

European Engagement in West Africa

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Europe's interest and tradition of intervention in Africa did not cease with African independences: European states have shown a keen interest in Africa's political and economic development throughout the post-colonial era. West Africa, where European interests have long been closely intertwined, proved to be the focus of attention and of bilateral interventions during the Cold War and after. Over the last fifteen years, it has been a privileged field of experimentation for new – essentially French and British – political agendas and new actors such as the European Union. Following a brief reminder of the history of postcolonial relations between Europe and West Africa, this paper will consider the recent evolution of European engagement in West Africa and address its paradoxes, the concepts that underlie this engagement, as well as the new hopes it triggers.

Brief Historical Background: European Military and Diplomatic Presence in West Africa during the Cold War

West Africa, Traditionally a French '*Pré Carré*'¹

A quick look at a map of colonial Africa explains France's long-lasting influence in West Africa. French West Africa spread over most of the region and there were few exceptions to this rule. The United Kingdom possessed four territories (Nigeria, the God Coast – now Ghana, Sierra Leone and the Gambia) whose geopolitical isolation from one another prevented them from ever reaching the kind of integration that the French colonies had achieved. The Portuguese, meanwhile, ruled over

¹ '*Pré Carré*' is a French expression often used when describing France's tendency to consider some parts – if not all – of Africa as its own and exclusive 'playfield'.

the small territories of Portuguese Guinea and Cape Verde. Liberia, finally, was the only non-European territory: Former American slaves settled there from the beginning of the 19th century and declared the territory's independence in 1948.

Over the decades following West Africa's independences – most of which were declared during the first half of the 1960s – the French omnipresence in the region was hardly questioned. With its former colonies, first, France retained strong political, military, economic and cultural links. The former colonial power regularly intervened in the political life of francophone West Africa and did not hesitate, through more or less covert means, to support its favourite candidates. France's military presence also remained extraordinarily important in what had become sovereign states. The former colonial power retained military bases and concluded defence agreements in both Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, while providing technical military cooperation to all other former colonies.

France's influence in West Africa did not stop at the borders of its former colonies, moreover: Many young Sierra Leonean students were offered visiting scholarships to France in the 1960s and 1970s, for example. Guinea-Bissau, which was completely surrounded by francophone states and whose population traditionally migrated and traded with Senegal and Guinea, similarly seemed to adopt France as a second tutelary power, especially since Portuguese involvement in its former colony became rather limited after the end of Guinea-Bissau's long war of independence in 1974. The most obvious sign of this is the adoption, by Guinea-Bissau, of the CFA Franc and its admission to the French-speaking West African Monetary and Economic Union (*Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine – UEMOA*) in 1997.

The United Kingdom's relations with its former West African colonies were quite different. The British government's interest in West African issues generally remained quite limited, although all four English-speaking countries in West Africa entered the Commonwealth as soon as they became independent. British-West African relations however mostly survived outside the political sphere, thanks to the efforts of the

Church of England and the work of major NGOs such as Oxfam, Save the Children or Christian Aid (Gaulme, 2003).

The former colonial powers were not the only European countries that showed some concern for West Africa. Other European countries offered their economic and technical supports in matters of development, although this was often limited to a small geographic sphere or development sector or done on an irregular basis. SIDA, the Swedish International Development Agency, for example, provided bilateral support to Guinea Bissau in the 1970s and 1980s and to regional anti-desertification programmes.

West Africa, Another Field for Cold War Divisions

Other European countries' involvement in West Africa was tinged by the ideologies that characterised the Cold War era: The socialist state of Guinea, for example, enjoyed a close relationship with the German Democratic Republic (*Deutsche Demokratische Republik – DDR*) which provided development aid as well as visiting scholarships to Guinean students. The Biafra war in Nigeria (1967-1970) is another, dramatic, illustration of opposing European interests in West Africa. While the UK firmly supported the Nigerian federal government – mostly in reaction to the USSR's strong involvement at the government's side from the very beginning of the conflict, Portugal and France decided to support the secessionist Biafra state to which France discretely provided weapons. The conflict resulted in an unprecedented famine, which brought this part of West Africa to the attention of the European media and public opinion and triggered the intervention of the Red Cross and the foundation of a new French NGO, 'Doctors Without Borders' (*Médecins Sans Frontières – MSF*).

