



Summary

A Lost Cause? Armed Forces and Development Cooperation in Mali

27 April 2022, 19:00 – 20:30hrs
German Bundestag, Berlin

Background

At the end of May, the mandates for the participation of the German Armed Forces in Mali expire and the German Bundestag must decide whether and in what form the Bundeswehr will remain engaged in Mali. Currently, around 1,100 German soldiers are stationed in Mali, where Germany is participating militarily in the UN blue helmet mission MINUSMA and the EU training mission EUTM. In addition, Germany is also an important development policy partner of Mali and is considered one of the largest financiers of Development Cooperation projects on the ground. The decision on the future of the German Armed Forces mission comes at a difficult time for both the West African country and the region: the political situation has recently become further destabilised after two successive coups in 2020 and 2021. While ECOWAS reacted with tough sanctions and the suspension of Mali's membership from the regional economic community, relations with France also deteriorated visibly. After the military junta, which is popular with parts of the Malian population, announced at the end of last year that it would not hold democratic elections until 2025/2026, Paris announced the complete withdrawal of its troops from Mali.

Against this background, the German Africa Foundation and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, under the patronage of Dr Christoph Hoffmann MdB, invited to a panel discussion.

Highlights

- The continuation of the UN mission in Mali is crucial for the security situation in the country and in the region.
- The French withdrawal created a security vacuum that had to be filled; only a holistic approach of military deployment and development cooperation could guarantee a sustainably stable security situation in Mali.
- The Malian transitional government continues to maintain its bilateral cooperation with Russia in the security sector.

Introduction Closing Remarks:

Jo Holden,
Director West Africa,
Friedrich Naumann
Foundation for Freedom

Discussion

Dr Christoph Hoffmann MP (FDP), Vice-Chairman of the Committee on Economic Cooperation and Development

H.E. Oumou Sall ép. Seck,
Ambassador of the Republic of Mali to Germany

Rebecca Schamber MP (SPD),
Member of the Defence Committee and the Committee on Economic Cooperation and Development

El-Ghassim Wane,
Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MINUSMA

Moderation

Sabine Odhiambo,
Secretary General, German Africa Foundation



The Bundeswehr missions in Mali

After a brief introduction and summary of the conflict, the panelists in turn noted the complexity of the situation in Mali. The West African country is facing a multitude of challenges, which include not only the acutely deteriorating security situation, but also corruption and an endangered food security situation. The terrorist threat in particular would further worsen the situation on the ground, and the peace process had been faltering for some time. An evaluation of the success of the EU and UN missions in which Germany is involved in the country is extremely difficult due to the large number of different internal and external actors, said the head of the MINUSMA mission, Wane. Unlike the French mission, which met with many protests in Mali due to the common colonial past, the soldiers of the German Armed Forces met with the support and approval of broad sections of the civilian population, reported Schamber MP, among others, from her trip to Mali, from which she had just returned. Freedom of the press as a cornerstone for democracies.

The policy of the Malian transitional government

The transitional government that emerged from last year's coup is pursuing a policy that attaches great importance to the sovereignty of the country, explained Ambassador Sall ép. Seck. In this context, the Malian security forces want to assume more and more responsibility themselves in order to be perceived as an equal (dialogue) partner. Accordingly, despite the indignation of the Western partners in the wake of the Russian war against Ukraine, Mali is sticking to its bilateral cooperation with Russia. As a sovereign state, Mali reserves the right to choose its own cooperation partners and to avoid any external influence. However, cooperation with Russia in the security sector would also play a central role in the decision on the continuation and design of the German Armed Forces mandates, and here in particular on the EUTM mission, which has already been partially discontinued for this reason, the Members of the Bundestag agreed.

German development cooperation in Mali

Mali is considered a priority country of German development cooperation in the Sahel region; therefore, also with a view to the entire region, it is crucial to continue and further strengthen development cooperation with Mali, because only through new perspectives and jobs can the security situation improve in the long term, said Dr Hoffmann MP. At present, cooperation in Mali is mainly based on local organisations instead of state actors. Of course, security and development cooperation go hand in hand, and the MINUSMA mission is also an important support in the field of humanitarian aid. For this reason, there is great interest on the part of Germany in the continuation of MINUSMA. The Malian government is also interested in continuing the cooperation, emphasised Ambassador Sall ép. Seck. However, a detailed reflection on the previous missions and a joint and open exchange on an equal footing about the future goals and their concrete implementation would be central.