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The Role of Civil Society in Morocco: Towards Democracy or Autocracy?

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Abstract

The process of democratization in Morocco has confronted political and economic challenges. Civil society has recently become very active in Moroccan society, operating in all sectors and starting from the paradigm of human rights. However, this civil society faces two major difficulties. The first is intrinsic to its existence, because it lacks resources and professionalism; whereas the second difficulty lies in the nature of power and its centralization, as central power is obsessed by co-optation of political actors and actors from civil society. Thus political actors and social activists must start from consensus as a prerequisite and avoid anything that could challenge the political system. This leaves little room for a genuine democratic process. This is the context that the EU enters as an external player. How is it perceived by grassroots actors, and what role could it play to become a true partner towards democracy?

Introduction

Since the accession of Mohammed VI to power in 1999, hopes for political and economic progress in Morocco have emerged. The appointment of the young king was perceived as the final step towards the establishment of a democratic state, since a new government was formed of members of the previous opposition led by Abderrahmane Youssoufi. The new monarch and his government began with implementing steps that distanced him from his father. He allowed opposition figures to come back to Morocco, among them Abraham Serfaty. He released Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine, a member of the *Adl wa-l-Ihsan* group, after a decade of house arrest. He also lifted the official ban on performances by comedian Ahmed Snoussi whose criticism of the political system did not appeal to the late king. These were all indications that change was on its way in the country. A new Morocco was on the rise and civil society gained momentum. But while opening up to democracy, releasing political prisoners and drafting new laws granting more rights to women, the Moroccan political establishment relentlessly combined moderate civil liberties with centralization of power.

It is within this framework that this report explores first how the political system works in Morocco, relying on academic literature, grey literature produced by civil society, and the work of the author on this subject; next, a short section gives an overview of EU–Morocco relations. In this context, the report then moves to analysis of the stakeholder consultations, in which three key ideas came across: (1) the quasi-consensus among these actors regarding the lack of true democracy and true respect of human rights in Morocco; (2) the different

ideas and projects adopted by each group; and (3) a critical discourse regarding the European community, which is perceived as either defending its own interests, or giving little attention to the issue of human rights as it aspires to maintain stability of power rather than induce change. For these consultations, we conducted 25 interviews with different actors participating in the political system – which itself is created and recreated through means of domination and through these actors' ability to take part in power games.

In so doing, this report adds a critical approach to certain studies on Morocco. The analysts undertaking such studies have tended to conduct a static reading of the Moroccan political scene. In this regard, Catherine Sweet stated:

> Moroccan institutions are certainly more liberal than before. But none of the changes under the late King Hassan or King Mohammed has affected the king's prerogatives – the monarchy retains supra-institutional power. There is no mechanism for removing the king from office, short of revolution. His power is not subject to modification by the mass public or elected officials. It would be incorrect, then, to characterize Morocco's recent political evolution as democratization. To the contrary, many of these "democratic" changes have instead solidified the monarchy's position as the "first among institutions." (Sweet 2001: 23).

These readings were particularly challenged by the February 20 Movement. The monarchy is certainly strong, but does not control the whole scene, and it is not considered the one and only political actor in the field. Hence, reviewing the issue of politics with civil society actors led us to examine the political reforms and the issue of human rights, in addition to analysing the reigning process of Mohammed VI since 1999, as well as EU policies in this respect. The discourse of these actors allows a more nuanced reading of the monarchy's status, the political system and the role of the EU.

In this report, we will proceed to make an assessment of the political scene and economic policies, before briefly delving into an overview of EU–Morocco relations. After that, we will look at the emergence of the issue of human rights in the discourse of the actors, which constitutes the corpus of this study. This discourse is subsequently analysed with emphasis on its attitude towards the European Union.

