



# SECURITY DYNAMICS IN NORTH AFRICA AND SAHEL REGION IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2021

*Crăişor-Constantin IONIŢĂ, PhD\**

*The first half of 2021 was marked by the continued spread of the Sars-CoV-2 virus throughout the African continent, by the desperate attempts of the UN and regional powers to implement the Ceasefire Agreement in Libya and keep security situation under control, and increasing the number of illegal migrants to Europe.*

*The COVID-19 pandemic did not reduce terrorist acts in the Sahel region, nor did it stop the wave of small immigrant boats to Spain and Italy from Africa. But the coronavirus pandemic has led to the closure of many African borders, bringing the economies of those countries to the brink of bankruptcy and deteriorating the humanitarian situation in North Africa and the Sahel region.*

*The international community has difficulty monitoring the situation in the area, especially the humanitarian crisis and illegal migration, which is seriously affecting security in its vicinity.*

**Keywords:** *North Africa; Sahel region; Civil War; interim Government of National Union; transborder terrorism; illegal migration; ECOWAS; Barkhane Operation; Frontex.*

## Introduction

The multiple conflicts and terrorist activities that took place during 2020 and continue to take place this year throughout Africa have exacerbated the coronavirus pandemic in the region, leading to the emergence of a so-called African virus strain

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*\* Colonel (Ret.) Crăişor-Constantin IONIŢĂ, PhD, is Scientific Researcher at the Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies (CDSSS) within “Carol I” National Defence University, Bucharest, Romania. E-mail: ionita.constantin@unap.ro*



and making it difficult to control the implementation of anti-COVID-19 measures at the African Government's level. The emergence and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the areas of bloody conflicts and crisis has increased insecurity, forcing a lot of civilians to take refuge in much stable areas and significantly hampering sanctions, counterterrorism or humanitarian operations. There have been human casualties and destruction of humanitarian facilities, especially in Mozambique, Burkina Faso, Congo and Somalia. There is also a risk of a recurrence of famine in Northeastern Nigeria, parts of the Sahel region and South Sudan.

The end of 2020 was marked, in North Africa and the Sahel region, by the signing, on 23 October 2020, of a fragile Ceasefire Agreement between Libyan warring parties and their foreign sponsors, followed by the establishment of an interim government to organize the first free and democratic elections in Libya, in December 2021. The biggest challenge for this interim Libyan Government of National Unity is the implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement, especially by taking all measures to remove foreign mercenaries who fought on one side or the other, as well as the development of a plan to unite the different parts of Libya under the leadership of one party. To date, the UN embargo on illegal arms trafficking in the area has proved ineffective, with diplomats around the world associating the assassination of Chadian President Idriss Deby on April 19, 2021, with a group of trained and armed rebels in Libya. The great fear of these diplomats is that what happened in Chad could be repeated in the Sahel province and then spread to the Horn of Africa, Sudan, South Sudan, Niger, Ethiopia, the Central African Republic and even Mozambique, if not undertaken effective actions to counter that threat.<sup>1</sup>

Also, the middle of 2020 was marked by a military coup in Mali, resulting in the removal from power of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita by a military junta led by Colonel Assimi Goita. Subsequently, under pressure from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a transitional government was set up towards the end of last year, led by interim President colonel (ret.) Bah N'Daw, with Colonel Goita as Vice President. But, in March 2021, this Government was also overthrown, the interim President and Prime-minister being arrested, and colonel Goita took over the Government again, being elected interim President of the country on June 7, 2021. In return, at the ECOWAS Summit on May 29, 2021, African heads of state and government decided to suspend Mali's membership from their regional organisation. The same measure was taken by the African Union (AU), and France suspended its military cooperation with the Malian junta.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edith M. Lederer, "UN focuses on demand to repatriate foreign fighters in Libya", *Associated Press News*, 30 April 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-libya-europe-africa-middle-east-5746eb32c1f3ac676d8f37dacec3213c>, accessed on 15.05.2021.

