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EU-MOROCCAN COOPERATION IN THE SECURITY AND DEFENCE ARENA

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This conference paper focuses on the relation of the European Union (EU) with one of its distinguished partners in the Mediterranean region, Morocco, with particular emphasis on security cooperation between the EU and Morocco within the framework of the Common European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). I will start with some context-setting by reviewing the situation of the partnership in general. I will then move to analyse the interaction between the two partners within the framework of ESDP.

The EU-Moroccan relations began from the early start of the European integration with the endorsement treaties of 1957. The relations emerged as a result of colonialism, and its economic ties, when France managed to secure a preferential arrangement to Moroccan exports, thereby assuring the protection of its commercial and economic interests.

It is true that the relations have developed over the last five decades, although not with the speed seen with other EU partners. It is not the aim of this paper to go through every period of the Moroccan-EU cooperation, as the time space does not allow for a comprehensive analysis. I rather focus on the current state of the cooperation between these two partners. Nowadays, Morocco has been given privileged status in its relations with the EU. This “Advanced Status” has been described as less than membership but more that a partnership. It has distinguished Morocco from its Arab-Mediterranean peers in their relations with the EU. For Morocco, this is a statement of confidence from its most important partner, the EU. It is also a recognition of all the Moroccan efforts to modernise its socio-economic and political institutions. Morocco is quite often quoted by European officials as a model of reform in the South Mediterranean countries and entire Arab world.

The Advanced Status is more a declaration of intentions than a defined and finalised product of cooperation. This new political framework of cooperation states that both partners are willing to explore all possibilities of deepening their partnership, but without EU membership aspirations. The Advanced Status aims to deepen and strengthen com-

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Commercial relations to include all aspects, but also to allow free movement of people for professional purposes. It aims also at gradually involving Morocco in many European sectoral policies.

The fact that this form of cooperation is not a legally binding framework should not lead politicians and observers to fail to recognise the opportunities associated with its flexibility. The announcement has set a political ceiling for the EU-Moroccan cooperation, which is everything but membership. The content of the Advanced Status is a workshop for artisans to shape. It is up to the countries in the region, mainly Morocco and other European Mediterranean countries to draw its features.

Since the announcement of the Advanced Status some first steps that translate the spirit of this new phase of cooperation have been adopted.

- The negotiations between the European Commission and Morocco on agriculture trade have resulted in an agreement, which is waiting for the approval of the European Parliament and the Council. This agreement aims to achieve full liberalisation of agricultural trade between the EU and Morocco over the coming years.
- Another agreement to set-up a dispute settlement mechanism has also been finalised. Its main purpose is to strengthen the economic and commercial relations between the two partners. The main aim of this mechanism is to handle trade disputes that might arise between the two partners.
- A protocol that established the participation of Morocco in several EU programmes has been approved by the Council last September 2010.

However, having highlighted the potentials of cooperation, it is worth mentioning potential sources of concern. This privileged status granted to Morocco in its relation with the EU came at very difficult economic and financial times. Most of the EU members economies are suffering from economic recession and huge deficits in their public finances. The threat of protectionism is looming at the horizon. High unemployment and budget deficits are endangering the prospect of further commercial and economic cooperation between the EU and third countries, or at least, limiting it to a cherry-picking strategy. With this new economic and financial reality, the challenge for EU-Moroccan cooperation is to assure that short-term solutions should not compromise the achievement of the timely-needed long-term objectives.

With all these in mind, a question poses itself. If everything but institutions is an accepted policy framework of cooperation with the Advanced Status, is it possible to go through it with appropriate speed and in a comprehensive way? The challenge for Morocco with its European partners is to set up an agenda that discusses more issues, such as economics, security, and free movement of people within a reasonable time-frame.

