



## EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

The influence of criminal and extremist networks in the Sahel Region has undergone a marked increase over the last few months. It started with the fall of Muammar al-Gaddafi in Libya. Thousands of Tuareg, who had acted as mercenaries in his employ, returned to northern Mali and declared independence for the region. Vast swathes of the country have become lawless, as Bakary Sambe describes in his article. Criminal networks such as al-Qaida in the Islamist Maghreb are terrorising the civilian population.

The crisis in the state of Mali has severe consequences for the entire Sahel Region. This has turned into an uncontrollable area, vulnerable not only to Islamists, but also to extortion as well as the drug trade and human trafficking. As diplomatic initiatives have not succeeded in resolving the conflict to date, the community of West African states ECOWAS has now petitioned the United Nations Security Council for a mandate for an intervention in Mali. A positive decision is expected in the near future. However, seeing that Cheick Modibo Diarra, head of the transitional government, was deposed by the military on 10 December, it is unclear whether Mali itself is still supporting military intervention. While Diarra was in favour, it remains to be seen what the military's stance on the plans is. There is also the question whether the contingents and the equipment of the ECOWAS troops are sufficient to pacify northern Mali by military means. Besides France, Italy, Spain and Poland, Germany has also expressed its willingness to support the African soldiers through training measures.

Those who think that they can rely purely on political negotiations must answer the question as to who would be the negotiating partner in this scenario. The Tuareg form a heterogeneous and unpredictable group. They do not correspond to the romantic image of the proud desert people

riding on camels that is still widespread. Instead, they form a community structured along feudal lines, which is accused of partly making a living from organised crime and whose integration into Mali society would be difficult for the simple reason that they consider themselves white and superior to Mali's black inhabitants. Black Malians who are in the service of the Tuareg suffer the effects of this feeling of superiority.

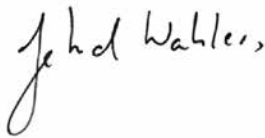
Military action will not be successful in the long run unless it is accompanied by social, economic and political development. Afghanistan taught us that lesson. This would require efforts to help the northern region develop by supporting the education and health care systems there, generally improving the infrastructure and helping to set up a functioning administrative system as well as finding a political solution with respect to the role and position of the Tuareg. While Mali was under democratic government, there was at least some political will towards the development of the Tuareg areas apparent, even if it was rather lukewarm. These positive beginnings must be resumed to prevent further radicalisation.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has been active in the region for many years with its regional programme Political Dialogue West Africa based in Cotonou, Benin, as well as the Country Programme Senegal/Mali based in Dakar. Our activities make us feel connected to the people in the region. We see their problems and the challenges they face, and we want to support them in their efforts to find effective and appropriate strategies. To this end, we organised an event in November in Lomé, Togo, where we brought together parliamentarians, security experts and high-ranking representatives of the military from the countries of the region.

The participants urged better cooperation between the affected countries to find a solution. Although the crisis in Mali endangers the security of the neighbouring states, many of these have their own strategic interests that further complicate this process. The government in Algiers, for instance, is concerned that terrorists and criminals driven into the Sahel Region might return to Algeria after

pacification of the region. Mauritania is also reticent, as it is currently enjoying something of an economic boom thanks to illegal money from the Sahel Region.

If northern Mali were to become a new safe haven for international Islamist terrorism, this would also endanger the security of the European Union in the medium term. Stability in the region is therefore in our European interest. Mali is considerably closer to Europe geographically than Afghanistan.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gerhard Wahlers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'G'.

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