POLITICAL COMMITTEE (PC)

INSTABILITY IN THE SOUTH

General Report

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I.   INTRODUCTION

1.   The Arab uprisings of 2011 (and their national aftermaths) have led to a collapse of the regional order, thus transforming the Southern Mediterranean shores into a basin of persistent instability. The continuing volatility and conflicts in NATO's southern neighbourhood directly affect the security of the Alliance. Threats emanating from terrorist groups and the migration crisis are largely due to economic, social and political factors as well as weak governance in NATO's Mediterranean partners.

2.   At the Warsaw Summit NATO Heads of State and Government agreed to put a premium on pursuing a 360-degree security approach. In this context, the Allies agreed to increase their support "to the efforts of the international community in projecting stability and strengthening security outside their territory, thereby contributing to Alliance security."

3.   While progress has been made in tackling the manifold challenges, the overall security and stability of the region remains volatile and the situation in some countries has even deteriorated. Due to the complexity of the crises, the situation is not expected to improve soon. Therefore, if the Alliance wants to stabilise its southern neighbourhood it needs to continue, and indeed increase, its attention and support for its partners in the Mediterranean.

4.   After providing a brief update on the recent developments in Syria and Iraq your Rapporteur briefly analyses the key drivers promoting insecurity and instability in North Africa. The paper argues that the continuing volatility of the region is also impacted by developments to the South, particularly in the Sahel zone and the Gulf of Guinea. The Rapporteur concludes by providing a brief overview of NATO's efforts in support of its Mediterranean partners.

5.   The report is an update of the Assembly's monitoring of the developments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and serves as a basis for discussion among the members of the Political Committee and the Assembly as a whole.

II.   THE SITUATION IN SYRIA AND IRAQ: AN UPDATE

A.   SYRIA

6.   The war in Syria, which entered its seventh year in March 2018, has had a devastating effect on the population and the infrastructure of the country. The conflict is a major source of instability far beyond Syria's borders, fuelling radicalisation, refugee flight and tension between outside powers. Since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, vast parts of the country have been destroyed, more than 400,000 people have been killed, approximately 6.5 million people have been internally displaced and almost 5.6 million Syrian refugees have registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

7.   The military, intelligence and logistics support provided by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah has enabled the Assad regime to regain control of large swaths of the country. With the military balance tipped in their favour, Syrian government forces, backed by their Russian and Iranian allies, have recaptured the Damascus suburb of Eastern Ghouta after a five-year siege.   Several reports have accused the Assad regime of using chlorine gas as part of their airstrike campaign. If these allegations are confirmed, the incident in Eastern Ghouta once again demonstrates the blatant disregard of the Syrian regime for the international agreements it has signed, including the Chemical Weapons Convention. The international community needs to hold the Assad regime accountable for the use of chemical weapons against its own people. Your Rapporteur wants to point out that in a joint statement on August 21, 2018 France, the United Kingdom, and the United States warned the Syrian regime that they would not tolerate the use of chemical weapons in any assault on Idlib.

8.   While Russian President Vladimir Putin, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani failed to agree on a ceasefire at a meeting in Tehran on 7 September 2018 Russia and Turkey announced an agreement to establish a demilitarised zone around Idlib province on 18 September. However, at the time of writing the forces of the Syrian regime are preparing to launch an offensive against the rebels' last stronghold in Idlib in the north-west of the country. Idlib province is mainly controlled by the jihadist alliance Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the core of which is al-Qaeda's former Syrian affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra. Although Turkey, Russia, and Iran had agreed to establish a de-escalation zone in the area in September 2017 fighting has intensified since December 2017, when government forces, boosted by Russian air support, launched a major military campaign to dislodge HTS and conquer the province. There is considerable concern about the consequences of a military assault on Idlib; an official from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) warned that an attack could create the century's "worst humanitarian catastrophe" (AFP, 2018). Idlib, the last remaining stronghold of the opposition, is home to an estimated 3 million civilians, at least 1.2 million of whom are internally displaced, and an estimated 70,000 rebel fighters.

9.   The involvement of foreign actors has further complicated the already complex situation in Syria. In the North-Western province of Afrin, in the close vicinity of the conflict in Idlib, Turkey has launched Operation "Olive Branch" against the People's Protection Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*: YPG) and Women's Protection Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Jin*: YPJ), the armed wings of both Kurdish Democratic Union Party (*Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat*: PYD). The Turkish offensive began in January 2018, shortly after the United States signalled an open-ended military presence in Syria as part of a broader strategy to prevent the resurgence of Daesh. In this context, a US military spokesperson announced plans to create a 30,000-strong Syrian border protection force drawing on the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). While Turkey's stated objective is to remove the PYD from its southern borders, observers have argued that another aim of the operation is to convince the United States to reverse its support for Kurdish forces as the anti-Daesh campaign draws to a close.

