

Organized Crime in the Sahel Region and Regional International Law Mechanisms for Combating It

La criminalité organisée dans la région du Sahel : les mécanismes juridiques internationaux régionaux de lutte contre celle-ci.

Dr. Mohammed Eladel Elmostafa Si Ali,

Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, Chlef of University

Email: adelsiali@yahoo.fr

Pro. Ahmed Si Ali,

Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, Chlef of University

Email: Ah.siali@univ-chlef.dz

Dr. Titraoui Abderrazak,

Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, Chlef of University

Email: a.titraoui@univ-chlef.dz

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Abstract:

The African Sahel region is considered a favorable space for the spread of all forms of organized crime, including drugs, human trafficking, smuggling, and money laundering. This is due to several factors, some of which are related to the region's natural and geographical features, while others are connected to historical factors such as colonial intervention in Sahelian countries. Perhaps the most important factor is ethnicity, which has led to conflicts between groups and minorities, with colonialism playing a pivotal role in their persistence to this day.

The spread of organized crime in the African Sahel has prompted African and European states to seek legal means to combat these crimes. On the one hand, they have relied on treaty-based mechanisms, such as the Liptako-Gourma Charter for the establishment of the Confederation of Sahel States and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. On the other hand, they have adopted institutional mechanisms, such as the African Union through its main organ, the African Peace and Security Council, and the African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL). The European Union has also played a role in combating organized crime in the region by adopting a strategy to support military forces in African states.

Keywords: organized crime, African Sahel, treaty mechanisms, institutional mechanisms.

Résumé:

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La région du Sahel africain est considérée comme un espace propice à la prolifération de toutes les formes de criminalité organisée, notamment le trafic de drogue, la traite des êtres humains, la contrebande et le blanchiment d'argent. Cela s'explique par plusieurs facteurs, dont certains sont liés à la nature et à la situation géographique de la région, et d'autres à des facteurs historiques tels que le mouvement colonial dans les pays du Sahel. Le facteur le plus important est sans doute l'ethnicité, qui a conduit à des guerres entre groupes et minorités, le colonialisme ayant joué un rôle central dans leur persistance jusqu'à aujourd'hui.

La propagation de la criminalité organisée dans le Sahel africain a conduit les États africains et européens à rechercher des moyens juridiques pour lutter contre ces crimes. D'une part, ils ont eu recours à des mécanismes conventionnels, tels que la Charte de Liptako-Gourma pour l'établissement de la Confédération des États du Sahel et la Convention des Nations Unies contre la criminalité transnationale organisée. D'autre part, ils ont adopté des mécanismes institutionnels, tels que l'Union africaine à travers son organe principal, le Conseil africain de paix et de sécurité, ainsi que le mécanisme de coopération policière de l'Union africaine (AFRIPOL). L'Union européenne a également joué un rôle dans la lutte contre la criminalité organisée dans la région en adoptant une stratégie de soutien aux forces militaires des États africains.

Mots-clés : criminalité organisée, Sahel africain, mécanismes conventionnels, mécanismes institutionnels.

Introduction:

The African Sahel is a vital region connecting North Africa with its south, east, and west. It is called the African Sahel because of its crescent-shaped and tropical form. It includes Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, Sudan, parts of Burkina Faso, and parts of Eritrea and Ethiopia. It also serves as a trade corridor linking the Red Sea through Sudan to the Atlantic Ocean through Mauritania. It is likewise a bridge connecting North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. It does not merely separate terrains; it also separates the identity and civilization of North Africa from that of sub-Saharan Africa, which is one of the causes of violence and instability prevailing throughout the region.

The region has experienced internal tensions and armed conflicts for several reasons, prompting scholars in international law and international relations to search for legal and political solutions to these escalating tensions, which have rapidly led to the spread of all forms of organized crime in the region, foremost among them mercenary activity, arms trafficking, and organized terrorism. This has negatively affected the states of the African Sahel as well as neighboring states, which also face a direct threat to their regional security.

In light of the worsening Sahel crisis, international organizations intervened through legal mechanisms of a regional nature by creating international legal rules and specialized bodies aimed

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at eliminating all forms of crime in the African Sahel. However, these efforts faced difficulties in implementing the strategies adopted by African and non-African international organizations, which sought to curb the spread of organized crime in the African Sahel and neighboring areas. In this context, it becomes necessary to examine the effectiveness of these international mechanisms, which requires comparing the available legal rules and their implementation mechanisms with the realities of the region and the conditions experienced by African peoples.

