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# Foreword

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Border violence in North and West Africa is increasing. Within the first six months of 2021, 60% of violent incidents and related casualties occurred within 100 kilometres of a border, half of which involved civilians. This trend, which was already apparent in the Sahel and West Africa (SWAC) report published in 2021, is most visible in West Africa, as the situation in North Africa has since stabilised with the signing of the recent ceasefire (Libya, October 2020). In view of the development of conflicts and transnational terrorist groups, three questions arise: are borderlands more violent than other areas? Has the intensity of violence increased? Are some borderlands more violent than others?

Despite being geographically and politically peripheral, borderlands influence the spatial diffusion of violence and political instability. Border conflicts are not only associated with their peripheral position to the central state, they also reflect broader political problems, such as the perceived marginalisation of certain groups.

The factors that drive state and non-state actors to adopt a transnational strategy are highly dependent on contexts at state and local levels, which explains why some borderlands are much more violent than others. Currently, the two main hotbeds of border violence are in the

Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger region and the Lake Chad Basin, where conflicts are more intense and violent events more clustered than elsewhere. There is also a commingling of violence along several of Nigeria's borders, where hotbeds of tension fuelled by different issues are converging geographically. These dynamics are further complicated by the fact that the location of the violence is changing over time.

In addition to mapping and analysing cross-border violence since the late 1990s at regional and local levels (Central and Eastern Sahel), this report also includes the views of colleagues and prominent figures involved at several levels in security and development issues. In my opinion, the following points that they raise seem particularly important:

The decline of security in the Sahel over the past 15 years highlights the fragility of Sahelian states and societies. This deterioration is not limited solely to terrorist and jihadist phenomena, but also reflects the emergence or re-emergence of community conflicts, insurgencies and the multiplication of militias with varying motives.

This lack of lasting security and stability makes it more difficult to develop an environment conducive to value creation, particularly in the agricultural sector, or to develop infrastructure

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to increase the commercial opportunities of borderlands, which are essential hubs for territorial structuring and regional integration. In addition to the fact that this situation erodes trust between the border populations and the state, humanitarian organisations are struggling to keep their promises on the ground due to restricted freedom of movement.

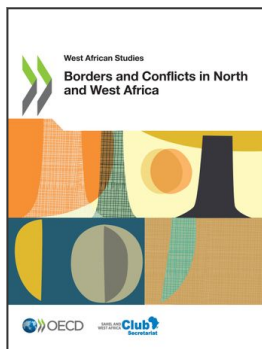
Against this backdrop, and in view of the rather pessimistic trends that emerge from the conclusions of this report, I would like to reiterate the three priorities set out by Ambassador Maman Sidikou: protect the dignity of populations, rethink territorial and information continuity, and promote local regional integration.

While the findings of this report do not claim to provide ready-made solutions to the strategies already in place, the options presented stress the importance of having new policy support tools that allow a spatial, relational and

temporal understanding of violence and trends. The European Union Special Representative (EUSR), Ms Emanuela Del Re, stresses the importance of a "civilian and political surge" as highlighted in the new European Union pact that aims to accompany the stabilisation of the region by working in close co-operation with its Sahelian partners. The report also shows the need for qualitative and quantitative interpretations through a combination of more conventional and consistent statistics with innovative indicators. These analyses are mechanisms to support decision-making in order to better anticipate future dynamics, to adapt to the region's fragilities and their interactions and volatility, and to imagine more inclusive, contextualised and place-based development and policies. SWAC/OECD hopes that these tools can be used to support sustainable and transformative change in borderlands that are at the heart of Africa's territories of tomorrow.

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