METHODOLOGY

In line with MEDRESET's overall methodology, this report is based on recursive multiple stakeholder consultations (RMSCs) in Morocco. A first round of 17 interviews was pursued in September and October 2017, and a second round of 8 interviews between March and May 2018 (see anonymized list of interviewees in the Annex). Among the interviewees were 19 males and 6 females. The field work confronted a difficulty with gender balance, because of the omnipresence of men in the structures chosen for our field work. The interviews ranged between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours in duration and were conducted by the author in diverse cities of Morocco. They included representatives from the sectors of economic, political and social rights, minority rights (migrants), women's rights, identity rights (Amazighs), the right to education (student movement), the right to create Islamist organizations (*Adl wa-l-Ihsan*, *Islah*

wa-l-Tajdid) and labour rights (labour unions). In line with MEDRESET's data management plan, all interviews were anonymous and hence were not recorded, but based on notetaking. Our questionnaire focused on the flow of political and economic ideas and projects. The objective was to collect the ideas of the actors in order to identify the commonalities and discrepancies in their projects.

Besides the interviews, the first section of analysis in this report, which serves to contextualize the interviews, is based on grey literature by Moroccan civil society, secondary academic literature, as well as the author's own work on this subject.

1. POLITICAL STABILITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The political dynamic of post-colonial Morocco is characterized by a hybrid political system. This political system, although adopting the modern aspect of French constitutional law represented in a multi-party system, did not relinquish its historical "nature" in the exercise of power. Modern administration is thus used as an instrument of clientelism and at the same time the system has kept its historic and traditional legitimacy. Based on this practice of power, political life reconfigured itself within a complex political system in which modernity maintains tradition. In fact, the monarchy controls and manipulates the political scene and proceeds to restructure its alliances with the leaders of rural society as well as the elites of the urban society using tactics of reward and alienation. Thus, the only way to succeed economically and politically is having the ear of the monarch. Since independence in 1956, and more so in the 1960s, the monarchy relied on maintaining the balance between the urban bourgeoisie and the traditional rural leaders, in order to preserve its power (Leveau 1985, Hammoudi 2001). This balance is built on the contradictions between the different actors, while the monarchy fears all sides at the same time. And it is this balance, maintained by a religious monarchy that is against any sharing of power, that allows the latter to positively label itself as the exception in the region.

Stability is a key concept in this study of politics in Morocco and one that can sometimes be used at the expense of human rights and democracy. It is important to mention here that Morocco is a monarchy based on religious legitimacy in which the king is described in the constitution as the leader of believers. Stability was achieved at the expense of the respect of human rights, which is an issue that has always been a problem to the Moroccan regime. Both local and international human rights organizations have indicated that torture, arbitrary detention and forced disappearance of dissidents are common in political life. It was only at the end of the 1980s that the whole world discovered secret detention centres in Morocco, notably the "Tazmamart" centre, mainly used to detain members of the military who participated in the coups against King Hassan II in 1971 and 1972.

This policy of repression and closure adopted by the authority gained yet another dimension after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The change in the world order pushed the monarchy to adopt new measures regarding the respect of human rights, and resulted in the emergence of a new political dynamic. Thus, in his speech on 20 August 1992, King Hassan II stressed the need and will of Morocco to adapt to the new world context by calling for a referendum about the new constitution. This constitution recognized for the first time in the history of Morocco the

importance of respecting human rights as universally recognized. It was in reality a message to the international community (Bendourou and Aouam 1993) to reassure it following multiple reports, particularly those presented by Amnesty International, highlighting multiple violations of human rights in Morocco.

The 1990s were the years during which the Moroccan monarchy opened up to the new political era, without however loosening its grip on power. The initiatives taken by the regime mainly revolved around the establishment of the Advisory Council for Human Rights (predecessor of the National Human Rights Council) and the Independent Arbitration Commission for the Compensation for Victims of Enforced Disappearance and Arbitrary Detention, in addition to recognizing the Amazigh dialects through the Hassan II speech of 20 August 1994, after years of repression of Amazigh cultural associations. These initiatives were part of a new strategy adopted by the political regime, aiming to introduce new actors to the political scene. The review of the constitution in 1996 was also a tool used by the monarchy to introduce changes. However, the principle of the ruling monarch did not change; therefore, the monarchy remains the key political actor.

