

## ‘WITH WHOM WE TALK?’ DRAWING REGIONS IN 21ST CENTURY AFRICA

Mădălin-Cătălin Blidaru\*

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### Abstract

*The African continent inherited borders drawn by foreign actors for centuries, with a limited influence exerted by its internal political structures. This impacted its development across decades, acting as a contributing factor to economic, social and political conflicts, some of them resulting in further divisions in time: new states emerged, while the federal structures developed within some states remain unstable.*

*In this paper, the author investigates the current regional groupings of states established in different African frameworks in an attempt to answer the question “how external actors influence and legitimize the development of regions” in 21st century. From a functionalist perspective, it explores the motives for the formation of a wide range of regional integration and cooperation organizations.*

*The case study of G5 Sahel, an institutionalized regional arrangement focused on security and development of its member states, is analyzed as an arrangement emerged with support from France and the European Union. The case study analysis trails the cooperation with these two foreign actors with the G5 Sahel member states in the five years, focused on evolution, financing and joint initiatives – including to what extent these contributed to consolidation of the regional borders.*

**Keywords:** region-building, G5 Sahel, regional cooperation, European Union, development cooperation

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\* PhD student, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest. Contact: [contact@madalinblidaru.ro](mailto:contact@madalinblidaru.ro)

## 1. A theoretical framework for region-building. The functionalist perspective

The study of regions provides an opportunity to answer questions on how regions were designed and developed, how regional institutions were built, under what context, how the difference is managed or how the processes of regional integration were sustained in time.

In some cases, based on historical processes as in the colonial past, regions were drawn and influenced to a large extent by external actors. Our aim in this paper is to investigate the current groupings of states established in Africa and to answer the question how external actors legitimised these groups and regions and drive the agenda of regional integration and international cooperation. A case study later follows this influence in the development of G5 Sahel, based on the analysis of official documents and initiatives developed by the grouping. As explained later in the article, there is not a single interpretation of the boundaries of Sahel, with different countries and regions sharing the space and defining its limits.

With or without external influence, regions are not only a level of governance above and beyond the state in the international order. Their role is justified, according to Andrew Hurrell, apart from the homonymous level in the multilevel global governance, as containers for diversity and difference, as poles and powers, and harbinger of change in international society.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, understanding regional projects from multiple analytical frameworks is central to discuss their viability.

This endeavour is inspired by the functional approach to international relations, which argued in favor of a pragmatic functional integration, the functional organization of the world proposed by the Romanian-born British academic David Mitranyi in 1943. Described during the World War II, in period of intense debate over the new organization of peace, the main principle of the functional approach states that *“the activities would be selected specifically and organized separately-each according to its nature, to the*

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Hurrell, “One World? Many Worlds? The Place of Regions in the Study of International Society”, in *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs), 83, no. 1, 2007, pp. 127–146.

*conditions under which it would allow to operate, and to the needs of the moment would allow, therefore, all freedom for practical variation in the organization of the several functions, as well as in the working of a particular function as needs and conditions alter*".<sup>2</sup> Mitranyi described even the wider cooperation in this 'spiritless cooperation', in which various interlinked functional agencies can work together in a more comprehensive international organization, working together with an international planning agency.

Even though Mitranyi promoted an idea aimed at peace and cooperation at world level, the functional approach can be replicated at regional level. In a response to critics, David Mitranyi underlined that functional arrangements can be adapted to every dimension, including regional, that suits the nature of the task<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, the focus in the case study on the G5 Sahel is based on the areas of cooperation it is authorised to act and relevant initiatives it has developed in time to promote regional cooperation. The functional approach of region-building is focused on the organization of international organisations at regional level. The political authority overseeing these processes can be or cannot be, as argued by the father of this approach in the foundational text, in which agreements between states can fill this gap.

## **2. Origins of regions in Africa. From UN to AU and other conceptions.**

### **Introducing the levels of analysis**

Often, Africa is depicted as unitary entity, despite the variety it contains in many aspects of social and political life.

In terms of regional cooperation, the development of the African Union as a continental political form of organization, with 55 member states, almost all of the African states, has contributed to this image. While the regional organization is at the forefront of the Pan-Africanist objectives, with equivalents as the European Union or the Association of South-East

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<sup>2</sup> David Mitranyi, *A Working Peace System*, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966 [1943], p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> David Mitranyi, "The Functional Approach in Historical Perspective", in *International Affairs*, 47, no. 3, 1971, p. 541.