The issue of the African Sahel raises many questions about the effectiveness of international efforts to combat organized crime, especially since the states that constitute it are now unable to confront the alarming and rapid spread of organized crime. The great interest shown by researchers and experts in the region is due to several historical, natural, human, cultural, and economic factors, as it is a region with characteristics that distinguish it from the rest of North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as ethnic, political, and racial components that have produced a form of conflict and a state of instability and insecurity. This necessitates an examination from an international law perspective, to identify the available legal means to reduce the spread of all types of organized crime in the African Sahel.

If we consider the African Sahel a region characterized by tensions and conflicts resulting from the spread of organized crime, and given that international law has established a set of regional mechanisms to address this phenomenon, the following question arises: **To what extent have these regional international legal mechanisms succeeded in combating organized crime in the African Sahel despite the structural political and security challenges facing the region?**

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical legal approach to examine the phenomenon of organized crime in the African Sahel and analyze the regional international legal mechanisms established to combat it. It also relies on the analytical method to assess the effectiveness of relevant legal instruments and institutional frameworks. Furthermore, the study employs a critical approach to identify the challenges limiting the implementation and effectiveness of these mechanisms in the region.

To address the research problem, the study is divided into two sections: the first examines the manifestations of organized crime in the African Sahel, while the second focuses on the regional efforts undertaken to combat organized crime in the region.

First Requirement: Factors Behind the Spread of Organized Crime in the African Sahel

At the outset, it should be noted that the definition of organized crime, as stated by more than one author, is “a group of three or more persons working in criminal activity for a certain period of time with the aim of committing one or more crimes in order to achieve financial or material gain, directly or indirectly.” Organized crime is considered the most widespread phenomenon in Africa due to several factors that must be examined in this requirement.

First Subsection: Ethnic and Historical Factors in the Spread of Organized Crime in the African Sahel

The historical study of the causes of tension in the African Sahel leads us first to the colonial factor, under which the colonial powers arbitrarily and irregularly divided the existing borders among African states. This division contributed to making the region rife with conflicts and tensions because ethnic and racial affiliations were not taken into account when drawing the borders, since they were drawn to separate peoples belonging to the same ethnic group, which created many border problems between neighboring African states.

After decolonization in many African states and their independence, they adopted the principle of not altering the borders inherited from colonialism. This principle resulted in security dilemmas of an internal nature that quickly developed into non-international conflicts threatening the security and safety of the peoples of the Sahel region as a whole. In this way, colonialism affected the region's regional security by encouraging ethnic conflict, resulting from the application of the principle of inherited borders after independence, which divided peoples of the same ethnic composition into two or more states. Consequently, these groups are dispersed across more than one state, which is the main reason for the severity of these conflicts and, at times, their inability to be resolved (Samir, 2020).

In this context, we may refer to some examples of ethnic conflicts in the states of the African Sahel resulting from the arbitrary distribution of tribes and ethnic groups, such as the Hausa tribes spread across Sudan, Chad, and parts of Niger, the Tuareg tribes spread across more than two states, including Mali, Niger, Algeria, Chad, Libya, and Mauritania, in addition to the Tubu and Fulani tribes. The major colonial powers, led by France, also separated ethnic groups from one another and altered the ethnic map according to their strategic interests. Colonial powers followed a policy of favoring some ethnic groups over others, as France did during its colonization of Mali by favoring the Timbuktu tribes residing in southern Mali near the capital, thereby seeking to exclude other tribes and groups (Samir, 2020).

Some specialists in the history of societies believe that ethnic belonging is merely an ideological and political construct intended to achieve the strategic goals and interests of great powers, which may be colonial powers. This perspective is consistent with the situation of African tribes and peoples, especially since the conflicts in the region have remained unresolved despite all national and international efforts. If this indicates anything, it reflects the degree of influence these tribes received from the policies of some major powers during and after the colonial period. This analysis applies accurately to African peoples (Socpa, 1998).

