

# The coup in Niger

## Consequences for EU policies in the Sahel

### SUMMARY

Adding to a succession of coups in the Sahel region, the 26 July ousting of Niger's democratically elected President Mohamed Bazoum is already having major consequences in the region and for the credibility of the African Union and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It also challenges the security architecture that the European Union (EU), France, other EU Member States, such as Germany and Italy, and the United States sought to build in the Sahel to fight terrorism. Jihadist attacks were already devastating before the coup, and have risen since. Russia- and Wagner-affiliated media continue to exploit and exacerbate anti-French feeling.

Although deemed risky by several analysts and third countries, ECOWAS is considering military intervention in Niger. The EU supports ECOWAS' efforts to secure a return to constitutional order, but has not taken a position on possible military intervention. The EU has also suspended development and military cooperation with the country, previously considered a stronghold of EU and US counter-terrorism in the Sahel. In addition, the EU is setting up autonomous sanctions against the junta leaders in Niger, while continuing its humanitarian assistance.

Niger is one of the poorest countries on earth, with 40 % of its budget dependent on foreign aid, and one of the most severely hit by climate change and terrorism. The accumulated challenges highlight the need to rethink EU strategy in the Sahel region once more. During its September 2023 plenary meeting, the European Parliament called for a thorough revision of this strategy, while the situation in Niger and the broader Sahel remains volatile. This briefing analyses the situation in Niger up to 25 September 2023.



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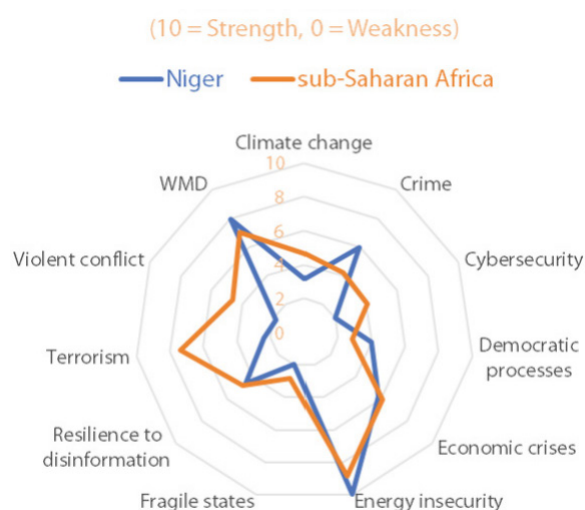
## The coup and its aftermath

On 26 July 2023, part of the Nigerien presidential guard removed President Mohamed Bazoum from office. On 28 July, the head of the presidential guard, General Abdourahamane Tchiani (appointed by [former President Mahamadou Issoufou](#) – 2011-2021) declared himself president of the military grouping taking power, the 'Conseil national pour la sauvegarde de la patrie' (CNSP, 'National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland'). President Bazoum has been [detained](#) since the coup and has not officially resigned. The junta announced its intention to charge him with [high treason](#). Other members of the government were arrested in the following days.

This coup follows other recent [unconstitutional regime changes](#) in the Sahel and West Africa: in Mali (August 2020 and May 2021), Chad (April 2021), Guinea (September 2021), and Burkina Faso (January 2022). The Niger coup preceded another coup, in Gabon (August 2023). The reasons for the coup in Niger are [unclear](#). The actors claimed to have seized power to address the deteriorating [security situation](#); however analysts consider that Niger was [performing better](#) than other Sahel countries in the fight against armed groups. [EU and Western partners](#) considered Niger stable enough to include it as a key partner in the fight against Islamist armed groups. Niger reportedly devoted more than [17%](#) of its budget to the security and defence sector, preventing wide [territorial control](#) by non-state armed groups. In addition, the Nigerien government [contributed](#) to [EU and Member States' effort](#) to [combat illegal migration](#) across the Mediterranean. Niger experienced a relatively fair [democratic transition in 2021](#), with the election of Mohamed Bazoum as President. However, the opposition challenged [the results](#) and an [attempted coup](#) was reportedly thwarted on 31 March 2021, 2 days before President Bazoum took office.

The authors of the July 2023 coup leveraged discontent with the ruling party, accused by Nigeriens of systemic [nepotism and corruption](#) – even though this has also profited [military officers](#). Several analysts consider that the coup is primarily linked to a [power struggle](#) within the Nigerien security forces and President Bazoum's plan to reorganise the presidential guard. Support from the [army's chief of staff](#) after the coup has consolidated General Tchiani's position temporarily, but tensions persist. On 19 August, General Tchiani announced a [3-year transition period](#) before the return to constitutional order.

Figure 1 – Niger: Peace profile 2023



Source: EPRS, [Normandy Index](#), 2023.

