Conflict and war, but most of all overwhelming despair are driving massive numbers of mostly young people from the Middle East and North Africa, Central Africa, the Balkans, Ukraine and Central Asia to leave their homes for Europe in search of safety. What do they need most in order to lead their lives in peace and security? How can opportunities for a meaningful and secure future in their countries of origin be improved? How can the EU – acting in concert with its principles – support these people in their search for freedom, self-determination and well-being? These are the questions addressed in “Escaping the Escape.” The publication features authors from refugee-source countries and experts from Europe who examine the situation in the crisis regions and offer concrete recommendations for actions to be taken in each region.

Countries and regions covered in this publication are: Afghanistan, Algeria and Sahel, the Balkans, Egypt, Eritrea, Gaza, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, Yemen.

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Migration and Refugees in Algeria and the Sahel: Targeting a Win-Win Neighborhood Policy in the Mediterranean

Arslan Chikhaoui

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Migration and Refugees in Algeria and the Sahel

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Note: All figures for 2015 unless otherwise specified. Sources (in alphabetical order): Bertelsmann Transformation Index BTI, CIA World Factbook, Eurostat, UNCTAD, UN Data, World Bank (for details, see "A Note from the Editors").

The Maghreb and Sahel regions continue to be the site of major east-west and north-south migration routes. Both regions suffer from low-intensity conflicts, autocratic rule, terrorist activities and organized crime. The fight against terrorism and organized crime requires the existence of structured international cooperation and the ability to formulate common policies. However, these regions are far from achieving coherence in battling international terrorism – a problem since the early 1990s – and in addressing arms smuggling, which has been a source of friction since the Arab Spring of 2011.

Maghreb states include Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Western Sahara; Sahel states include Algerian Sahara, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal.
At the same time, North Africa is a key location for the production and trafficking of illicit drugs. Morocco, for example, is a major source of cannabis resin, most of which is destined for France or Spain (UNODC 2016). Many of the drugs trafficked to Europe are transported by illegal migrants from the Sahel and the Maghreb, in particular.

This combination of drug trafficking and illegal migrants has become a major concern among both European and Maghreb states. Indeed, the linkages between drug trafficking, organized crime, money laundering, weapon smuggling and terrorism have become apparent. These linkages pose significant security challenges to social order and stability across the Maghreb and Sahel, and to Europe. Close and strong cooperation on both shores of the Mediterranean is the only way to identify, define and resolve these security problems.

There is a drastic demographic imbalance between the two shores of the Mediterranean in terms of population and age. The countries of North Africa are in the midst of a stage two demographic transition marking a shift from high to low mortality and birth rates. By 2025, North Africa’s population is expected to reach 260 million, of which Algeria will account for 48 million inhabitants. In addition, whereas those under the age of 25 account on average for 60 percent of the population in North African countries, this age group accounts for only 20 percent of the population, on average, for France, Italy and Spain (Watkiss, Dowell and Hill 2011).

This demographic imbalance – combined with political instability, waning security and stagnating economies featuring rapidly rising unemployment figures – among many southern Mediterranean states is driving much of the migration toward northern Mediterranean states. Until the southern Mediterranean states feature equally advantageous economic, social and cultural conditions, migration will continue to be a major concern in the Mediterranean region. Among the 6 million North African migrants currently in Europe, more than 3.5 million are Algerians living primarily in France, Germany, Italy and Spain (Cazanciuc 2016).

Migration also entails a psychological dimension that has had worrisome consequences in the past. In many of the destination countries (in this case, southern European states), the influx of migration is believed to pose severe economic and social challenges as well as a cultural threat to their societies. In addition, many perceive in-migration as the most significant threat to their internal security and stability as violent extremist organizations expand their reach. Expressing fears of losing their national identity and stability, organizations and political parties in Europe on the right or far right have called for anti-immigration measures, and certain southern European governments have taken steps in this direction. As migratory pressures from the south have grown, several European countries have also started formulating policies to reduce unwanted in-migration.

Europeans therefore see the issue of migration as a question of control rather than a triple-win opportunity for migrants, their countries of origin and destination countries. It is now widely accepted in Europe that underlying drivers of northward migration (which are mainly socioeconomic) are not only southern Mediterranean concerns, but also European concerns.
Migration and Refugees in Algeria and the Sahel

For destination countries and European states grappling with stage three or four demographic transition, an influx of in-migration in particular can help these societies cope with a deficit of births and/or provide the skilled labor needed for sustainable growth. However, illegal immigration is beyond the wishes of any destination country.