Second Subsection: Geographical and Natural Factors Behind the Spread of Organized Crime in the African Sahel

Geopolitical studies cannot in any way be separated from legal analysis, especially when dealing with the natural and geographical factors that have supported the spread of organized crime in the Sahel. The region is rich in energy resources needed by states, including uranium, oil, gas, and various precious minerals such as gold and uranium, which have made major powers compete in every possible way to exploit them. As a result, the region's states have suffered delay and stagnation, experiencing comprehensive underdevelopment in all sectors. The Sahel lies in the middle of the African continent, close to the north, which explains the repeated threats facing neighboring areas such as Algeria and Morocco, and even security threats extending to some European states (CNBC Arabic, 2024).

The location of the African Sahel in the middle of the African continent gives it strategic importance both within and beyond the continent. The region is regarded as a route linking India, the Red Sea, and the Arabian Gulf to the east, and it also serves as a link between the Americas and the rest of Africa and Asia. Historically, this location played a major role in trade because it has long been, and still is, an important trade route connecting eastern and western regions, alongside the passage of numerous other trade routes through the Sahel (CNBC Arabic, 2024).

Experts in international relations explain the above data by arguing that, through its geographical components and natural characteristics, the African Sahel constitutes an integrated space that can be described, according to Castex's theory, as a zone of insecurity. According to this logic, any major security event can affect the regional security of neighboring areas, and the geographical borders of states become meaningless because instability in the internal security of any state affects other neighboring states. Accordingly, no state can ensure its regional security in isolation from other states, because geographical borders alone are insufficient to establish regional security for African states. Even neighboring states that do not belong to the region, such as Algeria, cannot ignore the value of the African Sahel and its importance for the security and stability of their border areas and even their internal security (Saifi, 2016).

Second Requirement: Forms of Organized Crime in the African Sahel

The factors mentioned in the first requirement of this study have led to a dramatic spread of organized crimes in the African Sahel, which has negatively affected the development of the states in the region as well as neighboring states. Organized crime in Africa witnessed wide expansion after 2019, when the growth rate of organized crime was estimated at 0.20 during the same period. It is also noted that the increase in organized crime intensified after the Cold War, and in the twenty-first century it diversified to include bombings, assassinations, hostage-taking and detention, sabotage, illicit drug trafficking, arms trafficking, human trafficking, money

laundering, and terrorism. This study will focus on the most important and most widespread of these crimes in the African Sahel.

First Subsection: Smuggling and Illicit Drug Trafficking

Smuggling and drug-related crimes are among the most important and foremost crimes threatening the security and safety of the African Sahel, and they also affect the collective security of the region as a whole.

First: Smuggling

Smuggling in the African Sahel includes many goods, such as cigarettes, gasoline, and even weapons, as well as the smuggling of migrants to Europe. Cigarettes were among the first goods smuggled by criminal groups in the region across the territorial borders of the Sahel states and neighboring countries. This activity is closely linked to the spread of weapons trafficking in the rest of the African Sahel. Cigarette smuggling contributed to the growth of drug trade in the region and enriched major extremists and insurgents, thereby fueling the region with various criminal activities and creating a comprehensive threat to regional security and stability. This took place amid the inability of Sahel and Sahara states to confront cross-border security challenges, opening the door for NATO to intervene in order to establish peace in the region (Al-Haddad, 2023).

A report by the Italian news agency Nova in 2024 also indicated an increase in the number of irregular migrants heading to Italian shores from Libya and other neighboring states such as Mali and Togo. This was due to weak surveillance over the shores of the Mediterranean Sea opposite the European coasts. Moreover, the intensification of fighting in Libya involving General Haftar's forces prompted many Libyans to organize mass migrations to smuggle migrants and leave the region, fleeing civil wars in Libya or in neighboring states suffering from instability in their security situation (Al-Haddad, 2023).

The spread of smuggling in Sahel states has been facilitated by the primitive lifestyle of most of the region's inhabitants, whose economic base is livestock and trade in some local markets in most smuggled goods, either from neighboring countries or from Latin America. In the near-total absence of urbanization, the population continues to rely on social customs inherited from the colonial era, which governments have been unable to curb despite their efforts. In the absence of order, smuggling remains possible and may extend to various goods, including weapons. The latter pose a serious security threat not only to Sahel states but also to neighboring countries. For example, smuggling operations may supply Tuareg groups with various weapons. These groups are in rebellion against the state and are mainly concentrated in Niger and Mali, and today they coordinate with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, which constitutes a security threat to neighboring states such as Algeria (Mansouri, 2014).