<sup>2</sup> Baba Ahmed, "Mali junta leader sworn in as president after 2nd coup", *Associated Press News*, 7 June 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/africa-mali-government-and-politics->



The security situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) continues to deteriorate, being characterised by repeated violations of the Peace Agreement signed in February 2019 between rebel groups and the Central African Government, through violations of human rights and International Humanitarian Law – illegal taxation, sexual abuse, all kinds of robbery, illegal arms trafficking and smuggling of foreign fighters, weapons and natural resources across the border. Even if a new President was elected in December last year, in the person of Faustin Archange Touadera, the armed groups have continued to control most of the national territory, while the Armed Forces, trained by Russian military advisers, attacked, on May 30, 2021, a border checkpoint with Chad, killing six Chadian soldiers and creating tensions with the neighbouring country. During the clashes, three Russian instructors died because of a mine explosion.<sup>3</sup> As a result of the crisis, the Central African Prime-Minister resigned and France suspended its military and financial aid to the country.

A special situation is the humanitarian crisis in the Tigray area, where clashes with Ethiopian military forces continue, directed mainly against the civilian population and where, until March 2021, international and regional humanitarian organisations did not have access. Although the UN has recently managed to provide the food and medicine supplies for the internal displaced persons (IDP) in the four emergency areas, the humanitarian situation continues to worsen with the intervention of Eritrea in the conflict, which has led to food insecurity, starvation of local population and the increase of diseases, including the SARS-CoV-2 virus. UN officials draw attention to the growing risk of famine in Tigray and parts of northern Ethiopia for hundreds of thousands of people as a result of humanitarian convoys being retained or delayed from providing aid to the local population and the transformation of food and medicine use into warfare tactics. Both the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments accuse the Biden administration of continuing support for the Tigray People's Liberation Movement (TPLF), considered by them a terrorist organisation, as well as intimidation and interference in their internal affairs, by restricting the visas of officials from the two countries.

Although fighting in Sudan stopped last year because of the danger of contamination with COVID-19, recent attempts to resume peace talks between the Sudanese interim Government and the leaders of major rebel groups, under the patronage of South Sudanese President Salva Kiir, have failed and there are no positive prospects in this endeavor. Thus, in early June 2021, tribal fighting have resumed between Taaisha and Falata in the Darfur region of Western Sudan,

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60afe11f3629bc3440b4b2dab14e476a, accessed on 09.08.2021.

<sup>3</sup> Edith M. Lederer, "UN strongly condemned violations in Central African Republic", *Associated Press News*, 8 June 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-europe-africa-central-africa-central-african-republic-6419b744546276d77498bc5a99b0614e>, accessed on 11.06.2021.



resulting in 36 dead and 32 wounded.<sup>4</sup>

The situation in the Blue Nile area is no longer relaxed, after Ethiopian authorities start to fill up the Great Dam of the Renaissance with water, thus triggering a political and security crisis with Egypt and Sudan. To prevent the Ethiopian Government from filling the dam's basin, Egyptian diplomacy is seeking to restore damaged relations with Djibouti to lure it to its side in the regional water dispute. They have already managed to draw the attention of the US President, Joe Biden, to a possible military conflict in the area as a result of the competition for water and to request the intervention of the international community to sign an agreement for the sharing of Blue Nile water.

The May eruption of Nyiragongo volcano near the Eastern city of Goma, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, also worsened the precarious humanitarian and medical situation in the area, killing 32 locals and destroying more than 500 homes. The ensuing lava waves forced 25,000 people to relocate to the Northwestern city of Sake, and about 5,000 civilians emigrated to Rwanda.<sup>5</sup> After the first decade of June, these emigrants began to return to their locations, hoping to find their homes intact.

But the most disastrous situation in North Africa and the Sahel region is the illegal migration phenomenon, especially the desperate attempts of African emigrants to move internally to more stable African states or to cross the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean to territories/islands belonging to European states. Currently, the most attractive areas for emigration are the Spanish enclave Ceuta, in North Africa, and the island of Lampedusa, in Southern Italy.

### **1. Implementing the Ceasefire Agreement in Libya**

February 2021 was marked by the holding of elections in Libya, under the auspices of the UN and an interim Government of National Union started to work at the beginning of March, led by Abdul Hamid Dbeibah. This Government has two major goals on their agenda – the implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement signed by the belligerents in October 2020 and the holding of general elections on December 24, 2021.