Asian Nations, the achievement of the objectives of the African Union is based on the pillars of regional economic communities, 'the building blocks' of the Union.

However, the continental Pan-African dimension and the regional economic communities are not the unique subregional entities in Africa. A functional approach to regional organization will redirect us to other agencies of international cooperation.

In Northern Africa, together with Jordan, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia signed the Agadir Agreement (entered into force in 2007), a plurilateral free trade agreement among the Arab Mediterranean countries, born in the context of the Barcelona Process, hosted in Amman. Additionally, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia are part of PAFTA, Pan-Arab Free Trade Area, an agreement that entered into force in 1998, known also as the Greater Arab Free Trade Area. Four more African states are candidates to join this plurilateral trade area: Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania and Somalia. In Eastern and Southern Africa, eleven states became part of a joint partnership agreement with the European Union. While there are distinct groupings joining this evolving partnership on trade and development cooperation, it brought together Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe in a functional region, described as Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) by the European side. Furthermore, the Sahelian region is an interesting case, as discussed in the paper.

The Abuja Treaty, adopted in 1991 and entered into force in 1994, established the African Economic Community, with a proposal of six stages for a transitional period of up to 34 years. The first stage consisted in strengthening the regional economic communities and the establishment of new economic communities in regions where they do not exist, as part of the gradual establishment of the Community.<sup>4</sup> Most of African states are currently members of the regional communities. These regional communities reflect their own development. Despite having a roadmap for economic integration and contributions to the continental communities, there are different states of development and regional integration. Most of the regional economic communities were established before the Abuja Treaty.

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<sup>4</sup> Organization of African Unity, *Treaty establishing the African Economic Community*, 1991.

While there are other regional groupings, the African Union states that it recognizes only eight regional economic communities: Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Community of Sahel–Saharan States (CEN–SAD), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Southern African Development Community (SADC), with two additional entities part of the African Standby Force, with whom it maintains relations: Eastern Africa Standby Force Coordination Mechanism and the North African Regional Capability.<sup>5</sup> Among them, the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) did not sign the protocol on the coordination framework between the regional economic communities and the African Union. Furthermore, UMA is more engaged in Mediterranean and Pan-Arab dialogue and less developed in the distinct four-five Maghreb unitary cooperation.

A functional approach to regional cooperation in African redirects us specific sectors. From a security perspective, regional groupings are based on the African Standby Force (ASF) pillar within the African Peace and Security Architecture. There are five regional groupings: the North African Regional Capacity, ECOWAS Standby Force, ECCAS Standby Force, Eastern Africa Standby Force and the SADC Standby Brigade. Nevertheless, some of them are less effective in achieving the objectives and each region has its own operational strategy. Among the five brigades, some of them are in a less capacitated situation: relatively frozen since conflicts arose (e.g. Arab Spring), temporary based on UNSC authorisation (e.g. ECCAS Standby Force). On military matters, the external influence is more visible compared to the cases of regional political cooperation, since there are joint missions and support for capacity building not only from the continental level and the United Nations, but also from external stakeholders with security roles as the People's Republic of China, the European Union or the United States of America.

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<sup>5</sup> African Union, *Regional Economic Communities (RECs)*, AU Organs, 2013, [<https://au.int/en/organs/recs>], 21 May 2020.

An observer of regional dynamics in Africa can see additional initiatives developed over time with a functional role. Remembering the older commissions for Danube or Rhine, the Mano River Union (MRU) was created in 1973 as a custom union and economic cooperation organization between Sierra Leone and Liberia. It survived the conflicts within its member states and developed joint projects with benefits for all its member states. Currently, the Mano River Union has four member states: Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire, members of ECOWAS. It is a bottom-up initiative with dialogue and cooperation, regional integration and development objectives. MRU highlights success stories based on international cooperation through its contributions to border security and peace maintenance, addressing diamond smuggling, crisis response in the Ebola health crisis and ecosystem conservation.<sup>6</sup> This organisation is an example *sui generis* for the functional approach to international relations, with states developing cooperation agreements in areas such as defense and security, trade, internal affairs, and foreign affairs. Nevertheless, its first part of existence, regardless of joint projects, did not guarantee the maintenance of peace, and it was relaunched as soon as the peace and security cooperation allowed.