Among European states, one response to the very large waves of in-migration has been to pursue “selective immigration,” which favors more highly skilled and educated migrants from developing countries. However, such policies have created a brain drain and flight of skills from these source countries, with detrimental impact to their development. Overall, the nature of global migration trends means that many countries have now become origin, destination and transit countries witnessing a variety of migration forms simultaneously.

Refugees in Algeria and the Sahel

Since the Arab Spring, Algeria and the Sahel countries have been facing a new paradigm of migration issues in which many of these states are at once source, destination and transit countries. The EU has adopted several security resolutions to protect its borders along the Mediterranean, and these have yielded palpable effects in the countries along the southern Mediterranean shore.

Algeria

Since 1962, when Algeria achieved independence from France, the Algerian diaspora community in France has reached 3 million. This community is deeply rooted in France; many have French citizenship and are dual nationals. Many bilateral agreements based on the Evian Agreement signed in March 1962 frame the principle of freedom of movement. According to the Algerian central bank, remittances from France via bank transfer hover around $2 billion a year (ICMPD 2011: 13). However, according to intelligence estimates, remittances through informal family networks easily exceed an annual $1.5 billion. In total, remittances from Algerian emigrants in France likely reach $4 billion to $5 billion a year and mostly derive from the construction sector. Some of Algeria’s mountainous regions, which are a source area of migrants, have been developed in large part as a result of these remittances.

The Algerian state allows members of its diaspora to return at any time. The government does not have in place a program targeting returning migrants, and does not distinguish legally between these individuals and citizens who have resided continuously in Algeria.

Moreover, Algeria has historically served as a host country for refugees. Following every crisis driven by natural disasters in the Sahara, sub-Saharan Africans have
regularly migrated to southern Algeria. Algeria has hosted Sahrawi refugees on its territory since 1975, and there have been movements of refugees over many years from crises in Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, more recently, Mali. According to the Algerian Ministry of National Solidarity, Family and Women’s Affairs, there are at least 300,000 foreigners living in Algeria, more than 80 percent of whom are refugees, asylum-seekers and other displaced people, including migrants without status (AMNSFW 2016).

Although Algeria has adopted strict migration regulations in recent years, the country has recently demonstrated more flexibility in order to meet the basic requirements of people displaced by the political crises in North Africa and the Sahel. These flexible rules of admission for foreign populations also mean that the authorities need to control 1,200 kilometers of Mediterranean coastline as well as 6,000 kilometers of land borders without assistance, as Frontex only assists the countries to the north. Having closed the land borders with Morocco in 1994 in response to Morocco’s unilateral decision to require an entry visa for Algerian citizens seeking to travel to Morocco, Algeria has also fortified its borders with Libya (December 2012), Mali (January 2013) and Tunisia (August 2013). These efforts to restrict and monitor border crossings are a direct result of increasing cross-border trafficking, terrorism and transnational crime that are rooted in a variety of crises across the region.

Algeria’s policy toward refugees and illegal migrants is to support their return home by providing financial aid and chartered flights to their countries of origin. However, to date, Algerian authorities have refused to set up EU-funded refugee intake centers on Algerian territory in an effort to stem the flow of migrants headed for the northern shore of the Mediterranean. Algeria believes this EU proposal contradicts human rights principles, and sees it as embodying a double standard. The Algerian government therefore calls for greater flexibility in the EU’s mobility policy and strong sustainable aid to be directed at the Sahel and sub-Saharan countries. Expanding the EU’s MEDA program, a key financial instrument of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, to include sub-Saharan countries could help tackle the challenges associated with containing migration movements.

**Western Sahara**

Located in northwestern Africa, the Western Sahara is a disputed territory that the United Nations officially refers to as a “non-self-governing territory.” With an Atlantic coastline, the territory shares a border to the north with Morocco, to the northeast with Algeria, and to the east and south with Mauritania. This former Spanish colony has sought a definitive legal status since the departure of the Spanish in 1976. The territory is claimed by both Morocco and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, proclaimed by the Polisario Front in 1976. A U.N.-mediated cease-
Migration and Refugees in Algeria and the Sahel

Fire in 1991 brought an end to the armed conflict between Morocco and the Polisario Front underway since 1976. Today, the territory is divided by a wall built in the 1980s by Morocco, which occupies 80 percent of the territory. The remaining 20 percent of the territory is under the control of the Polisario Front. For several years, the United Nations has called for a referendum to determine the territory’s status, but this has been postponed several times. Since 2007, the United Nations has been mediating between representatives of Morocco and the Polisario Front without obtaining any agreement. Whereas Morocco advocates broad self-government that allows for local government under Moroccan sovereignty, the Polisario Front, which is supported by Algeria, calls for self-determination and independence.