With regard to the ceasefire agreement, one of its essential provisions stipulates the withdrawal of all foreign fighters and mercenaries from Libya within 90 days,

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<sup>4</sup> Samy Magdy, "Report: Tribal clashes in Sudan's Darfur kill at least 36", *Associated Press News*, 7 June 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-africa-sudan-456165e4b100419fa2308be478fa26ba>, accessed on 11.06.2021.

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Yves Kamale, "Death toll from Conge volcano eruption rises to at least 32", *Associated Press News*, 25 May 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/world-news-africa-science-health-coronavirus-pandemic-74ef0b8ec0c838933ab625d80e538752>, accessed on 28.05.2021.



but does not clearly specify the date from which this term is calculated – starting with the establishment of the interim Government or after the general elections. As a result, the latest UN report states that there has been no reduction in the number of mercenaries, estimated at over 20,000 (Syrians, Russians, Sudanese and Chadians), whilst violations of the UN arms embargo on Libya continue to take place. Moreover, it is estimated that the number of foreign fighters would have increased, stating that there were, at the end of April, 13,000 Syrians and 11,000 Sudanese in the area.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of the withdrawal of foreign fighters and mercenaries is to allow the future free elected Government to fight terrorism. This desideratum is the basic condition for the reopening of the diplomatic missions of Great Powers in Tripoli, especially of the USA and Italy. To date, several European countries, including France and Greece, have already reopened their embassies in Libya.<sup>7</sup> In early June, Spain also announced the reopening of its embassy in Tripoli, after seven years of severing diplomatic relations between the two countries.<sup>8</sup> This event took place on the occasion of the visit of the Spanish Prime-Minister, Pedro Sánchez, in the Libyan capital, on June 4, 2021.

A report of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), established since 2011, shows that the fortification of some settlements and the construction of defence positions in Central Libya have started, on the key roads between the strategic city of Sirte, the gateway to the great fields oil and port terminals, and the city of Jufra. The report states that “despite the commitments made by the parties, air freight activities continued with flights to various air bases in the Western and Eastern regions of Libya”, and “the data indicate that no reduction in the number of foreign fighters or of their activities in Central Libya has been achieved”<sup>9</sup>. Following the uncertain situation, on 7 April 2021, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres submitted a letter to the Security Council calling for a resolution to speed up the withdrawal of foreign fighters and mercenaries from Libya, and this activity to be monitored by 60 Observers deployed within the UNSMIL Mission.

One of the most difficult tasks of the current interim Libyan Government will be to persuade Turkey to withdraw its military forces and Syrian mercenaries from the

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<sup>6</sup> Noha Elhennawy, “Senior US diplomat in Libya to support interim government”, *Associated Press News*, 18 May 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-libya-africa-joe-biden-ad3786c02e74bbb7b1d922b357afbc51>, accessed on 25.05.2021.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> Noha Elhennawy, “Spain reopens its embassy in Libya after 7 years of closure”, *Associated Press News*, 3 June 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/libya-africa-europe-spain-middle-east-b802474d9e715be8bbf2227c040c3437>, accessed on 09.06.2021.

<sup>9</sup> Edith M. Lederer, “UN chief: Foreign fighters in Libya are violating cease-fire”, *Associated Press News*, 15 May 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-libya-africa-middle-east-f3a758d5ab63f21e71a50ee1c95b9a8c>, accessed on 15.05.2021.



area. The agreements signed by the Turkish Government with the UN-recognized Libyan one (GNA) on military support for loyal forces in Tripoli and the new delimitation of Libyan territorial waters in the Mediterranean Sea, to the detriment of Greece and Cyprus, were based on the hypothesis of a long-term Turkish military presence in the area. In fact, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated, in April 2021, that he had agreed with the Libyan Prime-Minister to maintain the provisions of the controversial Maritime Agreement signed in 2019, in exchange for medical aid of 150,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine and Turkey's management of a pandemic hospital in Tripoli.<sup>10</sup> Turkey's intention is to replace the military presence with a political-economic one, concluding five economic agreements with Libya for the construction of a power plant and the return of Turkish companies in the field of liquid fuel extraction and production.