The functional approach is identifiable in the case of the ten Central African countries that form the Commission of the Forests from Central Africa (COMIFAC). As an international organization, it aims to harmonise the forestry policies at subregional level and to better govern and make use of the forests and the protected areas.<sup>7</sup> Thus, it contributes to conservation and better management at subregional level of the natural resources within its scope.

Another case is present in the Great Lakes region. Established in 1976, the Economic Community of Great Lakes Countries (ECGLC), formed by Burundi, Congo DR and Rwanda, all three COMESA members, oversees four specialised institutions in the region with functional roles: a development

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<sup>6</sup> Mano River Union, "*Mano River Union - Success Stories*", 2020, [<https://mru.int/success-stories/>], 3 June 2020.

<sup>7</sup> COMIFAC, "*Missions de la COMIFAC*", *Commission Des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale*, 2020, [<https://www.comifac.org/a-propos/que-faisons-nous/missions>], 3 June 2020.

bank, an electricity generation company, an energy community and an agricultural research institute. Internal struggles limited the development of ECGLC, yet the organization was reinvigorated in the previous two decades. ECGLC describes its missions to strengthen the peace, security and stability in its member state, to encourage economic and social activities of joint interest, to foster trade exchange and the free movement of goods and persons, and to cooperate in multiple areas.<sup>8</sup>

### *United Nations regions and African Union regional economic communities*

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was established as part of the United Nations global organization, being set up in 1958.

ECA has five regional offices (North, East, Southern, West and Central Africa). Their roles are mainly in the policy realm: providing better information, strengthening the capacity of the member states in policy-making activities for economic and social development according to their priorities, provision of policy advisory services to states, economic communities and other actors to support regional integration and sub-regional initiatives, facilitating UN system's integration activities. Their mandates are closely linked to the African development agenda - Agenda 2063 - and its ten-year implementation roadmaps.

However, the UN sub-regional offices do not necessarily reflect the AU regional economic communities. In fact, the distribution is slightly different, in spite of the geographical designation. The following country table highlights the differences between the UN subregional offices (SRO) and the regional economic communities (REC). Additionally, it underlines the participation of member states in overlapping regional integration processes.

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<sup>8</sup> ECGLC, "Communauté Économique Des Pays Des Grand Lacs", *Communauté Économique Des Pays Des Grand Lacs*, 2020, [<http://www.cepgl.org/cepgl>], 7 June 2020.

Table 2: Membership distribution in AU RECs and UN SROs

Region	#	Membership	Region	#	Membership
SRO - CA	10	AO, BI, CM, CF, TD, CD, CG, GQ, GA, ST	ECCAS	11	AO, BI, CM, CF, TD, CD, CG, GQ, GA, RW, ST
SRO - EA	14	BI, KM, CD, DJ, ER, ET, KE, MG, RW, SC, SO, SS, SD, TZ, UG	IGAD	8	DJ, ER, ET, KE, SO, SS, SD, UG
SRO - NA	7	DZ, EG, LY, MR, MA, SD, TN	UMA	5	DZ, LY, MR, MA, TN
SRO - SA	11	AO, BW, LS, MW, MU, MZ, NA, ZA, SZ, ZM, ZW	SADC	17	AO, BW, KM, CD, SZ, LS, MG, MW, MU, MZ, NA, ZA, TZ, ZM, ZW
SRO - WA	15	BE, BF, CV, CI, GM, GH, GN, LR, ML, NE, NG, SN, SL, TG	ECOWAS	15	BJ, BF, CV, CI, GM, GH, GN, GW, LR, ML, NE, NG, SN, SL, TG
			EAC	6	BI, KE, RW, SS, RZ, UG
			CEN-SAD	23	BJ, BF, CF, TD, CI, DJ, EG, ER, GM, GH, GW, LR, LY, ML, MA, NE, NG, SN, SL, SO, SD, TG, TN
			COMESA	21	BI, KM, CD, DJ, EG, ER, SZ, ET, KE, LY, MG, MW, MU, RW, SC, SO, SD, TN, UG, ZM, ZW



Historically, the UN Economic Commission for Africa provides the first regional arrangement in the global post-war order within the continent, followed by the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity as a Cold War peak of the Pan-Africanist movements. The opening of the subregional offices followed in 1963 supporting strengthening the capacity of member states, development support, policy support, providing technical assistance and contributing to regional cooperation and integration. These functions are applicable to the five subregional offices and the close cooperation with the regional cooperation and integration initiatives serves as a pillar.<sup>9</sup>

Mapping the main regional initiatives is important to understand the local, subregional, regional and continental governance in Africa. Moreover, it provides an image of the main cleavages in the definition of the regions. In-depth analysis of each of them is further required to give a clear perspective on a case by case basis. However, this is not the aim of this paper. Since Dumbarton Oaks, regional arrangements have been a key pillar of international organization and management of peace, security and development.

