?

Panel 1 – The Main Challenges in the Sahel

This panel will outline what are the principal challenges to political stability and economic development in the Sahel. Does the EU strategy towards the Sahel pose an adequate response to the challenges identified? Why do humanitarian emergencies prove to be such a persistent plague? What is the rationale behind the international approach towards the region? How do African stakeholders perceive the European engagement?

Panel 2 – Local and Regional Dynamics

In this panel the regional and local actors will be analyzed. What are the main forces in the region? Who would benefit from a protracted crisis? What is the position of several armed groups? What is their political agenda and whose interest do they serve? What is the role of the different regional powers?

Panel 3 – From Military Intervention to Security Assistance

The EU’s security engagement in the Sahel has evolved considerably over the past twelve months. What has the EU learned from its EUCAP Sahel mission that can be used for operations in Mali? What is the organizational division of labour between Operation Serval, the EU Training Mission in Mali and AFISMA? How does the provision of military assistance tie in with broader developmental and security objectives?
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8:30-9:00 Registration & Welcome Coffee

9:00-10.00 Introductory Remarks: The View from Brussels, the View from Addis
Chair: Amelia Hadfield, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for European Studies
Ajay Kumar Bramdeo, Head of Mission to the EU, African Union
Nick Westcott, Managing Director for Africa, EEAS (tbc.)

10.00-11:20 Panel 1 - The Main Challenges in the Sahel
Chair: Marc Otte, Ambassador, Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Natalia Alonso, Head of the EU Office, Oxfam International
Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Secretary General of the ACP
Erica Gerretsen, Acting Head of Unit West Africa, DEVCO, European Commission (tbc.)
Franck Paris, French EU Permanent Representation

11:20-11:40 Coffee

11:40-13:00 Panel 2 – Local and Regional Dynamics
Chair: Hans Hoebeke, Director of the Africa Programme, Egmont Institute
Amar Bendjama, Ambassador of Algeria
Lori-Anne Théroux-Bénoni, Senior Researcher, ISS Dakar Office
Wolfram Lacher, Research Associate, SWP Berlin
Baz Lecocq, Professor African History, Universiteit Gent

13:00-14:00 Lunch

14:00-15:30 Panel 3 – From Military Intervention to Security Assistance
Chair: Alexander Mattelaer, Assistant Director, Institute for European Studies
Felix Edobor Awanbor, Ambassador of Nigeria (tbc)
Miguel Garijo, CIVCOM Representative, Spanish Permanent Representation to the EU
Bernd Schulte Berge, Head of the Military Advisory Branch, German Permanent Representation to the EU
Vincent Tassel, Strategic Planner Africa, Crisis Management Planning Directorate

15:30-16:00 Closing Remarks
Paul-Simon Handy, Research Director, Institute for Security Studies
Jo Coelmont, Senior Associate Fellow, Egmont Institute