1. INTRODUCTION

In 2013, after the “Arab spring”, disturbing news about armed conflict in Northern Africa reached the international community again. An ethnic (more like tribal) conflict, with a virtually powerless government and a violent coup evolved into civil war where the ever-present terrorist cells became suddenly active in the region and the conflict threatened with a humanitarian disaster – let alone the creation of a terrorist foothold in the neighbourhood of Europe.

This study gives a brief insight into the events of the Malian conflict, its causes and its evolution; describes the EU – and particularly the French – approach and in particular, it introduces the training mission, its goals, agenda, progress and results. Since the study focuses on the training mission and the strategy of the European Union regarding the conflict, it applies an approach from the angle of the Common Security and Defense Policy.

2. THE ROLE OF THE MISSION

The European Union Training Mission (EUTM) in Mali is a venture of a military training organised, financed and led by forces of member states of the European Union. Due to the recent events in Mali, this country in the Sahel region\(^1\) has become a nest of high insecurity: Tuareg rebels, joined by Islamic terrorist groups have taken over the northern part of the country, with the aim of forming

\(^1\) A large region south of the Sahara desert, stretching across Northern Africa.
an independent, Islamic country. It took several months and a foreign intervention to solve the crisis. The goal of the mission is to help rebuild the Malian armed forces, thus, contributing to the restoration of public order in the country and the region, eliminating the threat of terrorist presence and alleviating concerns for Europe in humanitarian issues.

The European Union’s objective in Mali is to support Malian efforts in order to:

1. fully restore constitutional and democratic order through the implementation of road-map adopted on 29 January by the National Assembly;
2. help the Malian authorities to fully exercise their sovereignty over the whole of the country;
3. neutralise organised crime and terrorist threats.²

3. THE EVENTS

As a “spill-over effect” of the “Arab spring”, in the so-called region of Azawad, in northern Mali, several Tuareg military groups claimed for greater independence from the Malian government via organising an insurgency in the region.

On 22 March 2012, several officers of the Malian army, declaring that the actual government was incapable of treating the Tuareg uprising in the north, managed to perform a coup d'état and took over control in Bamako. They suspended the constitution but promised that after dealing with the rebels they would welcome a new, democratically elected government.

Despite the takeover, the situation escalated. Approximately two weeks later, on 6 April, the organization of revolters, the MNLA (Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad, Azawad National Liberation Movement), supported by a radical Islamic group, managed to occupy the northern region of Mali (see on the map); after occupying three neighbouring towns and driving out the Malian army, they declared the independence of Azawad. Neither the surrounding, nor the leading nations recognised the sovereignty

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4 Source: http://www.globalsecurity.org [cit. 2013-11-06].
of the newly born “state”; what is more, tensions rose promptly, concerning the security of the region and thus, that of Europe.

Consequently, the overall situation rapidly deteriorated; thousands of people fled their homes, seeking asylum in the neighbouring countries (e.g. Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger), further aggravating the food crisis in the Sahel region, the West African regional body (called ECOWAS) imposed a full trading embargo on Mali and froze its funds in its central bank (member countries use a common currency).

The aforementioned radical Islamic group, Ansar Dine (“Defenders of Faith”) imposed strict Sharia, Islamic common law in Azawad; what is more, during the following months, they successfully ousted Tuareg rebels who were forced to retreat from most of the region at the end of June.

The government of Mali asked for military intervention in order to recapture the northern parts of the country. On 11 January 2013, François Hollande, President of France announced that they were going to aid the Malian armed forces to restore their authority over the occupied region. By the beginning of February, the combined French, ECOWAS and Malian forces managed to drive the Islamists out of Azawad; on the other hand, Tuareg separatists continued to fight their former allies; although, they were reported to have performed attacks against the Malian army, as well. On 18 June 2013, the Malian government and the Tuareg rebels signed a peace

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6 Mali’s Conflict Refugees – Oxfam Briefing Paper, 1
deal in Ouagadougou, concerning an immediate ceasefire and governmental return to the Tuareg-held city of Kidal.10

During autumn, a one-week tension threatened with the return of hostilities in the country; on 26 September, the MNLA cancelled their participation in the peace deal, complaining that the government had failed to keep their end of the agreement; after that the Malian authorities released 23 insurgents, on 5 October the separatists announced that they were willing to rejoin the peace process.11

On 11 August, presidential elections were held, with the victory of Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta.12