Before the July 2023 coup, Niger ranked 119th of 137 countries in the [Normandy Index](#) (which measures resilience to threats to peace and democracy). The coup risks further destabilising the country, on top of [existing issues](#) such as the proliferation of violent jihadist groups, a surge in refugees and internally displaced people, and the already dire effects of climate change and seasonal floods on access to resources. Attacks by [armed groups](#) are on the rise and several humanitarian actors warn sanctions imposed by neighbouring countries and international donors complicate [humanitarian action](#). On 31 August, the junta banned [NGOs, UN and international agencies](#) from working in military operation zones. According to the International Organization for

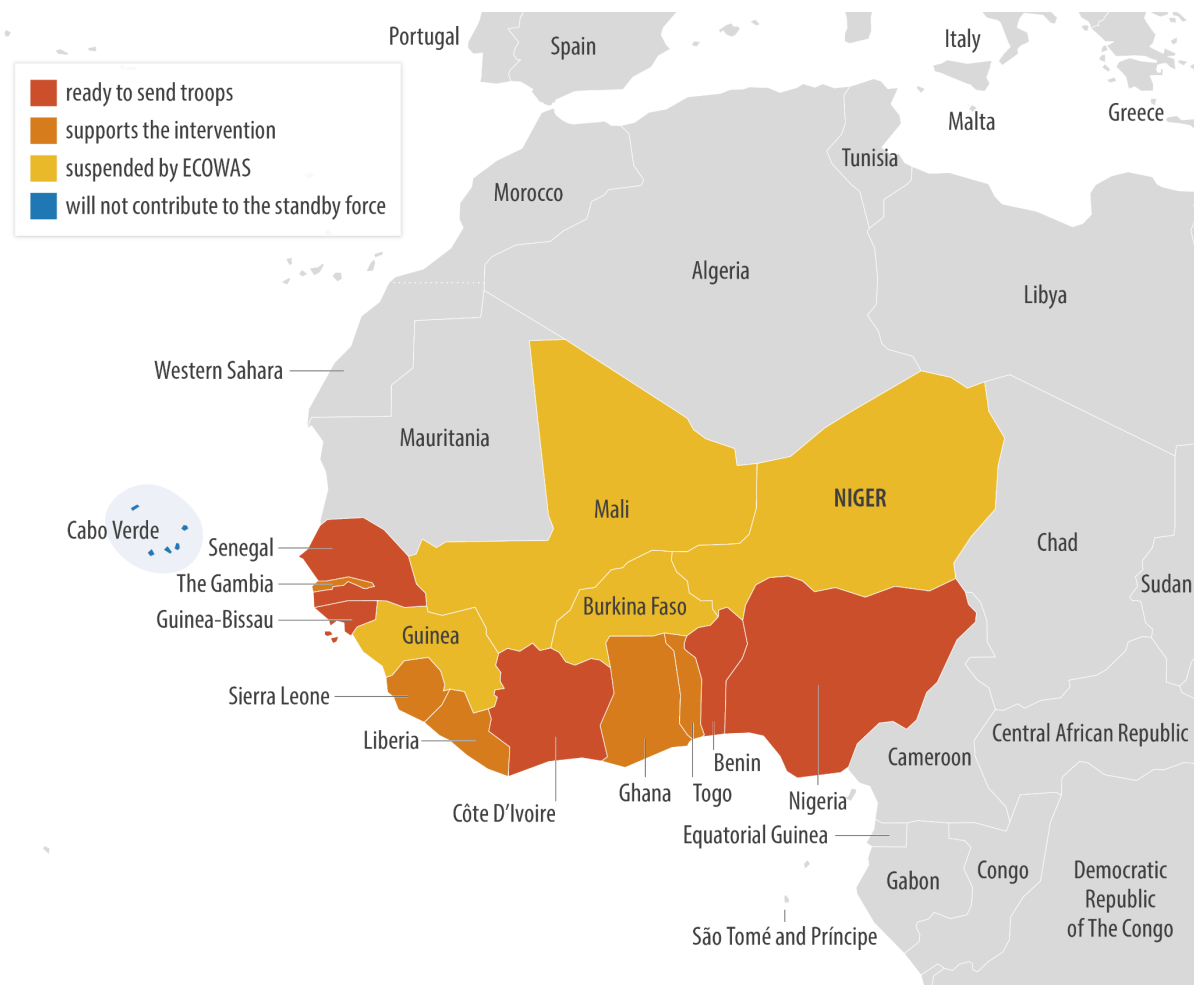
Migration, due to border closures, nearly 7 000 African individuals discouraged from migrating to Europe from [Algeria](#) or [Libya](#) are now stranded in Niger on their return to their countries of origin.

## Regional and international reactions

### ECOWAS and regional institutions

ECOWAS [condemned](#) the coup on 26 July and [decided](#) to close the borders, suspend financial and commercial transactions with Niger, and impose other economic sanctions and travel bans on 30 July. The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) [supports](#) these sanctions. The 30 July statement gave the CNSP 1 week to release President Bazoum, but ECOWAS [did not trigger action](#) by this deadline. On 17 August 2023, ECOWAS declared most of its member states were ready for [military intervention](#) to reinstate President Bazoum. However some of its members (Cabo Verde and the countries under military rule: Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea), will not contribute to the joint forces (see Figure 1). At the same time, ECOWAS expressed the hope that a successful outcome of [diplomatic efforts](#) will avoid military intervention.