For its part, Russia is playing on two fronts so as not to acknowledge its active involvement in Libya. On one hand, it continues to maintain the Wagner Group of mercenaries in the area, loyal to Kremlin, and on the other hand it voted the Security Council Resolution of 16 April 2021, on authorising the 60 UN Monitors to support the new UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Libya Ján Kubiš to implement the October 2020 Ceasefire Agreement and streamline the 10-year embargo on illegal arms trafficking.

Italy maintains its interest in reducing the number of illegal immigrants from North Africa and wants to strengthen its military agreement with the Libyan Coast Guard on efforts to block Libyan ports and return immigrants leaving the Libyan coast with makeshift boats. To this end, Italian Prime-Minister Mario Draghi met in Tripoli with his Libyan counterpart, in early April 2021, to discuss the strenghteen of bilateral relations and, in particular, the cessation of Libyan human trafficking groups' activities and decreasing Libyan rescue authorities' work on migrants detention in illegal detention centers.<sup>11</sup> He presented to his Libyan counterpart the European Union's intentions to become more effectively involved in stopping illegal human trafficking and illegal migration to Europe.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi also met with the newly elected interim Libyan Prime-Minister in Cairo, immediately after his recognition by the House of Representatives. The purpose of the meeting was to increase the support of regional powers for the unification of Libya, by concluding expanded partnerships to bring Egyptian economic projects to the country.

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<sup>10</sup> Suzan Fraser, "Turkey, Libya recommit to contested maritime borders deal", *Associated Press News*, 12 April 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/turkey-libya-recep-tayyip-erdogan-tripoli-ankara-9faece0a5a1751c58df7b6739318bff7>, accessed on 17.05.2021.

<sup>11</sup> Rami Musa, "In the first travel abroad, new Italian PM visits Libya", *Associated Press News*, 6 April 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/europe-africa-italy-libya-middle-east-14fde11cc7caf013e34f67c17cae90d7>, accessed on 30.05.2021.



Under the United States pressure the rest of the regional powers which were behind one of the rival factions, such as France and the United Arab Emirates, officially confirmed unconditional diplomatic support for ending the Libyan Civil War and the immediate departure of foreign fighters and mercenaries from the area. However, illegal arms trafficking continues unabated to both warring sides in Libya, undermining ceasefire efforts and the establishing of a lasting peace in the region.

## 2. Migrants Situation in North Africa

Europe continues to face a new influx of African immigrants this year trying to illegally reach the continent, crossing the Mediterranean Sea in atypical boats, unsuitable for navigation in international waters. Moreover, the large number of people embarking on such ships far exceeds the carrying capacity of those vessels, and the storms that often break out at sea lead to the sinking of some of them and the drowning or disappearance of many migrants.

The combined efforts of the Libyan Coast Guard's ships and those of the EU Naval Operation "IRINI" off the Libyan coast to prevent the illegal departure of African immigrants to Southern European countries have only partially demonstrated their effectiveness since the beginning of this year. Thus, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), out of more than 1,000 illegal migrants leaving Libya by sea alone, a number of nine boats carrying more than 800 people<sup>12</sup> were intercepted and the migrants were returned to internal detention centers. Unfortunately, there are currently about 11,000 African migrants in these detention centers, where the humanitarian situation and personal safety are precarious.

Since the beginning of this year, media sources has shown that the most accessible European areas for emigration have become the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, in North Africa, and the island of Lampedusa, in Southern Italy. Thus, almost 13,000 African immigrants arrived in Italy, and almost 8,000 sub-Saharan Africans passed through the Spanish enclave of Ceuta<sup>13</sup> in Morocco, of which about 2,000 are minors.<sup>14</sup> Approximately 80 Africans also emigrated to the other Spanish

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<sup>12</sup>\*\*\*, "UN agency: Libyan navy intercepts over 800 EU-bound migrants", *Associated Press News*, 5 February 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/europe-africa-libya-middle-east-mediterranean-sea-5a155e8c9df4b7292ea66d3dd4fbbefc>, accessed on 25.05.2021.