Since 1975, several tens of thousands of people have left Western Sahara to escape the conflict and arrived as refugees in Algeria. Many of these people, currently estimated by Algerian authorities to number more than 165,000, have lived for more than 30 years in camps around the city of Tindouf in southwestern Algeria. According to the UNHCR figures reported by Reuters, there are few income-generating activities available to refugees and camps rely heavily on humanitarian assistance (Bensemra 2016). The UNCHR classifies 90,000 of these refugees as vulnerable.

The Sahel

In the Sahel, poverty, exponential population growth, food and nutrition crises, armed conflicts and violence undermine the lives, assets and future prospects of the population across this region. More than 1 million persons are displaced as a result of conflict. Tackling displacement in the Sahel is critical for both poverty alleviation and stabilization. A development response to forced displacement in the Sahel is the only response and requires a regional approach.

The lives and livelihood of some 20 million people across the Sahel (e.g. Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria) are threatened. Recurrent conflict, violent extremism, erratic weather patterns and epidemics continue to weaken the resilience of households across a region still suffering chronic levels of food insecurity and malnutrition.

According to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (UNOCHA), 23.5 million people at the beginning of 2016 remain food insecure (UNOCHA 2016: 3). Epidemics continue to be a serious concern. In addition to cholera, meningitis, Lassa fever and yellow fever, the Ebola virus has been posing a threat to the Sahel region and has affected Mali and Nigeria.

Beyond the threats of food insecurity, malnutrition and epidemics, low-intensity conflicts in and around the Sahel region have been driving population displacement. According to the International Red Cross, more than 2.5 million people within the Sahel have been displaced since 2011 (ibid.). An escalating conflict in northeastern Nigeria accounts for an estimated 1 million internally displaced peo-
ple. In addition, more than 150,000 Nigerian refugees have fled to neighboring Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The volatile security situation in northern Mali continues to have a devastating impact on civilians. More than 36,762 Malians are internally displaced, and 136,405 Malian refugees remain in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger (IOM 2016).

The crisis in Mali continues to be a source of concern. In addition, a chaotic Libya, an unstable Darfur, and the return to civil war in the Central African Republic have each resulted in spillover effects for the Sahel countries, which already struggle with chronic difficulties.

Since 2014, Mali has grappled with insecurity and political instability. As a result, a large number of Malian refugees are currently residing in remote, arid and underdeveloped areas of neighboring countries (Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger) that are subject to recurring food crises. The ethnic makeup of these Malian refugees is diverse; many are Tuareg, Songhai or Arab, though Hausa, Fula and Bambara number among them as well. Malian refugees are comprised of the following ethnic groups in the following countries: Niger – Tuareg 79 percent, Songhai 12 percent, Arab 2 percent; Burkina Faso – Tuareg 77 percent, Arab 11 percent, Songhai 2 percent; and Mauritania – Arab 54 percent, Tuareg 45 percent (Léon 2016).

Following the clashes in the region of Kidal in May 2014 between the Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA) and the Malian government, refugees in Mauritania’s Mbera camp in particular expressed reticence to go home. In the absence of a guaranteed safe return, many of these refugees fear a lack of security and basic services should they be forced to return to Mali.

In the Lake Chad basin, the violent extremist organization Boko Haram threatens the lives and security of more than 30 million people living in the poorest areas of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. According to NGO observers, as of January 2016, more than 9 million people across these countries are in urgent need of assistance and protection. More than 2.5 million people have been displaced by the Boko Haram threat, of which 2 million are in Nigeria alone and half of whom are children (U.N. News Centre 2016).