The end of the Cold War, a Turning Point? Linking Diplomacy, Security and Development

The end of the Cold War triggered many hopes, in particular that some long-lasting conflicts that had torn whole regions of Africa apart would finally come to an end for lack of superpower support. Some – in Southern Africa mostly – did, but the violent conflicts in Somalia (1991-1995) and Rwanda (1994) underlined how unrealistic these hopes had been and that the Western world, and Europe in particular, was both unprepared and unwilling to intervene in African conflicts to prevent an escalation of violence and humanitarian emergencies similar to the one in Biafra which seriously shocked Western public opinion in the 1960s. What these conflicts of the 1990s did lead to, however, was a shift in the intervention agenda from a secret, clearly interested, even neo-colonial involvement to a broader and moral type of intervention: Western powers intervene in the name of human rights, political stability and international security (Châtaigner, 2004), while their interventions shifted from limited efforts towards simple mediation to a broader engagement with the processes that created the conflicts. Critical security studies scholars encouraged this trend towards an all-encompassing development agenda by adopting a holistic approach to security, which they find particularly fitting for the study of ‘Third World’ states in which security is based on economic development and environmental sustainability (Bilgin and Morton, 2002).

France’s Revision of its Africa policy: A ‘Paristroïka’?²

Even France, which hadn’t paid much attention to moral issues in its relations with Africa and had tended to play the role of Africa’s policeman during the Cold War, felt the need to revise and normalise its African policy. The first step towards a reform of the ‘Françafrique’ was

² The term ‘Paristroïka’ was made up by French journalist Stephen Smith to refer to France’s decision to downgrade and normalise its political agenda in Africa just after Mikhail Gorbachev’s decision to implement his ‘perestroïka’ reform programme, often considered as the first step towards the end of the Cold War.

President Mitterrand's speech in La Baule, in June 1990, in which he acknowledged the necessary link between democracy and development, while reaffirming France's determination to be among Africa's privileged partners and first supporters (Mitterrand, 1990). This speech did not mark a radical change in France's Africa policy, but it was symbolic enough to worry some West African leaders and would soon be followed by practical decisions. France thus suspended its military technical assistance to Togo in 1992, when the Togolese army committed exactions against civilians, the political opposition and the state's few democratic institutions. Another major event marked the end of France's unconditional support to West Africa: The CFA franc was devaluated in January 1994. France had refused, until then, the IMF's demands that it revise its monetary policy in West Africa, but the death, in 1993, of Ivorian President Houphouët-Boigny who was one of France's 'close friends' and who had feared this devaluation, opened the way to what the international financial institutions thought was a necessary reform.

The genocide in Rwanda, in 1994, and France's late and contested intervention, fuelled a major debate on France's traditional military presence in Africa. The bulk of the reforms of France's military cooperation with Africa, however, were implemented in 1997-1998, after François Mitterrand's death and the socialist party took hold of the government in the 1997 elections. Both France's defence and cooperation policies were then the objects of major shifts. Military expenditures were to be reduced, while the former Ministry of Cooperation was integrated into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which led to the creation of a new Department for Military Cooperation and Defence whose competence and geographic sphere of influence were larger than that of its predecessor. These institutional reforms were accompanied by a redefinition of France's military cooperation doctrine in Africa: Bilateral military interventions were to be avoided except for the protection of French expatriates, the number of permanent French military staff would be reduced (the French military base in the Central African Republic was closed), and France would multilateralise its solutions to insecurity in Africa and support 'African solutions to African problems through regional military training programmes (Hughes, 2003) – this last point will be considered at more length in part 3 of this paper. Suffice to say, that this reform also

led France to extend its military cooperation to non-francophone countries such as Nigeria and Ghana.

