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The European Union and the Threat of Terrorism from Nigeria

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Despite numerous internal problems, Nigeria is a potential African economic and political leader and an important European Union partner that is benefitting from significant European Development Fund aid. The EU–Nigeria cooperation has recently been dominated by counterterrorism issues, but this fact should not lead to the neglect of other areas in which the Nigerian state would benefit from international assistance.

With more than 160 million inhabitants, Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and one of the most important members of the African Union, the all-African political and economic organisation, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the organisation responsible for promoting economic integration in the region. Nigeria is also the second largest economic power in Africa after South Africa, the eighth highest world exporter of oil and sixteenth in natural gas. It remains one of the candidates for membership in the BRICS group, which brings together the most important emerging powers of the modern world. The country's economic and political successes, coupled with its post-1999 achievements in the transition from military dictatorship to democracy, situate Nigeria as one of the leaders on the African continent and a potentially significant actor in international relations.

Nigeria's Internal Problems. Despite Nigeria's recent growth in importance, the country is faced with many internal problems. Its nominal gross domestic product (GDP) is less than half that of Poland. Moreover, with such a large population, Nigeria's GDP per capita is ranked 174th in the world. Consequently, its economic growth, even though in recent years amounting to 7-9% GDP per year, has not resulted in a rapid reduction in the number of people living below the poverty line, which in some northern states of the country amounts to almost 70% of the population.

One way Nigeria has tried to ensure social peace in conditions of widespread poverty has been the redistribution of national revenue through fuel price subsidies worth \$8 billion per year. According to Nigerian public opinion, the subsidies are one of the few social privileges available to the populace in this corrupt and ill-governed country. Though the government tried in 1994 and 2003 to abolish them, the January 2012 attempt along with the promise to reinvest the equivalent of the subsidies into infrastructure and social programmes floundered amidst violent social protests. Eventually, a compromise was reached and the subsidies were reduced but not abolished. If they were, it might galvanise future protests aimed at the government, which is determined to deregulate the oil sector in Nigeria.

Nigeria's difficult economic situation is complicated by its social problems—the country is inhabited by about 250 ethnic groups, Christians in the south (the richer part of the country), and Muslims in the north. Ethnic, religious, and economic differences between the Christian south and the Muslim north often lead to serious riots in which, between 1999 and 2011, 16,000 people have been killed. The northern Muslim-dominated states are ripe for inter-communal clashes with the visible and large Christian minority, which is both a target and an instigator of sectarian attacks. Moreover, between 2006 and 2009, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) conducted a terrorist campaign in the southern part of the country aimed at winning concessions over the allegedly unfair distribution of resources derived from the sale of oil and intent on pressuring the government to stop the devastation of the environment in the Niger Delta. The campaign ended

after a government amnesty and the introduction of a re-integration programme for the former terrorists at a cost of up to a half billion dollars a year.

The EU's Involvement in Nigeria. Finding solutions to Nigeria's internal problems is of key importance if the country is to continue its dynamic economic growth and to function as a democratic Sub-Saharan role model for the continent. Nigeria is the largest beneficiary of EU aid in Sub-Saharan Africa (€670 million over 2008–2013). The EU is unequivocal in its recognition of Nigeria's potential internationally and for growth while offering financial assistance, through the European Development Fund, for the amnesty process for MEND members, strengthening the state's central and local administrations—including the Independent National Electoral Commission and institutions fighting corruption—and supporting pro-transparency activities in the Nigerian justice system and reform in water resources management and police training.

During the last few months, however, most of the discussions between the EU, represented by the Danish presidency, and Nigeria have concentrated on the issue of countering terrorism by Islamist fundamentalist Boko Haram (BH, "Western Education is a Sin"). The group increased its activity in 2011 and transformed into a major threat to Nigeria's internal security.¹ Both the EU and Nigeria agree on the need to prepare a joint action plan for countering BH that could also include other African terrorist organisations also threatening Europe.

The Threat of Terrorism in Nigeria. BH is a missionary organisation operating in northeastern Nigeria that also conducts paramilitary and terrorist attacks against the Nigerian state apparatus. It has been ignored by the Nigerian authorities, which in the past have had to deal with similar religion-motivated outfits. In each case, e.g. in 1980 and 2003, the BH's predecessors met determined state resistance the moment they attempted to expand their activities into Nigeria's other regions. Similar events took place in 2009 when the Nigerian military attacked BH bases and killed the organisation's leader. As a result, the BH decentralised and in 2010 went underground, conducting secret and illegal activities.

The threat from BH increased in 2011 when more than 500 people were killed in 115 terrorist attacks attributed to this organisation. The first three weeks of 2012 saw another 250 deaths. This was the net result of BH expanding its operations beyond northeastern Nigeria, including to its capital, Abuja, and second-largest city, Kano. For the first time in BH's history the organisation deployed suicide bombers, who targeted the headquarters of the Nigerian police force and the UN compound in Abuja. This only served to increase speculation about BH's links with the group Al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb, which in recent years has begun to operate in the Sahara and has increased its propaganda campaign to recruit new members in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Although cooperation between the two organisations remains speculative, the Nigerian government decided to form closer security and intelligence bonds with neighbouring Mali and Niger. This points to the country's increasing interest in terrorism as a threat to Western Africa.

Conclusions. In 2012, EU–Nigeria cooperation will concentrate on security and combating BH. The EU should insist on the demilitarisation of Nigerian counterterrorist efforts because a democratically controlled police and security service are much better positioned to fulfil this task. It is necessary to strengthen these institutions' capacities for independent and transparent activities with the help of training exercises devised and overseen by EU advisors and observers.

Counterterrorism cooperation should not, however, totally dominate EU–Nigeria relations. The EU needs to synchronise its spending plans with those of the Nigerian government, which is aiming to place the country amongst the world's twenty largest economies by the year 2020. In order to achieve this goal, Nigeria will have to make a meaningful investment in its education system, which is largely unreformed and unprepared for global competition, and must strive to accomplish medium- and long-term rises in productivity and competitiveness. In line with Poland's long-term development aid plans for 2012–2015, its democratic transformation experiences, protection of human rights, and reform and expansion of its education system in the aftermath of communism's collapse—experience that is not widely known or appreciated in Sub-Saharan Africa—can serve as examples for Nigeria.

¹ K. Rękawek, "The Threat of Terrorism in Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa", *PISM Bulletin*, no. 101 (318), 2 November 2011.