4. THE LAUNCH OF EUTM MALI

During the events elaborated above, Malian armed forces proved to be unable to handle the dangerous situation caused by the combined forces of the separatists and Islamic extremists. An effort was needed to modernise the Malian army; furthermore, this mission fits into the global approach of the European Union, outlined in the Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel.13

After the official request from the Malian government, and in accordance with United Nation Security Council resolutions

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EU Training Mission in Mali – 2013

(S/RES/2071\textsuperscript{14} and S/RES/2085\textsuperscript{15}), the European Union decided to start a new military mission within the framework of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).\textsuperscript{1617}

The mission was launched on 17 February 2013, after a meeting in Brussels, where foreign ministers of the European Union and the Malian Foreign Office Minister, Hubert Coulibaly met each other and decided to immediately begin the training of the Malian army. The European Council appointed Brigadier General François Lecointre from France as the commander of the EU mission.\textsuperscript{18} The Council set up the headquarters of the mission in the capital, Bamako.

Earlier, on 8 February, an advance team consisting of 70 members arrived in Bamako; with the Malian authorities whose task was to finalise the system for providing advice to the chain of command and prepare the setting-up of the headquarters and the arrival of the trainers for the mission in Bamako.\textsuperscript{19}

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The official launch of the mission was announced on 20 February in Bamako with the participation of General Démbélé (Chef d'État-Major Général des Armées, CEMGA; Joint Chief of Staff), General Camara (Minister for Defense, Mali) and General Lecointre. General Lecointre and Démbélé signed a technical arrangement which set the responsibilities and obligations of the Malian and European forces.\(^{20}\)

5. PARTICIPANTS OF THE MISSION AND THE ROLE OF FRANCE

In EUTM Mali, 23 European countries decided to take part and contribute to the adequate training of the Malian forces: France (being the leading nation in the training mission, as well), Spain, Germany, Belgium, United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Poland, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Slovenia, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Romania, Portugal and the Netherlands.

The role of France is special in the mission: with more than 200 soldiers deployed, they contribute the most to the success of the programme. However, this is not surprising: since EUTM Mali and the military intervention (Opération Serval) share the same goal – free the northern region and restore the integrity of the country – it is obvious that the two missions are aligned in the same strategy of France.

At the same time, one has to underline that EUTM Mali is about training and giving advice and they do not take part in the combat operations carried out in Azawad – the role of the programme is to enable Malian “official” armed forces to keep order after the departure of the intervening French troops and to be able to avoid similar events in the future.

The mission – so far – has had two commanders; the first is General François Lecointre who led the training mission until August

2013. Having 25 years military experience\(^{21}\) and serving on different crisis venues (first Gulf War, Djibouti during the civil war, Rwanda and Somalia), he was an adequate choice for a mission dealing with a crisis situation in Africa. On 1 August, the command was passed onto General Bruno Guibert who has been in charge of the command of EUTM Mali ever since. According to his professional history, General Guibert also has experience in military actions in Africa, especially in Chad, the Central African Republic, Rwanda and the Ivory Coast. Since France has taken a major role in the mission, it is hardly surprising that both commanders are of French nationality.

The role of France is special in this whole crisis management. Since their economic interests in Northern Africa go back to the colonial era (uranium interests in the neighbouring Niger, for example), the French government reacts sensitively to all incidents in the region; given that the European Union showed “no appetite”\(^{22}\) for a combat operation under EU flag, President Hollande decided to prevent the further escalation of the conflict, taking action swiftly, thus enabling the multinational African forces to carry out their mission under UNSC Resolution 2085 in order to bring stability to the region.

6. **THE TRAINING**

Whereas the headquarters are at the capital, the training itself takes place at Koulikoro base, cca. 60 kilometres from Bamako. 550 troops were sent to train the Malian armed forces; out of these about 150 are trainers – the rest of the contingent provide support and serve as a protective force in the mission. Besides the mentioned French troops (207), Germany provided 71 soldiers, Spain contributed with 54, the


UK with 40, the Czech Republic with 34, Belgium sent 25 and Poland 20.\textsuperscript{23}

General Lecointre was quite straightforward about the overall condition of the to-be-trained forces: the Malian army possessed poor and “heterogeneous” equipment, donated by richer nations over the last 20 years; “(...) the bigger issue however is the army’s lack of a clear hierarchy and chain of command, with little team spirit.”\textsuperscript{24}

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\textbf{2. Figure} The region of Koulikoro\textsuperscript{25}
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After the first coordinative training for the trainers at the end of March,\textsuperscript{26} the basic formation began on 2 April 2013 – when the first


\textsuperscript{25}Source: http://www.alimaong.org [cit. 2013-11-17].
official Malian battalion arrived at Koulikoro (see on the map). Consisting of 600 people, this battalion was the first unit which took part in the training carried out by the European EUTM Mali instructors. According to the plans, the training would last for 10 weeks and comprise several different phases. The battalion officially named itself “Waraba”, which means “lion” in the local Bambara language; its chief is Malian Lieutenant Colonel Yacouba Sanogo.