Case Study: Côte d'Ivoire and France's Paradoxes

In spite of France's tendency to withdraw from military operations in Africa, it agreed to send a military mission of more than 4,000 troops to Côte d'Ivoire in September 2002, in support of the ECOMICI mission of the ECOWAS (a UN mission, the ONUCI took over in April 2004). This double intervention succeeded in ensuring a fragile peace in Côte d'Ivoire, while establishing the partition of the country, with the rebel troops ruling over the North and President Gbagbo's loyal troops over the South. French efforts to broker a peace agreement led to the signature by all parties of the Marcoussis agreement, in January 2003. This, as well as the United Nations' and the African Union's many efforts since, have all failed to bring a long-lasting solution to the crisis and the country remains deeply divided.

France's military presence, moreover, has been heavily contested by President Gbagbo's supporters. Anti-French demonstrations in Abidjan immediately followed the Marcoussis agreement and regularly took place thereafter. Following the rebels' refusal to disarm, President Gbagbo led a military offensive against the North in October-November 2004. A military 'mistake'³ however led the Ivorian aviation to shell the French military base in Bouaké and killed 9 French troops and a US civilian. The French forces reacted immediately by destroying the Ivorian military airplanes at the Abidjan airport. This marked the beginning of an escalation of violence against French and Western expatriates who were evacuated. Although the fragile peace that prevailed before these events was rapidly re-established, the French intervention remains contested. The suspected murder, by two French troops, of a young Ivorian highwayman, Firmin Mahé, has logically not improved its image. An

³ Whether this mistake was an accident or a disguised aggression is still a matter of debate and opposition between Côte d'Ivoire and France.

inquiry, led by the French military court with the assistance of the Ivorian judiciary, is underway (Rémy, 2006).

The United Kingdom's Renewed Interest in Africa: An 'Ethical Foreign Policy'

While France was actively revising its African agenda downwards, New Labour's accession to power, in 1997, in the United Kingdom, led the other major former colonial power to revise its own agenda in Africa upwards. The trio constituted by Prime Minister Tony Blair, Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown and Secretary of State for International Development (DfID) Clare Short were indeed determined to promote a new and dynamic development policy in Africa. The first step towards this end was the creation of DfID, a new autonomous ministry, in place of the Overseas Development Administration (ODA), which was administratively attached to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). In addition, Foreign Secretary R. Cook, in May 1997, defined, in his mission statement, what he called an 'ethical foreign policy': '[Britain's] foreign policy must have an ethical dimension and must support the demands of other peoples for the democratic rights on which we insist for ourselves' (Cook, 1997).

The UK's reform of its Africa policy also led it to adopt the long-term and holistic approach in matters of development and conflict prevention, as advocated by some scholars, NGOs and United Nations agencies. This had a direct institutional consequence with the creation, in 2001, of the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool (ACPP), 'an interdepartmental mechanism which draws together the conflict prevention knowledge, skills and resources of the Department for International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence' (FCO website). Cooperation between the three ministries takes place at ministerial, departmental and in-country level. The ACPP, which is chaired by the Secretary of State for International Development, was allocated £ 60 million for 2004/05 (this allocation should rise to £ 67.5 million by 2007/2008). The ACPP has a strong thematic focus on the following issues: enhancing peace support operation capabilities; secu-

rity sector reform; demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR); curbing small arms proliferation and misuse; and the economic and financial causes of conflict. This list underlines the broadness of the ACPD mandate, while a quick look at its main interventions in West Africa shows that British cooperation, like its French counterpart, tends to focus on the UK's former colonies – Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria.

Case Study: Sierra Leone, the Africa Conflict Prevention Pool and Security Sector Reform

Britain's intervention, first in the conflict that tore apart Sierra Leone, and then in its post-conflict reconstruction programme, provides us with an interesting illustration of New Labour's African policy and the ACPD's work and implementation of its new concepts. The UK's involvement in the peacekeeping operations in Sierra Leone was unprecedented: British forces were deployed to Freetown in 2000 to evacuate UK citizens and secure the airport to allow the arrival of UN reinforcements. Troops also began training Sierra Leone's armed forces, while Britain lobbied to secure good quality troops for the UN peacekeeping missions and assisted and advised the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme. The novelty of the UK's strategy in Sierra Leone is above all in its broadened understanding of the 'security sector' that integrates both traditional security forces (including intelligence), but also the institutions in charge of controlling them (ministries and Parliament) or necessary for their good working order (judiciary system) (Leboeuf, 2005). Security sector reform, therefore, deals with political, military and development issues. Britain accordingly signed a ten-year Memorandum of Understanding with the government of Sierra Leone to deliver development support. This has provided around 100 military personnel involved in training Sierra Leone's armed forces, it actively supports the reform of the judiciary system and of the police, as well as ad-hoc institutions such as the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Special Court and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and provides technical assistance to the government of Sierra Leone (FCO website).

