

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S PROJECTION AS A GLOBAL ACTOR THROUGH ITS ACTIONS IN THE SAHEL: THE CASE STUDY OF MALI

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Abstract

This article examines the European Union's (EU) role as a global actor through its engagement in Mali. Drawing on a Politics, Military, Economic, Social, Information and Infrastructure (PMESII) spectrum analysis of Mali's multidimensional crisis, it assesses the EU's response via its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, strategic frameworks, and financial instruments. The study argues that the EU demonstrates significant capacity in comprehensive crisis management and multilateral coordination, thereby reinforcing its external identity. However, limitations related to political cohesion, local ownership, and structural instability constrain its overall effectiveness. The case of Mali illustrates both the potential and the challenges of the EU's projection as a security actor in the international system.

Keywords

European Union, Mali, CSDP, Sahel, PMESII, SWOT.

Resumo

O presente artigo analisa o papel da União Europeia (UE) enquanto ator global através do seu envolvimento no Mali. Com base numa análise do espectro Político, Militar, Económico, Social, de Informação e Infraestrutura (PMESII) e da natureza multidimensional da crise maliana, avalia-se a resposta europeia por meio das missões no âmbito da Política Comum de Segurança e Defesa (PCSD), dos enquadramentos estratégicos e dos instrumentos financeiros mobilizados. Argumenta-se que a UE revela capacidade relevante na gestão abrangente de crises e na coordenação multilateral, reforçando a sua identidade externa. Contudo, limitações associadas à coesão política, à apropriação local e à instabilidade estrutural condicionam a eficácia global da sua intervenção. O caso do Mali evidencia, simultaneamente, as potencialidades e os desafios da projeção da UE enquanto ator de segurança no sistema internacional.

Palavras-chave

European Union, Mali, CSDP, Sahel, PMESII, SWOT.

How to cite this article

Freitas, Miguel Afonso Figueira Cerdeira de (2026). The European Union's Projection as a Global Actor Through its Actions in the Sahel: The Case Study of Mali. *Janus.net, e-journal of international relations*. Thematic Dossier - European Union Security Governance: from Integration to Strategic Autonomy, VOL. 16, Nº. 2, TD4, April 2026, pp. 93-109. <https://doi.org/10.26619/1647-7251.DT03226.6>



Article received on February 10, 2025 and accepted for publication on February 13, 2026.





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Introduction

The role of the European Union (EU) and its relevance in the international system continue to be topics of debate in academia. In an increasingly complex world with multidimensional threats, recently exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, the EU seeks to achieve autonomy that allows it to act independently in defending its interests.

This article aims to demonstrate that the EU can position itself in the international system as a relevant actor in crisis management, through the application of existing foreign policy instruments and its commitment to multilateralism.

In the first phase of this investigation, the EU's crisis management capacity is explored within the complex and multidimensional context of Mali. The Malian geopolitical context is analysed through a Politics, Military, Economic, Social, Information and Infrastructure (PMESII) spectrum analysis, thus achieving a holistic understanding of the reality facing the EU in Mali. Knowledge of the Malian context allows us to understand the main factors weakening the country, which will serve as a starting point for investigating the EU's actions in Mali.

Secondly, the main elements of European foreign policy used in its presence in Mali are analysed. This allows for an understanding of the EU's mode of operation, its main strengths and weaknesses, and what distinguishes it from other actors in the international system.

The article culminates in a SWOT analysis of European action in Mali, thus outlining the political perspectives in terms of potential and constraints that a presence in the country may present to the EU.

The crisis scenario in Mali

Mali is located in the arid Sahel region. Considering the EU definition of a region, the Sahel is understood as a strip of territory that extends along the African continent, with



the Sahara Desert as its northern limit and the humid savannas as its southern limit, Senegal to the west and Eritrea to the east (Pichon, 2020).

The security context in which Mali finds itself is quite complex, not only regionally but also nationally. Communities in the country have faced numerous armed rebellions, terrorist attacks, drug trafficking, and a proliferation of weapons (Galito, 2013). Together, all these factors contribute to significant instability in the region and the country.

The history of Mali, like that of any other country in the world, is full of conflicts and wars. Despite the deep temporal and social roots of Malian conflicts, they are currently the result of pressure exerted by various armed groups that have established themselves in the Sahel region (UN, 2020).

