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## Article

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## The mixed legacy of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The Moroccan exception

Dragoş - Ştefan CALCAN\*

### Abstract

*Since the creation of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the EU has aimed to create a ring of stability outside its borders, in its eastern and southern neighbourhoods. In this challenging landscape, going from east to south, one of the few European successes in terms of neighbourhood policy has been Morocco, country which became a privileged partner of the EU. The paper assesses Morocco's successful cooperation with the EU, which cannot be separated from the developments regarding Western Sahara. The paper argues, by using a neo-realist approach, that the EU-Moroccan success story can be explained through the lens of history and the mutual search for security enhancement. Even though the Moroccan case study presents specific characteristics, a security centred approach could benefit the EU in relation to other neighbour countries.*

**Keywords:** EU, neighbourhood policy, Morocco, Western Sahara, security

### Introduction

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has been launched in 2004 with the aim of creating a ring of stability outside EU's borders, in the eastern and southern neighbourhoods. The policy benefited from updated terms in 2015, taking into consideration the security challenges that emerged in both neighbourhoods since 2008. The policy encompasses 16 countries, but the initial ambitions and enthusiasm of the EU were curbed after the effects propelled by the Arab Spring, in the southern regions, and the Russian military involvement in Georgia and Ukraine.

The EU recognized the existence of weak points in its strategy, acknowledging, in 2015, that most of the countries involved in the ENP were less stable than 10 years ago, while the differences of engagement between the partner countries widened during the same period (European Commission, 2015). In this context, it was highlighted the need for differentiation between the countries' engagement and aspirations, for purposes of strategic orientation, flexibility and greater visibility inside the local societies. Most of the issues remain actual even today.

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Six countries are part of the EU's eastern ENP approach: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Even though the EU's approach towards the six countries has been grouped under the umbrella of the Eastern Partnership, launched in 2009, the effectiveness of the overall approach was limited by the stronger involvement of Russia in the neighbourhood, translated in conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine and in a stronger support offered for the authoritarian regime from Minsk.

The EU's approach towards the Southern Neighbourhood has been crystallized under the Union for the Mediterranean, in 2008. However, trying to find consensus and harmonizing divergent interest between all the 27 EU member states and an additional 15 Mediterranean countries proved to be a daunting objective, rendering this institution rather ineffective.

Out of the 16 countries involved in the ENP, the cooperation with the Kingdom of Morocco stands out for its effectiveness, especially when comparing to the other countries which are part of the ENP. This paper aims to gain more understanding upon the success of the EU-Morocco cooperation, by focusing on the historical developments around Western Sahara, a disputed territory controlled *de facto* by Morocco. These evolutions are analysed in correlation with EU's approach towards Morocco and, in subsidiary, towards Western Sahara. The thesis used a neo-realist theoretical perspective, centred around the need of the state actors (or entities, in the case of the EU) to increase their security.

Edward Hallett Carr introduced the term realism in international relations theory, in 1939, aiming to describe the approach of states in the context of the systemic anarchy. Realism postulates the existence of a state-centric system, in which states are characterized by rationality and aim to gain as much power as possible. Meanwhile, states are sovereign entities, which entitles them to act as they please in internal matters, while not being entitled to meddle in the internal affairs of other states (Pevehouse and Goldstein, 2017, p. 43).

Kenneth Waltz introduced, in 1979, a refined version of realism, which became known as neo-realism. While acknowledging the key premises of realism, neo-realism postulates that states seek security rather than power to attain their subsequent goals. Moreover, the concept of power is deprived of its abstract meaning, gaining the understanding of being an aggregate indicator of one state's population, territory, natural resources, economical capacity, military capability and political stability (Baldwin, 2016, pp. 131-132). In what concerns cooperation between states, alliances are motivated by circumstantial common interests and cannot be regarded as long-lasting (Anand, 2009, p. 28).

The neo-realist perspective is used in this paper to highlight that cooperation centred on security can be successful in certain instances, even for the EU, an organization dedicated to the promotion of

liberal values. However, this case study should not be understood as a postulation for acknowledging the end of liberalism or neo-liberalism, but rather as an example of a positive dynamic that could be replicated in time by the EU, in relation with other countries involved in the ENP.

Even though the EU has been labelled as an „unidentified political object” (Rhinard and Sjöstedt, 2019, p. 4), due to its hybrid structure, which places it in between an international organization and a state, the relation between the EU and Morocco will be assimilated, in what concerns this paper's study, to a bilateral relation between two similar actors in what concerns the security interests.