The tendency to neglect the influence of external actors is attractive, based on the historical anti-colonial developments and the development of the past years. Similarly, the questions of external actors' influence in the design of regional arrangements appear, with patterns of regional organisation discernible. Some regions reflect historical constructs. ECOWAS, for example, is still politically divided by two regional blocs, the French and the English-speaking regions, with separate levels and heritage of economic and monetary integration. The Southern African Custom Union (SACU) claims its origin in a 1889 custom union convention and describes itself as the world's oldest custom union. Following successive agreements, the custom union has resisted until today. The East African Community traces its origins in the late 19th century colonial development projects and the early 20th century established customs and currency unions. Nowadays, the East African Community has a clear path towards regional integration with the end of a political federation, transitioned by a confederation project.

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<sup>9</sup> Information about the subregional offices are available on the website of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2020, [<https://www.uneca.org/sro-ea>]

According to the World Trade Organisation repository of the trade agreements, filtered by plurilateral intra-regional agreements, EAC is the most advanced in terms of regional integration, with an enacted customs union agreement and economic integration agreement. COMESA, ECCAS, ECOWAS & WAEMU, SACU function as customs unions, and SADC has a multilateral free trade agreement in force.<sup>10</sup> Even with these arrangements, as the database shows, Africa remains the global region whose countries have the least participation in regional trade agreements in goods and services.

### **3. Understanding the emergence of G5 Sahel and the role of external actors**

#### ***3.1. Mapping the Sahelian distribution of regional organisations***

Sahelian regionalism brings a set of methodological questions. While the geographical Sahel is relatively clear, as described below, the political Sahel has older and novel organizational projects. Firstly, these projects do not fit the already discussed allocation of regional economic communities or subregional development offices. Moreover, the external influence in the development of these region is remarkable - G5 Sahel is discussed in detail. Thirdly, it trails a functional participation of its member states focused on security and development, supported by the former colonial rule.

Based on the regional economic communities, the countries that are understood as part of Sahel are dispersed across several regional communities: ECCAS, ECOWAS, UMA and CEN-SAD. CEN-SAD, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States, gathers most of the Sahelian countries. However, the Tripoli-based organization established in 1998, is crumbling, despite a treaty revision focused on regional security and sustainable development. CEN-SAD aimed to develop an economic union, focused on removal of restrictions hampering integration, promoting external trade, developing

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<sup>10</sup> RTA-IS, "Regional Trade Agreements Database", *World Trade Organization*, 2020, [<http://rtais.wto.org/UI/PublicMaintainRTAHome.aspx>], 4 July 2020.

common projects and promoting the harmonization of measures in areas such as education and culture. Founded by six Sahel-Saharan states (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger, Sudan and Libya), it gathered 29 member states during its peak in 29. The following crisis in northern and central Africa made the project unoperational. The treaty revision in 2013 obtained only 13 signatures from a minimum of 15.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the orientation towards the Sahel in the region decreased; NEPAD programmes implemented in CEN-SAD were rather oriented towards the development of the Eastern or the Western side of the territory.<sup>12</sup> CEN-SAD included the Sahel states as members.

Bringing into question the limits of the political Sahel and its understanding by external actors, various lines of separation appear. The French diplomacy limits it to five states: Niger, Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mauritania, with a population of almost 100 million people.<sup>13</sup> Not the same interpretation is provided by other external stakeholders. The former Department of International Development of the United Kingdom included in the Sahel region Niger, Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Nigeria, Sudan and South Sudan.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the core members, Spain also added Senegal in the pool of Sahelian countries.<sup>15</sup> Nine states are highlighted in the region by the United Nations Secretary General: Niger, Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Senegal, Sudan, Eritrea and Nigeria.<sup>16</sup> UNOCHA

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<sup>11</sup> ECA, "CEN-SAD - The Community of Sahel-Saharan States", *United Nations Economic Commission for Africa*, 2020, [<https://www.uneca.org/oria/pages/cen-sad-community-sahel-saharan-states>], 4 June 2020.