Second: Drug Trafficking

The term illicit drug trafficking is an international expression covering crimes involving narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, and it encompasses several stages of the offense, such as production, cultivation, smuggling, purchase, sale, possession, and so on. It also extends to crimes related to the tools and means of transport used to smuggle these substances into certain areas for consumption or distribution to targeted groups in society (Aidan, 2020).

The international community has paid close attention to the crime of illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, as expressed in the preamble to the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988. The Convention contains references reflecting the deep concern of the actors of the international community over illicit drug trafficking and the other criminal activities that result from it, which threaten state security and undermine legitimate economies. It also referred to the profits and wealth enabling transnational criminal organizations to corrupt and contaminate government administration, which is indeed what happened in the Sahel states, where political and economic systems are already fragile (United Nations, 1988).

Drugs are directly and closely linked to the previous crime, since smuggling also includes drugs of all types. It has been established that the rate of drug trafficking rose between 2019 and 2023, reaching 4.58. Cocaine trafficking in Africa also witnessed substantial growth, reaching 4.52 during the same period. It is known that this period witnessed a global humanitarian crisis, namely the COVID-19 pandemic, and the crisis helped increase the rate of organized crime in the region, indicating that the health situation directly contributed to the spread of cocaine trade and also accelerated the movement of these substances between West African and East African states. According to the same statistics, Equatorial Guinea was the highest in cocaine trade, with the rate reaching 8.50 (Enact, 2023).

Illicit drug trafficking in the African Sahel includes all kinds of psychotropic substances, such as cocaine, heroin, and synthetic and derivative drugs, coming from Latin America to Africa, where the two regions have flourished as a strategic corridor for the passage of drugs from these continents toward European countries and, why not, the rest of the world. This reality would not have emerged without the prevailing hybrid disturbances and tensions in the region, in addition to the fragility of the political systems of the Sahel states, such that physical borders are no longer sufficient to limit the entry and exit of drugs and all psychotropic substances to and from the Sahel region (Hassina, 2019).

Second Subsection: Human Trafficking and Money Laundering in the African Sahel

The African Sahel is a fertile environment for human trafficking, as this crime has found all the conditions necessary for its spread in an environment filled with disturbances and tensions

that, in some areas, have led to civil wars. Money laundering is likewise one of the crimes that has become widespread in the African Sahel for the same reasons mentioned above.

First: Human Trafficking in the African Sahel

Human trafficking is based on all methods used to target victims for the purpose of exploiting them. It aims at specific purposes such as sexual exploitation, forced labor, and exploitation in criminal activity. In some cases, it also includes exploitation for the removal of human organs, which represents a highly advanced form of criminality in trafficking persons and exploiting them in every possible way. The concept of human trafficking may overlap with migrant smuggling, because in the latter, too, people who seek to leave their countries illegally in search of a better life are exploited, though they are often exposed to serious dangers such as kidnapping or death during transit to their destinations. These criminal acts are committed by smugglers belonging to international criminal networks operating in many states in exchange for substantial financial gains (Interpol, 2023).

Most reports indicate the severity of the situation in the African Sahel, especially in the last five years. All indicators point to this. The ENACT 2023 report states that the rate of human trafficking reached 6.06, the highest rate compared with other crimes prevalent in the region. In 2019, it was estimated at 5.36, meaning that it increased by 0.70 points. The rate of this crime in 2021 reached nearly 5.93. This increase coincided with the rise in conflict levels on the African continent, and it is a natural result of conflicts and the forced displacement, modern forms of slavery, and forced recruitment that they produce, including the recruitment of children who are protected under international conventions and even the national laws of states. Wars and internal conflicts also affect family and social ties, pushing many people inevitably to be exploited in various ways, whether sexually, materially, or morally (Enact, 2023).

Major criminal gangs exploit the fragility of states and the lack of international and national mechanisms to spread this crime across Africa, and their only concern is to gain more wealth while completely ignoring the negative effects these acts create at the social and economic levels. This is the reality troubling the entire African continent, which has not been able, until today, to eradicate these scourges despite its persistent efforts to do so.

