



“Algeria: A Pivotal State in a Pivotal Region”

Africa briefing

1st June 2012 (9.45-13.00)

Algeria, the largest country in Africa, has been battered by repeated violence and repression over the past half-century. Nevertheless, it has not been directly affected by the ‘Arab spring’, which has, since the end of 2010, overthrown three authoritarian regimes of the sub region, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.

Situated at the heart of the Maghreb, bridge between North Africa and non-Arab West Africa, Algeria is in a pivotal position. As an active partner within the African Union (AU) and certainly within the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)¹, its recent internal political developments as well as its regional positioning will have a major impact on the ongoing mutation of the entire region².

With this briefing, the Observatoire de l’Afrique seeks to capture Algeria’s core role in the various regional and transnational dynamics of North and West Africa and its possible influence on the stabilization of the region.

¹ On the economic side, Algeria is also oil and gas producer, which makes it even further a key country in the region.

² International partners of Algeria on its neighborhood policy, Sahel more particularly, are the US and some neighboring EU Member States (Spain, and France in particular).

The *issues that will be specifically analyzed* in this briefing are:

- In 2011, Algeria opposed the NATO operation in Libya, notably concerned that the internationalization of the conflict would endanger its own border security. Indeed, the vacuum created by the fall of Gaddafi, already has serious consequences especially in the Sahel region where the flow of weapons and fighters was instrumental in the major political and security crisis in Mali.
- The internationalization of the AQIM terrorist group represents another major issue of concern for Algeria. AQIM, which emerged in 2007 and finds its roots in the Algerian civil war of 1991 to 2002, has developed into a regional phenomenon. The current vacuum in the region, partly a consequence of the Arab spring, partly a result of the fragile nature of regional states – such as Mali – and the porosity of the borders provide it an opportunity to further entrench the movement in the region – especially in Northern Mali, since the take-over by the Tuareg rebellion. Algeria has established a joint military structure, the CEMOC between Algeria, Mali, Niger and Mauritania, based in Tamanrasset.
- Algeria is still having complex relations with its neighbor, Morocco. However, the recent attempt to rejuvenate the long dormant Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and the starting of the 9th round of negotiations on the status of Western Sahara may provide an opportunity to appease the old two countries' struggles. A further thaw in the bilateral relations between both countries could effectively jump-start the regional integration process, secure each country's economical and trade interests and would also have positive effects on EU initiatives in the Mediterranean basin. It would also facilitate the relationship with the Sahelian states that can currently play the favor of one over the other.
- Finally, the result of the Algerian parliamentary election of 10th May, which confirmed the position of the ruling party, has bucked the trend of the "Arab Spring" and put aside the Islamists. This recent political development sets Algeria on a very interesting position within the sub region, where the Islamists parties have triumphed in Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt.

PROGRAM:

- **Introduction**
- **Panel's presentation**
- **Interactive debate**

Chair: *Mr. Hans Hoebeke*, Director of the Africa Program at Egmont Institute

Panel: *Professor Mohammed Benhammou*, President of the Moroccan Center for Strategic Studies, International expert on security and terrorism;

Mr. Abdelkader Abderrahmane, North Africa Senior Researcher, Conflict Resolution and Risk Analysis Program (CPRA), Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Addis;

Ms. Annette Lohmann, Mali Resident Representative, Friederich Ebert Stiftung (FES);

Mr. Charles Clermont, Doctor in History, Associated Researcher at the Centre d'études des mondes africains (CEMAf).

The working language will be English. Chatham House Rules apply.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION:

The event will take place in Brussels on *1st of June 2012 (9.45- 13.00)*.

Event venue:

Palais d'Egmont (room Orange)
Petit Sablon, 8
1000 Brussels

Participation is on invitation basis.

Participants are requested to register to Mrs. Julie Godin, Project Manager at Egmont Institute: j.godin@egmontinstitute.be.

The number of places is limited