Now that the emergency phase is over, however, the limits of this broad strategy are slowly coming to the fore. The first two elements of the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme were successfully led, but the reintegration programme requires a long-term commitment and a dynamic economy that would provide former combatants with employment and hope in a better future. Cooperation between the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development, moreover, has shown its limits: The three entities pursue very different, sometimes contradictory objectives, and although efforts are done to coordinate their programmes, some misunderstandings still occur. The major challenge, however, is to continue supporting the government of Sierra Leone while avoiding the emergence of a culture of dependency. Now that peace is secured throughout the country, voices are starting to rise up against the government's tendency to rely too heavily on the international community.⁴

West Africa: Another Yalta?

The French intervention in Côte d'Ivoire, the British intervention in Sierra Leone as well as the efforts at peace resolution made by Portugal and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) in Guinea-Bissau proved how much European engagement in West Africa was still characterised by traditional bilateralism. Another sign of this clear divide of influence are the tensions that arise when one European power tries to intervene in the affairs of another's *protégé*. There were, for example, important tensions between France and Portugal over the crisis in Guinea-Bissau in 1998-1999: France's involvement was obvious and strongly resented by the former colonial power (MacQueen, 2003). The same tensions appeared between France and Britain over Sierra Leone in 2000 when France and other European states rejected the British request for military assistance under the pretext that it was a 'British problem', while Britain resented France's support to the former

⁴ This part of the paper draws on observations and interviews led Freetown (Sierra Leone) November-December 2005.

Liberian President Charles Taylor who was perceived to be very much involved in the Sierra Leonean conflict (Williams, 2004). The West African states are well aware of the advantages they can gain from these tensions and traditionally turn towards their former colonial power to defend their case before international institutions such as the European Union (EU) or the United Nations (UN). This situation led a diplomat in Freetown, Sierra Leone, to refer to the 2nd World War Yalta Conference when describing the spheres of Western influence in West Africa.⁵ This is particularly true in the region of the Mano River, where Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire are usually considered France's responsibility, Sierra Leone Britain's and Liberia the USA's.

The World Bank, the IMF and other UN agencies are the other international actors that enjoy a major influence in West Africa and over the European agendas in the region. The paradigm shift that led them to draw a link, in the 1990s, between their political, economic and military agendas in West Africa was characteristic of these institutions' influence and analysis of development issues. This uncontested position, however, is not without risks. The merging of development and security programmes poses serious ethical questions and forces many donor-countries – such as, in particular, Germany which maintains a strong pacifist tradition since the end of the Second World War – to reconsider the contents of their development programmes. Another risk is that the funds meant for development be increasingly used for military and security reforms, or that some countries include their military assistance programme expenditures into their development budgets: The border between development and security programmes is becoming ever thinner (Châtaigner, 2004). A trend that some authors find preoccupying since it might lead to short-term interventions with the use of 'hard instruments' – emergency policing and military measures – to the detriment of long term cooperation that would address the root causes of political crises (Bayne, 2003).

⁵ Interview conducted in Freetown, Sierra Leone, November 2005.

Supporting Military Training in West Africa: Old Traditions, New Focuses

Local Ownership: A Step Towards ‘Multilateral Subsidiarity’?