The paper takes into consideration the historical evolutions of Western Sahara since the Moroccan independence (1956) until 2020, in parallel with the cooperation developed between the EU and Morocco since 2000. The research was conducted through a qualitative methodological approach, by focusing on a case study research method, while utilizing political documents, archive documents and official statements, as well as secondary literature. Some of the premises presented are supported by quantitative data, available through official reports or mass-media publications.

## **1. Western Sahara – historical context and UN involvement**

Western Sahara, situated on the Western shore of Africa, between Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria, is regarded as the last African territory still haunted by the colonialist spectre, being part of the UN list of non-self-governed territories since 1963, when it was still part of the Spanish Kingdom. With a population of approximately 567 000 persons and a surface of 266 000 km<sup>2</sup> (United Nations, 2019), Western Sahara is the biggest entity from the 16 territories list of the global non-self-governed entities.

After the Moroccan independence, in 1956, Spain renounced to most territorial possessions in the region, with some notable exceptions – the Ceuta and Melilla exclaves, the Canary Islands and Rio del Oro (Western Sahara) (Calvocoressi, 1991, p. 486). The status of the Spanish Sahara - official name of Western Sahara from 1958 to 1976 - was further complicated by the Moroccan independence (1956) and the Mauritanian independence (1960). Both states requested to exert control over the Spanish Sahara, taking into consideration their historical rights.

In northern Africa, Morocco and Algeria started their post-independence relation in the most unconstructive way, by engaging in a war for the delimitation of borders in 1963. Thus, the premises for decades of mistrust and problematic relations between the two parties were created, with Rabat and Algiers developing opposing views on Western Sahara. Moreover, the historical events also shaped the evolution of the two countries. Morocco represented an important ally for the United States

of America after the Second World War and especially after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (Mundy, 2017, p. 60.). On the other side, the brutal war of independence of Algeria against France, an important NATO member, opened the way for Algiers in choosing a close relation with the USSR. Moreover, in the diplomatic correspondence of the era it was believed that the United States of America favoured Morocco's position to prevent Western Sahara from becoming an Algerian, and subsequently, a USSR proxy with access to the Atlantic Ocean (Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, 1975, p. 73).

According to the UN recommendations, Spain initiated demarches for organising a referendum that would address the self-determination aspirations of the people from the Spanish Sahara. The Spanish position, formulated in 1966, was supported by Mauritania and approved by Morocco (Cour Internationale De Justice, 1975). Nevertheless, considering the requests formulated afterwards by Morocco and Mauritania, the UN decided, through the General Assembly's resolution 3292/December 13, 1974, to request the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over the status of the Spanish Sahara. The Court had to answer two questions: "*Was Western Sahara (Rio de Oro and Sakiet El Hamra) at the time of colonization by Spain a territory belonging to no one (terra nullius)?*" and, in case of a negative answer, "*What were the legal ties between this territory and the Kingdom of Morocco and the Mauritanian entity?*". Moreover, through the same resolution, the UN requested Spain to postpone the organisation of the referendum, in order to implement the most adequate measures for the decolonization of Western Sahara, in line with the answers of the ICJ (United Nations General Assembly, 1974).

The International Court of Justice decided that Western Sahara was colonized by Spain in 1884. Taking into consideration the Royal Spanish Decree from December 26, 1884, which confirmed the Spanish protectorate over Rio de Oro, following the agreements concluded with the local independent tribal chiefs as well as the negotiations with France for a common border in northern Africa, the ICJ concluded that Western Sahara was not a governed territory at the time of the colonization (Cour Internationale De Justice, 1975).

In what concerns the second question, the court concluded that even though the Saharan tribes had relations with both the Moroccan sultan and Mauritanian tribes, the interactions were the result of the nomadic character of the population or of personal relations.

In the meantime, the identification of important phosphates deposits, coupled with the territorial claims of Morocco and Mauritania, fuelled the apparition of an anti-colonial movement in Western Sahara. The Polisario Front (Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el-Hamra y de Río de Oro) thus emerged in 1973, in Mauritania.

