

Statement of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) parliamentary group
in the German Bundestag

Adjusting German and European Sahel policy

Germany has been active in development cooperation in the Sahel for many decades, but it is only in the last ten years that the region has become a focus of German and European security policy interests in Africa. When the collapse of Libya in 2011 triggered a Tuareg rebellion in the northern region of Mali, with jihadist groups threatening to take over the country and sections of the Mali military overthrowing the government in Bamako, the French military intervened in 2013 with considerable international support. While France remains more committed to military intervention than other international actors, the UN mission MINUSMA has been supporting the implementation of the Algiers peace agreement and the stabilisation of Mali since 2013. The EU has also been training military and civilian security forces since 2013. When the Sahel region became a transit route for migrants in 2015, it shifted even more strongly into the focus of the EU countries, which have further expanded their activities in the region since then.

The security situation in the Sahel has deteriorated in the past few years, despite the engagement of the international community. The violence in the Sahel is not primarily driven by ideological or religious fanaticism within society. It is rooted partly in the economic and political marginalisation of social groups and in complex tensions along ethnic lines that have been brewing within the rural population for decades. The lack of perspectives regarding social, economic, and political inclusion and the erosion of trust in the state due to corrupt and self-centred governing elites that ignore the needs of the peripheral rural communities, along with human rights violations by public security forces, make people susceptible to alternative structures. The younger generation, in particular, are flocking to join armed groups that know how to exploit the diverse lines of conflict for their own benefit and are steadily expanding their scope of influence. These negative trends are substantially exacerbated by high population growth and the already massive impact of climate change.

Although the results of the engagement of the international community in the Sahel region so far have been mixed, withdrawal is not an option. Critical analysis and a corresponding policy adjustment, however, are urgently needed. The challenges arising from climate change, migration flows, organised crime and terrorism must be jointly tackled by Europe and the Sahel countries. Even if the region does not, on the face of it, seem to harbour a direct risk of terrorism for Europe, a further destabilisation of the G5 states, particularly Burkina Faso, could raise the security threat for Europe if fallback areas for terrorist groups and organised crime continue to exist. Moreover, the armed groups seem to be expanding into West Africa's coastal states and connections to the conflict unfolding in the Lake Chad region are an additional concern.

It is thus in the strategic interest of Europe and Germany to alleviate the humanitarian distress in the region, to support the Sahel countries in their fight against extremism, prevent a possible collapse of the states, and support an approach to containing the conflicts within the region. This must include combating criminal activities in order to deprive terrorist groups of their primary financial basis.

In view of the manifold and deep-rooted origins of conflict in the region, European and German engagement will only bring about sustained peace in the long term if it offers the local population perspectives for social, economic and political inclusion. We need to take a holistic approach to tackling the social and security policy challenges and set realistic objectives. The European and German engagement must be strategically aligned to these objectives and implemented in a targeted way. The short and long-term objectives of our Sahel policy must be carefully coordinated. Civilian and military measures must complement each other seamlessly and their values remain based on the rule of law and democracy. To ensure that the military missions are not overstretched in terms of manpower and time, the international community must set clear criteria of success and realistic targets including interim targets.

While the coup in Mali on 18 August 2020 did not fundamentally change the security situation in the Sahel region, it highlighted the political instability and contradictory nature of the cooperation with the local public bodies. The transition process in Mali leading up to the elections in March 2022 is an opportunity to realign international engagement in Mali and place it on a more stable foundation to better support the country and the Sahel region overall on the path to long-term stabilisation and peace. Cooperation with local governments, elites and citizens must take place in a stronger framework of binding agreements on accountability mechanisms and combating corruption. A key element in our efforts is that we do not just promote empowerment, good governance, combating corruption, the observance of human rights and political inclusion of citizens but expressly demand it.

Unified international action through multilateral coordination

Joint European approach

Different national approaches and bilateral engagement in the region are not necessarily a problem but can complement each other and be seen as an opportunity for the Sahel region to progress towards long-term peace and stability. Rather than one individual country taking the leading role in the international engagement in the Sahel region, the focus should be on achieving a more effective multilateral coordination that includes all international actors. German foreign, development and security policy should advocate this more intensively, consolidating a unified European approach in a first step.