Due to the ongoing crisis in the Lake Chad basin, Chad is now the tenth-largest refugee-hosting country in the world with over 800,000 displaced persons, the majority of whom are refugees from other countries or Chadian returnees who have fled from the Central African Republic, Libya, Nigeria and Sudan (UNHCR 2016: 15). By the end of 2015, the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel called on the international community to increase its support in response to the multidimensional humanitarian challenges affecting the country. In December 2015, U.N. agencies and partners also launched the Sahel Humanitarian Response Plan for 2016. The regional plan calls for $1.98 billion in aid slated for basic assistance to the millions in need in nine Sahel countries (UNOCHA 2016). As of May 2016, only 19 percent of the plan’s funding had been secured, according to NGO reports.
Opportunity areas

Effectively addressing challenges in the Maghreb and Sahel, such as illegal migration, will require coordinated efforts among the countries affected. Regional organizations should therefore provide funds to member states that demonstrate commitment to measures such as police cooperation and the safe return of deportees by signing memoranda of understanding. The EU will also have to pursue similar agreements and ensure that they are sufficiently resourced. In return for such agreements, the European Union should support economic development in partner countries by providing expertise, advice and funding for infrastructure, and continue to promote security, democratization and political stability.

The EU needs a more flexible framework to manage migration. Yet EU member states are struggling to align national attitudes with the spirit of mechanisms such as the Dublin Agreement. As a result, many member states have drawn upon the principle of subsidiarity and, in some cases, disregarded EU rules.

For EU member states, cooperation and the harmonization of policies within the EU are key to managing migration flows effectively. Current efforts generally aim to ensure a balance between fighting illegal migration and establishing a migration policy able to channel and control systems of entry quotas at borders.

And while the EU aims to battle illegal migration and stop human trafficking, this should not involve demonizing and stigmatizing foreigners. Yet, too often, legal and regulatory immigration processes in EU member states do exactly that. Even worse, extremist parties and some media outlets instrumentalize migration and refugee issues, thereby fueling racial tensions.

Clearly, it is not the goal of member states to castigate or exclude foreigners, but rather to ensure and protect human rights and freedoms. Aiming to build solidarity between the rich North and the disadvantaged South, the EU has a vested interest in improving its capacity to effectively counter organized crime and others involved with human trafficking, as well as violent extremist organizations.

Most EU member states are aware of the fact that they are countries of immigration. Given its demographics, the EU also knows that it needs and will continue to need foreigners. Economic sectors across the EU are in desperate need of skilled labor, a situation destined to become more urgent as populations in Europe age and birthrates decline.

NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), which allows for a direct line of communication between Algeria and NATO without EU intermediaries, provides an opportunity for effective cooperation on migration issues in the Mediterranean region. Since 2011, for example, Algeria has been able to work closely with NATO on human-trafficking issues without provoking controversy. Most observers agree that the MD forum is well positioned to foster further cooperation with NATO patrol vessels at sea should NATO be called upon. Enhanced NATO-Algerian naval cooperation is needed in order to handle sudden future shifts in migration patterns or favored routes across the Mediterranean. Today, the western route into Europe through Spain and Portugal
is quieter than eastern and central routes, though this could change in the near future. By developing new mechanisms for naval interoperability and institutional cooperation, NATO and Algeria will be better prepared and able to respond to any future crisis. Furthermore, within the framework of the MD Work Programme, NATO experts could provide a train-the-trainers program that focuses on tackling organized crime activities, such as arms smuggling and drug and human trafficking.

Algeria has refused Western offers to establish military bases in or fly drones over the Sahara in efforts to combat violent extremist organizations. A 2010 plan for a cross-border anti-terrorist unit that would be comprised of forces from all the Sahel states and patrol Algeria’s interior has not been realized to date. However, if realized, and if the unit were to be based (as planned) in the southern Algerian province of Tamanrasset, it could prove effective in defusing trafficking networks long before migrants reached the Mediterranean. In addition, Algeria and NATO signed an Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP) in October 2014 that marks the start of a formal legal framework outlining bilateral security cooperation.

**Conclusion**

In the long run, the rule of law and democracy are central elements of political and economic stability throughout the Maghreb and Sahel regions. At the same time, countries in these regions need more and improved means to work together toward the objective of building stronger regional economic ties.

The challenge for the European Union is to boost efforts already underway to open up national economies and thereby enable productive intra-regional trade, investment, transfers of knowledge, innovation and technology-sharing. This will deepen the collaborative process and ensure that existing regional economic institutions are truly effective instruments for region-wide economic development. New institutions can be created as needed.

A strong win-win neighborhood policy is needed to feasibly address security challenges in the Maghreb, Sahel and sub-Saharan, and to bring about social order and stability to the countries in these regions. Indeed, establishing a peaceful “sub-Mediterranean” region in which the Maghreb and Sahel states form an integrated geopolitical and economic entity is required to contain illegal migration and to tackle all kinds of trafficking and emerging threats.

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