EU-Moroccan Cooperation on Security and Defence

EU-Moroccan cooperation in the areas of security and defence began with one of the earliest EU crisis management missions, operation
Althea, in 2004, the EU’s intervention in former Bosnia-Herzegovina. Following EU contacts, Morocco accepted the EU’s invitation to contribute personnel and assets to the operation. Following the signing of the contribution agreement in February 2005, approximately 150 Moroccan troops moved to serve under the European Command in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The Moroccan contribution to this European security mission was meant to show Morocco’s desire to strengthen bilateral ties with the EU in all policy areas. The Moroccan contribution to this EU-lead security mission was carried out through a window of cooperation that the EU opened to third countries for defence and security collaboration. In consequence, a Moroccan representative had to participate in the committee of contributors, which oversees day to day management of the operation. This parallel organ was created to accommodate the presence of non-EU contributors, since their participation in the Political and Security Committee (PSC) is legally not possible. The PSC is the key institution in this whole policy area.

Another forum of the EU-Morocco interaction on security and defence area was the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue on ESDP meetings. Moroccan officials attended meetings with PSC representatives, an initiative that was designed to banish distrust vis-à-vis ESDP among non-European Mediterranean partners.

Since the launch of the Mediterranean Union initiative, that includes security cooperation as part of its agenda, and within the framework of the Advanced Status, several Moroccan senior diplomats participated in meetings at the level of PSC to deliberate issues related to the Mediterranean. Inviting Morocco to participate in some meetings of ESDP committees is aimed to eradicate any possible mistrust, and to increase transparency about the views held about the regions and themes of common interest. It is also a manifestation of the special partnership between the EU and Morocco.

However, this ad hoc arrangement and limited window of engagement may not produce the effects the EU expects—and therefore probably will not last very long. The participation on an ad hoc basis will not contribute to the building of trust among the Euro-Med partners, and it does not result in the effectiveness needed. The Moroccan bilateral interaction with the PSC is limited only to an exchange of information in relation to issues of common interests. As a non-EU member, Morocco will have no room to shape the decisions of the PSC.

This takes me to remind us of what has been already said somewhere else: that there is a need for a new formal and institutionalised security and defence forum. The building of an organisation is not going to be motivated with the homogeneity that characterises the partners, but rather by the unity of the goals. The disparity among the partners in the Mediterranean is huge; Sharpe differences exist in economic structures, political practices and cultures, as well as social protection. But in a world of major global shifts at the centre of powers, a new paradigm should emerge that will govern the relation with neighbour and partner countries. In other words, this divergence in development levels should not inhibit the partners from establishing security forums.
In my humble view, opening windows of dialogue throughout the ESDP to deliberate security issues should in no way stop the process of creating a formal and institutional forum of security cooperation that bring all the partners on equal basis.

This assertion could be easily criticized by arguing that the Euro-Mediterranean space is already saturated. My simple reply is that this overlap of initiatives is a fact of life in this complex world, and in particular in this area of policy. The overlapping of security dialogue and cooperation forum is not exclusive only to the Euro-Mediterranean area, such phenomenon could be easily observed at the European level. Conventional strategic wisdom dictates that in the field of security and defence alternative cards should always be kept at hand.

Morocco’s Security Perspective

No need exists to reiterate the fact that strengthening and deepening relations with the European Union has been and still is a fundamental pillar of the Moroccan Foreign Policy. Morocco is not part of any security arrangement as a full member. It is not surprising that the Moroccan leadership could be thinking in joining or forming a partnership with the partners that it shares many geo-economic and political interests with.

Nowadays, the Mediterranean is not only a bridge for Morocco in its relation with Europe, but it is a door to a global market. Morocco’s major logistical investments in its Mediterranean coastline are clear evidence of such an approach.

The Moroccan authorities have been reiterating for a while that security in the Euro-Mediterranean and the Sahel region is crucial for the security of Morocco. The Granada declaration stated this clearly in a joint statement following the first EU-Morocco summit. Morocco with its economic aspirations in the short and long terms requires major investment in securing its region, the Euro-Mediterranean and Sahel.

Conclusion

Although the Morocco-European Security cooperation is still one of the most advanced in the region, the potential for more collaboration is great, and remains until now under-exploited. Morocco’s security efforts appear to be more genuine, rather than a paper affaire. Morocco remains the closest Arab Islamic country to Europe, not only because of its geographical proximity, but through its urban elite and though the existence of large communities of Moroccans in Europe.

Finally, surveying the literature on the Euro-Med, there is much focus on what is not working and negatively different, but less on the potentials. There is a need for academic chairs to be added to universities to develop a literature and research, focusing on inclusive matters and opportunities.