The succession of King Mohammed VI to the throne on 23 July 1999 sparked once again the debate in Morocco about the centrality and omnipresence of the monarchy. Thus, many political aspirations surfaced with the crowning of the new king. Mohammed VI sought first and foremost to reconcile Morocco to its past, and this is why he made sure to create the Equity and Reconciliation Commission in 2004 whose objective was to open an investigation into violations committed during the reign of Hassan II and to subsequently provide compensation to the victims. Despite the achievements of this institution, its impact remained limited as it was under the king's control. The mission of reconciling Morocco to its past was not achieved as the Commission adopted a pragmatic philosophy of reconciliation which did not meet the expectations of human rights defenders.[2] Thus, this initiative was not followed by the establishment of a school curriculum about the contemporary history of Morocco, and other issues remained taboo including the insurgency repression in the Rif in 1958–59, and the disappearance of dissidents Mehdi Ben Barka in 1965 and Houcine Manouzi in 1972. Issues condemning King Hassan II remained unsolved, and this is a common interpretation shared by the actors we interviewed. For these actors, as indicated by the Moroccan researcher Omar Bendourou, the "Equity and Reconciliation Commission seemed to be more of a marketing political strategy than a step aiming at turning the page on the past and promoting human rights" (Bendourou 2014: 3).

The open door policy adopted by the monarchy did not last for long after the 11 September 2001 attacks and the Casablanca attacks of 2003; the regime then reverted to its authoritarian historical nature, as indicated by a Moroccan human rights organization representative:

> The honeymoon with the Makhzen did not last for long. The democratic opening started in the beginning of the 1990s with King Hassan II who was preparing for the political transition for his son; however, the repression resumed since 2003 after the attacks of Casablanca. (Interviewee 18)

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2   We are referring here to the testimony of actors from civil society.

This repression was initially used against the Salafi and Wahhabi movements, but the monarchy also saw it as an opportunity to restructure the political scene. The country adopted Law No. 03-03 pertaining to countering terrorism in 2003. This law confounds criminal acts based in common law, with terrorist acts. No political party or gathering dared to oppose this law. Only human rights organizations considered the law as a restriction on individual rights. Furthermore, the strategy of gaining more ground in political activity took form through the founding of the Authenticity and Modernity Party (*Parti de l'Authenticité et de la Modernité*, PAM) in 2008 by Fouad Ali Himma, a friend of the king. This initiative is identical to a practice used by King Hassan II, who founded many parties following his arrival in power in 1961. Parties such as the National Rally of Independents and the Constitutional Union were termed "administrative parties" by the Moroccan political sphere. During the reign of Mohammed VI, the objective of PAM has been to weaken other political parties, particularly the Islamic Justice and Development Party (*Parti de la Justice et du Développement*, PJD). Through continuing to fragment the political scene, the monarchy remained the main actor on the scene and the only actor in charge.

However, with the constitution of 29 July 2011, a significant step was achieved towards the evolution of the political process in Morocco. The new constitution seems to put an end to the monopolization of power by the monarch. It also opened the way for sharing power with the prime minister and for the recognition of individual rights. This constitution comes in the wake of the Arab Spring and meets the expectations of the political contestation movement, i.e., the February 20 Movement. This movement brought together not only human rights organizations but also youth not affiliated with political parties, with the aim of establishing a parliamentary monarchy (Mouna 2016), and putting

> an end to impunity and rendering of accounts, etc. The constitution seems to reflect a synthesis of the different demands of civil society and political parties. However, the contradiction between the proclamation of rights and the restrictions imposed on them is so striking that enjoying these rights seems virtually impossible. (Bendourou 2014: 1)

2. Can a State Be Democratic without Democracy?

The analysis of political life in Morocco is skewed in the written work of political experts. These writings have been limited to opposition binaries:

> It has […] inflected the Moroccan political vocabulary, which has been dominated by the binaries loyalty/betrayal, authenticity/modernity, unity/division, and consensus/disagreement. This has been an obstacle to the emergence of modern political thinking that could contribute to building a political party experience in a modern-democratic and political meaning manner. (Jandari 2012: 7)

In a study aiming to identify the main characteristics of political parties' experience in Morocco, Jandari (2012) relied on modern definitions of the term "political party". The author concluded that the lack of ideological perspectives in political parties is a result of the lack of modern political practice. This led to modern political parties unable of building themselves in the first place, let alone succeeding in setting a policy based on their electoral platforms.