The EU military and civilian missions are evidence that the EU is already intensively involved in the Sahel region. The primary goal must be to integrate the various security and development policy measures of the individual European countries. The different activities of the individual EU member states should be regarded as complementary and be further developed into a new and truly European Sahel strategy that can be embedded in the structures of the EU in the medium term. This would open up the opportunity to incorporate the more military French engagement in the Sahel region into a strategically broader European approach to provide a better balance between military and civilian activity.

On the bilateral level, although the priorities set by France and Germany may be different, the goal must be to expand the consultations on African policy with France. Existing formats, such as the regular talks between the foreign ministers and state secretaries, and other forums such as the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly, should be used intensively for dialogue on these issues.

Make the most of the Sahel Coalition as a tool for international coordination

It is important and right for Germany to call for a better coordination of the engagement of the international community in the Sahel region. The federal government's goal of taking an active part in the further development of the coalition for the Sahel region should thus be supported. The Sahel Coalition was founded in January 2020 in Pau at the summit of the heads of states of France, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad. Through its steering committees it serves as a coordinated superstructure for four complementary and equally weighted pillars of action. Some of the tasks of the individual pillars still need to be more clearly specified, operationalised and better coordinated:

- **Pillar 1:** Fighting armed terrorist groups
- **Pillar 2:** Building the capacities of the armed forces in the region
- **Pillar 3:** Supporting the return of the State and administrations in the territory; improving access to basic services
- **Pillar 4:** Assisting development

While the first pillar primarily focuses on military action against terrorism, the engagement of the federal government mainly concerns pillars two, three and four. The objective of this work must be to further develop tools and projects in line with German and European strategic interests and basic values in a process that also intensively includes local actors.

The Partnership for Security and Stability in Sahel (P3S) focuses on “strengthening the armed forces” (pillar two) and “the return of the state” (pillar 3). This forms the political framework for German engagement in the region. P3S was initiated by the French president and the German chancellor at the G7 summit in Biarritz in August 2019 together with the chair of G5 Sahel. It functions as the central tool to better coordinate and provide targeted support to the individual projects and initiatives of the two pillars. In internal consultations, the federal government must increase its efforts to persuade even close partners to give precedence to political and civilian measures and avoid excessive emphasis on a military approach. To achieve this, a common understanding of the integration and weighting of civilian and military instruments has to be reached. The manifold state, parliamentary and civilian ties between France and Germany should be used to step up dialogue on these issues. As the P3S secretariat is based at the European External Action Service, the EU should use its role as central coordinator to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the European engagement in the Sahel regarding these two pillars.

As a tool of development cooperation, the Sahel Alliance is a key element of the fourth pillar. Its work is extensively shaped by Germany as chair of its steering committee. Founded at the Council of Franco-German Ministers of July 2017, the Sahel Alliance now has 13 permanent members and has steadily expanded its cooperation with the G5 Sahel countries, improving the overview and coordination of the development policy work of the donor countries. It is necessary for the Sahel Alliance to obtain an even clearer political mandate to merge and coordinate support measures and to expand the interfaces with the respective regional African organisations.

The Sahel Coalition should not exercise an overriding authority or influence the independent and equally weighted work of the four pillars or the exchange between them. Even if Germany is not currently represented among the staff of the Sahel Coalition secretariat, the federal government should support it in organisational terms and strive for reasonable participation in the decision-making processes within the Sahel Coalition. At the same time, the internationalisation of the Sahel Coalition should be systematically advanced.

The fact that the secretariats of the Sahel Coalition, P3S and the Sahel Alliance are all based in Brussels, where all G5 states are also represented with embassies, shows that the EU and its member states are a key actor in the Sahel region. We should pursue this course and secure the EU a still stronger leading role.

Strengthen the work of and with African regional organisations

The group of G5 Sahel countries was founded in February 2014 primarily on the initiative of France by the heads of state of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad. In view of the extensive incapacity of regional actors to take action, the objective was to adopt a common policy to tackle cross-border challenges, strengthen integrated economic development and combat terrorism with a cross-border approach. The G5 Sahel has become a central cooperation partner of France and Europe. But although the G5 Sahel has developed into a qualified contact and central partner of the Sahel Alliance in the seven years since its foundation, this ad hoc coalition still has evident weaknesses in its operational capability

despite huge international support in the military area. The G5 Force Conjointe, which has also received financial and material support from the federal government and the EU to build its capacity, is still largely dependent on the French Operation Barkhane.