At the end of 2011, after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime, Tuareg fighters returned from Libya to Mali. Together with the Tuareg group National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), and with some Islamist armed groups including Ansar Dine, Al-Qaeda *Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM), the Movement for Unity and *Jihad* in West Africa (MUJAO) and some deserters from the Malian Armed Forces (FAM), they began, in January 2012, a series of attacks against government forces in the north of the country (UN, 2020b).

From the EU side, two missions were sent within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP): the *European Union Training Mission in Mali* (EUTM Mali) and the *European Union Capacity Building Mission in Mali* (EUCAP Sahel Mali). The first, sent at the request of the Malian government in 2013, had as its main objective the training and advising of the Malian Armed Forces in the fight against terrorism in the north of the country (EEAS, 2020), while the second, sent in 2014, was sent with the purpose of supporting the Malian police and security forces in reaffirming governmental authority throughout the territory (EEAS, 2016).

Modern crises are characterized by complex interdependence, resulting from a combination of historical, political, military, social, cultural, and economic factors. Therefore, to understand the complex scenario of insecurity and instability in Mali, the PMESII spectrum analysis model – political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, and information factors – was used. This model is employed by NATO in complex operations (NATO, 2019) to understand the nature of conflicts, human and organizational behaviour, both of local populations and insurgents (Angelelli & Maymir-Ducharme, 2015). However, one of the main difficulties observed during this analysis was the lack of official data, partly due to the complexity of the country's current paradigm and, on the other hand, due to the lack of current documentation on the factors under study.

PMESII Analysis

Political Factor

Mali, once considered a model of democracy on the African continent, has seen its democratic system decline in recent decades. The events of 2012 were the most recent illustration of the enduring tensions between the North and South of the country.



Following its independence, various tensions arose between the rulers, who resided in the South, and those in the North, leading to the political and economic marginalization of the North. This state "withdrawal" from the once prosperous and valuable region has made Northern Mali a risk and a threat to the security of the entire country (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015).

The deteriorating situation, with the collapse of the army in the North and the protests in Bamako against poor living conditions, ultimately led to the overthrow of President Amadou Toumani Touré on March 21, 2012. He was replaced by a transitional government headed by Diocounda Traoré.

Currently, Mali is governed by a transitional government led by Bah N'Daw, which is "fully dedicated to its primary duty of providing services to its citizens throughout the territory." However, this task is hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, as well as economic difficulties, persistent security problems, and all kinds of social pressures for better living conditions (Cisse, 2021).

Military Factor

The Malian Armed Forces (MAFs) are primarily focused on combating Islamist and rebel groups in the country. A defence reform process is underway, with assistance from external partners. Mali is supported by neighbouring G5 Sahel countries and receives support from the EU, France, and the US in assisting with the training of military and security forces. EUTM Mali, whose mandate has been extended until 2024, continues to train the Malian army and has also conducted some training for the Air Force. The MAFs participate in multinational exercises, particularly those focused on counter-terrorism capabilities. Equipment and maintenance capabilities are quite limited, and the suitability of some vehicles for service is questionable (ISS, 2020).

Economic Factor

Agriculture is the largest source of income and employment for Malians. With approximately 80% of Mali's population working in agricultural activities, the sector is the main driver of the country's economy and holds great potential for generating economic growth (USAID, 2021a; European Parliament, 2014). Another important element for the Malian economy is gold mining. In fact, Mali is the third largest gold producer on the African continent, behind South Africa and Ghana, and it is the country's most exported product (WTO, 2020).

Within its territory, there is a wide spectrum of regions with very different climatic and environmental conditions: from the arid Sahara Desert in the North, where the dry season can extend for more than nine months, to the semi-arid Sahel region which is interrupted by the Niger River delta area – usually quite affected by floods – and, finally, to the tropical savannas with a dry climate in the south (Nagarajan, 2020, pp. 13-14).

In general, in Mali, climate change and conflict together reduce the area of natural resources that can be used by communities for their subsistence. At the same time,



population growth, migration resulting from conflict and climate, and the impacts of climate change increase the pressure on competition for natural resources (Nagarajan, 2020, p. 19, our translation).

Both agriculture and livestock farming, the main drivers of the Malian economy, are highly dependent on climatic factors. According to the *Ministere de l'Environnement et de l'Assainissement* (2011), climate change, expressed in the decline and irregularity of rainfall, the increase in average annual temperatures and soil aridity, contributes to the decrease in agricultural and livestock yields. Furthermore, these factors contribute to increased inter-communal tensions and transhumance in the country.