<sup>12</sup> AUDA-NEPAD, "Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)", *African Union Development Agency*, 2019, [<https://www.nepad.org/where-we-work/region/110>], 4 June 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, "France's Action in the Sahel", *France Diplomacy*, 2020, [<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/security-disarmament-and-non-proliferation/terrorism-france-s-international-action/article/france-s-action-in-the-sahel>], 5 June 2020.

<sup>14</sup> DFID, "Profile of Development Work: Sahel", *Department for International Development*, London, 2020, p. 1, [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/profile-of-development-work-sahel>], 5 June 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación, "Sahel y Malí", *Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación*, 2020, [<http://www.exteriores.gob.es/Portal/es/PoliticaExteriorCooperacion/Africa/Paginas/Sahel.aspx>], 5 June 2020.

<sup>16</sup> UNSG, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in the Sahel Region", *United Nations Security Council*, New York, 2013, p. 2.

also includes Cameroon in the region.<sup>17</sup> The European Commission mentions nine Sahel countries.<sup>18</sup>

In 1976, OECD launched its partnership with Africa, *Club du Sahel*, after the first extreme drought crisis in 1973. *Club du Sahel* provided support for the Permanent Inter-State Committee of Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), a functional international organisation founded by six states - Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, currently having 13 members.<sup>19</sup> From 2001, it expanded and included additional West African states.

In 2014, to address the security and development challenges, G5 Sahel was announced by the representatives of Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad. Complementarily, in 2018, international donors, mainly European, announced their support for the Sahel Alliance, providing aid, assistance and investments to the Sahelian partners for hundreds of projects. The military arm of the group is the G5 Sahel - Joint Force. If the Sahel Alliance is focused on the development arm, the 2020 International Coalition for the Sahel focuses on the facilitation of the coordination provided by international actions, particularly on security, targeting areas such as fighting armed terrorist groups, building the capacities of armed forces, supporting the sovereign function of the state and administrations in the territory, and assisting development.

### ***3.2. The emergence of G5 Sahel: functions, sponsors and initiatives***

G5 Sahel emerged from security needs, supported by external actors, as a regional organization. Its origins can be traced to the French military operations in its former Sahelian colonies at the request of the Malian authorities. The case study discussion is centered on its origins, actors involved in its development, the region-building processes and their governance.

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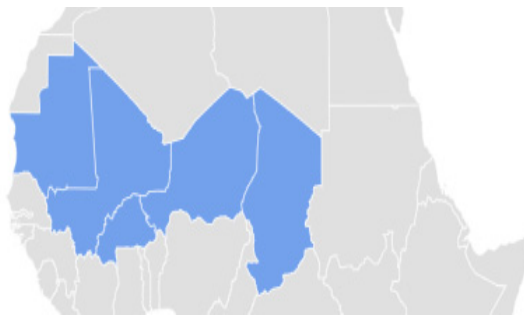
<sup>17</sup> UN OCHA, "Sahel", *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*, 2020, [<https://www.unocha.org/sahel>], 11 July 2020.

<sup>18</sup> European Commission, "European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations - Africa - Sahel", *European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations*, 2020, [[https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/africa/sahel\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/africa/sahel_en)], 18 July 2020.

<sup>19</sup> SWAC, "The Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC)", OECD, Paris, 2020, [<http://www.oecd.org/swac/aboutus/>], 18 July 2020.

Authorised by the United Nations, Operation Serval started on 11 January 2013 and fought against the advancements of the Islamists insurgents. Serval was declared a success by the French authorities at that time, yet the root causes of conflict remained. The crisis that became visible in 2012 in Mali, and the first attempts to stabilise was an African-led support mission to Mali (AFISMA). Operation Serval had three objectives: to stop the jihadist advance, to prevent them from further endangering the stability of the country, to protect the European and French nationals, and to restore Mali's territorial integrity.<sup>20</sup> Serval addressed the French political objectives but did not accomplish or provide a long-term solution to the conflict in Mali.<sup>21</sup> It transferred the stabilisation mission to the UN multidimensional mission and to Mali's authorities, deployed in 2013.