Second: Money Laundering in the African Sahel

Money laundering refers to the processes through which the true source of money and income acquired illegally, such as from drug trafficking or human trafficking, is concealed. This negatively affects the economic situation of states because it influences African states' public budgets. Administrative corruption in Sahel states is a major factor in the growth of this phenomenon, in addition to the shortcomings of the judicial system in punishing the perpetrators

of these crimes, which has led most criminals to escape punishment and continue their crimes, thereby affecting the state system (Majdhub, 2025).

According to the ENACT report prepared in 2023 by the International Criminal Police Organization in cooperation with the Institute for Security Studies and funded by the European Union, the rate of money laundering in the African Sahel reached 5.95. At this rate, it is the second most widespread crime in the African Sahel after human trafficking. This is a dangerous indicator showing that this crime is increasingly spreading in a strategic region through which the political and economic systems of states can be struck by many crises. The same report also stated that the reason for the rise of this crime is the political and administrative systems themselves (Enact, 2023).

The weakness of the economic organization of most local and foreign investment operations in most Sahel states is one of the most prominent reasons for the spread of money laundering. Most inhabitants of these areas have never invested their money in major projects that would finance their states' treasuries. Rather, most of their activities have been limited to practicing primitive forms of trade or engaging in prohibited trade, which does not contribute to the development of the state's economy; on the contrary, it causes economic collapse and decline (Majdhub, 2025).

Those familiar with political and security studies assert that money laundering negatively affects political stability and constitutes a threat to the national security of Sahel states, because most internal conflicts in the African Sahel are financed by major gangs that exploit their illicit revenues and profits to fund mercenaries and support conflicts and tensions in the African Sahel (Majdhub, 2025).

Section Two: Regional International Law Mechanisms for Combating Organized Crime in the African Sahel

Security threats in the African Sahel have pushed international efforts to intensify action to curb the spread of organized crime in the region by all means. International cooperation has thus become the only way to achieve this objective through international conventions as well as regional international organizations. Since the acts and effects of organized crime extend beyond the national borders of a single state to other states, international cooperation through both conventions and institutions became necessary to reduce the spread of these crimes in the African Sahel.

First Requirement: Treaty-Based Mechanisms for Combating Organized Crime in the African Sahel

Treaty-based mechanisms refer to the rules derived from international conventions aimed at combating organized crime in the African Sahel. The original principle is the application of

territoriality within the scope of national legislation in each state, but the requirements and conditions of the region-imposed exceptions that restricted the application of this principle. It became necessary to resort to two solutions: first, to impose the principle of universality over such crimes, meaning the application of national law wherever these crimes are found, even if committed outside the state's territory; second, to establish common regional criminal policies with neighboring states in the event of organized crimes being committed in the African Sahel. These international conventions aim to unify national criminal policies as an effective means of confronting what prevails within state territories, because different criminal policies hinder judges more than offenders (Adel, 2013).

First Subsection: The 2001 United Nations Convention against Organized Crime

The first of these conventions is the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, adopted in November 2001. In this Convention, the United Nations seeks to confront cross-border crime by setting five objectives: preventing organized crime between states and within them; controlling crime at the state and global levels; supporting regional and international cooperation in combating organized crime; promoting complementarity among states by supporting them in fighting organized crime; and finally, ensuring better and more effective management with regard to human rights (Adel, 2013).

This Convention is the only instrument whose provisions establish criteria by which organized crime is distinguished from other similar crimes. It is the only one that confines the cases in which, if its conditions are met, a crime qualifies as transnational organized crime: first, if the crime is committed in more than one state; second, if the crime is committed in one state but planned and directed toward another state; third, if the crime is committed in one state but carried out by an organization that operates in more than one state, such as gangs committing various types of organized crime; and fourth, if the crime is committed in one state but its effects are so severe that they extend beyond that one state, as when a criminal organization eliminates persons belonging to State A who are engaged in commercial activity in State B, with some clashes and skirmishes occurring between them and the security forces of State A, thereby negatively affecting bilateral relations between the two states (Adel, 2013).