Lastly, but no less importantly, the increase in drug trafficking and other illicit goods, as well as the rise in kidnappings, represents one of the main sources of income for some groups based in northern Mali. According to the 2019 *World Drug Report*, the West African region continues to play a significant role in drug trafficking, and Mali in particular plays an important role as both a transit and destination country (UNODC, 2019).

Sociocultural Factor

Mali is a remarkable example of ethno-linguistic coexistence, where diverse ethnic groups coexist and twenty languages are spoken throughout the country. The population of Mali can be divided into two large groups: sub-Saharan populations (90%) and Arab-Berber populations (10%), half of whom are Tuareg. The latter are mainly concentrated – about 95% – along 800 kilometres in the Niger River valley, between Niafouké and Gao, where they live as sedentary farmers (OECD/SWAC, 2014).

There are also several ethnic groups, including the Fulani, mostly nomadic and Muslim pastoralists, and the Dogon, generally polytheistic and sedentary. Since 2015, relations between these two ethnic groups have become significantly more antagonistic following accusations that the Fulani have been grazing their livestock on Dogon lands, as well as disputes over natural resources, partly due to disturbances caused by climate change, discussed later in this dissertation (Global Security, 2021).

Infrastructure Factor

Malian infrastructure is generally weak and unable to provide society with the necessary infrastructure for its development. However, there is little recent data on the condition of the various sectors of Malian infrastructure.

Nevertheless, it was possible to deepen the analysis in several sectors: most roads in the country are in acceptable condition for vehicle traffic; there is potential in linking the railways between Mali and Senegal; civil aviation and airports are at risk due to terrorist attacks in their vicinity; access to drinking water and basic sanitation is significantly deteriorated in the North.



Information Factor

The advent of information media in Mali dates back to colonial times, when French colonizers used the press as a propaganda tool to send messages in order to support their rule. Currently, the landscape is dominated by radio – which covers 75% of the territory – and the press, although it only exists in Bamako and some regional capitals (Konaté, 2021).

The entire sector, in general, has evolved precariously, even with the advent of democracy and information technologies that have revolutionized audiovisual media. At the same time, Malian media outlets experience difficulties stemming from a lack of professionalism and financial insecurity, which threatens their independence: they survive thanks to annual state subsidies. Furthermore, the 2021 crisis and economic instability are making the media increasingly susceptible to political influence (Konaté, 2021).

European Foreign Policy: Building an Identity

EU Global Strategy

In 2016, HR/VP Frederica Mogherini presented the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS), which reinforced the idea of a united and cohesive Europe, but which, nevertheless, “did not enjoy its full potential” (Mogherini, 2016). In response to a world in disarray, the EU's external action revolved around the vision of “principled pragmatism,” combining a realistic assessment of the strategic environment with an idealistic aspiration to make the world a better place (SEAE, 2016a). Moving away from aspirations to become a normative power that could export liberal values, the EU proved more modest in its objectives and more cooperative in its methods (Barbé & Morillas, 2019).

However, in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic triggered several dangerous dynamics in international relations that hampered the progress of the EU, such as the upward spiral of rivalry between the US and China, the increase in economic and social inequalities, or the disruption of societies affected by conflict with Libya, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen (Bargués, 2020; Biscop, 2020).

The Common Security and Defence Policy

The European Community Security Programme (ECSP) has become a crucial tool among the various mechanisms of European foreign policy, and its operations are the most visible manifestations of EU activity in fragile states (Cojocaru & Bursuc, 2020). However, EU efforts regarding its crisis management operations and support mechanisms have faced five main challenges that limit the action of the EU and its Member States (MS): the time lag between events and European responses (Juncos & Blockmans, 2018); cooperation with international partners in conflict prevention and peacebuilding



operations (EEAS, 2017); civil-military coordination (EEAS, 2018); ensuring local ownership (Christie, et al., 2018); and conflict sensitivity¹ (Bøås, et al., 2018).

Despite all these challenges, the CSDP's operations and missions have enabled the EU to develop its capabilities in a number of crucial areas, such as Security Sector Reform (SSR), the rule of law, civilian and military training, maritime security, and border management. From Missiroli's (2017) perspective, these activities are fundamental to crisis management and will likely become increasingly prominent in the coming years.