Regardless of the ICJ ruling, Morocco continued to pursue a policy for gaining control over Western Sahara. In 1975, Morocco and Mauritania concluded a preliminary agreement regarding the exploitation of the phosphate resources. Diplomatic correspondence from the era highlights that Morocco pressured Spain on the Western Sahara issue, by requesting the UN to include the Spanish exclaves in northern Africa on the UN list of non-self-governed territories, while trying to convince the Arab states to stop exporting energy to Spain (Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, 1975, pp. 9-16). In the same year, the Moroccan king, Hassan the Second, ordered the Green March, when 350 000 Moroccan entered Rio de Oro, still Spanish territory, to protest (Calvocoressi, 1991, p. 486.). Even though the Spanish army was considerably stronger, the authorities in Madrid decided to negotiate directly with Morocco and Mauritania over the control of Western Sahara. Thus, Spain, Morocco and Mauritania signed the Madrid Agreements, on November 14, 1975, which highlighted the Spanish decision to decolonize Western Sahara and to install a temporary administration, in collaboration with Morocco and Mauritania (United Nations, 1975). Morocco gained control over two thirds of the territory (the upper part), while one third was allotted to Mauritania (the lower part).

In 1976, after Spain ceded control of Western Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania, the Polisario Front started a conflict with both African countries. The leaders of Polisario also proclaimed the birth of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in exile in Libya, during the same year. (Calvocoressi, 1991, p. 486.) Despite suffering in the early stages of the conflict, the Polisario Front managed to recover by switching to guerrilla warfare. The war in the Western Sahara was financially too demanding for the fragile Mauritanian economy, which abandoned Western Sahara in 1978, following a military coup in Nouakchott. Mauritania renounced to all claims on Western Sahara and re-established diplomatic relations with Algeria (Calvocoressi, 1991, p. 486.). However, Morocco did not accuse the same economic shock of the war and occupied the territory abandoned by Mauritania. In 1981, Morocco started to build a fortified sand wall (berm), which reduced the threat of guerrilla attacks and which established a *de facto* rule of Morocco over about 85% of the Western Sahara's territory.

However, the Polisario Front was able to conduct violent attacks outside the berm. For example, according to diplomatic correspondence from the era, Polisario launched an attack, with soviet arms, in September 1988, that inflicted casualties on 146 Moroccan troops. (Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, 1988, p. 72). During the same year, Morocco and the Polisario Front seemed to reach a compromise for the settlement of the Western Sahara conflict, through a ceasefire agreement and an understanding towards organizing a referendum to decide the fate of Western

Sahara (United Nations, 1988). However, the fights resumed shortly, which prompted the UN to intervene in a firmer way and create a peacekeeping mission in Western Sahara.

The UN Security Council Resolution 690/April 29, 1991 created the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in the Western Sahara (MINURSO), which prompted a transition period in Western Sahara, during which a referendum was to be organised, for the local population to choose between independence or integration into the Moroccan state (United Nations Security Council, 1991).

Even though the referendum was scheduled to take place in 1996, both parties chose to delay the process when they considered the opposing party was closer to securing victory. Finally, MINURSO validated the participation of 86 368 persons for the referendum.

The appointment of Kofi Annan as UN secretary general and James Baker as Personal Envoy of the UN secretary general for Western Sahara created a new dynamic for the UN's involvement in the conflict. Baker elaborated two different plans for the settlement of the Western Sahara conflict, starting with an autonomy period for Western Sahara, under Moroccan rule, followed by a referendum. The explicit possibility on the referendum ballot to vote for independence caused Morocco to reject the proposals, while also gathering important support from two of the UN Security Council's permanent members – the United States of America and France and from one non-permanent member of the era - Spain (Congressional Research Service, 2014).

The coalition gathered by Morocco caused the abandonment of the Baker's plans, chain of events which also prompted his resignation. In 2007, Morocco proposed integrating Western Sahara under its territory and granting autonomy, as a basis for solving the conflict, while the Polisario Front proposed relaunching the Baker plans (Theofilopoulou, 2017, p. 45). The UN Security Council deemed the Moroccan proposal serious and credible and asked the parties to enter negotiations without preconditions, to identify a just, long-lasting and mutually acceptable political solution (United Nations Security Council, 2007).

The prolonged Western Sahara conflict and the lack of progress in the MINURSO mandate fulfilment, 29 years since the beginning of the mission, denotes a lack of understanding of the conflict. Even though, from the international law point of view, the Western Sahara conflict is tied to decolonization, from Morocco's point of view it is a secessionist attempt, situation which renders the positions of the parties irreconcilable (Mundy, 2017, p. 62.). The initial optimism brought by the first direct negotiations between parties in six years, obtained by UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Horst Köhler, in 2019, suffered a major setback after the UN official left his position due to health issues (Euractiv, 2019).



