Morocco and the African Union: A New Chapter for Western Sahara Resolution?

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Morocco and the African Union

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# Table of Contents

Executive Summary .......................... 1  
Introduction ................................ 2  
Historical and Political Context ........ 3  
Morocco's Split with the OAU ............. 5  
From the OAU to the AU .................... 9  
Morocco's Re-engagement with the African Continent 10  
New Opportunities to Mend Broken Ties .... 12  
References .................................. 15  
Writer's Biography .......................... 15
Executive Summary

Morocco, aware of the prominent role the African Union could play in the process of the resolution of the Western Sahara conflict, formally requested in September 2016 to join the African Union. In this way it could defend its sovereignty over the Western Sahara and break many African leaders’ unanimous support of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). Furthermore, a few years ago, many African leaders, at several occasions, extended the invitation to Morocco to step up to the plate and join the organization.

On January 31st, 2017, Morocco became the 55th member of the African Union (AU), the pan African body which took the place of the Organization of the African Unity (OAU) in July 2002. After more than thirty years in the African political wilderness, Morocco’s return to the African Union, witnessed the culmination of a yearlong extensive and fervent diplomatic battle aimed to extend its circle of African allies to major nations in the region.

When Morocco bitterly departed the pan-African organization in 1984 in protest of the admission of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as a full member, it continued to deal with this situation at a distance, or from behind the scenes and through allies, yet experienced ups and downs. Indeed, the fact that Morocco left the Pan-African organization was repeatedly criticized by many analysts and friends.

1 In November 1984, Morocco left the Organization of the African Union (OAU) after the SADR became a member. In the context of that period, the withdrawal from the OAU seemed necessary. The landscape offered by the continent did not allow Morocco to do otherwise. Already in 1982, the so-called SADR was admitted as the 51st member of the OAU, deemed illegal by Morocco, which succeeded in boycotting the Tripoli Summit by 24 of the 54 member countries in the organization. One can understand the reasoning behind the decision by the late King Hassan II to leave the African organization. The cost of this departure was evidently high: the diplomacy of the country was put in a difficult situation for approximately 32 years. Diplomats hostile to Morocco were given free rein for their views and undertakings.
of Morocco, who described it as an ‘empty chair policy’. Politically, this long distance combat became stiff, and this move ceded the advantage to Morocco’s adversaries through the influence of powerful states. Economically, however, Morocco has been slowly and steadily establishing itself, as an important economic power in sub-Saharan Africa. Although Morocco had pledged to have the SADR suspended from the Pan-African Organization, and swore that it will not sit in the same room as the SADR, Rabat will now have to coexist with all AU member states, including SADR.

Besides general political, economic and security interests, Morocco was persuaded to reenter the AU because of several specific factors. These include the UN stagnation in solving the Western Sahara dispute and Morocco’s priority to suppress the international pressure to have the human rights component included within the duties of the mandate of the United Nations Mission for Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Furthermore, reviving the Western Sahara dispute at the AU with Morocco’s presence, will allow Rabat to capitalize on the AU’s new transition, in order to benefit from more favorable terms and promote Morocco’s priorities in the Western Sahara. In addition, the May 2016 death of the SADR’s Secretary General, Mohamed Abdelaziz, a leader who has led the Polisario movement for more than 35 years, will help Rabat, to influence the movement’s new leadership in resolving the Western Sahara conflict.

Lastly, Morocco rejoining the African Union adheres to the organization’s objectives and priorities, to “… accelerate the political and socio-economic integration of the continent” (African Union, 2002). This again is also reiterated in the AU’s “Agenda 2063,” which states that “… the political unity of Africa will be the culmination of the integration process, including the free movement of people, the establishment of continental institutions, and full economic integration” (African Union, 2014).

Introduction

This paper will examine the fundamental reasons for Morocco acceding to the African Union as a member in light of its efforts to reinforce relations with many African countries at the economic and social development levels, after thirty years of political absence. Furthermore, this examination is conducted in the context of the longest of Africa’s disputes: the Western Sahara conflict. The inability of the African parties--along with the international community--to execute a realistic solution to this question has had a significant cost, especially for the African continent union.