European action in Mali

Overview of international interventions in Mali

France was the driving force behind the Western and European commitment in Mali (Debuysere & Blockmans, 2019a). Despite all indications that the crisis in Mali in 2012 could develop into a conflict with significant implications for all of Europe, France found itself alone among the European powers in the military intervention in the country (Skierka, 2013), and even "at the international level there were many reservations about military intervention in Mali" (Ribeiro, et al., 2014). Nevertheless, France ended up intervening unilaterally in Mali through Operation Serval in 2013. Operation Serval ended in July 2014 and was followed by its successor, Operation Barkhane (Ministère des Armées, 2021).

Besides France, there were other actors on the ground such as the UN, ECOWAS, the AU, the USA, among others. With this wide range of actors operating in Mali, Debuysere and Blockmans (2019a) identified three challenges that this multilateralism could bring to the EU. Primarily, the lack of coherence in the response between institutional actors has hindered effective conflict management. Secondly, the lack of coherence between the EU and the Member States has affected the effectiveness of the EU's response, particularly in terms of budgets, commitment, and the definition of strategic priorities. Finally, the unilateralist tendencies of some actors, which end up limiting the EU's impact, such as France, which quickly launched a unilateral mission in Mali (Operation Serval) shortly after the 2012 coup d'état.

The European approach in Mali: Strategies and Operational Instruments

Over the past decade, the EU has been increasing its support for Mali through various instruments. Within the context of the security-development nexus, the EU has two missions under the CSDP – EUTM Mali and EUCAP Sahel Mali – and multiple financial instruments to support the country's development. Furthermore, as existing challenges in the Sahel region merged with other emerging security threats, several EU foreign policy mechanisms were activated to formulate a political response to the problem

¹ In this article, the sensitivity of the conflict encompasses both spaces between implementation and local reception/perception.



(Gstohl & Lannon, 2014, p. 50). The result emerged at the Foreign Affairs Council in March 2011 with the adoption of the Strategy for the Sahel (ESDS).

Later, the migration issue also became a priority amidst the so-called “migration crisis” that developed in 2015 in European territory, immediately following the significant increase in the number of refugees arriving on European shores (Lucia, 2019). According to Lucia (2019), this was one of the main events that led to a change in Brussels' approach to the Sahel, leading to the creation of the Regional Action Plan (RAP) 2015-2020.

The European Joint Program (JCP) 2020-2024 is the EU's latest strategy for Mali. Joint programming is a process through which the European Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS), and the Member States jointly determine and develop a strategic response for a particular country, in this case Mali, and draft a document containing the strategic guidelines for European action, ideally replacing the bilateral strategies of European countries (Galeazzi et al., 2013). Therefore, the JCP Mali should be understood as a framework for the common objectives that the Member States and European institutions have established as priorities for their development programs in Mali for the period 2020-2024.

Finally, there are the two missions within the framework of the CSDP, already mentioned. One military, EUTM Mali, and the other civilian, EUCAP Sahel Mali. Despite the comprehensive approach, the two CSDP missions operate through different logics and, according to interviews conducted by Eickhoff (2020), there were different interpretations of their work environment and organizational responses.

Respondents to the EUCAP Sahel Mali mission expressed doubts about the Malian government's commitment to the SSR. At the same time, they emphasized that there was significant pressure for the mission to focus on the priorities of the European Member States in the areas of migration and border control and counter-terrorism operations. This follows the same line as Lopez (2017) argued: the Sahel Strategy tended to prioritize the strategic interests of the EU, with potentially negative consequences for the ability of CSDP missions and other European actors to take into account the priorities of the Sahel countries, thus having negative effects on the sense of domestic ownership.

On the EUTM side, respondents emphasized the importance of fulfilling the mandate and only supporting processes that favoured or promoted the Malian parties. “Adherence to Malian priorities” was identified as the main guide for EUTM interactions with the Malian parties, while also enabling them to exercise control over important factors in shared activities such as, for example, the selection of trainees (Eickhoff, 2020).

EU financial assistance to Mali

The EU's financial instruments, established in the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2014-2020, have faced some difficulties regarding coherence and flexibility in responding to the constantly changing international context (Debuysere & Blockmans, 2019b). In an effort to address these difficulties, the EC developed a proposal for a new MFF corresponding to the period 2021-2027, thus establishing the priorities and the overall



budgetary framework for European external action through the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). The proposal aims to bring together nine instruments and funds from the 2014-2020 MFF, as well as the EDF, which is currently outside the MFF (Immenkamp, 2020).

The proposed simplification of the financing architecture for European external action is designed to help the EU respond as effectively as possible to the growing number of increasingly complex, multidimensional and rapidly evolving global challenges (Immenkamp, 2020).