Meanwhile, Morocco continued to consolidate its control on the disputed territory, with the Moroccan Parliament voting, on January 22, 2020, to integrate the Western Sahara territorial waters in the Moroccan maritime borders. The decision represented a blow to the SADR, but also to Spain, directly affected by this decision, with regards to the maritime area delimitation of the Canary Islands (Le Monde, 2020).

## **2.The EU – Morocco cooperation**

The relations between EU and Morocco go long way back, with the first commercial agreement between the parties being realized in 1976. The EU and Morocco signed an association agreement in 1996, which became functional in 2000, putting the basis of a comprehensive dialogue on good governance, migration and security, as the key areas of cooperation. Morocco was granted advanced cooperation status in 2008, the first southern ENP country to benefit from such a position which entitles the parties to work on a common economic area. Despite the massive EU investment, it remains doubtful that EU has succeed in transforming Morocco into a more democratic and inclusive society, in European reference terms. Moreover, granting Jordan advanced status in cooperation in 2010 and branding the cooperation with Tunisia as privileged partnership, in 2011, diluted, at that point in time, the advanced status granted to Morocco in 2008 (Martin, 2014). However, Morocco has gradually become a privileged partner of the EU, with the last association council taking place in 2019, standing today as one of the most successful partners of the EU in its neighbourhood.

In bilateral terms, on March 3, 2018 the Euro-Mediterranean Aviation Agreement between the European Community and its Member States and the Kingdom of Morocco entered into force. On April 4, 2018, the parties agreed on Morocco's participation in the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA), framework developed for enabling solutions to water scarcity and food security on both shores of the Mediterranean (European Commission, 2018).

The EU has allocated a financial package between EUR 1 323 million and EUR 1 617 million for bilateral assistance during the timeframe 2014-2020 (European Commission, 2020). In December 2019, the European Commission agreed new programs worth EUR 389 million, for cooperation with Morocco, in the areas of inclusive development, border management and reforms (European Commission, 2019). In 2019, the organization of the EU-Morocco Association Council led to the inauguration of the Euro-Moroccan Partnership for Shared Prosperity, relaunching also the talks regarding a new trade agreement – the first African state to be proposed a comprehensive free trade area, which would translate into economic integration, services liberalization, protection of



investments and standardization in several economic and commercial areas. New strategic priorities of the EU-Morocco cooperation were expected to be adopted in 2020, but the current pandemic context has temporarily paused the demarches. Nonetheless, the European Investment Bank announced in 2020 a financial package worth EUR 200 million, to be disbursed in two instalments, to help Morocco in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic (European Union, 2020).

The appointment of Josep Borrell as High Representative of the EU is believed to also have an important role in the current and future EU-Moroccan relations, considering Borrell's understanding of Moroccan realities, following his previous tenure as Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs. One of the major priorities of the EU will be to restart the dialogue on a mobility partnership, considering Morocco's reluctance to readmit third country nationals (Moran, 2019). The most recent interaction occurred on September 11, 2020, when Josep Borrell had a phone conversation with the Moroccan foreign minister, Nasser Bourita, regarding the developments in the Maghreb region, as well as on the recent developments in Libya, including Morocco's involvement in the peace talks (European Union External Action, 2020).

The cooperation between Brussels and Rabat developed also in the field of climate change and renewable energy. In 2020, the EU approved grants worth EUR 61.3 million, through the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, for several countries of the ENP – Morocco, Egypt, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The lion's share was taken by Morocco, who received EUR 21.1 million (Afrik21, 2020). It is worth noting that Morocco has the biggest solar farm in the world, in Ouarzazate, built on 3 000 hectares (approximately the size of 3 500 football pitches). Morocco aims to generate 42% of the national energy demand from renewable sources by the end of 2020 (CNN, 2019).

The gradual increase of cooperation between EU and Morocco encountered pauses only when the status of Western Sahara impeded bilateral initiatives. Following the Court of Justice of the EU's position, in 2016, regarding the non-application of the 2012 EU-Morocco trade agreement to Western Sahara, Morocco decided to suspend its political dialogue between 2016 and 2019. This event showcased how leverage could be used when both parties are actively interested in cooperating. On the one side, EU has a clear interest in cooperating with Morocco, for curbing the illegal migration from Sub-Saharan Africa towards Europe, with one of the migratory routes going through Mauritania upwards, to Morocco and Spain. According to figures presented by the Moroccan authorities, the north African country prevented, in 2019, around 74 000 irregular migration attempts towards Spain, dismantled 208 human trafficking rings, while rescuing 19 554 migrants at sea (El Pais, 2020). According to figures, about 57 000 people arrived illegally in Spain in 2018, while 89 000 were