10.   Turkey's operation "Olive Branch" in Northern Syria also exposed differences in the Allies' Syria policy. As part of their campaign against Daesh, the United States has provided the YPG-dominated SDF with military equipment and supported their ground-combat operations with airstrikes and Special Forces operations. Meanwhile, under the leadership of the PYD, *de facto* autonomous governance structures were established in the YPG / YPJ-held territories (commonly referred to as "Rojava", short for "*Rojavayê Kurdistanê*" / "Western Kurdistan"). Turkey considers the recognition of an autonomous Kurdish region in Syria in the close vicinity of its border as a major security threat. More specifically, Ankara is concerned that this would allow the PYD, which it regards as the Syrian branch of the PKK, to use Northern Syria as a staging ground for attacks on Turkey. Moreover, Turkey is apprehensive that an autonomous Kurdish region in Syria would encourage similar moves by Kurdish separatist groups within Turkey.

11.   These events unfold against the backdrop of continuing international efforts to defeat Daesh. After the liberation of Raqqa by US-backed SDF forces in October 2017 Daesh no longer controls any major Syrian city. However, Daesh's battlefield losses have not eradicated the organisation or its ideology. Instead, it seems likely that the group will adjust its tactics and transition from open combat to insurgency. Moreover, other fighters may seek refuge in ungoverned spaces across the region or return to their home countries, where they could continue to inspire and enable attacks. In any case, the lack of a joint, coordinated, Allied approach towards Syria risks eroding the achievements in the fight against Daesh and other terror groups.

12.   The situation on the ground is compounded by the fact that negotiations to end hostilities and find a political settlement have not produced any progress either. The two main peace initiatives held another set of talks in January 2018 – the UN-led Geneva process convened in Vienna, while a Syrian National Dialogue Congress organised by Russia, Turkey and Iran took place in Sochi. Both peace conferences focused on constitutional issues, but longstanding disagreement over the fate of

Syrian president Bashar al-Assad continues to stall the negotiations. As the military position of the Assad regime is improving, its diplomatic stance is hardening.

B. IRAQ

13.	In Iraq, Daesh is on the defensive as well. The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), backed by coalition air and special operations, were able to regain control over one third of the country that had been under Daesh's control at the height of the group's power. On 9 December 2017, half a year after the liberation of Mosul, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi proclaimed victory over Daesh in Iraq and the end of major military campaigns. However, like in Syria, the group's territorial contraction does not mean the end of Daesh as an organisation, but rather a shift to insurgency tactics. In addition to frequent small-scale attacks against security forces and civilians, the group maintains the ability to conduct high-profile attacks. For instance, it claimed responsibility for two concerted suicide bombings in central Baghdad on 15 January 2018, killing at least 38 people.

14.	The root causes that led to the emergence of Daesh in Iraq remain. Prime Minister al-Abadi has engaged in efforts to reverse the sectarian policies of his predecessor, Nouri al-Maliki, who consolidated power among Shi'a elites. However, years of Daesh's occupation and targeting of the Iraqi Shi'a and Christian populations in particular have exacerbated sectarian tensions. Reconciliation is likely to be a difficult endeavour, and the low turnout in the national parliamentary elections in May reveals the population's growing disillusionment with the ruling elites and the political system. The violent protests that erupted in the south of the country in July and September 2018 were clear showcases of the Iraqis' growing discontent over corruption, unemployment and lack of basic services such as electricity and clean water. According to the 2017 youth unemployment index of the World Bank, almost 18% of the 15-24 old, who represent 62.8% of the Iraqi population, are unemployed. Soaring unemployment, especially in the areas that were once controlled by Daesh, continues to fuel further instability. At the time of writing no government has been formed; it appears doubtful that Haider al-Abadi, who acts as caretaker Prime Minister, will be able to secure a second term.

15.	Over three years of intense combat have left vast parts of the country in ruins. In February 2018, Kuwait hosted an international fundraising conference dedicated to Iraq's post-war reconstruction. While participants made pledges worth USD 30 billion, mostly in credits and investments, the conference fell short of raising the USD 88 billion the Iraqi government estimates necessary to rebuild the country's shattered economy and infrastructure. In addition, about 2.6 million Iraqis remain internally displaced and 8.7 million are in need of humanitarian assistance. While Iraq does have meaningful energy resources that could be used for reconstruction, corruption remains an important impediment to attracting international investors. Transparency International's 2017 Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Iraq as the 11th most corrupt country (169th out of 180 countries).

16.	The conflict has also put additional pressure on the already strained relationship between the federal government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil. Proposed by KRG President Masoud Barzani, the KRG held a referendum on Kurdish independence in late September 2017. The federal government in Baghdad declared the referendum "illegal" and did not recognise its results. In addition to introducing punitive measure against the KRG, including a ban on international flights to the regions under Kurdish control, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi also ordered the ISF to retake Kirkuk. This effectively restored Baghdad's control over the disputed territories that Kurdish Peshmerga fighters had taken from Daesh in 2014. The loss of Kirkuk plunged Kurdistan into economic and political problems and led to the resignation of KRG President Masoud Barzani. The ban on international flights to the Kurdish controlled regions was lifted in March 2018. Most recently, the Iraqi parliament approved the new budget, which cuts the KRG's share from 17% to about 12,6%. Efforts to move beyond the standoff have largely proved unsuccessful so far.