In the context of security and defence, the EU faces a paradoxical situation in its efforts for peace and stabilization abroad. Despite being the largest provider of humanitarian and development aid in the world and a major provider of military training missions (currently with three missions that together mobilize more than 1,000 people), there is a gap in the provision of military aid and equipment directly to third countries so that they can take ownership of their own security (Morcos & Ruy, 2021).

This gap may be filled by the recent adoption of the European Peace Support Facility (EPF), on which Member States reached an agreement at the end of 2020. Initially proposed by former HR/VP Federica Mogherini in 2018, the facility aims to expand the “toolbox” of European external action, allowing the EU to supply military equipment and infrastructure directly to partner countries and to have “more responsibility as a security provider in our region and beyond” (Mogherini, 2018). At the same time, it aims, in a way, to guarantee the permanent availability of funds in order to allow for the rapid and flexible mobilization of European resources (European Commission, 2018b).

In order to carry out a more in-depth analysis of the development of EU financial support, data from 157 funding actions in the period 2011-2019 were compiled, divided among the sectors of the PMESII analysis. From this analysis, it became evident that the priority support sectors for the EU are the military, infrastructure and political sectors – which together represent an allocation of 88.8% of EU funding in this period.

Prospects for European continued presence in Mali – SWOT Analysis

Strengths

The complex nature of the threats facing the EU necessitates a sober response that must itself be complex and comprehensive. This may arguably have been the purpose of the EU Strategic Policy launched in 2016.

Furthermore, as can be seen, since the beginning of the crisis in 2012, the EU has placed the Sahel region, and consequently Mali, in an increasingly prominent position on its foreign policy agenda. The European presence in Mali, notably through CSDP missions and financial and humanitarian support, demonstrates the high degree of commitment of the EU to the stabilization of the Sahel region. Reaching a common strategy for the Sahel region, which identifies the main areas of interest for the entire EU, was a crucial step in projecting European identity in the region.



The new European Joint Program has renewed the European commitment to the stabilization of Mali. Furthermore, the financial instruments available to the EU have enabled continuous and consistent funding to support Mali since the beginning of the crisis in 2012, both in terms of development and security.

In this sense, the EU demonstrates unity and a sense of convergence regarding its actions in Mali. The presence of 11 Member States on the ground, the unprecedented investment, and the fact that the EU faces a significantly complex scenario in several dimensions, make Mali a "good training ground" (European Council, 2016) for European foreign policy.

Weaknesses

The various EU initiatives seem to tend, in a way, towards Brussels' priorities such as terrorism, illicit trafficking, and refugees in particular. In this sense, several authors (Peters, 2018; Cissé, et al., 2017) suggest that there seems to be a lack of clear sensitivity to the conflict, resulting from the development of policies in Brussels with limited consultation with local partners in Mali and government entities. Furthermore, the conflict hinders accurate monitoring of developments in the country.

However, the EU must also recognize that its priorities – notably the fight against terrorism and the increasing migration to European territory – may not necessarily be aligned with the interests of the Malian state and the various segments of the local population. This fact was demonstrated by the investigation carried out by Eickhoff (2020) on missions within the framework of the CSDP, in which the divergences between those that are the priorities for the EU and those of the Malian counterpart hinder the development of the missions.

In this sense, as Bøås et al. (2018) investigated, there is a perspective that Mali is seen as a laboratory for EU crisis response policies. This may suggest that there is limited interest on the part of Member States in developing policies tailored to the Malian context. However, if the intention is to promote a sense of local ownership, the EU should actively seek to work with the ideas and viewpoints of Malians, "despite the different cultures and divergence of values".

Some members do not demonstrate the necessary political will or even deny the use of military means (Simon et al., 2011). From a realistic point of view, it can be argued that this lack of political will arises, on the one hand, from the fact that military missions are very expensive and, on the other hand, from the self-interests of each of the EU Member States, which may be divergent.

Opportunities

The EU's presence in Mali has resulted in a new impetus for European foreign policy. Furthermore, there are other actors operating in the country, so it is important for the EU to strategically position itself as a key partner in Mali's development, as Borrel (2020) points out.



The focus of European action should be on those areas where the EU can make a greater contribution, those where the EU can make a difference. For example, when it comes to renewable energies, the EU possesses the *expertise*, the technology, and the financing capabilities. Sustainable development is the next great economic development (Borrell, 2020), and therefore, not only should the EU seek to share its experience and *know-how* with Mali so that the country develops sustainably, but this will also be an investment that could yield a significant return.