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The core argument in this article is that despite a lack of opportunities for fresh strategies and ingenious perspectives to solve the Western Sahara dispute, Morocco’s realpolitik and diplomatic strategy will be put to test. This is especially the case given that it will be confronted to its traditional rival, Algeria, as well as South Africa, when it comes to resolving the Western Sahara conflict. Therefore, with Morocco’s reentry within the AU, the Western Sahara dispute will not be buried anymore. However, there must be genuine collaboration with the protagonists in the conflict, the Polisario and Algeria, the latter of which has always considered itself as an interested party in the conflict.

Historical and Political Context

In 1884, Spain, a latecomer to the colonial scramble for Africa, seized the Western Sahara. Local tribes refused to accept this territorial claim, instead choosing to engage in a fifty year fight over this colonial power over control of the land. After Morocco won independence of its northern territory in 1956, Spain maintained control over the coastal region of the country known as the Western Sahara. The months of June and July 1956 marked the start of Morocco’s Liberation Army (MLA) actions along with two major Saharan tribes, Tekna and Reguibat, who fought against the Spanish rule to have the Western Sahara reintegrated within Morocco. In February 1957, the MLA launched its attacks against French posts. Spaniards and their supporters were killed and their installations as well as their garrisons were destroyed. In February, 1958, with the French military, the Spanish army retaliated, through a combined French-Spanish powerful military operation, by the name of Ouragan, during which the Moroccan Liberation Army was heavily defeated.

In 1963, Morocco successfully lobbied to have the United Nations formally declare the Western Sahara a non-self-governing territory and requested Spain to decolonize it. In 1976, Morocco’s colonial era came to an end when Spain eventually decided to withdraw from the Western Sahara, through the Madrid Accords signed jointly with Spain, Mauritania and Morocco on November 14th 1975. This accord deferred sovereignty of the territory to Morocco (the northern two-thirds) and Mauritania (the southern third), after a transitional tripartite administration period. Subsequently, 1976 saw the establishment of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), with a government in exile in Algeria, whose aim is to establish a sovereign state in Western Sahara. Serious fighting took place between the SADR’s national

liberation movement, the Polisario forces, Mauritania and Morocco. This led Mauritania to sign a cease-fire agreement with the Polisario in August 1975, renouncing its part of Western Sahara. Morocco immediately took control of most of the southern part of the territory formerly occupied by Mauritania.

Initially, the Polisario Front - A liberation group founded on May 10, 1973 by Mustapha Sayed El Ouali whose initial goal was to “Opt for revolutionary violence and armed struggle as the means by which the Saharawi population can recover its total liberty and foil the maneuvers of Spanish colonialism,” then completely changed its course of action, delivering an ambiguous statement in favor of full independence of the Western Sahara, during its second congress in August 1974. This announcement proclaimed the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as a government-in-exile in Algeria. The Polisario have since received the political, military and diplomatic backing of the Algerian regime against Morocco.

Since Morocco inherited the Spanish Sahara territory in 1975, it has engaged in a costly battle with the Algerian-backed Polisario both on the ground and through international organizations. Not only have Algeria and Libya tried all they could to undermine Morocco’s lobbying for international endorsement of its claim to the territory, but these governments have also actively helped the Polisario gain international recognition as the government-in-exile. In 1988, both parties accepted a UN Peace Plan and in 1991, the United Nations Security Council brokered a ceasefire which was monitored by The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).

Under the aegis of the United Nations, neither Morocco nor the Polisario has moved away from their original incompatible positions that would break the stalemate. The latest UN resolution on Western Sahara 6, under the new general secretary Antonio Guterres, marks the continuity of substantive talks between the two protagonists. The end results will now rest on Morocco’s and the Polisario’s good will, and on UN efforts to involve Algeria in the negotiations. The difficulties faced by all the previous UN special envoys for Western Sahara should also encourage the new UN secretary general to rethink their role on the basis of a new “road map” whose goal is to come up with new negotiations dynamics for a “fair and mutually acceptable solution under the UN auspices.