However, reality has shown that most of these objectives have remained mere ink on paper and have not been translated into actual national or international measures capable of reducing the negative effects of these crimes, especially in the African Sahel. Although the Convention has largely succeeded in defining the acts classified as organized crimes, by setting criteria through which organized crime can be distinguished from other similar crimes, this does not mean that it has practical effectiveness, because effectiveness is fundamentally linked to the political will of states.

Second Subsection: The Lipagour Gourma Charter Establishing the Confederation of Sahel States

In September 2023, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso formed an alliance to unify defense and foreign policies. The Lipagour Gourma Charter states that this alliance aims to elevate these states into a confederal union as a space for coordinating diplomatic action and unifying the positions of the aforementioned states to combat organized crime and terrorism, which have begun threatening the security and safety of the peoples living in the African Sahel. The Charter also includes a reference to the establishment of a joint parliament to propose and discuss legislative texts and agreements concerning the public affairs of the three states (Mayabi, 2024).

This union, insofar as it initially took the form of a confederal state whose degree of integration reached its peak through cooperation in resolving economic and political issues, constitutes a genuine space bringing together states that are highly similar in their political systems, namely military councils whose ruling authorities came to power through a series of coups between 2020 and 2023. These states adopted a common stance toward their former allies, namely the states of the regional organization of West Africa (ECOWAS). However, from our point of view, this hinders the goals of the confederal union, because the three states are in urgent need of openness and international cooperation with neighboring states, both for financial resources and to support their foreign political positions (Mayabi, 2024).

It is legally established that the confederal union, or what some call the treaty union, as one of the forms of states, is one of the legal means that plays a role in achieving interconnection among different independent sovereign states, through which each state retains its external and internal independence while the notion of sovereignty recedes in some areas such as defense and finance. This Charter indicates that the three states form a joint military force to confront security threats in the African Sahel. Yet this is not sufficient to make these states form a confederal union. In our view, this Charter has not yet achieved the goals it proclaimed, and the novelty of its creation makes it difficult to evaluate its performance. The truth is that this kind of union has not seen the light of day in many instances, and international practice has demonstrated its weakness and collapse on several occasions, for example the union established among the Arab republics, which included Egypt, Syria, and Libya on 1 September 1971 and dissolved in 1977 after the conflict between Libya and the Arab Republic of Egypt (Tounsi, 2000).

Second Requirement: Regional Institutional Mechanisms for Combating Organized Crime in the African Sahel

Institutional mechanisms refer to regional international organizations that aim, through their plans, to protect the states and peoples of the African Sahel from the dangers of organized crime. In this context, it is necessary to point to the role now played by both the African Union

and the European Union, since both are mechanisms pursuing the same objective, especially as the European Union has vital interests with the states of the African Sahel.

First Subsection: The African Union as a Regional Mechanism for Combating Organized Crime in the African Sahel

The African Union generally seeks to achieve unity and solidarity among African states and peoples in various economic, political, and social fields, especially security. Most of these fields were included in the form of shared objectives set out in the Constitutive Act as an integrated set of immediate and future goals. In order to achieve these objectives, the Union established affiliated bodies entrusted with safeguarding the security and safety of African peoples. In this study, we will devote part of our discussion to these institutional mechanisms and the extent of their effectiveness in achieving the Union's goals.

First: The African Peace and Security Council

The African Peace and Security Council was established in December 2003, and it began its functions on 25 May 2004. According to the protocol establishing it, the Council is a regional body concerned with achieving a number of objectives set out in Article 3 of the Protocol, namely: promoting peace and security in Africa while providing guarantees to protect the life and property of African people, achieving the welfare of peoples, improving their environment, and providing conditions supportive of sustainable development; working to anticipate conflicts in advance, and in the event that they occur, the African Peace and Security Council bears responsibility for undertaking peace-building tasks to facilitate settlement; carrying out post-conflict peace-building and promoting and consolidating peace to prevent the re-emergence of violence; coordinating and harmonizing continental efforts to deter and combat international terrorism in all its forms; and establishing a common defense policy (Massas, 2018).

From our reading of these objectives, we observe that combating organized crime is implicitly included in every one of the aforementioned provisions. Evidence of this is that most of the Council's efforts aim to prevent the spread of terrorism, extremism, and organized crime in the African Sahel and its neighboring regions. The first strategic steps toward this end were taken in 2002 at the conference held in Algeria to agree on an action plan for preventing and combating terrorism. The plan essentially aims to strengthen and exchange expertise and information related to terrorism and organized crime on the African continent, especially in the Sahel, which, because of the conditions mentioned earlier, has become a space where various forms of organized crime have spread strongly (Massas, 2018).