Thus, the European presence in Mali represents an opportunity for the EU to position itself on the international stage as an important and distinct actor in its mode of action. In this sense, the new multiannual framework 2021-2027, which includes the NDCIC and the EPF, reinforces the idea of an EU with greater capacity and flexibility. At the same time, the new EPF can represent a new role for the EU in the international system, since it allows the supply of military equipment directly to third countries, something more in line with what other powers such as the US and Russia, recognized for their *hard power capabilities*, have done to date.

Threats

Some of the constraints on European action arise from factors external to the EU. Mali's internal governance is weakened. On the one hand, it is a country with porous and large borders. On the other hand, the current political crisis hinders dialogue between the EU and the Malian government. Furthermore, the desert to the northwest has created a porous border with Mauritania, the desert to the northeast a porous border with Niger and Burkina Faso, and the mountainous terrain to the north a porous border with Algeria. These porous borders have allowed drug trafficking to proliferate (Raineri & Strazzari, 2015; Rousseau, 2017).

As previously mentioned, armed groups in northern and central Mali resort to drug trafficking to finance their rebellions and, more specifically, the costs of recruitment and armament. Given that the European continent is the largest market for illicit drugs originating from South America, the proximity of northern Mali's borders to southern Europe makes the country an important transit point for narcotics (Rousseau, 2017).

Just as the porous borders of the North allow drug trafficking to flourish into the European continent, they also encourage human trafficking and migration flows. Around 400,000 people have been displaced due to conflict and climate change in Mali. As a result, these people seek refuge anywhere, including Europe.

At the military level, despite efforts to coordinate action through its CSDP, the EU largely assumed a supporting role for France in Mali. Attempts to Europeanize the intervention were compromised by local perceptions of neocolonialism and institutional constraints. The inability to transfer security responsibilities to Malian authorities or regional actors created a vacuum that was progressively filled by non-Western powers, particularly Russia, whose growing presence signals an intensification of geopolitical competition in the Sahel, in a context of growing distrust towards traditional Western actors (Campo, 2025).



At the same time, some tensions between the ruling military junta and the EU, the deteriorating security situation, and suspicions of ongoing human rights violations led to the suspension of EUTM Mali in May 2024 by the EU. Furthermore, the type of actions carried out by European forces raised internal doubts in the Member States (Lebovich, 2021).

Conclusion

As we can see, the EU's presence in Mali has been intensifying over the last decade, emerging as one of the country's main partners in the fight against terrorism, development, the promotion of human rights, and border control management.

Mali faces a complex conflict, where several factors exacerbate its effects. The PMESII analysis carried out, although limited by the lack of current literature on some of the sectors under analysis, allowed us to identify, within those factors, the structuring points of the current conflict in Mali.

The EU then emerged as one of Mali's main partners in managing the crisis in the country. We witnessed an attempt to streamline the European foreign policy process, revealing a sense of unity and coherence among the Member States, a factor strictly necessary for the success of European operations.

Through SWOT analysis, it was possible to observe that the EU, in its strengths, has multiple instruments and strategies for its action in Mali, revealing a united and convergent bloc in supporting Mali in crisis management and the country's development.

Regarding the prospects for opportunities for European involvement in Mali, the creation of new instruments for foreign policy has revealed a renewed impetus for conflict resolution. Thus, the EU intends to establish itself as a relevant actor in crisis management. Finally, the European intervention can serve as a trial run for future European interventions in other crisis scenarios.

There are several constraints to the EU's continued presence in Malian territory. The persistent threats to European security posed by terrorism and mass migration put some pressure on European action. At the same time, European action is limited by the local perception of neocolonialism and institutional constraints that lead to a security vacuum that is progressively filled by non-Western powers, whose presence is synonymous with an intensification of geopolitical competition in the Sahel.

Nevertheless, the EU projects itself onto the international system as a relevant actor in conflict management, through the application of its foreign policy instruments and its commitment to multilateralism. The case of Mali has revealed the potential of its instruments through their application in the highly complex scenario that the country faces. Thus, through its presence in Mali, the EU aims to ensure the stability and security of its immediate neighbourhood and European interests in an increasingly complex and competitive world, while finding new impetus for the European project regarding its common security and defence, towards a more autonomous and global EU. Global policy is achieved through the political commitment of its Member States in participating in



missions and operations, notably Portugal's presence, over the last decade, in missions within the framework of the EU, the UN and multilateral organizations, reflecting the complementary efforts of various organizations to achieve international peace and security.

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