Such writings all agree on the political change in Morocco, and many articles and studies conducted by non-governmental institutions have highlighted this political change in Morocco. Two main actors are described as having the main role in this dynamic of change: the monarchy and civil society. These studies thus indicate Morocco's will to become one of the few countries in the MENA region to adopt a democratic vision in its political system, since the beginning of the new millennium (Howe 2000). This change was mainly noted in the Moroccan civil society. In the 1990s, Hassan II had adopted a policy of openness regarding political parties, allowing them to exist. Mohammed VI, on the other hand, promoted the emergence of civil society which has grown significantly since his reign began. As a result, the king has led many changes in the country, starting with tackling the issue of human rights. Moreover, he established many intermediation institutions to make a political transition possible, not to mention the impeachment of Interior Minister Driss Basri, implicated in several cases of corruption during the era of Hassan II.

The democratization project started by Hassan II was associated with the proliferation of political parties, which gave the impression that Morocco was seeking to implement serious changes to become a democracy (Howe 2000). Moreover, this openness came with a complete liberalization of the Moroccan economy and the entry of foreign capital into the country, taking advantage of a policy of privatization. This economic liberalization made Morocco the leading country in the Maghreb region in terms of social inequality, particularly since the reforms introduced in 2011 which allowed the state to reduce its involvement in the compensation fund.[3] These implemented reforms favoured pluralism confined within a civil society

> which is probably among the most vibrant in the Middle East. Civil society, conceived in terms of formal organizations and structures, has made a substantial impact on policy-making especially in areas of women's and human rights. Associations such as the Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM) and the Union Action Féminine (UAF) articulated discourses of women's rights and human rights, and adopted a "self-limiting framework" that is independent of political parties. (Daadaoui 2010: 3)

These associations represented change within Moroccan society. This change was the result of awareness about issues related to human rights and the needed political reforms. Nonetheless, the state was able to reassert its dominion within civil society using a socio-economic public policy by, for example, establishing the National Human Development Initiative in 2005. This initiative was a tool to gain control over civil society by granting funds to associations. More than ten years into this initiative, experts noted poor results, considering the budget dedicated to it. The establishment of the National Human Rights Council was also an attempt to take over the discourse about human rights, in the eyes of some of our interviewees. But despite the relative freedom given to civil society, the monarchy is still perceived as omnipresent considering the lack of political competition.

> [...] democratic reforms have been lagging as the monarchy still dominates the institutional realm in Morocco. The ritualization of the political process has had a detrimental effect on any movement towards democratic governance. [...] Similarly, the

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3   A fund dedicated to subsidies on essential goods.

monarchy is secure from any instability as long as it dominates the religious discourse and continues to utilize it, as it has for the past three decades, to clutter the public discourse and offset the ability of opposition forces to mobilize along religious lines. (Daadaoui 2010: 3)

These analyses position the monarchy not only at the centre of power due to its omnipresence, but also above the sphere of power. Thus, we neglect the fact that power is a field of competition and rivalry; the monarchy, however, is already ahead in such a competition.

Acts of isolating or reinstating civil society actors are justified by the role these actors play within society. In a report published in 2011 about civil society, one can note that voluntary work, where the majority of organization members are unpaid volunteers, remains crucial to maintain a civil society (Akesbi 2011: 27). Funding is limited and the majority of organizations receive funding from neither the state nor foreign donors. Funding criteria are not transparent and are subject to nepotism. The report indicates that civil society's most impactful activities are those in the field of education, social development and support. Thus, the population has more trust in institutions working on charity, environmental issues and local development and less trust in those working in the political sphere. When it comes to the external environment, the weak involvement of civil society is due to the lower educational level of actors, in addition to high illiteracy rates and widespread poverty. More than 40 per cent of organizations consider the legal structure unfavourable and too restrictive (Akesbi 2011: 61). As for civil society's strengths and weaknesses, the report identified four advantages provided by these organizations: proximity; participation in citizenship; credibility; and will to actively engage. The main identified weaknesses were inadequate funding, opportunistic behaviour, and lack of autonomy, in addition to nepotism. The lack of reforms pertaining to associations can be explained by the state's fear of losing control over these associations; it should be mentioned that the majority of these organizations still rely on state funding.