The Council consists of five mechanisms according to Articles 11–21 of the Protocol establishing it: the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System, the African Standby Force, the Military Staff Committee, and the Council Fund (Massas, 2018). The last of these is the

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weakest link in the Council, since most member states are suffering acute economic crises, including foreign debt to European states or global financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. How, then, can they finance this fund to support peace and security in the region? Given that organized crime is one of the crimes requiring high-level international cooperation to curb its spread, this does not align with the reality of African states, whose peoples remain extremely poor and whose national systems are so fragile that they have been unable to achieve any development.

Second: The African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL)

The establishment of the African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation, known as AFRIPOL, dates back to the African Conference of Directors and Inspectors General of Police held in Algeria on 10 February 2014. At that conference, the former Director General of Algerian Security called for expanding cooperation among African police forces to confront the shared security challenges faced by most African states. The Union was in fact created, and African states agreed that its headquarters would be in Algeria. It is considered one of the mechanisms of the African Union because, referring to the second paragraph of Article 2 of the Statute of AFRIPOL, we conclude that it derives its legal personality from that of the Union. At the same time, it is an independent body from the states making up the Union. Evidence of its legal independence lies in the fact that the Director of AFRIPOL or his legally appointed representative represents the mechanism in all its legal matters. Official relations between the governments of African states and the police union proceed through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or other government departments. The privileges and immunities of AFRIPOL personnel are also legally protected under Article 26 of the Statute of the African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (Ahlam, 2020).

Since its establishment, AFRIPOL has sought to adopt a clear strategy aimed at combating terrorism and organized crime in the African Sahel. Its first steps consist of collecting information, data, and images of criminals, through coordinating the efforts of all police elements in African states and directing them toward a common objective, essentially the fight against organized crime. In addition, it implements security plans in accordance with the principle of African partnership mentioned in the Union's Statute. AFRIPOL also works to find practical solutions to the problems posed by the trade in small arms in the Sahel, as well as the recruitment of children, which is one of the manifestations of organized crime openly widespread in the African Sahel (Ahlam, 2020).

Second Subsection: The Role of the European Union in Combating Organized Crime in the African Sahel

Relations between the North and the South are characterized by distinctive features that set them apart from other relations. At times they lean toward cooperation, and at other times toward

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tension and unrest. Yet despite occasional high-intensity tensions, cooperation remains the dominant pattern in relations between European and African states. This may be logically explained by geopolitical considerations, since the two continents are adjacent, and it may also be explained by the history of relations between states of the two continents.

The events taking place in the states of the African Sahel affect international security, including that of the European Union states, whose safety and security are tied to the security of the African continent, especially the Sahel states. Their relationship is vital in several respects, including economic, security, and political ones. For example, the rise in irregular migration toward Europe negatively affects European states' security. Military coups also have consequences for international security, requiring European Union states to intervene to restore peace. For example, the coup in Mali and Burkina Faso weakened state efforts to combat terrorism in the region. Statistics indicate that the coup in Mali caused 40 percent of Mali's territory to fall under the control of extremist groups. This dangerous situation leads to the growth of organized crime in Mali and neighboring states and may reach an advanced stage whereby these territories become spaces for the spread of crime, affecting international security (ECCI, 2023).

In light of these factors, the European Union now considers its relationship with the states of the African Sahel to be necessary and strategically important, because the security of both sides is interconnected due first to the geographical proximity of the two continents, and second to the historical relationship linking European colonial states with the states of the Sahel region, especially France. This relationship has become even more important, particularly in the aftermath of the energy crisis resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine since 2022, when European states increased their need to conclude partnerships with the states of the African Sahel in order to secure energy supplies and develop their national economies (ECCI, 2023).