17.   Manoeuvring between state and sub-state or non-state actors remains a challenge within Iraqi security forces as well. Most notably, the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), an umbrella organisation of about 60 militias that formed as the ISF collapsed under Daesh advances in 2014, both strengthens and contests state security structures. A law passed in November 2016 vaguely defines the PMF both as an independent military institution and as part of the official security forces under the auspices of the Prime Minister's office. However, the 60,000-strong PMF cannot be understood as a unified bloc. While some of these groups are expected to disband or integrate into state security forces, others formed long before 2014 and are likely to resist any moves aiming to curtail their independence. Although a number of security reforms have been implemented there are still numerous forces and militias which operate outside the control of the federal government. Some PMF factions are now entering the political sphere, as part of the political alliance Fatah, or Conquest, which has gained the second place in the Iraqi elections. In any case, how to deal with these groups will be one of the challenges in building a stable and peaceful Iraq after defeating Daesh.

18.   Another important issue that will influence the future development of Iraq is its bilateral relationship with its neighbours, particularly with Iran. It remains to be seen if, and how, the new government in Baghdad will (re-) define Iraq's relationship with Iran, particularly with regard to Tehran's influence in the country.

III.   DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH AFRICA

19.   Instability in Syria and Iraq has repercussions beyond their borders and exacerbates an already volatile security situation in North Africa. The uprisings of 2011 toppled the governments of Tunisia and Libya, while the political ramifications in Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco were not as dramatic. Despite their profound differences, however, the five countries face similar challenges that impact European and Euro-Atlantic security. Albeit to varying degrees, they are all confronted with challenging demographic developments (youth bulge), a stagnant economy, illegal migration and violent forms of political Islam. The situation in Libya, in particular, continues to adversely affect the security in the region. Vast swaths of its territory elude government control and Libya's society is deeply divided between different factions. The action plan for Libya, proposed by the United Nations' Special Envoy to Libya, Ghassan Salamé, to revive and extend the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) has not been implemented. At the time of writing more than 100 people have been killed in the fights between rival militias in Tripoli despite a UN-backed ceasefire since late August.

A.   ECONOMIC STAGNATION AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

20.   Economic and social challenges are key drivers of regional instability. Despite their differences, all countries in North Africa suffer from high levels of unemployment. In 2017 about 12% of the total population in North African countries was out of work, a number that is twice as high as the average unemployment rate in middle income countries. Mitigating these challenges is complicated by a particular age structure in North African societies, which is commonly known as the 'youth bulge'. Except for Mauritania, birth rates across the region have been decreasing in recent years, and the countries under investigation are about to reach a "demographic turning point". Currently, however, young adults account for a large proportion of the population in North Africa while the job creation rate lags behind the growth of the working-age population. The political instability that has troubled the region in recent years, has exacerbated the situation, causing a decline in tourism and foreign direct investment.

21.   These factors put additional pressure on the region's already strained labour markets. The numbers draw a clear picture: with about one third of the 15 to 24-year-old population out of work, the youth unemployment rate in North Africa is higher than in any other region in the world. Moreover, those who manage to enter the workforce often suffer from precarious and informal working conditions. High-skilled, university-educated young people are frequently underemployed, i.e. they

are unable to find adequate jobs according to their skills and availability. In sum, many young people are stuck in economically vulnerable situations or in jobs that do not meet their expectations. Particularly disadvantaged are women and those living in rural areas.

22. The Arab uprisings of 2011 showed that economic hardship of this magnitude involves serious risks for the region's socio-political stability. The turmoil that swept through the area seven years ago started with Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution and was prompted by frustration over deteriorating socio-economic circumstances. The push for Ben Ali's ouster was first and foremost motivated by the belief that democracy would entail a more inclusive development and new economic opportunities. In a poll for the Arab Barometer later in 2011, 68% of Tunisians stated economic conditions were of primary concern for the country whereas only 2% saw the democratic transition as the country's most important challenge.

23. The issues of economic stagnation and youth unemployment remain highly relevant across the region. In January 2018, many Tunisians marched the streets of Tunis again. Opposing the recently passed budget law, which entails new austerity measures, protesters called for "a fall of the budget", slightly adapting the 2011 demands for a fall of the regime. The re-emerging protests are indicative of a growing sense of injustice and frustration caused by the post-revolutionary leaders' failure to deliver on their promises to redress the population's economic grievances. The successive failure of nine cabinets to curb unemployment and inflation have led President Beji Caid Essebi in July 2018 to call for the resignation of Prime Minister Chahed. On the other hand, Tunisia's continuing decentralisation efforts can, over time, generate a more equitable distribution of resources, thus improve service delivery across the country.