Morocco’s Split with the OAU

In light of Algeria and Libya’s unconditional support of the Polisario becoming a member of the Organisation of the African Union (OAU), several meetings were held on the matter. In January 1976, the OAU Liberation Committee in Maputo, Mozambique endorsed the entry of the Polisario into the OAU as a liberation movement, but it did not obtain the majority of the states’ votes. Then, in July 1976, the Polisario leaders were expelled from the OAU Summit in Port Louis. The foreign affairs minister of Mauritius, Sir Harold Walter, stated that “...The Polisario, which unilaterally proclaimed the independence of the Saharawi Republic, is not a liberation movement that could be recognized by the OAU, and it has not yet been recognized by the Organisation of the African Union.” During the summit, Algeria and Libya managed to re-open the Sahara issue and concluded by calling for an extraordinary summit to examine the Western Sahara question. Issues discussed at the summit included the date, the venue and reaching out to the protagonists, including the population of the Western Sahara. During this particular meeting, no indication was made as to whether the Polisario would be included.

Two years later, on the eve of its fifteenth summit held in Khartoum, the OAU postponed an emergency summit addressing the Sahara question, instead creating an ad-hoc committee of “Wisemen” in charge of a fact-finding mission to examine all aspects of the problem including the population of the territory’s right to self-determination. The committee was interrupted by the sudden overthrow of Mauritanian President Mokhtar Ould Dada. Both Algeria and Morocco objected to some members of the committee, and stated that they would impede the committee’s progress as they found it to be impartial. On the one hand, Morocco opposed the membership of Moussa Traoré of Mali and Julius Nyerer of Tanzania because of the Malian president’s hostility toward Rabat and the November 1978 Tanzanian recognition of SADR. On the other hand, Algeria vehemently opposed that the committee be supervised by Sudan because of President Nimeiri’s strong ties with Rabat.

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8 Resolution AHG/res 92 XV. The committee of “wisemen” or “sages” comprised the heads of state of Nigeria, Mali, Gunea, Ivory Coast and Tanzania. It was chaired by President Jaafar Numeiri of Sudan.

When the OAU rulings came out, Morocco accepted them, but Algeria and the Polisario protested the composition of the committee and clearly stated that they would not heed the findings of the OAU’s special summit, instead declaring that the UN is the only “true and appropriate framework for decolonization”. Along with Kodjo and the Malian president, Moussa Traoré, who were clearly standing with the Algerian position, the Polisario regained trust in the ad-hoc committee during which a report recognized the Madrid Accord of November 14, 1975 as an international juridical act by virtue of which “the administration of the territory was transferred to Morocco and Mauritania and did not embody a transfer of sovereignty”. Morocco vehemently contested that its sovereignty over the Western Sahara had never been abandoned, even during the Spanish occupation.

The harsh ideological differences between Morocco, Algeria, and Libya escalated to a degree that they impacted upon the other OAU members. By 1982 two ideological groups surfaced within the Pan-African Organisation.

In December 1979, during a meeting in Monrovia, Chadli Benjdid, along with the Mauritanian Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as the Polisario leaders, heavily campaigned on behalf of SADR’s leadership. A resolution emerged from the ad-hoc committee and took into consideration the Algiers Accord, which calls Morocco to withdraw its troops and administration from the Western Sahara. It also proposed that an OAU peace-keeping force should observe a ceasefire while the referendum was being held. This would not have happened if Morocco had attended the meeting.