Figure 2 – ECOWAS members' possible contribution to a military intervention in Niger



Source: Samy Chahri, EPRS. Data sources: [Al Jazeera](#), 17 August 2023; [RFI](#), 18 August 2023.

In contrast, the **African Union's** (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) [rejected](#) any military intervention against the Nigerien junta. The PSC however [suspended](#) Niger's participation from all AU activities until a return to constitutional order.

On 26 July, the United Nations (UN) Secretary General strongly condemned the [unconstitutional change](#) of government in Niger. Consequently, the [military government envoy](#) was not allowed to speak at the UN General Assembly in September 2023, due to the deposed government's opposition.

## Neighbouring and other Sahel countries

On 1 August, in line with the ECOWAS decision to sanction Niger after the coup, **Nigeria** cut its [electricity supply](#) – representing 70 % of Niger's consumption. Nigeria's president and current ECOWAS chair, Bola Tinubu, is reportedly the [strongest advocate](#) for a return to constitutional order, including through military intervention. However, [Nigerian senators](#) expressed strong reservations about such an intervention, notably on the grounds that it could harm [Niger-Nigeria cooperation](#) on fighting cross-border criminal activities, and further aggravate the insecurity in Northern Nigeria. Should this opposition prevent the most powerful military force in ECOWAS from intervening, the operation would be compromised. On 31 August, President Tinubu reportedly hinted at the possibility of a [9-month transition](#) period (the Nigerien military regime had proposed 3 years, and Algeria – see below – 6 months); ECOWAS did not endorse this position: a [statement](#) on the same day again called for Bazoum to be reinstated immediately.

### Is an ECOWAS military intervention possible?

While ECOWAS has previously intervened militarily to deter coups (most recently in [the Gambia](#), after former president Jammeh contested his defeat in the 2016 presidential election), such an intervention risks being more complicated in Niger, given the current environment: across the region. A number of factors [increase the coup risks](#), such as governance and legitimacy crises, corruption, and fragile economies. Currently 4 of the 15 ECOWAS member states are led by unconstitutional governments (and are suspended, see Figure 1), weakening its [capacity to defend democracy](#).

Several analysts put forward legal and practical reasons why such an intervention could be difficult:

- The legality of such an intervention is questionable: Niger is still an ECOWAS member state, which have [committed not to attack](#) each other; a military intervention in the case of an [unconstitutional change](#) of government should be decided by a two-thirds majority of ECOWAS members or an [authorisation](#) from the UN Security Council;
- In some countries, the approval of Parliament would be requested. Assent cannot be taken for granted;
- Even among the ECOWAS countries supporting this option, only [Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau](#) have expressed their willingness to send troops;
- Nigerien forces are skilled and better equipped than other ECOWAS armies, which could justify General Tchiani's words that such an intervention would not be '[a walk in the park](#)';
- Turning other armies against Nigerien troops could [undermine their common fight](#) against terrorism;
- An intervention could damage regional (and European) economic interests: it could hinder the construction of a [gas pipeline](#) from Nigeria to Algeria through Niger for example, expected by the EU to provide an alternative to Russian gas;
- Few [third countries](#) – except France – support this option; the African Union, the United States and Russia are not in favour.

Main sources: [Strategic Comments, 29:6, i-iii](#); [Lieber Institute West Point](#), blog, 21 August 2023, [The Conversation](#), 8 August 2023.

**Algeria** is [against a military intervention](#) by ECOWAS (of which it is not a member state). President Tebboune fears this would threaten Algeria's security, as it shares a border with Niger. Insecurity in Niger could increase already massive illegal migration to Algeria – Algeria regularly turns back [illegal migrants](#) to Niger under a [security cooperation agreement](#) and has deported several thousand individuals to the Nigerian border, often in dire conditions, putting added strain on humanitarian aid. Diplomatically, Algeria needs to align with its Western partners, but cannot weaken its [relations with Russia](#), its main arms and military training [provider](#). On 29 August, the

Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs announced it had proposed [a 6-month transition plan](#) to the Nigerien junta with the participation of all political forces in the country and under the leadership of an unnamed 'consensual person accepted by all sides of the political spectrum'.

Among the [G5 Sahel](#) group of countries, four are now under a government brought into power under an unconstitutional change: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger. The fifth, **Mauritania**, which had not condemned previous coups, denounced the unconstitutional regime change in Niger on this occasion. However, Mauritania [did not align](#) with ECOWAS (of which it is not a member) on sanctions or military interventions.

General Mahamat Déby Itno, the leader of the transitional government in **Chad** was also brought to power in a military takeover. However, in contrast with the situation in Niger, Mahamat Déby Itno is rather seen positively on the international scene. He represented ECOWAS (of which Chad is not a member) in [opening talks](#) with the new military rulers in Niger on 31 July; he also [met President Bazoum](#). He [received](#) the prime minister appointed by the Nigerien junta on 15 August. Chad is [not in favour](#) of a military intervention, as Niger remains one of its few routes to the sea, and the country is already [challenged](#) by the ongoing conflict in Sudan. After the overthrow of President Bazoum, Chad could become the main [ally](#) of Western and African forces in the fight against terrorism in the region – Chad notably hosts [more than 1 000 French troops](#).