24. In Egypt, the government launched an ambitious economic reform plan in 2016 to attract foreign direct investment and convince international donors of the government's ability to recalibrate the economy. Although the reforms were successful in securing a USD 12 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan, they have also increased economic hardship for the majority of Egyptians. At the same time, fears of instability and terrorism took their toll on the country's tourism sector, one of the Egyptian economy's key streams of revenue and an essential source of foreign currency earnings. While more than 14 million visitors came to Egypt in 2010, numbers dropped below 5.3 million in 2016. The government of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has not been able to deliver the prosperity and security it promised, and the austerity measures that were introduced harshly impact Egypt's middle class and the poor in particular.

25. The civil war in Libya had detrimental effects on the country's vital infrastructure as well as on oil and gas production. Smuggling and human trafficking have become highly lucrative, thus alluring young adults with more opportunities and higher revenues. Smuggling is increasingly seen as an ordinary occupation, rather than a crime. While there have been a few signs recently that Libya's oil production is slowly recovering, the fractured political landscape and the rampant corruption cast a shadow over the country's economic development.

26. Algeria's and Mauritania's socio-economic situation is also volatile, due to declining prices for oil in Algeria and extractive resources in Mauritania. Riots by disenchanted youth in Algeria's South in 2016 already indicated that the country's social peace is threatened. The unresolved succession question in Algeria and the constitutional issue in Mauritania (i.e. whether President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz will change the constitution to allow him another term) further exacerbate socio-political tensions.

B. ILLEGAL MIGRATION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

27.   North Africa continues to be both a destination as well as a transit hub for illegal migrants from the Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa. Seeking to reach Europe, refugees and migrants often traverse the Sahara and then wait in Algeria for a suitable opportunity to reach Europe via Morocco, Tunisia or Libya. Entering directly by crossing Libya's Southern border is just as common. The European Union estimates that about 90% of illegal migrants come from or through Libya. Taking advantage of the porous borders and general lack of state authority in the country, African migrants that travel to Libya either search for economic opportunities or use it as a stepping stone to migrate across the Mediterranean to Europe.

28.   Another reason why Libya, already home to more than 200,000 internally displaced people (IDP), is a particular cause for concern is the proliferation of the slave trade. Many migrants are extremely vulnerable to ill treatment and abuse by traffickers and armed groups. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) drew attention to this issue in 2017. There are numerous reports about Sub-Saharan migrants being sold and bought, then held captive in disastrous conditions, where they often suffer numerous forms of abuse, including forced labour, torture and sexual violence.

29.   To protect migrants from criminal networks along travelling routes, the African Union, the European Union and the United Nations established a joint task force in November 2017. The second half of 2017 saw a significant drop in the number of migrants attempting to reach Europe through the central Mediterranean. This is likely due in part to the efforts of one-member state, Italy, which engaged in a cash-for-migration-control strategy for Libya. The medium-to-longer term impact on Libya, particularly with regard to institution building, remains to be seen, as this approach also resulted in the co-option of militias which had been deeply involved with human smuggling before. More generally, a European focus on limiting the migration flow from the MENA and Sub-Saharan regions risks strengthening the power and influence of militias and other groups whose main concern is resource predation.

C. JIHADISM / MILITANT ORGANISATIONS / TERRORISM

30.   The continuing instability of the MENA region provides favourable conditions for jihadist groups, as it facilitates recruitment and allows them to operate relatively freely. This has led to a revival of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and allowed Daesh to expand westwards.

31.   In Libya, in addition to divisions along tribal lines, three nominal governments are vying for dominance. The resulting political instability and competition for natural resources are key factors of the chaos and insecurity in Libya. The country's fragmentation and its vast ungoverned spaces allow non-state actors, including violent extremist groups, to operate and build support. Daesh franchises made significant territorial gains in Libya in 2015, making the country its first target to expand outside of Iraq and Syria. Although the group lost its stronghold in Sirte in December 2016 and no longer controls territory in Libya, it remains active throughout the country. Libya's precarious security situation has serious repercussions on the proliferation of violent extremist groups in the entire region. The civil war resulted in the unregulated proliferation of weapons, explosives and military equipment throughout the region via established trafficking routes.

32.   The consequences are acutely felt in Tunisia as well, where a surge of terrorist incidents since the 2011 uprisings threatens the fragile democratic transition. Terrorist groups increased their activities considerably after 2011, as demonstrated by the wave of high-level attacks in 2013 and 2015. The developments in Tunisia and Libya seem to confirm lessons from Syria and Iraq, "that jihadists' influence is more a product of instability than its primary driver".