The disastrous interventions in Somalia and Rwanda in the 1990s led most Western powers to revise their intervention policies in Africa. Although the interventions in Côte d’Ivoire and Sierra Leone tend to contradict this rule, most European powers are now unwilling to send their own troops on peacekeeping missions. This, and the acknowledgement that development programmes should provide countries with long-term solutions, gave birth to the now popular notion of local ownership and by-products such as ‘African solutions to African problems’. The UK, France and the US therefore decided to concentrate much of their military efforts in Africa on the training and equipping of Africa’s armies. British Military Advisory and Training Teams therefore train a significant number of African troops to conduct effective peace support operations. The FCO estimates that at least 17,000 African troops will have been trained either directly or through organisations supported by the UK Government by 2010 (FCO website). France also has its own training programme aimed at strengthening African peacekeeping capacities (Renforcement des Capacités Africaines de Maintien de la Paix – RECAMP) which provides for military seminars and training as well as on-field, multinational exercises. RECAMP’s fifth series was inaugurated in June 2005 and will take place in Central Africa (website of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

This strengthening of African peacekeeping capacities could lead to an intervention system based on what could be referred to as ‘multilateral subsidiarity’: The African Union (AU) and regional organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) should do their best to manage the region’s conflicts. When this is not possible, however, or when rapid intervention or financial support is needed, European states will be ready to lend their support. Such arrangements have already taken place: The UK provided the ECOWAS missions in Liberia (ECOMIL) and Côte d’Ivoire (ECOMICI, which was transferred

to a UN Operation, UNOCI, in April 2004) with financial and staff support (FCO website), while France supported logistically and financially both ECOWAS missions in Guinea-Bissau (MISAB, then ECOMOG). These facts point to another side of Europe's military programme for Africa: Regionalisation of training, equipment and interventions is increasingly encouraged. France thus contributed to the transformation of the national military schools it supports into National Schools with a Regional Objective (Ecoles Nationales à Vocation Régionale – ENVR). Similarly, the training provided by the British Military Advisory and Training Teams is not solely aimed at the country's troops: 50% of students attending courses at the Ghana Armed Forces Command and Staff College, for which the UK provides personnel, training and infrastructure support, come from outside Ghana, mainly from ECOWAS countries (FCO website). A similar coordination effort could have been expected on the European side. France, the UK and the US announced a joint 'P-3 Initiative' in May 1997 but this was followed by limited results in terms of coordination, although some field exercises were led jointly (Berman, 2002).

West Africa: A Forerunner in Multinational Military Training

West Africa, as was already underlined above, was from the start at the forefront of these regional training initiatives: Training in the national military schools was opened to troops coming from neighbouring countries, joint field training was encouraged and supported, while France puts the equipment stored in its base in Dakar, Senegal, at the disposal of regional or UN peace support operations. The next step will consist of the creation of three regional training schools in Mali, Nigeria and Ghana. The Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) in Accra (Ghana) started its full training and education cycle in March 2000, while the construction of a new school in Bamako, Mali, began in July 2005. Eventually, each school should provide for one part – operational, strategic or tactical – of a complete military training programme (Traoré, 2005). These schools also enabled other European states to contribute both financial support and training staff to West Africa's training initiatives. As shown on the following table, Germany,

Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, as well as the European Union and non-EU countries such as Switzerland and Norway have added their support to that of the UK and France. Germany, in particular, was the first to offer a contribution to the construction of KAIPTC in Accra.

Centre	Location	Nature of the Training	Donors
Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre	Accra, Ghana	Operational Training	Germany, Canada, USA, UK, India, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, European Union, Japan, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, Australia, South Africa
Peacekeeping School (<i>Ecole de Maintien de la Paix</i>)	Koulikoro, Mali (previously in Zambakro, Côte d'Ivoire, and soon in Bamako, Mali)	Tactical Training	France, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Germany, USA, the Netherlands, Denmark
National War College	Abuja, Nigeria	Strategic Training	—

Conflict Prevention: A Difficult and Unrewarding Task

Although conflict prevention now appears as a clear objective in most strategy papers on Africa, its practical implementation remains limited. The holistic definition given to the concept, which assumes an all-encompassing strategy, which takes economic, political and military factors into account, as well as the lack of newsworthy visibility of most conflict prevention efforts, make it an unrewarding task that most Euro-