G5 Sahel was created in February 2014 to respond to the security and development challenges at the initiative of the given countries in the region, particularly at the initiative of the Mauritanian Presidency of the African Union. Based on the creed that joint action and



regional integration could reinforce their resilience, the group of five countries announced the creation of "*an institutional framework of coordination and regional cooperation named G5 Sahel*".<sup>22</sup> The new legal person has its headquarters located in Nouakchott and has four objectives: "*to guarantee the security and development conditions in the member countries, to provide a strategic framework for intervention that allows the improvements of the life conditions of the populations, to link development and security, supported by democracy and good governance in a mutually beneficial international and regional cooperation framework, to promote a sustainable and inclusive regional development*".<sup>23</sup> A new regional organisation is born.

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<sup>20</sup> Sergei Boeke and Bart Schuurman, "Operation 'Serval': A Strategic Analysis of the French Intervention in Mali, 2013–2014", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 38, no. 6, 2015, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 22.

<sup>22</sup> G5 Sahel, *Convention portant creation du G5 Sahel*, 2014, Nouakchott, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

The leaders and promoters of the new organisation were aware of and recognised the importance of the international partners in order to achieve the expected results. The preamble of the Convention reaffirms the willingness for cooperation with the external partners by negotiating jointly with "*technical and financial partners, public and private, to find harmonious solutions to problems affecting security and development*".<sup>24</sup> From that moment, it continued its development as an organization. G5 Sahel became the main regional partner for international organisation on the Sahelian issues.

Who supports what? The answer to this question is provided by looking into the participation of the ceremonies that launched the initiatives under the G5 Sahel framework. In 2014, in a 'mini-summit' of the five countries. According to the then president of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, and chair of the African Union, the organization "*does not replace CILSS or other subregional organisation but allows for coordination among the five countries that share the same challenges*".<sup>25</sup> Based on media reports, the presidents called for support from partners in order to develop their actions, especially from the Arab financing institutions and OPEC. The missing country at that time was Senegal.

Few months later, France launched Operation Barkhane. The French ministry described the operation as an initiative aimed to encourage partnership and the stabilisation in Mali and Liptako-Gourma. According to French sources, the Sahelian strategy aimed to support the states in the region to ensure their security by their own. Barkhane had three objectives: fight against terrorist groups, support the armies of the G5 partners, and action in the service of the population.<sup>26</sup>

The joint force of G5 Sahel (FC-G5S) was launched in 2017. Announced in 2017, the joint force was marked by a summit that, apart from the participation of the G5 Sahel presidents, the French president was taking part. The European Unions supported and financed the initiative. France does not assume directly the ownership of this initiative, despite the involvement and efforts pursuit in this direction. However, in public diplomacy, the

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Le Monde, "Un « G5 Du Sahel » Pour Le Développement et La Sécurité", *Le Monde Afrique*, February 16, 2014, [[https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2014/02/16/un-g5-du-sahel-pour-le-developpement-et-la-securite\\_4367635\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2014/02/16/un-g5-du-sahel-pour-le-developpement-et-la-securite_4367635_3212.html)], 13 January 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Ministère des Armées, "Dossier de Presse: Operation Barkhane", 2020, p. 7.

Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations mentions its initiatives within the Security Council on this matter and it recognised, in the case of FC-G5S, it *"is resolutely committed to the fight against terrorism in Mali and the Sahel alongside the joint G5 Sahel force, with Operation Barkhane"*.<sup>27</sup>

The region-building process continued with an extensive investment commitment. Launched in July 2007 by France, Germany and the European Union, the Sahel Alliance is focused on the five countries and focuses on development cooperation. The implementation of over 800 projects is planned by 2022 with funding amounting 11,6 billion EUR.<sup>28</sup> Other European states joined in the meantime the Alliance (Italy, Spain, United Kingdom, Luxemburg, Denmark, Netherlands), together with multilateral financing organisations such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the United Nations. We can observe that, apart from the G5 states, Sahel Alliance remains a European initiative for the development of the region. The African participation is limited. The African Development Bank, despite having beneficiaries from Africa, has a global membership. The projects implemented in G5 Sahel by the Alliance will improve the interconnectivity and functional cooperation among its member states. Among the 800 projects, most of them are limited to one country, yet there are transnational initiatives (e.g. energy, border management, security).