Before any particular training session, the battalion was evaluated during a series of tests in order to obtain information about the soldiers’ general physical condition, technical knowledge and their capacity to command. The initial results were positive, meaning that the majority of the battalion had the basics required to begin the training.

Three weeks of individual and group infantry training followed the evaluation, when on 29 April the EUTM Mali entered into a new phase: special training. This phase took 4 weeks and each special training module was carried out by different instructors from different EU countries:

1. Armoured light cavalry: Italy and Slovenia;
2. Artillery: Great Britain;
3. Engineering: Germany;
4. Commando: Spain;
5. Logistics: Poland;
6. Elite snipers: Hungary;
7. Communication: Greece;
8. Aerial control: Italy.

Besides physical and tactical exercises, the battalion also followed courses on international humanitarian law. Lessons were held for an

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hour every week and were adapted to the audience. During these sessions, soldiers discussed real matters concerning humanitarian issues, such as “protection of children in armed conflict situation.”

Besides that, several United Nations organizations also took part in the humanitarian law courses (e.g. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Office in Mali, United Nations Population Fund Agency, UNICEF), aiding EUTM Mali with the main objective to “make the Malian soldiers understand and increase their sensibility towards human rights and to the obligations of soldiers in a conflict facing the civil population, women, children, civilian captives and war prisoners.”

The training of the “Waraba” battalion ended with a final exercise in the region of Koulikoro where both the Commander of the mission, General Lecointre and the Joint Chief of Staff, General Dembélé were present; the aim of the event was to attest the operational capacity of the battalion. The unit contains 715 members organised into different companies: three infantry and several special units in the fields of cavalry, artillery and engineering. The battalion met the requirements and was put under the command of the Malian Army. On 22 June, the battalion left the Koulikoro training camp and headed towards the northern part of the country to be deployed for the first time in the city of Gao.

On 9 July, the second battalion, appointed by the Malian state, began its training cycle in Koulikoro. The unit was to be commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Samaké and consisted of three infantry companies, reinforced by a fourth company of specialized support

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units.\textsuperscript{34} After the evaluation of the soldiers two weeks of infantry training and a following special training took place. The battalion, named Elou ("elephants" in the language of tamashek) finished their training officially on 14 September\textsuperscript{35} they left the training camp on 28 September. The 700 men and 60 vehicles joined the first battalion in Gao and – similarly to their predecessors – was accompanied by a French detachment of operational assistance.\textsuperscript{36}

The third battalion arrived at the Koulikoro base on 30 September. The unit was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Sangaré; the 720 soldiers who came from the training centre of the Malian armed forces mainly from Markala, completed by elements coming from all Mali.\textsuperscript{37} The name of the third battalion is "Sigi", meaning "Buffalo" in Bambara language. The training is currently taking place at the training centre.

7. RECEPTION

The overall support of the programme has been great so far, many prominent representatives visited the training camp: the German Minister of Defense, Thomas de Maizière; the European Union’s Special Representative for the Sahel region, Michel Reveyrand de Menthon; the Swedish Minister of Defense, Madame Karin Enström; the Spanish Minister of Defense, Pedro Morenés Eulate; twice the Malian Minister of Defense and Veteran Combatants, Yamoussoua Camara; the Spanish Ambassador, Jose Maria Matres Manso; Jean-

\textsuperscript{34} Le second bataillon malien entame sa formation à Koulikoro, available at: http://www.eutmmali.eu/?p=1135 [cit. 2013-11-17].
Yves Le Drian, the French Minister of Defense and the Belgian
Minister of Defense, Pieter de Crem.