33.   In Egypt, Daesh-affiliated groups continue to wage an insurgency in the Northern part of the Sinai Peninsula. While their attacks initially targeted security forces, terrorist groups are increasingly

focusing on civilians, most notably Coptic Christians and Sufi Muslims. The attack on the al-Rawda mosque in November 2017 killed more than 300 people, making it the deadliest terrorist attack in Egypt's recent history. Moreover, jihadist groups have demonstrated their ability to expand their activities beyond Northern Sinai to Central and Southern parts of the Peninsula as well as to urban centres in the Nile Delta. The security forces' harsh crackdown on all Islamist groups and the government's heavy-handed approach towards the opposition in the context of the Presidential elections in March 2018 risk polarising communities and further fuelling radicalisation.

34.   In addition to jihadi activities in the region, North Africa is one of the top sources of foreign fighters who leave their home countries to join militant groups in Syria and Iraq. Tunisia has produced the highest number of foreign fighters per capita globally. Authorities in the region have to find ways to stem radicalisation before people are able to leave the country. They will eventually have to face the challenge of how to prevent returning fighters from filling the ranks of AQIM- and Daesh-affiliates in North Africa and reintegrate them into society.

IV.   SECURITY ISSUES IN THE SAHEL AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE STABILITY IN THE MENA REGION

35.   Stability in North Africa is not only affected by developments within these countries' borders, but also to a large extent by spill-over from the Sahel region. In the South, the Mediterranean littoral states share borders with the Sahelian states of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Sudan, all of which face numerous security challenges, including a lack of control over their territories and the inability to manage their borders effectively.

36.   Due to weak governance, high levels of population growth, persistent poverty, armed conflict, and the devastating consequences of climate change the security situation in the Sahel is extremely precarious. The Libyan conflict has further exacerbated the region's fragile security situation. In addition to the high number of IDPs in the county, the fighting has unleashed a stream of displaced people, weapons and armed combats from Libya to the Sahel. The collapse of the Libyan state has caused a proliferation of non-state actors across borders and regions, rendering the traditional division in security terms between North Africa and the Sahel obsolete.

A.   DEVELOPMENTS IN MALI

37.   The 2012 jihadist insurgency in Mali alerted the world to the fragility of the Sahel region. The collapse of the Libyan state prompted a surge of arms and trained militants into Mali. Returning fighters swelled the ranks of AQIM and affiliated jihadist organisations as well as Tuareg rebellion groups in Mali, where they joined forces to launch a large-scale insurgency against the Malian state. These groups had widespread access to weapons and held deeply violent and anti-Western ideology. The French-led intervention in January 2013, Operation Serval, was aimed at dismantling these groups before they gained more power and influence.

38.   Although the intervention managed to push back the insurgency and restored the legitimacy of the Malian state, the security situation in Mali's Northern and Central provinces remains unstable. Little progress has been made in implementing the "Bamako Agreement" of 2015, which was supposed to initiate an era of peace and stability in the country. As a result, disillusionment and frustration among the population are growing – as is the risk that demobilised militants may take up arms again. Instead, insecurity has increased and spread to other areas of Mali. Jihadist attacks have increased in numbers, sophistication, and scope not only in Northern and Central Mali but also in Western Niger and Northern Burkina Faso. There are also signs that Daesh and al-Qaeda-affiliated militants cooperate and that fighters from other MENA regions are swelling their ranks.

B.   AL-QAEDA IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB'S 'SAHELISATION'

39.   The developments in Mali are indicative of the broader security concerns caused by violent extremist groups that emerged in North Africa and shifted their focus to the Sahel. Established during the Algerian civil war, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) continued to operate after the war had ended and eventually pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2007. Since then, the group has rebranded itself as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and developed into the region's most significant terrorist organisation in terms of number of members and potential for violence.

40.   Rather than defeating the terror organisation, Algerian counterterrorism efforts have pushed AQIM to relocate to Algeria's southern neighbours. There, the group found a safe haven in the Sahel region's vast open spaces and porous borders. Exploiting the Sahelian states' weak counterterrorism capabilities AQIM established itself and forged close ties with local communities and tribes. It was able to incorporate pre-existing grievances in the narrative of militant Islamism, for instance with parts of the marginalised Tuareg population in Mali and Niger. Over the past decade AQIM was thus able to extend its foothold beyond Algeria to Niger, Tunisia, Mauritania, Chad, Libya and Mali.

C.   BOKO HARAM AND THE LAKE CHAD BASIN CRISIS

41.   Besides Libya's South-West (the Fezzan), the Lake Chad basin is considered a key centre of jihadism and a transit hub for smuggling people and goods. The basin region, spanning the borders between Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria and Niger, is an example of the devastating consequences of environmental degradation and violent conflict. The drying-up of Lake Chad to less than 10% of its size in 1963 has had severe consequences for the approximately 50 million people living in the area. Water shortages, crop failures and collapsed freshwater fisheries have accelerated poverty and tensions between different groups competing for the scarce resources that remain.