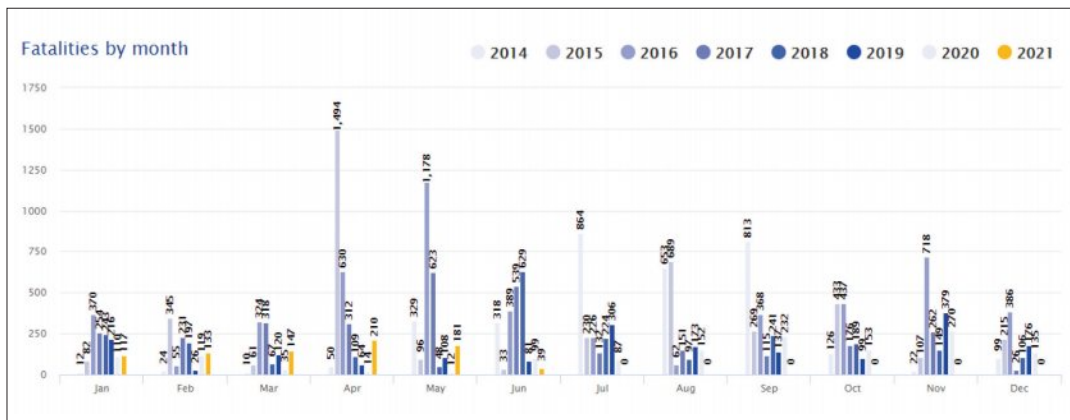
<sup>13</sup> A.N: The Spanish enclave Ceuta is a Spanish city of 20 km<sup>2</sup> and 85,000 inhabitants, located in North Africa on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and separated from Morocco by a double fence made of wire mesh 10 meters high. It has an autonomous political status and is led by President Juan Jesús Vivas.

<sup>14</sup> Vlad Mironescu, „Copii morți aduși de valuri pe plajele din Libia, după ce ar fi încercat să ajungă în Europa”, *Digi Tv*, 26 May 2021, URL: <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/copii-morti-au-fost-adusi-de-valuri-pe-plajele-din-libia-sustine-o-organizatie-caritabila-1541849>, accessed on 31.05.2021.



enclave in the region, Melilla, 350 km east of Ceuta.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the arrival of the hit season could lead to an increase in their number. Following the relaxation of border control by Moroccan border police, the Spanish Army redeployed troops and armored vehicles to the border with Morocco, intervened repeatedly and returned half of the emigrants to Morocco. However, the current situation in the enclave has continuously deteriorating, culminating with the biggest humanitarian, diplomatic and political crisis between Spain and Morocco since the territorial dispute of 2002, and Spanish political leaders believe that the situation was created especially by Rabat, as a result of bilateral assistance granted by Spain to Brahim Ghali, the leader of the Polisario Front, an Algeria-sponsored Western Sahara liberation movement.

The desperate attempt by African emigrants to illegally leave the coasts of North Africa and escape the humiliating humanitarian conditions from the area, under the clandestine actions of human illegal traffickers, continues to result in large numbers of people drowned and missing in the Mediterranean Sea. According to the IOM project on the disappearance of migrants' data, this year the number of people drowned or missing in the entire Mediterranean Sea is 827, much higher than last year, and 691 migrants drowned in the Central area of the sea (see Fig. no. 1)<sup>16</sup>.



**Figure no. 1:** The Situation of Drawed Migrants in the Mediterranean Sea between 2014-2021<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Renata Brito, Aritz Parra, “Spain, Marocco square off after 8,000 migrants arrive by sea”, *Associated Press News*, 18 May 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/spain-europe-africa-morocco-migration-9833744a7058cc9438a8d7417d2944c6>, accessed on 27.05.2021.

<sup>16</sup> A.N.: The project on the disappearance of migrants on the main routes in the Mediterranean Sea is an initiative of the International Organization for Migrants (IOM), started in 2013, under the 2030 Agenda, to sustain the development, and the data are listed on the website <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean>?, accessed on 25.06.2021.