pean actors find difficult to lead. It is much simpler and advantageous to play the role of courageous firemen in a conflict that has already made it to the front page. The efforts produced by the UK in Sierra Leone and their temporary results show how difficult it is to implement a broad programme that ensures a long-lasting peace, but also how costly it can be. Such a strategy also implies close work with West African civil society, something most European states are not used to, as they generally work with Western NGOs. France, in particular, admits that it has been rather unable to engage in the sort of holistic strategy the UK chose to implement in Sierra Leone and therefore concentrates its efforts on military assistance, following the idea that well-equipped and trained troops can prevent rebel groups from crossing the borders. This strategy showed some results in Guinea 2000-2001, when rebels from Sierra Leone attacked the forest region of Guinea. The Guinean army was able to repel the rebels, but this was done with the help of young rebels, whose demobilisation and reintegration is still problematic. The role of civil society should certainly not be underestimated, however, especially in West Africa where traditional leaders and storytellers can play a determining role when a conflict arises among communities.

Here again, one could expect the European countries to reflect themselves on the kind of holistic approach they advocate in West Africa. NGOs increasingly point to the negative effects of some European – especially, trade – policies on conflict prevention in Africa. Arm sales are now closely regulated by international law and Security Council Resolutions, but the proliferation of light weapons remains a crucial issue in West Africa (Vines, 2005). Trade outside the military sphere can also have negative consequences, especially when liberalisation measures threaten the economic balance of a country and trigger youth unemployment.⁶ Detailed analyses of the effects of liberal trade on security in West Africa are yet to be conducted, but a conflict prevention approach in Europe's trade with West Africa would certainly enhance the impact

⁶ For critical accounts of the EU's trade policy with Africa and the project, contained in the Cotonou Agreement, of creating Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with ACP regional organisations, please see: R. Gibb (2000), 'Post-Lomé: The European Union and the South', *Third World Quarterly* (31, 3) and Y. Graham (2005), '... Only if we stay in the market', *The Guardian*, 12th March 2005.

of Europe's conflict prevention efforts in other, more obvious fields. The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme, which aims at preventing the illegal trade of so-called 'blood diamonds', was a first step in this direction. Similar strategies for other products that were at the centre of West African conflicts are currently under consideration.

The European Union: A New Security Actor in West Africa?

Conflict Prevention: Adding a Political Dimension to the EU's Development Policy

Since its first communication on African conflicts in 1996, in which it insisted on the necessity of adopting a conflict prevention approach to its development policy (European Commission, 1996), the European Commission has sought to further affirm its desire to deal with the issue and to assume a more political role in Africa than had previously been the case. Conflict prevention is now cited among the EU's main objectives in all strategy documents concerning Africa. A Conflict Prevention Unit (A4) was created in the Directorate-General in charge of external relations (DG Relex). Meanwhile, European delegations are asked to assess conflict risks and to report these to the Brussels desk officers of the Directorate-General Development (DG Dev). The European delegations are now ready to support concrete conflict prevention programmes: The EU delegation in Guinea plans to support a conflict prevention project led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the forest region of Guinea, which hasn't yet recovered after the rebel attacks of 2000/2001.

EU delegations, however, and in spite of the deconcentration process, initiated in 2000, that gives them more autonomy and influence over the programmes they support, are still far from being the equivalent of European embassies. They still lack the financial and material means and the training that would enable them to move from an essentially technical mission in development cooperation to a more diplomatic and

political one. Such an evolution will however soon be essential if the EU really intends to respond consistently to Africa's security needs, as purely diplomatic measures can significantly address the political dynamics of an emerging conflict and play a determining prevention role (Smith, 2003). As of now, European member-states, especially those which have a permanent in-country representation, retain the intelligence, political expertise and influence that make a strong diplomatic culture while the European delegation's role in these matters very much depends on the determination of the chief of delegation to encourage his/her delegation to acquire capacities in political analysis or on a member-state's expressed wish that a member of staff trained in conflict prevention strategies be appointed to a delegation.⁷