Neighbouring **Mali** and **Burkina Faso**, also under military leadership and suspended from ECOWAS, welcomed the coup and have pledged to [defend Niger](#) against external intervention aimed at restoring President Bazoum to office. The military leaders of the three countries signed a [mutual defense pact](#) on 16 September. Niger's military leaders also requested [support](#) from **Guinea**, another transitional military regime suspended from ECOWAS.

## Non-African partners

### France

As the [former colonial power](#), France is particularly targeted by the coup leaders and their supporters. After the coup, [demonstrations against France](#) took place in several parts of the country. France [evacuated](#) French and EU civilians.

France's economic interests in the country are now [rather limited](#), but some companies are still perceived as a symbol of [hoarding of Niger's wealth](#) by a few. This is notably the case for Orano (formerly Areva), a French company which owns three uranium mines in Niger. Just a few months before the coup, Orano had renewed its [agreement with Niger](#) to exploit the only active of these mines, and has plans to exploit [one of the major uranium deposits](#) in the world by 2028. Although the military regime [did not ban](#) uranium exports, border closures [hamper](#) Orano's logistics, slowing down its activities. Nevertheless, [Orano](#) and [Euratom](#) estimate a loss of uranium supply from Niger – which accounts for less than [20 %](#) of France's nuclear plants' needs – would not limit nuclear power production in France or other EU Member States due to current stock levels.

More significantly, France has a long-established [strong military presence](#) in Niger. Part of the French forces, which left Mali and Burkina Faso after the coups there, are now stationed in Niger. France has nearly [1 500 military staff](#) in Niger, working with the Nigerien army in operations to tackle armed groups. Despite this contribution, the presence of French troops has been [increasingly criticised](#) by Nigerien politicians and citizens, criticism nurtured by [false information](#) circulated by Russian or Wagner-affiliated media. The authors of the coup reject military cooperation with France, arguing that this cooperation [failed](#) to help restore the government's authority over territories under armed groups' control. Consequently, the junta has [demanded the withdrawal](#) of French troops, a demand [supported](#) by many Nigerien pro-junta protesters. Other Member States (including [Belgium](#), [Germany](#) and [Italy](#)) have a (more limited) military presence in Niger, but the military in power has not demanded their withdrawal.

On 5 August, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna declared that France 'supports with firmness and determination the efforts of ECOWAS to defeat this coup attempt', including a military intervention by ECOWAS, a position that other EU Member States [do not share](#). On 29 August, the junta removed the French Ambassador's diplomatic immunity and ordered his [expulsion](#). In response, a military spokesperson stated that French military forces were 'ready to respond to any upturn in tension that could harm French diplomatic and military premises in Niger'. On 9 September, the military regime asserted that France was actually deploying troops in several West African countries (mentioning Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Benin), in preparation for intervention in Niger, coordinated with ECOWAS. In response, President Macron emphasised that France does 'not recognise the legitimacy of the putschists' declarations' and that any redeployment of troops would only occur upon a request from the deposed head of state. According to an analyst, in maintaining troops in Niger, France risks being perceived as an occupying force, reinforcing support for the authors of the coup. Other observers note that the departure of French troops from Niger could create a vacuum for other powers to fill, such as Russia, Türkiye or China, or on the contrary that it could diminish Russia's symbolic appeal as 'anti-France'. France initially [refused](#) to abide by the junta's request for its [ambassador](#) and troops to leave Niger, but has now agreed to recall its ambassador, and [to withdraw](#) French troops from Niger at the end of 2023.

## China and Russia

**China** is concerned about Niger's stability – and provided [military support](#) to past governments to this end – as it has important economic interests in Niger's [oil and uranium](#) resources. The China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) is notably involved in the construction of an [oil pipeline](#) from Niger to the port of Sèmè-Podji in Benin, which before the coup was expected to deliver up to 110 000 barrels a day from January 2024. Some argue that greed over the oil revenues might be one trigger for the coup. China has called for a '[political resolution of the coup](#)' and proposed to mediate talks: a [Chinese representative](#) visited General Tchiani on 17 September.

**Russia's** Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov condemned the coup and called for the [restoration of the constitutional order](#) in Niger. However, Russia is [opposed](#) to external military intervention. In contrast, a social media message posted by the late chief of the Russian private military group Wagner, Yevgeny Prigozhin, welcomed the coup and [offered Wagner's help](#) to the leaders. Despite some [allegations](#), there is [no evidence](#) of direct Russian or Wagner involvement in the coup, according to several analysts.

While President Bazoum continued Niger's [military cooperation with Russia](#), he claimed that he had refused to permit a [Wagner](#) presence on Nigerien territory. Niger's new leadership might seek closer relations with Russia and Wagner, potentially at the [expense of its relationships](#) with the West. The waving of Russian flags or Wagner banners during demonstrations in support of the coup confirms Russia's increasing influence on the country. Reportedly, [social media channels](#) linked to the Russian government significantly increased the number of posts about Niger after the coup, with anti-French narratives in particular. However, positive opinions about Russia – 'seen as the last defender of the [moral values](#) dear to [many] Africans, such as marriage between men and women and respect for religion' – were common in Niger, as in other Sahel countries, well before the coup.