<sup>17</sup> Source: Deaths of migrants recorded in the Mediteranean, *Missing Migrants*, URL: <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean?>





The first disastrous event of this year took place on January 19, when a boat carrying illegal immigrants to Europe sank off the Libyan coast, killing 43 people, all men from West African states. At the end of March 2021, another boat capsized off the Libyan coast, killing five people (2 women and 3 children) and 77 migrants were rescued by the Libyan Coast Guard and returned to internal detention centers.<sup>18</sup> The most tragic naval accident since the beginning of illegal migration in North Africa took place in April, in which at least 130 people lost their lives. In early May 2021, at least 11 illegal migrants drowned when a rubber boat carrying 20 people capsized off<sup>19</sup>, and on May 9, 2021, a boat with 66 people on board also sank off Libya, 24 Africans drowned and 42 were rescued by the Libyan Coast Guard and transported to Tripoli.<sup>20</sup>

But not only the Mediterranean Sea has had such maritime accidents. On June 13, 2021, a boat with 200 migrants from the Horn of Africa, which departed from Djibouti, capsized off the coast of Yemen, all those on board being reported missing. Since the beginning of the year, another 40 migrants have drowned off the coast of Djibouti.<sup>21</sup>

All these unfortunate events led the IOM representatives to ask the European states from the Mediterranean Sea neighbourhood to analyse the situation created and to redeploy naval Search-and-Rescue capabilities in the area.

### **3. The Impact of North African's Situation on Regional and European Security**

The existing crisis situations, ongoing conflicts and humanitarian disasters in some African states in North Africa and the Sahel region, which continued also during the first half of 2021, have deteriorated and continue to significantly deteriorate regional and European security. Moreover, the acute shortage of COVID-19 vaccines and specialised medical personnel in the area amplifies the economic and health insecurity of African states, and the intensification of illegal trafficking of

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<sup>18</sup> Samy Magdy, "UN: 2 women, 3 children drown in shipwreck off Libya's coast", *Associated Press News*, 31 March 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/europe-north-africa-drownings-libya-africa-eda22245e6ddb9543b41a457bf2cc2fb>, accessed on 27.04.2021.

<sup>19</sup> \*\*\*, "UN agency: Libyan navy intercepts over 800 EU-bound migrants", *Associated Press News*, 10 May 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/europe-africa-libya-middle-east-mediterranean-sea-5a155e8c9df4b7292ea66d3dd4fbefc>, p.2, accessed on 25.05.2021.

<sup>20</sup> Samy Magdy, "UN: Migrant boat capsized off Libya; 2 dozen presumed dead", *Associated Press News*, 10 May 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/world-news-united-nations-libya-africa-middle-east-111ea2236cf6b278d49c5fc1201d67cd>, accessed on 25.05.2021.

<sup>21</sup> Ahmed Al-Haj, "Officials: Migrant boat capsizes off Yemen, some 200 missing", *Associated Press News*, 14 June 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-yemen-africa-immigration-health-fcd4add84264d9add649d8351cdb2bc6>, accessed on 16.06.2021.



African immigrants to Southern Europe further affects European security, damaging diplomatic relations between states.

Thus, in addition to the Spanish-Moroccan crisis created by the situation in the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, a diplomatic crisis also arose between Morocco and Germany, as a result of supporting the liberation movement in Western Sahara, both internationally and with information, but also of undermining Rabat's regional involvement in solving the Libyan Civil War by not inviting Morocco to the Berlin peace talks, in January 2021. As a result, in early May 2021, the Moroccan ambassador to Berlin was recalled to the country and diplomatic relations between the two countries has frozen.<sup>22</sup>

The impossibility of solving the dispute over sharing the Blue Nile water between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, as a result of starting to fill up the "Great Ethiopian Renaissance" dam and the failure of US-led diplomatic negotiations on the subject, have determined Cairo and Khartoum to request the involvement of the African Union (AU) in this dispute with tendencies to turn into a regional conflict and the possibility of a deterioration of the security situation in the Horn of Africa. But the African Union Summit in April 2021 on water security in the area did not have the expected effect, even though all Arab states have shown solidarity with the Egyptian-Sudanese position. As a result, the AU called for the urgent involvement of the UN Security Council in this dispute, in order to begin an extensive negotiation process with a view to concluding a tripartite agreement.<sup>23</sup>

One of the most disastrous terrorist attacks in recent years took place in early June 2021 in Burkina Faso. Jihadist insurgents affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State groups attacked the local population of the Solhan village, killing at least 132 civilians and setting fire to their homes.<sup>24</sup> Also in June, an Islamist suicide bomber belonging to the al-Shabab extremist group, an al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist organisation, blew himself up in a military training center in Mogadishu, killing 15 people and injuring 20 others.<sup>25</sup>

The internal security situation in West Africa also suffered this year - six

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<sup>22</sup> \*\*\*, "Morocco recalls its ambassador to Germany as tensions rise", *Associated Press News*, 6 May 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/europe-germany-africa-morocco-government-and-politics-f1d59cf3edaa36f368b15a58d8b53eca>, accessed on 22.05.2021.