Forewarning Signs of a European Security and Defence Policy in West Africa

The EU has, however, achieved significant steps in the field of military and civilian crisis management in Africa over the last two years, though none of its four first missions were led in West Africa. Operation Artemis, in 2003 in Bunia (Ituri region in the Democratic Republic of Congo), was the very first military intervention led under the EU's leadership, with France acting as a framework nation. It was an interim emergency multinational force meant to provide the UN mission in DRC (MONUC) with some additional time to adjust to the situation and successfully fulfil its mission (Bagayoko-Pénone, 2004; Bayart, 2004). Two subsequent European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) missions were launched in DRC: EUPOL Kinshasa monitored, mentored, and advised an integrated police unit once trained and operational under a Congolese chain of command, while EUSEC DR Congo provides advice and assistance for security sector reform in the DRC. Finally, the EU provides logistical assistance to the African Union's mission AMIS II in Darfur, Sudan. The diversity, in both nature and contents, of these ESDP

⁷ This last paragraph draws on observations and interviews led in Brussels (Belgium) and London (United Kingdom) in September-October 2005 and in Freetown (Sierra Leone) and Conakry (Guinea) in November-December 2005.

missions underlines the EU's willingness to assume crisis management missions. The Council of the European Union now has an African task force, with a West African division, and is slowly expanding its intelligence, planning and implementation tools in matters of crisis management (Crisis Group, 2005). The decision to create a force of up to 60,000 personnel – divided into battle groups – that could be deployed within 60 days, for the purposes of humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping, and crisis management, was also clearly taken with Africa in mind (Gow, 2004).

West Africa, which seems to have achieved some political stability, might be an ideal field for the sort of multilateral subsidiarity system described earlier in this paper: ECOWAS has already proven its willingness to deal with West African conflicts, although it does not always have the financial and material means to do so. Accordingly, the EU may be ready to provide the training, financial support, technical assistance or equipment necessary for such interventions. In which case, the EU's contribution would resemble a Europeanised RECAMP project, which is what both France and its African partners called for in September 2005, with the agreement of EU's high representative for CFSP, Javier Solana (Zecchini, 2005).

The EU, a Model for Regional Peace-Building and Integration?

The EU is often considered an obvious proof of successful regional integration and many, including the regional organisation's staff itself, underline the EU's specific experience in regional security and peace-building (European Union, 2004). The EU moreover possesses a comparative advantage over its member-states in that its identity is marked neither by a colonial past nor by post-colonial interests (Loisel, 2004). The EU therefore possesses both an acknowledged experience in development and peace-building, as well as a fresh legitimacy, and West African actors themselves insist on the necessity for the EU to share its experience and assist West Africa in its security integration efforts. The EU's, as well as ECOWAS's, progress in this field, however, remains rather irregular. ECOWAS's effectiveness in matters of conflict man-

agement has traditionally depended on Nigeria's willingness to support the organisation's monitoring group and on European powers' readiness to lend it some logistical and financial support. The African Union's project to create regional standby brigades may however be an additional incentive towards more integration in the security field, while some observers encourage smaller regional organisations such as the Mano River Union⁸ to assume conflict prevention duties (such as joint border control, regional trade programmes for natural resources such as diamond and timber or support to regional civil society initiatives).

Conclusion

Over the last fifteen years, European engagement in West Africa has undergone major paradigm shifts and reforms that led European countries to evolve towards a more multilateral approach, based on a broad strategy that encompasses conflict prevention, crisis management as well as post-conflict reconstruction efforts. These reforms are still under way and their newness, as well as the disinterested positions of some European powers, partly explains the contradictions and limits that often characterise European responses to conflicts and security needs in West Africa. In spite of Europe's long history of engagement in this region of Africa, peace support interventions, as they are now conceived, remain a rather new activity for European defence, Foreign Service and development staff that need to be better prepared, trained and supported. Europe will above all have to solve the contradiction that leads it to still intervene, sometimes on a long-term basis, in West Africa's political affairs while seeking to generate 'local ownership' – therefore avoiding the (re)emergence of a culture of dependency.

⁸ The Mano River Union (MRU) is a society established in 1973 between Liberia and Sierra Leone. In 1980, Guinea joined the union. The goal of the Union was to foster economic cooperation between the countries. Due to conflicts between the countries, the objectives of the Union could not be achieved. However, on May 20, 2004, the Union was reactivated by a summit of the three leaders of the Mano River Union states, Presidents Lansana Conte of Guinea, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone and Chairman Gyude Bryant of Liberia.

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