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10 The OAU ad-hoc committee document AHG/93 (XVI). See, Jeune Afrique, No 970, Paris, 8 August 1979, pp.39-53. The committee recommendations are in p.52; see also, Sahara info 36-37, August-September 1979, p.11

11 Ali Bahaijoub, Western Sahara Conflict: Historical, Regional and International Dimensions, North South Books, 2010, p.344

12 Text of resolution in, Sahara-info 41. Algiers, January 1980, p.3; Le Monde, 7 December 1979, p.3

13 Article 28 of the OAU Charter stipulates that: “1- any independent sovereign African State may at any time notify the Secretary General of its intention to adhere or accede to this charter”. “2- The Secretary General shall, on receipt of such notification, communicate a copy of it to all the member states. The decision of each Member State shall be transmitted to the Secretary General, who shall, upon receipt of the required number of votes, communicate the decision to the state concerned”
By 1980, 26 out of 50 OAU members had recognized the SADR, and it appealed for its admission within the OAU on the grounds of Article 28 of the charter. Moroccan officials contended the enforcement of the OAU Charter, especially Articles 4, 27, and 28 paragraph one, and argues that the SADR was not a state, nor was it independent and sovereign and therefore could not claim admission into the organization. The committee met again in Freetown in 1980, under the chairmanship of Siaka Stevens and with the presence of the interested parties, which was comprised of delegations from Morocco, Algeria, the Polisario, Mauritania, Guinea, Nigeria, Mali, Sudan and Tanzania. The committee also included representatives from the Mouvement de la Resistance des Hommes Bleus (MOREHOB); Front de Libération et de l’Unité (FLU); Partido de la Union Nacional Sahraoui (PUNS) and Association des originaires du Sahara anciennement espagnol (L’AOSARIO).

A resolution was adopted during the meeting, based on the Monrovia Summit, with recommendations to implement a ceasefire, to be executed by a UN peacekeeping force, within three months and for the OAU to hold a referendum with the help of the United Nations. Morocco endorsed the referendum held at the OAU Summit in Nairobi in 1981. This was also hailed by Chadli Benjdid but declined by the Polisario leaders who put pressure to conduct direct negotiations as a precondition to any referendum in the Western Sahara. During the second session in Nairobi in February 1982, the foreign ministers came up with details of the referendum and the ceasefire, but neither the Polisario nor Algeria compromised on the outcome and insisted once more on conducting direct negotiations, as a sine qua non condition to any progress on the issue.

The implementation committee enforced Decision AHG/IMP.C/WS/DEC I. (II).REV.2., which stipulated inter alia that the Committee and the chairman would set up a date for the ceasefire, and that a peacekeeping force and/or a military observer group would supervise the confinement of troops to their bases. At the request of the Moroccan administration, it would stay in the Western Sahara and was called

14 Article 4 stipulates that: “Each independent sovereign African state shall be entitled to become a Member of the Organisation”. Article 27 states that, “any question which may arise concerning the interpretation of this Charter shall be decided by a vote of two-thirds of the Assembly of Heads of States and Government of the Organisation

15 Memorandum on the Admission of the SADR to the OAU, Edem Kodjo, Secretary General of the OAU, Addis Ababa, August 1982, p3

16 This was a delegation of over a hundred Sahrawi leaders representing pro-Moroccan groups in Western Sahara.

17 Chadli Benjdid’s speech in, El-Moudjahid, Algiers, 26-27 June 198
upon to collaborate when necessary\textsuperscript{18}. Kenyan president and OAU Chairman, Daniel Arap Moi, was delegated the task of conducting a meeting with the parties concerned with the conflict, but the Polisario categorically declined the initiative, claiming that Algeria needed to welcome his move before it would agree to it. Morocco, on the other hand, welcomed the initiative and consented to full collaboration with the work of the OAU Chairman and the Implementation Committee.

The OAU effort came to nothing at the thirty-eighth ordinary session of the Council of Ministers that took place in Addis Ababa on February 23-28, 1982 when Edem Kodjo, the then Secretary General of the OAU-without prior consultation with the Implementation Committee or the OAU chairman--made the somewhat undiplomatic move to allow the SADR to take part in the deliberations as a member state\textsuperscript{19}. Nineteen states showed their discontent with this decision and walked out in protest to demonstrate their dissatisfaction at the Secretary General’s behavior, which hampered the resolution of the dispute\textsuperscript{20}.