As a token of appreciation for his work, General Lecointre was
elevated to the rank of Commander of the National Order of Mali on
31 July.38

On 14 October, during a ceremony held in the main
Headquarters of the EUTM Mali mission in Bamako, the imposition
of the European medal for the security and defence policy took
place; all personnel of the mission was near to the completion of
their deployment. The event was chaired by the Deputy Commander
of the mission, the Spanish Colonel, called Felix Eugenio Garcia
Cortijo.39 EUTM Mali officers were honoured by the Malian
Minister of Defence and Veteran Combatants and were appointed as
knights of the National Order of Mali.40

A considerable emphasis was placed upon the acceptance of
the mission among the local populace, as well. The European
servicemen of the mission EUTM led a series of actions for the
benefit of the population of the city. On 25 October, in co-operation
with the local authorities, Colonel Testard, accompanied with
trainers of the mission visited four public schools to distribute school
effects to children living there. The initiative went on with the
projection of a cartoon to the children of a school situated in the
outskirts of the city. These two actions were greeted by the teaching
profession and the authorities of the city. A new distribution of
school kits took place on Monday, 28 October in four other schools
of Koulikoro. Altogether, more than 600 school kits were distributed
to the children.41

38 Le général Lecointre élevé au rang de Commandeur de l’Ordre National
39 Cérémonie de remise de la médaille de la politique européenne de
2013-11-17].
40 Officers of EUTM Mali honored, available at: http://www.eutmmali.eu/?
p=1085 [cit. 2013-11-17].
41 Mission EUTM Mali: aide à la population malienne, available at:
8. CONCLUSIONS

If we want to give a thorough opinion on the success of EUTM Mali, we would not find ourselves in an easy situation. The fact itself that the mission has successfully trained three battalions and is currently under the process of training more is a huge result, without any doubts. On the other hand, forming a solid judgement of the mission now would be quite difficult, since it is currently an ongoing one, set to be finished in the end of May 2014. However, in my opinion we can still make some conclusions of the experiences.

The mission is widely considered to be a success; former commander, General Lecointre even advises that the mandate should be prolonged in order to train the whole of the Malian armed forces. Foreign experts have already welcomed the idea that instead of spending large amount of money on keeping order in occupied territories (e.g. the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan), it is much more profitable to train, thus, enable “domestic” forces to cope with the internal security issues after leaving the area. This measure also makes it possible to prevent that paramilitary forces occupy a part of the country (it was substantially due to the inability of regular forces that Ansar Dine was able to gain influence and set a foothold in Azawad) – and of course, trained Malian forces will be suitable to take part in the combat against international terrorism. Due to the consequences of the “Arab spring”, the Maghreb region is also exposed to the security dangers of the transition process (e.g. in Libya until the present day there are grave atrocities in spite of the democratic change after the civil war or, to provide a more recent example, we could mention the civil war-torn Syria as well) so the modernised army will probably play a crucial role in maintaining internal security and fending off terrorist threats.

Although, – fortunately – the “real” test has been “postponed” (the radical Islamic forces had been driven out of the region by French troops by the time the Waraba battalion arrived at the city of Gao) it is nevertheless an important mission for the trained forces to preserve the fragile tranquillity and protect the population in the northern region. We can also see that the peace process can become
unstable as the result of even the slightest tensions; the Tuareg issue will require a political solution but in the meantime it is advisable to be prepared for possible incidents similar to the one happened in the last years.

It is worth emphasizing that, the policy of the European Union can set an example for further crisis management in international conflicts. The EU recognised that long-lasting effects of social and economic development are strongly correlated with internal security and there is no other effective force to maintain that like a domestic one. In my opinion, it is also important to communicate properly towards European citizens why hundreds of millions of euros are spent for an African region and why it is beneficial for the community, as well.

The emphasis on international humanitarian law is also a remarkable feature of the programme – besides social responsibility actions carried out by the trainers, it is also crucial that Malian soldiers respect human rights; this way the population can feel that armed forces fight for them and they are not exposed to harassment or more severe incidents. The efforts to increase the popularity of the foreign forces can also play an important part in the pacification of the region; the transparency of the goals of the international coalition can prevent the Islamists to recreate a base by convincing the local population to support them; a generally great problem encountered while fighting terrorists.

In sum, it can be concluded that it is a welcomed idea to give a helping hand in restoring public order via enabling local forces to combat challenges. However, significant caution will be needed in the near future in order to stabilize the political climate of the country. Democracy must take roots in the governing principles of Mali, otherwise trained soldiers can be easily “redirected” to fight other causes instead of protecting the population by maintaining public order. International organizations, the UN and the European Union should continue to monitor the rebuilding process in the Sahel region.
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