



REPORT

Prospects for Dialogue in the Central Sahel

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On 23 October 2025, the Egmont Royal Institute of International Relations hosted a seminar titled “Prospects for Dialogue in the Central Sahel”, in partnership with the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA). The discussion brought together experts including Per Bjälkander (FBA), Dr Yvan Guichaoua (Bonn International Center for Conflict Studies), Dr Jenny Lorentzen (Norwegian Institute for International Affairs), and Dr Sidy Mariko (University of Kurukanfuga, Bamako).

Speakers examined the possibilities for renewed dialogue in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger amid political instability, ongoing violence, and regional fragmentation following the emergence of the Alliance des États du Sahel (AES).

Per Bjälkander opened the session by questioning how the region can be effectively engaged through peaceful means and what entry points for dialogue remain viable. Dr Guichaoua then presented the main findings of the FBA’s research, which drew on multiple roundtable consultations with Sahelian actors. The study reviewed three key areas: regional dialogue, talks with jihadist insurgents, and women’s participation in peace processes. At the regional level, dialogue is largely stalled multilaterally, yet bilateral exchanges persist between AES members and certain ECOWAS states acting as brokers. However, the AES itself was described as offering limited benefit to local populations, functioning mainly as a political alliance among military leaders.

On dialogue with jihadist groups, it was stressed that high-level negotiations, while most likely to yield durable peace, remain politically sensitive. Governments show little readiness to engage, and jihadist factions set high conditions for talks. More localised dialogue initiatives were identified as the most feasible short-term approach to alleviate civilian suffering. Regarding women’s participation, it was noted that although frameworks like the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and DIMPR have created openings, women’s inclusion remains partial and inconsistent, reflecting deeper structural barriers.

The discussion concluded with a call for greater regional and European solidarity, as countries like Mali and Burkina Faso face mounting pressure with limited support from neighbours. Participants agreed that despite the obstacles, dialogue in the Sahel remains possible—but it must be locally grounded, inclusive, and supported by sustained international engagement to have lasting impact.