42.   Apart from these long-term challenges, the region is strained by an almost decade-long terror campaign by the jihadist group Boko Haram. Established in Northern Nigeria in 2002, the group became increasingly violent after the death of its founder in 2009 and spread in the broader Lake Chad area to Cameroon, Chad and Niger. In 2014, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), comprising forces from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria and, until recently, Niger, launched a crackdown on Boko Haram. As a result of growing military pressure, the group's members split into three factions – one extremely violent faction, a second that pledges allegiance to Daesh and a third that aligns with al-Qaeda. Boko Haram was classified as the world's deadliest terrorist group in 2014, but casualty numbers dropped significantly following the group's military defeat by the MNJTF.

43.   Nevertheless, the security situation in the Lake Chad basin remains extremely fragile, causing severe humanitarian hardship and security repercussions beyond the directly affected area. According to the latest UN report on West Africa and the Sahel, more than 5 million people in the basin area are currently receiving humanitarian assistance and some 2.4 million people suffer from forced displacement.

D. MARITIME SECURITY IN THE GULF OF GUINEA

44.   Another source of instability in the region is the Gulf of Guinea, where piracy has surged in recent years. Attacks have primarily taken the form of low-level robberies targeting oil tankers and cargo vessels. Recently, however, kidnappings for ransom have become more prevalent, as the decline of global oil prices has reduced the financial benefits resulting from oil theft. These attacks are increasingly violent with assailants using more sophisticated weaponry such as AK-47s and various types of machine guns.

45.   This adversely affects the advancement and prosperity of Africa's vital blue economy. Ninety percent of Africa's trade is carried by sea with the Gulf of Guinea functioning as an important transit

hub, most notably for petroleum products. Maritime security is crucial to extract revenue from the 5.4 million barrels of oil produced in the Gulf every day. In the wrong hands, gains from oil theft may contribute to the financing of terrorist activities in the Sahel.

46.   Moreover, piracy poses a direct threat to seafarers and vessels transiting or operating in the region, including those flagged by NATO member states. Surpassing the waters off the Horn of Africa in terms of piracy and armed robbery at sea, the Gulf of Guinea is now considered to be the most dangerous region in the world for seafarers. According to the International Chamber of Commerce, there were 46 incidents of piracy and armed robbery in the area in 2017, including 10 incidents of kidnappings at sea. The number of unknown cases is estimated to be significantly higher, as reporting these incidents negatively affects corporate safety records and has few tangible benefits. Western crew members are frequently targeted, as they can be ransomed for more money in case they are captured.

V.   REGIONAL SECURITY IN THE MENA REGION AND NATO

47.   In light of the multifaceted challenges emanating from the South, the 2016 Warsaw Summit stipulated projecting stability and strengthening security in the MENA region as priority goals for NATO. Since then, the Alliance has been involved in the region in a number of ways, including military operations, training missions and partnership building.

48.   A NATO Hub for the South, based at NATO's Joint Force Command in Naples, was discussed at the Summit in 2016 and agreed upon by NATO Defence Ministers in February 2017. The Hub, formally known as NATO Strategic Direction South (NSD-S), is designed to improve the Alliance's awareness and understanding of the threats coming from Africa and the Middle East through the collection and analysis of shared information and intelligence. The Hub for the South will also further promote partnership, cooperation and dialogue with MENA partners. As such, the Hub is an ambitious project meant to ensure that NATO is ready to project stability in the South at any given time, by coordinating and synchronising the Alliance's activities in a wide range of areas, from counter-terrorism to tackling illicit trafficking of weapons, narcotics and human beings.

49.   The Hub, which is an integral part of NATO's "Package for the South", was declared fully operational at the 2018 NATO Summit. It is a welcome addition to EU-NATO cooperation, as it could coordinate with the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) in the realm of counter-terrorism.

50.   NATO's maritime operations in the Mediterranean are crucial to NATO efforts to stabilise the region. To that end, the Allies agreed to launch *Operation Sea Guardian* in November 2016. Led by NATO's Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM), *Operation Sea Guardian* has succeeded *Operation Active Endeavour*, launched in 2001 under the Article 5 framework. In contrast to *Active Endeavour*, which was conceived purely as a counterterrorism mission, *Sea Guardian* aims to boost maritime situational awareness, counter-terrorism efforts, and capacity building in and around the region. Moreover, *Sea Guardian* is also providing the EU's *Operation Sophia* with information and logistics support in the Mediterranean. NATO Allies have also been involved in the EU training programme for the Libyan coastguard to counter irregular migration and smuggling across the Mediterranean.

51.   In response to Libya's request for NATO's assistance in providing advice to develop its security architecture, the North Atlantic Council agreed in principle to provide advice to Libya in the area of defence and security institution building, in accordance with the previous decisions of NATO's Heads of State and Government at the Wales and Warsaw Summits. NATO plans to implement a measured and step-by-step approach, taking into account the complex and fluid political and security situation in the country, in complementarity with the support that is already being provided to Libya bilaterally by Allies, as well as by the UN and the EU. The 2018 Brussels Summit affirmed that NATO remains committed to providing advice to Libya in the area of defence and security institution building, and

mentioned the possibility of developing a long-term partnership, which could potentially lead to Libya's membership in the Mediterranean Dialogue.