## United States

The coup [threatens](#) the US [strategic partnership](#) with Niger: with 1 100 troops, the United States is the second largest foreign military presence in Niger after France, and Niger is the second largest recipient of US military assistance in sub-Saharan Africa. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken supported the ECOWAS call for the [restoration of constitutional order](#). However, contrary to France, the United States has not backed the option of a military intervention, and favours [diplomatic action](#), including entering talks with the coup leaders. On 7 August, the Acting Deputy Secretary of State, Victoria Nuland, met top military leaders, but could not meet General Tchiani nor President Bazoum. Victoria Nuland noted her call to restore constitutional order was not '[in any way taken up](#)'.

The United States has suspended military assistance to Nigerien forces, but did not withdraw its forces, nor was it asked to do so by the new military leaders. The United States continues to collect information on militant targets via drone – an operation that 'would [not directly benefit the junta](#)' according to one former US official – but has [suspended counterterrorism operations](#). This [approach](#), expected notably to contain [Russian influence](#) in the region, may be reconsidered if the ECOWAS intervention takes place, or if the security of US Staff is threatened by the arrival of numerous Wagner fighters to reinforce the military leaders.

## Consequences for EU strategy in the Sahel and beyond

The EU launched its current [integrated strategy in the Sahel](#) in April 2021. It revised a 2011 strategy with a view to shift from a mainly military approach towards stronger [action at political level](#), focusing on governance mechanisms, human rights, and collaboration with civil society and local authorities, while maintaining security cooperation with states in the region. Despite the EU '[stabilisation mantra](#)', the succession of recent coups in the Sahel makes it difficult to qualify the strategy as successful. For the former French diplomat Gérard Araud, the recent coup in Niger illustrates the [EU's failure](#) in the region. In his view, the French Barkhane military operation failed to put an end to jihadist terror, and even (not directly and not voluntarily) strengthened the jihadists; other EU countries that have troops and/or have invested in the Sahel (including Germany, Italy, Spain and Belgium) should also reassess their own presence and strategy in the region. While sharing the view that there is a lack of coherence and coordination of Member States' policies in the region, Nathalie Loiseau, (Renew, France), Chair of the European Parliament's subcommittee on security and defence (SEDE), considers that 'African coups are first and foremost the [Africans' concern](#), and therefore their failure'.

The domino effect of the coups in the Sahel region – and Central Africa after the [Gabon](#) coup – calls for a [rethinking of the EU approach](#) in the Sahel, and in the entire African continent. The first elements of such a possible realignment have not been proposed however in the first EU decisions taken after the coup in Niger. The statements made by the High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP) Josep Borrell express EU support for ECOWAS decisions, suspension of budgetary support (meaning suspension of most of the development aid), suspension of military cooperation, and the continued provision of humanitarian aid. The EU is also considering individual sanctions for the authors of the coup.

## Support for ECOWAS

On [29 July](#), HR/VP Borrell declared that the EU: 'did not recognise and will not recognise the authorities resulting from the putsch; called for the full and immediate restoration of the constitutional order; fully associated itself with the declarations of ECOWAS and its upcoming decisions, including the adoption of sanctions; and suspended with immediate effect budget support and all security cooperation activities'. On [12 August](#), the HR/VP stated that the EU reiterated its support for ECOWAS' decisions and its willingness to continue to seek a diplomatic solution to the crisis, while noting the mobilisation of the ECOWAS standby force; and that the EU will continue to provide humanitarian assistance.

On [30 August](#), in his press remarks just after the informal Council in Toledo with Defence Ministers, the HR/VP declared: 'The ministers reiterated our will to support African solutions to African problems (...). We are moving forward with an autonomous sanctions regime to take measures against the putschists (...). We will support ECOWAS accordingly with their requests at any circumstances, depending on what the requests are in concrete terms (...)'. As concerns the possible ECOWAS military intervention, the HR/VP did not '[disregard the possibility](#)' that the EU could finance the ECOWAS standby force. However among the [Member States](#), only France has expressed [support](#) for a possible military intervention by ECOWAS.

## Suspension of EU budget support

The cornerstone of the current EU-Niger bilateral development cooperation is the multi-annual indicative programme Niger-EU ([MIP 2021-2027](#)) adopted in December 2021.<sup>1</sup> The Niger-EU MIP secures a financial indicative allocation of €503 million for 2021-2024, split between three priority sectors: (i) governance (including management of migration and displacement, peace, security and human rights, and crisis anticipation and management), with €192 million, accounting for 38 % of the total allocation; (ii) education and professional training, with €99 million, or 20 %; and (iii) growth in a green economy, with €198 million, or 39 % of the total.