Given the inability of African states to deal with these challenges on their own, the states of the African continent had no option but to cooperate with the European Union to mitigate the impact of these crises on the African Sahel states, through the conclusion of numerous charters and declarations. Among them is the agreement concluded between the European Union and the states of the African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States (ACP), which focused on financial exemptions, leading to the Fourth Lomé Convention in January 1989. This agreement preserved the foundations and principles of North-South relations based on international cooperation, and it was later replaced by the Brussels Agreement, which marked a shift in the nature of relations between the European and African sides from cooperation to partnership, although this partnership remains based on inequality in the level of economic development between the two sides. In such agreements, the relationship aims to provide the greatest possible assistance to uplift the weaker party, namely the African states, especially those located in the African Sahel (Hussein, 2024).

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Through these agreements, the European Union seeks to support political systems on the African continent in order to activate human rights standards and entrench the foundations of democracy in African states. These objectives are closely linked to the security and safety of the territories of the Sahel states, because a regular transition toward establishing security in the Sahel necessarily requires financial support and the convergence of international efforts in this regard. It is important to recall European support for African states in 2007, amounting to nearly 250 million euros to facilitate the peace process in regions suffering from civil wars, through support for the military forces of African states (Hussein, 2024).

The European Union's support for the African Sahel states is also reflected in the humanitarian, economic, and security assistance it provides. From 2014 to 2023, it spent nearly 8 billion euros in aid directed to the Sahel states to enhance their capacity to confront all kinds of organized crime and terrorism. Since 2021, the European Council has adopted a new strategy in dealing with the issues of the African Sahel states. Instead of sending armies to African states, academies are established and managed by African armies together with the army of a European state under a joint military cooperation agreement, as happened between France and Mali. Germany has also restructured its relations with the African Sahel states, intensifying support and extending its participation in the United Nations mission in Mali. The German Minister for Development previously indicated that the alliance between her country and the African Sahel states aims to support nearly 1,200 projects in the region, with a total value estimated at 26,200 billion euros (ECCI, 2023).

The relationship between the European Union and the African Sahel is clearly reflected in the establishment of the European Union Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell for the Sahel in 2019, which is an advisory body aimed at supporting the Sahel states and coordinating the Union's initiatives in the region. In addition, the European Union Military Partnership Mission was established in 2023 in Niamey as the European Union's first military mission in Niger. It aims to strengthen the military capacities of the Nigerien armed forces by providing equipment, infrastructure, and a budget exceeding 30 million euros (ECCI, 2023).

Conclusion:

In conclusion, despite the intensification of international cooperation to combat the spread of organized crime in the African Sahel, it remains a reality that troubles the governments of the Sahel states and threatens their internal security and the stability of international relations in the region. The strategy of regional international mechanisms has, in this context, proven incapable. This is shown by the indicators mentioned in this article, which demonstrate the growth of organized crime in the region compared with previous years. Military coups are also a decisive

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factor in the rise of organized crime, as they undoubtedly lead to instability and insecurity, making the environment fertile and ready for the practice of all forms of organized crime.

The development of international cooperation mechanisms, from institutional and treaty-based mechanisms to the formation of alliances in the form of a confederation including Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, is a step toward cooperation in combating organized crime in the Sahel. However, because it is newly established, it is difficult to assess its role in eliminating organized crime in the Sahel states. It is a military and economic bloc, but given the international data, all these states suffer from the fragility of their political and economic systems. How, then, can they form an economic and military bloc? The weakness of their economies is evidenced by their dependence on external borrowing from international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

It is difficult to say that regional international mechanisms have achieved their objectives in the Sahel, given the many challenges both from within the region and from outside it. Major powers continue to pursue their economic interests in the Sahel, especially after the Ukraine crisis since 2022, which caused European states to turn their attention toward the African Sahel in order to exploit these states' energy and natural resources. Dealing with the Sahel states has thus become a necessity imposed by international circumstances.

The limited role of the African Union is due to the curtailment of its authority by the Security Council. What happened in Mali, where United Nations forces intervened under Security Council Resolution 2085 of 11 November 2012, indicates the decline of regional mechanisms and their inadequacy in the face of the growing role of global international law mechanisms, namely the United Nations and its principal organs, foremost among them the Security Council. This approach opens the door to another research topic: the institutional fragmentation of the rules of international law, meaning the conflict among international institutions in terms of jurisdiction. How can a global international mechanism intervene when regional mechanisms already exist, namely the African Union? In principle, priority should be given to regional international law mechanisms, since they are more specialized than global mechanisms because of their regional nature.

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