stopped by Morocco in the same year (Reuters, 2019). Besides these figures, the EU highly contributes to the development of specific projects related to the well-being of migrants arriving in Morocco, through the EU Trust Fund for Africa – the North Africa window. Seven projects were developed in this regard, worth a total of EUR 182 million. The cooperation on migration and fighting against terrorism is beneficial for both parties, with the EU borders being protected with an extra security layer and Morocco receiving funding for improving its own internal capabilities. However, despite Morocco's attentive monitoring of its borders and prevention on religious radicalization, EU's desiderate to reform a rather repressive Moroccan security sector remains far from reach.

On the other side, Morocco manages to access important funds through EU financial packages, while maintaining the red line of its external policy over the status of Western Sahara. The most recent declarations of the EU's officials on Western Sahara, as well as the boost in the bilateral relation seem to indicate a subtle common understanding on the matter. The EU, through the High-Representative Borrell, deemed the Morocco's efforts on Western Sahara and *serious and credible*, expressed support for the UN led negotiations, while encouraging the parties to continue to engage in talks in a *spirit of realism and compromise*. (The North Africa Post, 2020).

Even though Borrell referred to realism as an invitation for a reality-based perspective, his approach could be seen also as a referral to realism as theory of international relations. From Morocco's perspective, Western Sahara is a matter of national sovereignty and outside actors should refer to it in the same manner. From the EU's perspective, the status of Western Sahara is less important than the security rationales that guide the EU-Morocco relations, aspect that can be seen by Brussels' approach towards this entity.

### **3. European Union and Western Sahara in the wider context of EU-Morocco relations**

The EU supports the UN process in identifying a just, long-lasting solution, acceptable to both parties involved in the Western Sahara conflict. None of the EU countries recognized the SADR. However, the geopolitical and security interest of the EU generated a lower engagement from Brussels in the process of identifying a solution for the Western Sahara conflict. The specific administrative architecture of the EU also enabled the co-existence of ambivalent positions towards Western Sahara. Thus, even though the European Commission and the Council of the EU chose to rather ignore the Western Sahara issue and pursue close cooperation with Morocco, the European Parliament and the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid

Operations actioned, at times, sympathetic towards Western Sahara (Grande-Gascón and Ruiz-Seisdedos, 2017, p. 79.).

The position of the European Parliament towards Western Sahara is not constant, depending on the ideological composition resulted following the European elections. For example, the European Parliament considered in 1980 that Western Sahara was an internal conflict and not subject to decolonization, while the Parliament recognised in 1989 the right to self-determination of the Sahrawi population (Grande-Gascón and Ruiz-Seisdedos, 2017, p. 82).

Morocco's role became even more important after the regime change in Libya, which entitled an increase in the terrorist activity in the region with direct repercussions in the migration crisis. Besides the cooperation between Brussels and Rabat in terms of migration and mobility, Spain concluded a bilateral agreement with Morocco. The agreement, which is meant to decrease the migratory flows towards Spain (including exclaves Ceuta and Melilla), included a financial package of EUR 30 million for the Moroccan authorities (El Pais, 2019).

Another important dimension of the EU-Morocco relation is represented by the resource exploitation, with a particular focus on the fisheries. The EU and Morocco concluded fisheries agreements in 1988, 1992, 1995 and 2006. The EU decided not to extend the agreement in 2011, based on economic, ecological and legal issues. A new agreement was reached in 2014 (European Parliament, 2019), valid until 2018, which also constituted a decision of the European Court of Justice. On February 27, 2018, in the decision C-266/16, the European Court of Justice decided that the EU-Morocco fisheries agreement was valid only when referring to Moroccan territorial waters. The Court stated that while Western Sahara is not Moroccan territory, the fisheries agreement appliance to Western Sahara's waters would be contrary to international law and to the self-determination principle (Court of Justice of the European Union, 2018).