It is certainly the right approach to include all stakeholders in combating the security policy challenges and advancing the peace process in the Sahel region and to strengthen the regional security architecture in order to boost regional and local self-reliance. The impulse to avoid difficult political coordination and compromises within the multilateral system and instead mobilise regional support rapidly through ad hoc coalitions is understandable but counterproductive in the long term and must not undermine established regional organisations.

The African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) must take centre stage in our engagement in the Sahel region. These multilateral organisations have been supported by Germany and Europe for decades and remain the most important regional partners for our Sahel policy. Through its successful mediation efforts and sanctions, ECOWAS, in particular, has proven a valuable partner during the Mali transitional government period and with a not fully functioning G5 Sahel. Despite internal tensions, the ECOWAS and the AU exercise a certain authority and legitimacy in Sahel to promote peace within the region.

Pragmatic considerations also point in favour of a more prioritised and intensive collaboration with these two established regional organisations, as in conjunction with the UN, they have a wide spectrum of civilian (humanitarian and development policy), military and diplomatic tools and connections at their disposal. ECOWAS and the AU have decades of experience in this kind of work and provide an adequate framework to incorporate difficult external partners in a common approach.

Make security policy engagement more focused

Empowering Mali through an extensive reform of the security sector

It is still the case that the Mali state will only be able to safeguard its own security without international support if the Malian army receives continuous and targeted training and the entire security sector is reformed.

Stabilisation measures, particularly the training, equipping and advising of armed forces, police forces and the judiciary, are part of the strategic pillars of the security policy engagement of the EU and the federal government in the Sahel region. To enable the Malian armed forces, police forces and the judiciary to safeguard the internal security of the country in the long term, the EU Training Mission Mali (EUTM Mali) and EU Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP Sahel Mali) have been training the Malian security forces since 2013 and 2014. The current EUTM Mali mandate, approved by the Bundestag on 29 May 2020, have led to two changes: first, the German military training and support mission GAZELLE in Niger will gradually be integrated into EUTM Mali to strengthen the common European approach. Secondly, the training of Mali soldiers will increasingly take place in Sévaré in central Mali, once the training centre there has been completed. This will move the training closer to where the conflict is playing out and strengthen the state presence in central Mali. In parallel, the EU should renew its offer to Burkina Faso for the training of the EU missions to also include this country's army and security forces.

Although the European and German efforts in the Sahel have steadily increased since 2012, the security situation in the region has not improved as hoped. Human rights violations by state actors invariably lead to a further erosion of trust among the local population in the state and motivate young people to join jihadist groups. This cannot be accepted and must have consequences.

Unfortunately, the engagement of the international community is often too focused on the training and professionalisation of the armed forces without sufficiently embedding these measures within the rule of

law and civilian oversight. The German and European empowerment programmes (training, equipment, consultation), based on the second and third pillars of the Sahel Coalition, must not be targeted solely at increasing the short-term response capabilities of the armed forces in Mali and the other G5 countries, but should promote the sustainable establishment of military and police security structures based on the rule of law.

EUTM Mali and EUCAP Sahel Mali must be continued and based on realistic objectives. The continuation of the missions must be linked to the achievement of clearly defined success criteria. The European approach to building efficiency should be based on the following points:

Tactical training only in combination with structural reform: Providing short-term training and equipment is not in and of itself a sustainable strategy to empowering the armed forces in Mali and the other G5 countries. The European and German military training and equipment programmes must be oriented on effective long-term targets and embedded in an extensive national security sector reform which covers the military, the police, and the judiciary.

Building an efficient and effective military administration: More stringent budget control and structured personnel and material management must be at the heart of the reformed Malian military administration. More efficient administrative and regulatory structures include more resolute criminal prosecution of corruption and embezzlement, an objective recruitment process that reflects the ethnic plurality of the country, clear legal foundations for the payment of salaries, weeding out “ghost soldiers”, and documentation of the whereabouts and deployment of material aid and trained soldiers, for example with biometric identification documents. The measures must be aimed at establishing civilian control of the military.