Almost 60 % of the total of €503 million, €300 million, was already signed as budget support with the Bazoum government, in the form of cooperation projects, during Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen's visit to Niamey in March 2022. On [29 March 2022](#), she launched the joint priorities of the Niger-EU partnership (with the above-mentioned €300 million from the NDICI-Global Europe Instrument). These are: to support stability and security in Niger and the region, and to develop human capital as well as sustainable, inclusive and digital growth. Following-up on the sixth EU- AU summit, the Commissioner travelled to Niger, Ivory Coast and Ghana to enhance, under the [Global Gateway](#) strategy, the EU's partnership with these three key regional partners.

The Niger-EU MIP set up two [Team Europe Initiatives](#) (TEIs).<sup>2</sup> These TEIs are 'Governance, peace, rights' for priority sector 1 and 'Niger Future Generations' for priority sectors 2 and 3. The entire initial envelope of €503 million of the MIP was meant to contribute to the implementation of the two TEIs. This indicative EU contribution to the TEIs was subject to confirmation of significant indicative contributions from partners in the European Team and other partners (the Commission finalised the two TEIs at the start of 2021, when all contributions from Member States, third countries and international organisations participating into the two TEIs were not yet confirmed). The MIP stipulates that, in the absence of such confirmation, the indicative EU contribution may be redirected in accordance with the priority areas and allocations of the MIP. The obligation of the EU and of its Member States to coordinate their development policies following Commission initiatives, in accordance with [Article 210 TFEU](#), still applies.

The seven Member States which were present in Niger at the finalisation stage of the two TEIs (and of the MIP itself) contributed to these TEIs. Among those Member States, France provided, by far, the biggest indicative contribution (€545 million), an amount close to the EU total contribution itself (€589 million, including the EU humanitarian contribution from the Commission Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO)), followed by Germany (€248 million), Italy (€229 million), Luxembourg (€114 million), the Netherlands (€100 million), Belgium (€72 million) and Spain (€51 million). However the main two contributors to the two TEIs in Niger are the World Bank (€1 862 million) and the US (€680 million). In its annex on the TEIs, the [MIP](#) mentions an EU allocation of €292 million for the TEI 'Governance, peace, rights' (priority sector 1), i.e. €100 million more than the amount for priority sector 1 in the MIP's own indicative budget.<sup>3</sup> [Twenty days before the coup](#), the HR/VP visited Niger (Niamey, Agadez, Gouro Banda), to strengthen the bilateral partnership and discuss Niger's socio-economic development, the situation in the Sahel region, migration, and the two CSDP missions – EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUMPM Niger. The HR/VP participated in the inauguration of the [Gouro Banda solar power plant](#), a French-led part of the TEI 'Niger Future Generations', aimed at providing 30 MW of electricity to half a million Nigeriens. The extent to which, and how precisely, the contributions to the two TEIs will be suspended in reaction to the coup in Niger is difficult to predict, as it will also depend on decisions to be taken by non-EU contributors to the TEIs (third countries such as the United States or international organisations, such as the World Bank).



## Suspension of all EU-Niger security cooperation activities

The suspension of all EU-Niger security cooperation activities entails the suspension of the two EU CSDP missions in Niger, the civilian mission EUCAP Sahel Niger and the military mission EUMPM Niger. It also affects the European Peace Facility (EPF) funds.

Established in 2012, the [EUCAP Sahel Niger](#) mission is a civilian 'capacity' mission aimed at strengthening Niger's internal security sector and its capacities in the fight against security threats. Ongoing EUCAP Sahel mission's projects were suspended after the coup.

Established in December 2022, the [EU Military Partnership Mission in Niger \(EUMPM Niger\)](#) is a military mission meant to help the Nigerien army fight the terrorist threats and protect the population. The EUMPM Niger was expected to be run in coordination with EUCAP Sahel Niger. EUMPM Niger suspended its main activities following the military coup; this suspension should concern the [three assistance measures](#) decided on 17 March 2023 (€40 million, in conjunction with the mission), and on 8 June 2023 (two measures for a total of €5 million) under the EPF to equip the Nigerien forces, and a EPF contribution (€27.3 million) to the common costs of the mission, set out in Council Decision of [12 December 2022](#) establishing the mission. In the [budget for EPF-funded assistance measures for 2023](#), as amended by budget 2/2023 of 5 July 2023, the service for Foreign Policy Instrument (FPI),<sup>4</sup> mentions the following amounts for Title 61 (support for the Nigerien Armed Forces): out of commitment appropriations of €45 million (corresponding to the March and June 2023 assistance measures), the payment appropriations are set at €31 million. At the same time, the EU is likely to decide an EPF-funded assistance measure of €11 million for the armed forces of neighbouring Benin, to help them fight terrorism by strengthening intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities and aerial surveillance in the north of the country (Kourou Koulou area).<sup>5</sup>

EU Member States are likely to reassess EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUMPM Niger, whose mandates respectively expire on 30 September 2024 and 12 December 2025, in light of the recent events in Niger and in the broader Sahel. Their assessment should feed into the new EU-Africa strategic approach that European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said should be taken forward at the next EU-AU summit (see 'The need to rethink EU strategy' below).