<sup>23</sup> Samy Magdy, "Arab League backs calls for UN intervention in the dam dispute", *Associated Press News*, 6 May 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/arab-league-united-nations-europe-africa-middle-east-5fd51629f3158936afe3fae2da69f5b0>, accessed on 15.06.2021.

<sup>24</sup> Sam Mednick, "Death toll rises after Burkina Faso village attack", *Associated Press News*, 7 June 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/world-news-islamic-state-group-burkina-faso-africa-religion-2430cbdf4e324f49e20612e94ba5a800>, accessed on 14.06.2021.

<sup>25</sup> Hassan Barise, "Suicide bomber kills at least 15 at Somalia military site", *Associated Press News*, 15 June 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/somalia-suicide-bomber-2d3c682a38bbb75eb1cd3dbc89f26810>, accessed on 16.06.2021.



kidnappings have taken place in educational institutions from Northern Nigeria and Niger for ransom reasons, three of which were violent and resulted in eight deaths.<sup>26</sup>

The continuation of terrorist attacks in the Sahel region, despite the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, has forced France to rethink its African policy, especially the continuation of military intervention in the area. Although the latest French military interventions have been a real success, with the killing of jihadist leader Baye ag Bakabo of the al-Qaeda group in the area, French President Emmanuel Macron mentioned that, by the end of June 2021, Paris will terminate Operation Barkhane, which will replace with another military operation to fight Islamist extremists in the area, based on increased participation from partners. At the end, the French military presence in the Sahel region will be significantly reduced.<sup>27</sup>

The precarious economic situation in Tunisia, which has led to joblessness, rising youth unemployment and declining tourism, amplified by prolonged quarantine across the country to stop the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, was materialised earlier this year through civil demonstrations, large-scale and long-term riots against the Tunisian Parliament. Originally started in the capital, these demonstrations spread to other cities such as Kasserine, Gafsa, Sousse and Monastir, becoming more and more violent - Molotov cocktails, burglaries, vandalism of shops and clashes with Internal forces. In an attempt to resolve the situation created by force, the authorities used the Army's tear gas and arrest hundreds of protesters. The social crisis has forced Tunisian Prime-Minister Hichem Mechichi to revise his own cabinet, with some ministers deemed corrupt or suspected of such acts.<sup>28</sup>

The uncertain situation regarding the delimitation of territorial waters, contiguous areas and exclusive economic zones in the Mediterranean basin, amplified by the illegal trafficking of Africans who continue to migrate to the Greek islands and seek asylum, continues to sustain the politico-military crisis between Turkey and Greece. Even though there is an agreement to reduce migration, signed in 2016 between the EU and Turkey, the large number of illegal immigrants arriving on the shores of the Greek islands coming from Turkey remains high. As a result, despite pressure from the EU to manage asylum for immigrants inside the country, Greek leaders have decided to ask Ankara to look into asylum applications for

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<sup>26</sup> Sam Olukoya, "1 student fatally shot in new abduction in Nigeria's north", *Associated Press News*, 11 June 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/africa-nigeria-shootings-cf0591261074099da45365fd6859760b>, accessed on 15.06.2021.

<sup>27</sup> Edith M. Lederer, "UN envoy: More insecurity in Mali will have 'drastic' impact", *Associated Press News*, 15 June 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-mali-europe-africa-c66fb06c992ff6fd5435c973dbaa6eb7>, accessed on 16.06.2021.