Qualitative improvement of military training: The new training centre in Sévaré will allow the Malian armed forces to be trained closer to where they will be deployed. The move alone however, will not increase the effectiveness of the soldiers trained by the EUTM Mali. In future, the focus should lie on training whole operational units rather than individual training programmes. The Malian soldiers should receive comprehensive training that relates, in particular, to the weapon systems they actually have at their disposal.

Stringent observance of human rights: Human rights violations are drivers of conflict that undermine the acceptance of the state within the population and contradict the values and objectives of European and German engagement in the Sahel region. Although the observance of human rights is already a component of the training provided by EUTM Mali, monitoring to ensure that this is implemented in practice must be stepped up. Developing the necessary capacities for more resolute criminal prosecution of human rights violations must be demanded and supported more strongly.

Inclusion of local partners: Local state and non-state actors must – whenever possible – be more closely involved in the preparation and implementation of training programmes, if necessary with the assistance of language and cultural mediators. As well as increasing the quality of the training, this will also increase local ownership and the acceptance of the international military engagement among the local population.

Continuous and close political flanking: The federal government already has good contacts to the Malian transitional government and should put them to use. In high-level political talks, a reform of the security sector should be made a condition of additional capacity-building, and this process should then continue to receive consistent support and close political monitoring.

Continue with MINUSMA to implement the Algiers peace agreement

The international missions have had mixed results. MINUSMA has been able to implement its stabilisation drive for the northern part of Mali since it was launched in 2013. The UN mission provides a measure of

security in the Gao region, safeguards limited but much-needed military protection for development and humanitarian aid organisations and often serves as a logistic point of contact for them.

An extension of the MINUSMA mandate is required for the time being but should include a definition of performance criteria. Since its mandate was expanded in 2019, the new focus of MINUSMA is to protect the civilian population. However, based in central Mali, the mission now faces tasks that it cannot possibly fulfil with its current funds and manpower. Many people in Mali are dissatisfied with the work of the UN mission, partly because it is instrumentalised as a scapegoat by the conflicting parties. More priority should be given to countering this through public relations work.

In the context of the Algiers peace agreement, the role of MINUSMA to strengthen security and to support the political and reconciliation processes on the ground must be improved with targeted personnel and financial resources. Substantially increasing the police component of MINUSMA could better protect the population against crime. This, in turn, would increase the legitimacy of the mission. At the same time, the Malian judiciary must be made more effective to counter the current impunity. Further, the destabilising impact of organised crime between Mali and its neighbours must also be taken into consideration and combated with appropriate measures. This task cannot be tackled by military or police force alone but requires a combination of measures from various fields of policy.

Climate change is having a huge impact on the dynamics of the conflict in the country. The staff of the international missions currently responsible for the political flanking and support of peace and reconciliation processes should therefore also be trained on the links between climate and security so that they are able to incorporate these issues in their work and put them on the agenda in political and civil society dialogue. A good step would be to create the position of a climate expert at MINUSMA – following the example of the climate and security expert of the UNSOM Mission (Somalia).

Putting (development) policy work centre stage

The deep-rooted and complex political, social, economic and ecological problems in Mali and the entire Sahel region cannot be resolved primarily through military means. While it is certainly necessary to fight terrorism with military means and help stabilise the situation by training the armed forces, extensive political support and development cooperation are also essential. An adjustment of the German and European Sahel policy must see financial and personnel resources being allocated primarily to medium and long-term approaches of crisis prevention, political dialogue, and development cooperation.

Of course, these efforts must not stand in the way of short-term support. On the contrary, as the need for humanitarian aid in the whole Sahel region is growing through poverty, hunger and flight, the international community should ramp up its immediate support to the weakest and make longer-term commitments to already approved funds.

Create civil state structures and promote decentralisation

The absence of state structures with an efficient administration, an independent judiciary and a police force that is seen as legitimate by the population is a major destabilising factor in Mali. Mali has never had efficient and responsible government and administrative structures.