## Continued EU humanitarian assistance and possible EU autonomous sanctions

On 1 September 2023 in Dakar, [UN regional agencies](#) declared that 3.3 million people in Niger (13 % of the total population) were severely food insecure and that over 7 million people (28 % of the population) were at risk of severe food insecurity due to price hikes and loss of livelihood triggered by the ongoing political crisis. The UN also called on all stakeholders to facilitate the safe and unimpeded movement of humanitarian personnel and warned against any suspension or interruption of donor funding, in a country where 4.3 million people (mostly women and children) need urgent humanitarian assistance. In a non-paper circulated at the August 2023 informal meeting of EU defence ministers in Toledo, the European External Action Service (EEAS) [suggested](#) an [autonomous EU sanctions regime](#). This sanctions regime would be based on criteria targeting '[natural and legal persons](#) being responsible for, or providing support to or having engaged directly or indirectly in actions or policies that undermine democracy and the rule of law in Niger', and officials who 'obstruct or undermine efforts to restore the constitutional order'. The EEAS also suggested a possible first general framework of sanctions without listing names, where names might be added afterwards. It proposed a humanitarian exception in any future sanctions regime, to avoid the unintended consequences of sanctions for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. This has also been requested by most of the local and international humanitarian agencies working in Niger.

The European Commission's DG ECHO has so far allocated [€36.6 million](#) in 2023 to the humanitarian response in Niger, assisting those affected by conflict, natural disasters, and food insecurity. On 23 January 2023, DG ECHO indicated initial humanitarian funding to Niger for 2023 of [€25 million](#); this amount was €49.7 million in 2022.

## Need to rethink EU strategy

At a 30 August [press conference](#), a journalist concerned about EU-trained, equipped and financially supported Nigerien army's backing for the coup, asked about a possible revival of the suspended EUMPM Niger. The HR/VP replied 'For the time being, we have not gotten any specific request (...) All the military support that was scheduled using the resources of the EPF was committed but was not delivered. We have stopped it, obviously (...)'. On EUMPM Niger, the HR/VP declared: '[Out of] the bulk of resources that were allocated [from] the EPF [to the EUMPM] – I think it was more than €70 million – nothing has been delivered (...)'.

On 30 August 2023, the European Parliament's Committee for External Affairs (AFET) and Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE), in association with the Delegation to the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, held an [exchange of views](#) on the situation in Niger with the head of the EEAS West Africa division. According to the EEAS representative, the most difficult potential issue facing the EU would be to taking a decision regarding financial support for any potential ECOWAS military intervention in Niger. He acknowledged that a review of the EU Sahel strategy should follow an analysis of the situation, in particular to discover why the EU has such a poor image in the Sahel countries.

On 31 August, in his [press remarks](#) ahead of the informal Council with Foreign Affairs Ministers in Toledo, the HR/VP declared that this meeting would be 'an occasion for us to review our African policy'. In his Press remarks at the [press conference](#) closing the summit on the same day, he noted that African solutions should address African problems and that Ministers had also studied the situation of the Gulf of Guinea countries facing a growing jihadist terrorist threat.

A possible track to improve the EU Sahel strategy could be strengthening partnerships with local civil society organisations (CSOs). In a March 2023 [report](#), Goxho and Diallo observe that EU's funding mechanisms often exclude Sahel CSOs, particularly small ones, from access to EU funding. This is due to the EU's almost exclusive reliance either on budget support or on established international organisations or NGOs (or big local CSOs), which are already the EU's usual contractors, or due to the complexity of tender processing and the heavy bureaucratic burden. Goxho and Diallo note, for instance, that despite strong CSO-friendly language from EU officials, only two Nigerien CSOs received direct funding from the EU for implementing projects between 2019 and 2022. According to the report, this practice excludes Sahel civil society from decisions about the future of its region and fails to foster better governance and address the needs of the communities targeted.

A revision of EU regional strategies in Africa, notably in lowering cooperation with unconstitutional regimes, might prove difficult. Niger in particular had received investment as a stronghold against terrorism. However, the coup has shifted priorities, notably because Niger's forces are now [braced for an ECOWAS military intervention](#). Niger also strengthened its policy to combat [irregular migration](#) with EU support, as part of the EU's [new partnership with third countries](#) (2016). The military regime might [challenge this cooperation](#) or negotiate its continuation as [leverage](#) against sanctions. Niger's situation, at the crossroads of several migration routes, makes it a difficult [migration management partner](#) to circumvent.

In her [State of the Union address](#) on 13 September 2023, European Commission President von der Leyen made it clear the EU does not intend to withdraw from the field, but to rethink its strategic presence in the region, and in Africa at large:

*'The succession of military coups will make the [Sahel] region more unstable for years ahead. Russia is both influencing and benefiting from the chaos. And the region has become fertile ground for the rise in terrorism. This is of direct concern for Europe – for our security and prosperity. So we need to*

*show the same unity of purpose towards Africa as we have shown for Ukraine. We need to focus on cooperation with legitimate governments and regional organisations. And we need to develop a mutually beneficial partnership which focuses on common issues for Europe and Africa. This is why, together with High Representative Borrell, we will work on a new strategic approach to take forward at the next EU-AU Summit.'*

## European Parliament position

With the growing insecurity and the succession of coups in the Sahel region, the European Parliament has recently adopted a growing number of resolutions addressing the security and development problems in the region, generally in line with a triple-nexus approach (security-development-humanitarian action), but also increasingly critical regarding some features of the EU Sahel strategy.