52.   Allies also decided to support the Global Coalition Against Daesh through the deployment of NATO's AWACS surveillance flights, while several Allies committed to provide air-to-air refuelling capabilities. NATO's first AWACS operations had already started by October 2016. At the 2017 Brussels Summit, NATO member states decided to formally join the Global Coalition Against Daesh, thus stepping up the Alliance's efforts. As such, AWACS surveillance aircraft flight time sensibly increased, and NATO agreed to share information with the Coalition. After Daesh's territorial losses in Syria and Iraq, NATO has recently reaffirmed its commitment to the Global Coalition, as it moves from combat operations to stabilisation efforts. NATO's membership in the Global Coalition enables it to take part in the Coalition's meetings at different levels, including on the coordination of training and capacity building.

53.   More recently, Allies have begun to gradually increase their involvement in Iraq. On 15 February 2018, at the request of the Iraqi government and the Global Coalition Against Daesh, NATO Defence Ministers agreed to expand the Alliance's military training mission in Iraq. Earlier, from 2004 to 2011, Allied forces had trained 15,000 Iraqi officers under the NATO Training Mission - Iraq (NTM-I). While the mission was discontinued in 2011 due to disagreements over the status of forces agreement, the Alliance agreed to resume its training and capacity building activities in 2015. In April 2016, NATO forces began training Iraqi officers, first in Jordan and later also in Iraq. Training programmes are based on the 'train-the-trainer' approach and focus on countering improvised explosive devices (IEDs), de-mining, military medicine, and civil-military planning. Currently, this mission is based on a small core team, which organises and facilitates mobile training teams, i.e. teams that only stay in the country for short periods of time. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg also signalled that the Alliance is considering a more permanent presence of NATO instructors in Iraq and the possibility of building defence schools and academies. At the NATO 2018 Summit, the Alliance also announced the launch of a non-combat training and capacity building mission in Iraq. The role of the mission will be advising Iraqi officials, as well as to "train and advise instructors at professional military education institutions." Overall, NATO's mission in Iraq will be to maintain "a modest and scalable footprint", while supporting the ongoing efforts of the Coalition and other international actors accordingly.

54.   The deteriorating security situation in the Gulf of Guinea prompted regional as well as international stakeholders to collaborate in the fight against maritime crime long before 2016. For instance, the Gulf of Guinea littoral states agreed to establish integrated maritime security structures in 2013. Since then, three regional surveillance centres and two coordination centres have started to operate. Other responses to maritime crime in the region have been initiated by the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the EU and the G7 Friends of the Gulf of Guinea (G++FOGG). NATO is contributing to this security architecture with the Maritime Domain Awareness for Trade – Gulf of Guinea (MDAT-GoG). Run by the French and British navies, the MDAT-GoG pools security updates, reviews risks and provides guidance on vessel operating patterns in the Gulf area.

55.   More generally, NATO maintains a good level of cooperation with the African Union (AU). NATO first assisted the AU in 2005, under the framework of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS), by providing airlift for troop rotations and training, in what was the Alliance's first operation on the African continent. NATO also supported the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in 2007, again with airlift support for AU peacekeepers. Aside from specific operations, NATO provides continuous operational, logistic and capacity building support, and is involved in the operationalisation of the African Standby Force through exercises and training. NATO and the AU continue to coordinate their activities and objectives with other organisations, in particular the United Nations and the European Union, and with bilateral partners.

56.   In addition to NATO-led operations, Allies contribute to enhancing stability in the South through a number of multilateral or bilateral frameworks. In the Sahel region, for instance, Allies are active as part of Operation Barkhane (France's broader regional counter-insurgency campaign that superseded Operation Serval), the United Nations Multidimensional Integration Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), and the European Union's training missions in Mali and Niger. In 2017, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad launched the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel), a 5,000-strong multinational counter-terrorism force, to complement the aforementioned missions and prepare for the exit of foreign troops in the long-term. The group is now backed by two Security Council resolutions, has set up its headquarters in Sévaré in Mali and completed its first mission in the border area of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger last November. However, logistical and funding constraints prevent the force from becoming fully operational, which has prompted the EU, one of the group's major donors, to double its financial assistance.

57.   NATO's Partnership Cooperation Menu (PCM) outlines all the cooperation activities open to partners. It comprises a wide range of areas, including activities related to Military Education, Training and Doctrine, Defence Policy and Strategy, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, Defence Investment, Civil Emergency Planning, Crisis Management, Armaments and Intelligence. Participation by Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) countries in PCM activities has steadily increased over the years. In 2016 as well as in 2017, more than 1,000 activities were offered to MD partners.