The federal government is called upon to continue working together with the other representatives of the EU to advise the Malian government on reaching the targets it set itself in its transitional charter. Cooperation with the civilian transitional government in Bamako should also take account of the assessments of ECOWAS. The transitional government should be stepping up the fight against corruption, implementing structural reform of the administration, taking comprehensive account of UN Resolution 1325, and paving the way to a democratically legitimated government. Good preparation is necessary to make the next elections free and fair. The EU and Germany should offer political advice and logistical support in

these efforts. The reform work of the transitional government should be aligned with jointly defined milestones and clearly measurable indicators that must be monitored by international partners and ECOWAS.

Development cooperation has supported decentralisation measures for many decades. The trust of the population in centralised states following the French example has been lost in Mali and the Sahel region. Some regions have never had more than rudimentary state structures, some of which were too dependent on a centralised government. Local government structures must be supported, but in dialogue with local actors and through a combination of modern and traditional elements of administration to create local administrations that are effective and based on the real needs of the people living there.

Making the peace process inclusive and advancing dialogue between the conflicting parties

The Algiers peace agreement provides for fundamental decentralisation and regionalisation in favour of stronger self-government, particularly in the northern part of the country. However, the agreement has hardly been implemented so far. There is no agreement with groups affiliated with the Tuareg as there is in Niger, for example.

Political dialogue and mediation should be expanded by supporting local and regional approaches and by strengthening (west) African capacities on a regional, national, and local level. Within the African Peace and Security Architecture, these skills should be promoted, for example, by expanding the ECOWAS Mediation Support, the Panel of the Wise, and by increasing the role of women in mediation through FemWise.

The EU should continue to exert coordinated pressure on the conflicting parties to support the implementation of the Algiers peace agreement. Working together more closely with MINUSMA, the EU should adopt a coordinated civilian and military approach. The Malian transitional government should be encouraged to accept the opportunities for dialogue with non-state armed groups – particularly as these are very heterogeneous and by no means all based on a radical Islamic ideology.

Structure development cooperation for the long term

Without civil development and healthy economic development in Mali and the other G5 countries, any progress achieved through military means will not be sustainable. To ease social tensions, young people in particular must be given prospects for economic inclusion through targeted employment schemes.

To raise the level of education among the Malian rural population, the efforts of the international community made so far regarding schooling and vocational training must be intensified. A joint European education campaign would be a possible starting point to increase support to the Sahel countries in the field of education.

Alongside supporting the economic transformation of African countries by promoting the private economy, the least developed countries in particular must receive greater attention, preferably in a regional context. The huge development policy challenges in the Sahel region require long-term financial security. Coordinated and long-term development financing should be targeted towards strengthening good governance and fighting corruption, establishing infrastructure, and expanding decentralised, adapted and locally supported state structures. It should also be tied to measurable, verifiable progress. At the same time, the needs of the local population must be formulated in dialogue with local actors to serve as a basis for the establishment of state structures. Here, the donor community should act in the framework of multilateral structures, primarily the Sahel Alliance.

Despite diverse initiatives and bilateral programmes, no country in the Sahel counts among the ten biggest recipients of official development aid (ODA) in Africa.

The measures initiated by the UN, the EU, Germany, and the many NGOs should be consolidated. A considerable volume of funds flows into the Sahel region through the Sahel Alliance. Around 800 individual projects have already been coordinated with the G5 countries. In addition, at a Sahel Conference organised by Germany, Denmark, the EU and the United Nations on 20 October 2020, donors pledged humanitarian aid of more than 1.7 billion US dollars. The federal government has more than doubled its humanitarian aid for the Sahel region compared to 2019, raising it to 50 million euros for 2020. In cooperation with organisations such as the WFP, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF and the Welthungerhilfe, there are further pledges of over 100 million for food, water collection, health and education for the period 2020 to 2023.

To improve food security in Mali, agriculture and agropastoral practices need to be modernised. Alongside climate change and demographic trends, this economic basis is also jeopardised through conflicts between nomadic pastoralists (farmers using natural pastures) and small-scale farmers, which are massively exacerbated by the large-scale award of concessions, particularly in gold mining, and a lack of clarity about ownership. The Malian state must create a regulatory framework by newly structuring and implementing land use rights, particularly a rural land register.