In an effort to contain the disarray into which the OAU had plunged itself, Arap Moi chaired a small summit in Nairobi in February 1983 where twelve members convened in order to find a solution to the deadlock, but it lead nowhere. The OAU was so divided within itself that it could not succeed in holding a summit meeting. No major development happened until the OAU summit took place in Addis Ababa on 12-15 November 1984, during which the SADR delegation was invited to have a seat in the Conference Hall in Addis Ababa. The Moroccan delegation walked out without inviting its supporters to follow suit. King Hassan’s adviser, Ahmed Reda Guedira, transmitted a message from the king of Morocco in which he declared that the presence of the SADR was unacceptable, leaving Morocco no choice but to leave and resign from the pan-African organization\textsuperscript{21}.

Since then, the Western Sahara issue that has pestered the organization for more than a decade was simply avoided at every summit. Morocco, on the other hand, has shifted its focus toward Euro-Mediterranean integration and its membership in the Arab League as well as the United Nations, where the admission of the SADR seemed impossible, as long as it does not fulfill the requirements to be a full


independent and sovereign body which has the total authority of its territory and its population. The OAU started to decline due to the lack of leadership and consensus of its leaders. It started to be spoken of internationally as the ‘Dictators Club’, where corruption and authoritarianism prevailed among its members, who became caught up in proxy disputes fought on behalf of the Cold War superpowers. Furthermore, these African leaders’ non-intervention in civil wars contributed to the weakening of the organization.

From the OAU to the AU

By the end of the 90s, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi took the initiative to encourage the African leaders to rethink the Organization and create a new platform. In 2002, the OAU was transformed into the African Union. **Ambitious internal reforms**

The AU consists of the Assembly, comprising heads of state; the Executive Council and the Peace and Security Council, which handles the policy implementation and intervenes and mediates in African conflicts; the Pan-African Parliament; the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC); the Court of Justice and related bodies, namely the New Economic Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD).

Since the African Union (AU) was established, its goal as a pan-African institution has been to unite Africa in order to tackle several global and continental challenges. This task has not been easy for a new organization with a host of inherited internal organizational problems. The AU’s ambitious agenda includes peace and security, trade liberalization, food security, the sustainable use of natural resources and energy, climate change and migration. The immense scale of the AU’s ambitious plans has led it to face many challenges from its inception, many of them associated with problems afflicting the African continent for many decades, notably political instability, corruption, poverty, internal conflicts, terrorism and extremism.

In an effort to activate the process of integration and deal with the multiple challenges, summits of African Heads of State and Government were held in February and July 2009, during which there was an endorsement to move towards an African Union Authority (AUA). The plan was for the AUA to be the main pan-African institution piloting the African integration process. Until now, the AUA’s specific mandate remains unclear. Expectations placed on the African Union, specifically its peacekeeping

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missions, are largely due to the ongoing armed conflicts and humanitarian tragedies in Africa. These expectations were noticeable during the Zimbabwean crisis in 2000 during which the AU failed to come up with a real plan to solve the bloody war\(^\text{23}\). Nonetheless, security experts argue that despite these failures, the AU peacekeeping mission did succeed in settling armed conflicts in Somalia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone.

With those successes in mind, there is hope that the African Union can one day be an effective body for peace and prosperity in the region. Meanwhile, it faces two sets of challenges: issues that need prompt attention, and matters with resolutions that can be reached through long-term processes\(^\text{24}\). Most importantly, the AU’s success will depend on full and efficient collaboration with the African countries themselves, and on the resolution of Africa’s conflicts if the continent is longing for peace and prosperity. Among the most strained conflicts within the pan-African organization—which has been dormant for many years and even shunned in its forums and summits—is the Western Sahara issue. Unfortunately, the organization has done little but reiterate UN stances on the necessity of finding a solution to the conflict\(^\text{25}\).

**Morocco’s Re-engagement with the African Continent**

Since leaving the OAU, Morocco’s collaboration with the African continent have been marked by its activities in very specific areas such as oil imports and humanitarian aid. At the end of the 90s, under the reign of King Mohammed VI, Morocco’s African orientations undertook a new dimension whereby economic and commercial exchanges took center stage in Morocco’s re-engagement with Africa. The goal for this collaboration was to establish strong South-South cooperation, tapping into Morocco’s longstanding historical economic and cultural ties with the African continent.