58.   While NATO efforts to stabilise the MENA region have proved to be at least partially successful, they are insufficient to address the multifaceted threats emanating from its Southern flank. In many cases, NATO is not – and should not be – the first responder. Instead, the Alliance focuses on supporting the efforts of national authorities and multilateral organisations, most notably the AU, the EU and the UN, which are at the forefront of addressing security challenges in the South.

VI.   CONCLUSIONS

59.   The security challenges emanating from the southern flank remain of serious concern to the Alliance which has therefore a strategic interest in a stable southern neighbourhood. NATO does make an important contribution to the stability of its MENA partners through its political dialogue and particularly through its assistance to MD and Istanbul Cooperative Initiative (ICI) partners. At the 2018 Brussels Summit NATO Heads of State and Government confirmed this commitment and they decided to build a stronger and more dynamic relationship with NATO's southern partners.

60.   These decisions represent a gradual honing of NATO's cooperation with the Southern partners; they will deepen the footprint of the Alliance in the region, albeit only incrementally. As the threats from the South are more diffuse than those emanating from its Eastern flank the Alliance has now a "Framework for the South" - but not a fully-fledged strategy towards the MENA. This reflects the constraints that NATO as an organisation is facing when tackling the challenges emanating from the region. The underlying causes promoting instability and conflict on NATO's southern flank are manifold. They include, among others, acute food and water crises as a result of environmental problems, a youth bulge and hyper-urbanisation, as well as lack of social and economic opportunities which facilitate radicalisation and all kinds of extremism. These factors are aggravated by poor governance and weak state institutions. As a political-military organisation the Alliance does not dispose of the necessary instruments to address these issues or to assist MENA partner countries in tackling them. Moreover, the expectations and demands of NATO's MD and ICI partners also differ while their bilateral relationships are sometimes complicated, if not partly antagonistic.

61.   So where should NATO go from here? In the view of your Rapporteur, the Alliance needs to address the immediate security threats – which currently are in Iraq and Syria, as well as in Libya.

62.   Libya remains a security flashpoint. As long as there is no unified government there will be no progress and the country will remain in a state of chaos. The involvement of foreign actors which

pursue competing agendas and support rival factions is a main factor that has impeded the implementation of the UN action plan. NATO Allies should therefore agree on a joint policy towards Libya and use their diplomatic leverage to influence outside actors to force the actors on the ground to agree to implement the UN action plan. Following this, NATO should provide advice to Libya in the area of defence and security institution building.

63.   While NATO is not a player in Syria, the Alliance has a strategic interest in ending the civil war in the country. While the options for NATO, and NATO Allies, appear limited for the time being, NATO should obviously continue its engagement within the international coalition fighting Daesh to defeat the terror organisation on the battlefield. What is more, NATO Allies need to consider if and how they will be prepared to be involved in any post-conflict settlement. While the Assad regime appears to have won on the battlefield the Allies have leverage in shaping post-war Syria as the reconstruction of the country is likely to require some kind of contribution on their part. To that end, NATO Allies need to develop a common approach.

64.   In Iraq, the Allies need to sufficiently resource the non-combat training and capacity-building mission that was agreed upon at the 2018 Brussels Summit. Moreover, NATO Allies should consider additional measures to assist Iraq in its efforts to stabilise the country and fight terrorism. For example, in order to improve the effectiveness and sustainment of the Iraqi security structures NATO could expand its activities that promote transparency, accountability and good governance within Iraq's national security institutions and other government structures. NATO has already organised several workshops in the context of NATO Building Integrity Policy.

65.   An effective way for the Alliance to increase stability on its southern flank is to help its regional partners build resilience against security threats. NATO should therefore continue its engagement with and support for its southern partners. What is more, the Alliance should also explore ways to further develop its relations regional organisations like the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as with the AU. NATO should coordinate its initiatives with the European Union. In contrast to the Alliance, the European Union - which includes 22 of the 29 Member states of the Alliance and shares the same interests in the MENA region - is playing an important role in economic development, the promotion of good governance, democracy, rule of law and human rights. For example, the European Union's counter-terrorism policy comprises measures which are crucial in improving governance of the partner countries in the South. If applied effectively this can help Iraq, as well as other MENA countries, to address the underlying causes that drive extremism and allow terror organisations as Daesh to thrive. However, NATO and the EU can only provide assistance; the ultimate responsibility for developing good governance rests with the partner countries. Therefore, NATO needs to encourage MD partner countries to work to foster inter-ethnic and inter-sectarian reconciliation and to pursue an inclusive political process.

66.   Finally, your Rapporteur wants to stress once again that it is crucial that NATO Allies provide the necessary resources to implement the decisions already taken as well as the ones they will take in the future. If the Allies were to limit themselves to distributing mere declarations without offering the necessary military hardware to underpin the operations this would not only be counterproductive to achieving the goals for these operations, but it would also be counterproductive in that it would undermine NATO's credibility in the longer term.

67.   NATO's Southern Flank will remain unstable and will require the attention of the Allies. Your Rapporteur intends to continue to focus on this region.

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