Even if the framework conditions are improved, crop and livestock farming will no longer provide for the livelihood of the growing population. Without work in agriculture and the cultural roots provided by the rural community, many young men are at risk of being driven into the arms of the various militia. Careful reorientation is needed here. If agricultural products alone cannot provide for sufficient GDP then agriculture will have to be complemented more strongly by manual trades, tourism, mining, and industry.

Promote civil society with more targeted inclusion in political processes

International actors must increase their active political support of the national negotiation processes on the way to a decentralised state. This can only succeed in partnership with the local governments, although the work of the international community here should not only be geared towards state actors.

Mali's diverse and active civil society plays an important part in the internal cohesion of the country. The international community should continue to support this civil society and demand its political inclusion. It is particularly important to create prospects for the political inclusion of the young population and to promote the integration and equal rights of women.

The work of non-state actors in development cooperation, churches and political foundations must be supported. Plans are to set up a Goethe Institute in Mali. The Round Table of Civil Society initiated by the German embassy in Bamako should be continued and extended beyond the capital to other parts of the country.

Tackling the challenges of huge population growth

The Sahel countries are among the poorest in the world and the trend is still pointing downwards. Alongside the unfavourable conditions for adequate agriculture, the rapid growth of the population in the Sahel region is putting additional pressure on the extremely tense food situation and causing instability. Between 1950 and 2014 the population of Mali quadrupled from 4.4 million to 17.4 million. Every woman has an average of six children. Even though the birth rate has gone down slightly, the simultaneous significant rise in life expectancy means that a reversal of the trend is not to be expected.

Alongside the additional strain on food security, the current demographic trend in the Sahel region also means that the enormous increase in the number of young people is overloading the labour market. The resulting lack of economic perspectives for large sections of the population exacerbates conflict. Reaching a level of economic growth that can provide the basis for long-term stability is therefore only realistic if the countries manage to reach a sustainable population development with rapidly declining birth rates.

While it is good that the federal government addresses the demographic challenges on a political level with the G5 states and in other relevant forums, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development should also prioritise other areas of action that are connected to the demographic challenge. The issue of demography should be addressed to a greater extent in the Sahel Coalition and the Sahel Alliance and through the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). This applies particularly to the following areas: health and family planning, education for girls, social and economic development, and awareness building and public campaigns, also with religious representatives. In these efforts, the international community must particularly support homegrown African initiatives.

Support the Sahel countries in the fight against the consequences of climate change

The UN regards the Sahel as one of the most susceptible regions for the consequences of global warming. Climate change is increasingly leading to extreme weather conditions with floods and droughts which will further exacerbate the conflict potential in the region in the future. Already today, seasonal fluctuations can be observed in violence towards civilians.

The leaching out of nutrient salts and soil erosion caused by precipitation on the one hand and animals dying of thirst and agricultural crops withering through water shortages on the other is endangering the livelihoods of nomadic pastoralists and small-scale farmers. This is leading to resource conflicts between the two groups. Furthermore, traditional lifestyles, such as nomadic pastoralism, will become ever less possible, which will exacerbate already existing social tensions.

Mali's own possibilities to slow down climate change are extremely limited. With the right political framework and a targeted development agenda, however, much of the impact could be mitigated, the humanitarian situation improved, and risk management pursued. European and German engagement should be targeted towards ensuring that people whose current livelihoods and ways of life are in jeopardy can practice suitable forms of crop and livestock farming. Reforestation measures could also make it possible to use the land again.

The EU and particularly the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Federal Ministry for the Environment are already supporting some projects in the framework of the international climate protection initiative. These include the Pilot Programme for an Integrative Adaptation Strategy, the Programme for the Support of the National Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change, integrated risk analysis (FREXUS), and the National Programme for Sustainable Small-Scale Irrigation (PNIP) which promotes methods to protect against erosion and drip irrigation. Support of the Great Green Wall project, a green belt in northern Sahel, and energy generation through solar panels, for example to facilitate groundwater extraction, are also worth considering.

The climate foreign policy initiatives that were discussed in a multilateral framework during the German presidency of the UN Security Council in July 2020 and the German EU council presidency should now be further developed on the European level and given concrete form on the national level. The nexus of climate and security should also be anchored in the cross-departmental coordination that takes place in the context of the meeting of ministers of state.