Morocco took an important initiative at the first European African Summit in 2000 in Cairo by announcing a debt-forgiveness plan for several African countries as well as the elimination of custom duties on


imported goods. In the field of education, Morocco has become an important pioneer in granting scholarships for African students coming from more than thirty-five countries to study in Moroccan universities and religious centers. Morocco was committed in the last decade to cement its relations with the African continent efficiently. Its power lies in the economic and social sectors, as clearly stated by the African Development Bank, with 85% of Morocco’s foreign direct investment spent in Africa\textsuperscript{26}.

Starting in 2013, King Mohamed VI reinforced this economic, cultural, social and religious collaboration and commitment toward the African continent by personally making official visits to more than thirty-five sub-Saharan African countries. These included an initiative which lead to the establishment of more than 500 bilateral agreements in the field of trade and the promotion of investments, infrastructure, transport and projects related to human development. For better coordination of bilateral, regional and international initiatives concerning the African continent, Morocco created the Alliance for Development in Africa and put in place the ministerial conference of Atlantic countries. Further collaborations were achieved in the fields of politics, security, economics and environment.

As of 2015 and 2016, several public and private partnerships were signed, with the African continent witnessing the establishment of Moroccan businesses, banks and telecom operators. Today, the country’s companies have a strong presence in trans-Sahel countries like Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Senegal, Cameroon and Gabon, and also in southern Africa as well as in Angola and Burundi. Furthermore, a memorandum of understanding with the Millennium Challenge Corporation was signed with the objective of “reducing poverty in Africa, including a focus on promoting adoption of new technologies and innovative business models to promote entrepreneurship’.

Morocco’s political re-engagement with the African continent stems from several vital and strategic factors. Many African countries hail Morocco as playing a leading role in the economic and social sectors; it is considered as a country of important political and economic influence. Despite the fact that Morocco had refused to join the African Union due to the SADR’s membership, this did not stop the country from redoubling its efforts to reinvigorate its relations and linkages with Africa. When South Africa recognized the SADR in 2004, precipitating the withdrawal of the Moroccan ambassador to Pretoria, Peter Pham noted that “Moroccan officials were left reeling after the shock recognition of SADR by South Africa and

considered its official position as partial, stunning and ill-timed”\textsuperscript{27}. Morocco was aware that South Africa represented 25% of the African Union economy, so it saw the importance of reinvesting more in the continent.

Another impetus is the independence of South Sudan which Morocco feared, at the beginning, would have an impact on the international community and the question of Morocco’s sovereignty over the Western Sahara territory. However, a few months after South Sudan won its independence, it was plagued by sharp economic warfare with the North that some analysts compared to Kashmir-like scenarios, which will only lead to the balkanization of Africa. At the time of writing, Morocco continues to solidify and reinforce its role in South-South cooperation, be it at the economic, social or religious levels, as well as the fight against terrorism

\textbf{New Opportunities to Mend Broken Ties}

Thirty years after Morocco withdrew from the Organization of African Unity, Moroccan researchers, analysts and decision makers fully recognized that the withdrawal was a miscalculated move following the recognition of the SADR’s membership. Leaving an empty chair within the pan-African organization proved harmful to Morocco and left Algeria and Libya free to provide unlimited financial and diplomatic support to the Polisario.

Through a new vision, and a more realistic pragmatism, Morocco chose to submit its request to be awarded a seat within the African Union without any pre-conditions, as it faced the reality that the SADR was a full member of the African Union. The AU charter does not permit the suspension of states who are members, and it has no jurisdiction to de-recognize or suspend a member. There is, however, the possibility to review the Constitutive Act through a consensus or, by a two-thirds majority vote of the African Union Assembly to provide for such a possibility. If Morocco bids on the exclusion of the SADR, it has to gain the support of a two-thirds majority. At last count, Morocco has managed to get the backing of 28 of the AU’s 53 member countries, but Morocco is still eight votes shy of getting the motion adopted.