In its [resolution](#) of 18 January 2023 on the implementation of the common security and defence policy – 2022 annual report and highlighting the strategic importance of the Sahel to the EU, Parliament:

- 'expresse[d] deep concern about developments in the Sahel region and the recent coups d'état in the region'. It 'condemned the increasing presence of the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group in the Sahel and other parts of the African continent' and 'expresse[d] similar concern over the increased presence and activity of Islamist terrorist groups';
- 'acknowledge[d] that the various international missions in the Sahel have not yet achieved their primary goal of lasting peace in the Sahel region and that a reflection process on the mandates and roles of international missions and policies is therefore needed.' It 'call[ed] for more joint action and policy coherence between different EU and partner interventions in the Sahel';
- welcomed EPF assistance for the Nigerien armed forces and the establishment of the EUMPM Niger;
- However, it 'regret[ted] the increasing inadequacy of the EU training missions (EUTM) that were intended to meet the security challenges of the Sahel and Central African countries (Mali and the CAR)' and 'call[ed] for a thorough review of the objectives and guiding principles of EUTMs'. Parliament 'consider[ed] that EUTM mandates should be extended to accompanying measures, in order to enable EU advisers on the ground to verify as accurately as possible the extent to which training programmes have been properly implemented and are in line with the operational needs of the local armies'. It 'underline[d] the added value of advisory missions to the mission's command structures'.

In its [resolution](#) of 5 May 2022 on threats to stability, security and democracy in Western and Sahelian Africa, Parliament 'reiterate[d] that in the context of the relocation of [the French] operation Barkhane [from Mali] to Niger, lessons should be learned in order to redesign responses with a greater focus on prevention and a more comprehensive approach to governance, security and development assistance;' and 'recall[ed] that the NDICI-Global Europe does not support the financing of certain operations linked to the military or state security sector'. The Parliament called:

- on the EU to show more solidarity by supporting the region politically and militarily, including through the EPF, with arms training sufficient for the defence and development of and respect for human rights; call[ed] on all EU Member States to live up to their human rights obligations and refrain from arms transfers that could fuel human rights violations in West and Sahelian Africa; (...);
- for a reappraisal of the EU Sahel strategy, notably in view of strengthening the preventive nature of security cooperation in greater West Africa;
- for a new approach to security sector reform and security assistance to be jointly developed with ECOWAS and G5 Sahel;

- for EU Member States' coordination on capacity building, provision of military equipment and training in military and civilian operations; Parliament called for the coordinated maritime presence in the Gulf of Guinea to be reinforced.

The May 2022 resolution also states that, in the absence of a realistic timetable to return to democratic civil government, the EU should question any future cooperation, and cautioned African partners against any cooperation with the Wagner Group.

The European Parliament sent several ad hoc delegations to Niger in the framework of its parliamentary diplomacy. The most recent, in November 2022, saw a SEDE subcommittee [delegation](#), led by its Chair, Nathalie Loiseau and included the Chair of the AFET Committee, David McAllister (EPP, Germany). This delegation visited Niamey and Agadez, to assess the role of the EUCAP Sahel Niger, discuss specific security challenges related to growing jihadism and transnational major criminality, and reinforce the importance of EU-Niger security cooperation within the context of regional security concerns and the changing geopolitical realities in the Sahel.

In a [joint statement](#) on 7 September 2023, Ana Rita Sithole (Mozambique) and Carlos Zorrinho (S&D, Portugal), Co-Presidents of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, 'firmly condemn[ed] the coups in Niger and in Gabon and call[ed] for a swift and peaceful return to the constitutional order'.

During the 30 August 2023 AFET committee meeting, no support was expressed for a military operation against the junta in Niger. Members requested [to question the HR/VP on the situation in Niger](#) and the Sahel, which took place during the September 2023 plenary meeting.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The MIPs are the top 'programming documents' of the bilateral development cooperation between the EU and a particular partner country. Technically, they constitute 'implementing acts' under the [NDICI-Global Europe](#) Regulation and are adopted by the European Commission in full concertation with the partner country.
- <sup>2</sup> TEIs pool the resources and expertise of: the EU (including the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; its Member States – including their implementing agencies and public development banks; and third countries or non-EU institutions).
- <sup>3</sup> Niger-EU MIP, financial overview, p. 19-20.
- <sup>4</sup> The FPI is a Commission' service, implementing the 'assistance pillar' of the EPF (EPF-funded assistance measures decided by the Council), while the '[operation pillar](#)' of the EPF, hosted by the Council, implements the Council decisions on the CSDP missions and operations and their EPF-funded common costs.
- <sup>5</sup> Benin deployed 3 000 troops in the Kourou Koualou area under '[Operation Mirador](#)' to face terrorist incursions from Niger and Burkina Faso. On 25 September 2023, the Council adopted an [assistance measure](#) to support the Beninese Armed Forces, notably Operation Mirador (€11.75 million under the EPF).

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