<sup>28</sup> Bouzza Ben Bouzza, "Tunisians protest arrests; government faces confidence vote", *Associated Press News*, 26 January 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/north-africa-cabinets-tunisia-coronavirus-pandemic-africa-819dbd16717fe092a16fa18e1dac57ea>, accessed on 15.04.2021.



immigrants from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Somalia, and no longer sends them to Europe. Moreover, they demanded that Turkey receive back 1,453 illegal immigrants who have entered into Greece since the beginning of 2021, which has not happened so far.<sup>29</sup>

Following the inactivity of Turkish leaders, the Greek border police began using a high-tech automatic surveillance network, such as long-range “sound cannon”, digital barriers, sensors and cameras with high range and night vision, intelligent analytical systems and lie detectors, biometric identification by palm scanning, autonomous interview machines, integration of satellite data obtained from terrestrial, aerial, maritime and underwater drones and moved to the construction of a steel fence, similar to the one from the US-Mexico border. The investment, worth about 3 billion euros, was financed with European money, and Greece called on European leaders to turn the Southern European border protection mission “Frontex” into a full-fledged multinational security force to patrol the territorial waters of the Member States and stop the phenomenon of illegal migration from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

### Conclusions

The first half of 2021 is characterised by an improvement of some conflict situations in North Africa and the Sahel region (Libya, Sudan), but also by the continuation of some older ones or even their amplification (Mali, Tigray / Ethiopia, Central African Republic, Somalia) . The second year of the pandemic in Africa, as well as the inefficient and chaotic politico-military interventions of international organisations and regional powers, have failed to manage the roots / causes of these conflicts and have not helped African governments to cope.

The difficult pandemic situation has continued, especially in Central and Southern Africa, being amplified by the lack of qualified medical staff and, in particular, by the insufficient number of vaccines in the region. Thus, countries such as South Africa have been re-quarantined, and North African countries have continued to implement anti-COVID-19 measures, which are ineffective due to the poor international supply of vaccines and medicines.

We must not forget that, in the 21st Century, the international community is witnessing ethnic cleansing in the Tigray region, where the Ethiopian and Eritrean authorities have joined forces to wipe this ethnicity / tribe off the face of the earth., either through expulsion and genocide, or through starvation, which also leads to genocide.

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<sup>29</sup> Derek Gatopoulos și Costas Kantouris, “In post-pandemic Europe, migrants will face digital fortress”, *Associated Press News*, 31 May 2021, URL: <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-europe-migration-technology-health-c23251bec65ba45205a0851fab07e9b6>, accessed on 17.06.2021.



Changes in the EU policies on illegal migration have led to an increase in sea casualties and illegal human trafficking. Moreover, spending European funds on advanced technological tools to stop or delay migrants' access to Europe's Eastern borders, as well as the withdrawal of Search and Rescue ships and aircraft from areas often crossed by the improvised vessels of African migrants, did not have the intended effect of discouraging the maritime crossings of these ships and the desperate attempts of migrants to force illegal entry into the Greek islands. The new more aggressive European strategy on anti-migration has had, as severe side effects, harsh criticism from the EU's neighbours, as well as the emergence of diplomatic crises between some states bordering the Mediterranean Sea - Spain-Morocco, Greece-Turkey etc. Another effect that may arise in the near future is concerns about the ethics of the measures taken, which could lead to the deepening of European autocracy and those about the possibility of access to new technologies used at EU borders by non-member states or non-state actors.

An important step towards a review of European policies was taken by Denmark when approving, in early June 2021, the opening of a reception center for migrants in an African country, where the process of verifying asylum applications to this country should take place. We are talking about countries such as Rwanda, with which Denmark has already signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) since April 2021, but also Tunisia, Ethiopia or even Egypt. The same procedure was requested by Athens of the Turkish leaders in Ankara, in order to analyse and approve the asylum applications of the MENA refugees before they were sent to Europe. But their request remained so far unanswered.

The insecurity situation in North Africa and the Sahel region caused by unsolved conflicts, inter-ethnic / tribal crises, the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, terrorist actions and weapons, people and drugs illegal trafficking, hunger and poverty continue to show negative effects on African states in the region, but also on relations with European neighbours. In turn, the political, diplomatic, economic and military measures taken by European states and international organisations in Africa to manage the existing situation are inefficient and discordant, amplifying crises / conflicts in the area instead of solving them. All these negative effects have led to dissensions and even crises between certain states and even among the UN, AU and EU.

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