Algeria, known for its full backing of the Polisario, stood against such move and led a massive media campaign against Morocco. Abdelaziz Rabahi, an Algerian diplomat, declared that Morocco’s bid to join the African Union was to be considered an indirect recognition of the Polisario and of the Western Sahara as a state, and a clear defeat of the Kingdom’s claim to its land. The Algerian press, like Al Watan, talked about some African countries’ aborted plot to oust the SADR from the AU and to ensure the seat of Morocco. However, what it is really true is that should the United Nations negotiation talk lead to a final political settlement of the conflict, the SADR would, de facto, exist only in name.

CONCLUSION

Morocco’s accession to the African Union will undoubtedly change the course of how the Pan-African organization handles the Western Sahara dispute. Despite Morocco’s diplomatic approach to try to solve the dispute in a pragmatic way, its policy will remain the same as far the acceptance of the SADR is concerned. Morocco is likely to continue its constant policy to delegitimize any claim of the Polisario in its quest for becoming an independent state. It will also try to weaken the political influence of the Polisario leadership and its main backers, Algeria and South Africa.

However, to suspend the SADR from the African Union will be a tenuous task, as the latter can only defer member states whose governments were admitted through unconstitutional courses. Many African countries do not want the suspension of the SADR. Despite Morocco’s intense African policy agenda and colossal economic projects, there remain countries who still defend the Polisario leadership. The case of Nigeria, for instance, which benefitted from the Morocco’s economic dividends, still maintains its position to endorse the Polisario in their fight for independence. Let alone the traditional polisario backers Algeria, Libya, South Africa, and many southern African states.

One way or the other, now that Morocco has flexed its diplomatic and economic muscle to regain its seat at the African Union, it has to show that it is a capable partner whose membership will benefit the African Union, hence resolving the longest-running African colonial conflict. On the other hand, the SADR can also push for a solution by maintaining powerful AU member states support, especially, South Africa and Algeria, to ensure Morocco draws up some kind of a win-win negotiated settlement.

Morocco’s entry into the African Union has been long awaited by many African leaders. Within Morocco, many governmental and non-governmental entities, are aware that the western Sahara dispute is at an impasse, thus it needs to weigh the importance that the AU can conduct to come up with a solution. Therefore, it is important for civil society, political parties and governmental institutions to reinforce
relations with the Pan African organization. Furthermore, these institutions, along with Moroccan NGOs, need to review their communications and outreach strategy regarding the African continent. To many Moroccans, Africa unfortunately does not hold much interest, contrary to countries in the West. As put by Professor Khalid Chegraoui "Many still have the perception that the African Union runs in the same way as in the 70s and 80s. Africa has changed, notably the English-speaking African countries. This represents an important transition that Moroccan officials and businessmen, need to take into consideration."  

28 Interview of Professor Khalid Chegraoui with lesco.ma, september 8th, 2016
References


Writer’s Biography

Yasmine Hasnaoui is a communication and outreach specialist- She has worked in various policy institutions at the national and international levels. Ms. Hasnaoui is profiled regularly in media within the United States and Morocco, and is a frequent guest speaker at forums and events focused on human rights and the relations between Morocco and the US.

Previously, Ms. Hasnaoui held positions as specialist in International Cooperation at the Agency for Economic and Social Development in the Southern Provinces of Morocco and was assistant professor of Foreign Languages and North African Culture at the Osgood Center for International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, Amherst College, Austin College and Sherman College in the United States.
Ms. Hasnaoui has participated in several working sessions with the United Nations in Geneva and New York on the issue of human rights in conflict areas. Ms. Hasnaoui is a recipient of the Fulbright scholarship. She holds an M.A. in Communication Studies and Media from the Faculty Caddi Ayyad in Marrakech, Morocco, and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Conflict Resolution at the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences in Rabat, Morocco. She is the President of the Moroccan American Friendship Foundation and an active member of Global Ties US, a US network which gathers more than 1000 national and international organizations.