However, there are landmark projects in the region that can contribute to a new regionalization in this area. The railway project from N'Djamena to Nouakchott, the Trans-Sahelian, will link all G5 countries, from Chad to the Atlantic. The Defense College of G5 Sahel, a military higher education institution, had already the second promotion of officers trained.<sup>29</sup> Similar initiatives are discussed, having a regional dimension. The concerted action of G5 Sahel and Sahel Alliance contributes to the

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<sup>27</sup> Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations, "Sahel", 2020, [<https://onu.delegfrance.org/G5-Sahel-Joint-Force-10433>], 4 July 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Sahel Alliance, "The Sahel Alliance", 2020, [<https://www.alliance-sahel.org/en/sahel-alliance/>], 5 July 2020.

<sup>29</sup> G5 Sahel, "Collège de Défense du G5 Sahel: Sortie de la deuxième promotion" (2020, July 16), [<https://www.g5sahel.org/article/college-de-defense-du-g5-sahel-sortie-de-la-2e-promotion>], 2 August 2020

development of a common mechanism for the governance and implementation of priority projects for Sahel.<sup>30</sup>

While the financial sustainability of the organisation remains questionable without external support, G5 Sahel is a political reality as a regional project. The previous sections highlighted the differences related to name and the challenges related to the definition of specific regions embedding these member states. Seven years after the announcement of the G5 Sahel in a mini-summit, the coordination framework was announced: the International Coalition for the Sahel.

On 13th of January 2020, the International Coalition for the Sahel was announced during a summit held in Pau. The summit in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques brought together France and the G5 Sahel states, together with the representatives of the United Nations, European Union, African Union and other organizations. While the Coalition will not replace the G5 Sahel decision-making processes, it defined the governance framework for the region on military, security, political and development matters. Under its four pillars, all major initiatives of the last decade were reunited.<sup>31, 32</sup>

- Pillar 1 on fighting armed terrorist groups will be led by the African armies and the G5 Sahel Joint Force with its partners, including Barkhane, MINUSMA and the Takuba Task Force;
- Pillar 2 on building the capacities of the armed forces of States in the region, will be based on the Partnership for Security and Stability in the Sahel (P3S), initiated by France and Germany during the G7 Summit in Biarritz in 2019, the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and EU's support through EUTM Mali and the African Peace Facility;

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<sup>30</sup> Sahel Alliance, "The Projects", 2020, [<https://www.alliance-sahel.org/en/the-projects/>], 5 July 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Elysée, "G5 Sahel: Conférence de Presse Des Chefs d'État à l'issue Du Sommet de Pau", 2020, [<https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/01/13/sommet-de-pau-declaration-conjointe-des-chefs-detat>], 14 January 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, "France's Action in the Sahel", *France Diplomacy*, 2020, [<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/security-disarmament-and-non-proliferation/terrorism-france-s-international-action/article/france-s-action-in-the-sahel>], 7 June 2020.



- Pillar 3 on supporting the return of the State and administrations in the territory, will be based on P3S, and EU's support through the EU Emergency Trust Fund and the EU civilian missions (EUCAP Niger and Mali);
- Pillar 4 on assisting development will have the G5 Sahel and the Sahel Alliance as leaders.

Under the legitimizing auspices of external actors, in a context that required support for security and development, G5 Sahel emerged, disrupting the existing regional architecture and encouraged by a functional approach to international affairs.

### **Concluding remarks**

Region-building in Africa remains a dynamic process. There are few definitive or predictable regions. The aim of this paper was to investigate the current regional arrangements in Africa, focused mainly on the political dimension. Additionally, how external actors can drive the regional integration agenda. The latter case study provided an instance on how in less than a decade, but having the memory of conflict, historical links and pragmatic functional cooperation, a new regional project can be developed with a feasible future.

The emergence of G5 Sahel in an area historically dominated by other regional arrangements, either regional economic communities, plurilateral trade agreements or subregional development offices, provides an example for pragmatic functional cooperation at regional level. It raises in the same time interrogations related to the sustainability of the initiative. The relations of G5 Sahel with the African parties such as the African Union and ECOWAS raised questions from many observers. Does its governance framework consent sufficient local ownership? Is the political authority governing the regional cooperation real? Similarly, there is the question of

post-crisis operational and financial sustainability, since the wider context of the development of a new region, if we include the variations in the previous designation of Sahel, includes the crisis in northern Africa in a security nexus linked to Europe.

This new political Sahel is a reality today. Nevertheless, tomorrow, another reality can define the region, its borders and its development.

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