Nonetheless, the EU ratified, on May 4, 2019, a new fisheries agreement with Morocco, which applied also to Western Sahara's waters. The new agreement is concluded for a 4-year period, with the EU engaging to pay EUR 208 million to fish in Morocco's territorial waters (Council of the European Union, 2019), including in those corresponding to Western Sahara. In the proposal of the EU decision, from October 8, 2018, to adopt a new agreement, it is stipulated that the parties took into consideration the Decision of the European Court of Justice, as the local population benefits from the economic and social consequences of the agreement and that the Kingdom of Morocco is the sole possible dialogue partner of the EU in concluding a fisheries agreement (European Commission, 2018). Thus, the EU utilized the legal opinion of the deputy secretary general of the UN for legal affairs, Hans Corell, who stated in 2002 that the exploitation of natural resources from non-self-

governed territories is legal if there is collaboration with the local population and the interest of the natives is taken into consideration (Grande-Gascón and Ruiz-Seisdedos, 2017, p. 85).

The decision on the fisheries agreement came after the European Parliament voted on January 16, 2019, to amend the first and the fourth protocols of the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement between EU and Morocco, extending its provisions to goods coming from Western Sahara. The two decisions made the representative of the Polisario Front to address the UN secretary general, accusing EU of disrespecting human rights and international law, as well as the peace process led by the UN (United Nations Security Council, 2019).

Besides the EU interest, as a group, with the EU being the biggest economic partner of Rabat, Morocco enjoys the constant support of France and Spain. France equipped the Moroccan army during the active phase of the military conflict (1977-1991), while President Jacques Chirac referred to Western Sahara as the southern provinces of Morocco, in 2001, during an official visit to Rabat. The France's interest could also be regarded as maintaining leverage on the complicated relation with Algeria (Darbouche and Colombo, 2010, p. 6). On the other side, Spain has a more nuanced relation with Morocco, having to balance the bilateral interests with Rabat (exclaves Ceuta and Melilla, the fisheries agreement, the irregular migration), the favourable public opinion towards Western Sahara and the energetic interests in Algeria (Darbouche and Colombo, 2010, p. 7.). However, the large Moroccan communities from France and Spain, which generate important levels of remittances and tourist flows, contribute to the close relation and support provided by these countries to Rabat, regardless of other bilateral issues (Moran, 2019).

The Western Sahara issue also dominates the association initiatives between the European Union and the African Union, considering that SADR is an official member of the African continental organization since 1984. The fifth EU-AU summit, organized in 2017 in Abidjan, raised the issue of the SADR participation in the event, taken into consideration Morocco's opposition and the non-recognition of SADR by any European country. Even though SADR received an invitation only from the African Union (all the other countries received an invitation signed by three parties – the EU, the African Union and the host country of the summit), with the EU not willing to involve in the issue, the participation of the SADR generated no major incidents during the event.

At the same time, Western Sahara could be regarded as one of the reasons for the less productive relations between the EU and Algeria. Even though not officially part of conflict, Algeria is a long-standing ally of the Sahrawi cause. From a geopolitical perspective, Algeria tried to balance the power of its regional rival, choosing a close cooperation with actors like Russia or China, aspect which also explains its lower engagement with the EU.

## Conclusions

This paper aimed at gaining more understanding on the successful nature of the relation between the EU and Morocco, by applying a neo-realist approach to describe the mutually beneficial partnership, from the security point of view, which represents a basis for consolidating the additional economic cooperation.

The history of the modern and independent Morocco could not be separated from the developments regarding the status of Western Sahara, aspect that is replicated in all its external relations. Becoming a red line of the Moroccan foreign policy, Western Sahara became an important factor that shaped the EU-Morocco relations, taking into consideration both parties' interests. The migratory crisis and the growing threat of terrorism coming from northern Africa has decreased the incentives for the EU to become involved in the Western Sahara issue and enabled Brussels and some key member states to take a rather pro-Moroccan stance, considering Rabat efforts to stop irregular migration towards Europe. On the other side, not having the EU involved in the issues regarding Western Sahara was and still is important for Morocco, as it fortifies the portrait of dealing with domestic issue. Moreover, by relating to power in the neo-realist approach, Morocco's control consolidation over Western Sahara translates into bigger territory, larger population and more natural resources administered from the capital.

The paper did not aim to minimise the high rate of convergence in terms of values between the EU and Morocco (in comparison with other countries from the ENP), but rather to emphasize how security related issues entails two partners to enforce their collaboration and to minimise or to reinterpret international law (another neo-realist premise). The success of the EU – Morocco cooperation presents certain distinct features, with Western Sahara the most prominent one, which would make it hard to replicate, as a model, to other relations that EU is developing in its eastern and southern neighbourhood. However, shifting perspectives and adopting a more neo-realist approach could well benefit the EU in fostering other bilateral relations in its neighbourhood, starting from the basic concern evolving around security, which represented the core rationale of the ENP.

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