3. THE "ARAB SPRING" AND RESTRICTING THE POLITICAL SPHERE

Since the events of the Arab Spring erupted in 2011, the Moroccan state as presented itself once again as the political exception in the region (Saint-Pot and Rouvillois 2013). Thus, the Moroccan authorities implemented several measures in a hurry, the main measure being the constitutional reform made by a commission that was supposed to represent society. The Moroccan kingdom presented itself as adopting a reformist logic, allowing it to avoid the infernal spiral of contestation, revolution and anarchy (Mohsen-Finan 2013). Is this exception rooted in the very nature of the Moroccan political system? Or, is it an indicator of a crisis within the ranks of the political elite failing to bring change?

Political change started as a result of huge demonstrations of youth grouped together under the umbrella of the February 20 Movement. This movement certainly gained momentum as a result of previous events in the region. However, it was also based on the lack of legitimacy of political intermediaries in the country. The alienation of political parties by the monarchy resulted with a saturation of the political arena characterized by a political sphere relying on nepotism and lack of competence, and in which access to political positions is possible only

through allegiance rather than merit (Maghraoui 2001).[4] Thus engaging in politics to induce change can only be possible through the royal court. Huge development projects such as the National Human Development Initiative are actions tightly linked to the king and the Ministry of the Interior. This governance mode primarily based on political gimmicks and patronage ended up harming democracy within the parties, and the result was a very low participation rate in elections. This view of political life and political actors resulted in the emergence of a civil society that is more active in the political sphere.

It is within this context that the February 20 Movement started. The movement's organizational structure consisted of local chapters in more than 90 towns and cities. Its membership included mainly youth with no political affiliation. The movement also attracted young activists from the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (*Association marocaine des droits humains*, AMDH), Attac-Maroc, the Alternative Movement for Individual Liberties, the youth organizations of non-governmental parties such as the Democratic Way (*Annahj Addimocrati*), the Unified Socialist Party, the Amazigh movement, activists from non-recognized but tolerated organizations such as the Justice and Spirituality organization (*Adl wa-l-Ihsan*) and the now-banned Party of the Civilizational Alternative (*Al Badil al-Hadari*). Even though they did not all join the movement with the first call for demonstrations on 20 February 2011 (Bennani-Chraïbi and Jeghllaly 2012), these different actors, whether independent or affiliated with political parties, have rallied around common demands such as the establishment of a democratic constitution drafted by an elected constituent assembly, social justice (access to healthcare, education, employment, etc.), the rejection of nepotism, corruption and privatization of state public services, the implementation of good governance principles in public affairs management, the recognition of cultural diversity in the country, and so on. Civil society in Morocco has been transformed through the February 20 Movement into the driving force of social change. It is an active civil society aiming to lift the monarchy's hegemony and instigate political change (Sater 2007). In contrast, the parties are seen as having no political ideas and having only an electoral objective. They seek to obtain legitimacy in the royal court. The omnipresence of the monarchy led to the emergence of parties that serve the monarch and make no initiatives.

It was also in the context of the new constitution of 2011 that a restructuring of the political sphere was conducted, only partially addressing the demands of civil society. Confronted with the political crisis of the elite, the monarch made multiple accusations from a double standpoint: on the one hand, alienation from political parties, and accusing them of political failure on the other. Thus, during his speeches on the occasion of national celebrations, and even in parliament when the parliamentary year was inaugurated, the monarch accused the parties of failing in their duties, of being incapable of providing a political framework to citizens. The parties' inability to respond and their silence made the king's accusation look legitimate. However, many people have warned against this scheme used by the royal court, which remains in control of the situation.[5] In a non-democratic system, political parties should remain weak and failing, because they serve less to build institutions, rally people and govern and more to ensure the divide of resources and functions, to give legitimacy to public policies, to

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4   In fact, sacrificing competence led to a political crisis which in turn cast doubt on the nature of the political system.
5   See the manifesto signed by the researchers in social sciences in Morocco, which denounces the scheme used by the royal court in its management of the *Hirak* of the Rif: "Hirak: qu'en disent des chercheurs en sciences humaines et sociales?", in *TelQuel*, 12 June 2017, http://telquel.ma/2017/06/12/Hirak-quen-disent-chercheurs-en-sciences-humaines-sociales_1550319.

encourage investors and international actors – and most importantly, to diffuse responsibility in case of failure. From this point of view, the Moroccan political parties play their role perfectly.

If Hassan II had constitutionalized the practice of multi-partyism since 1962, a regime described as an electoral dictatorship (Mouline 2016: 31), Mohammed VI has encouraged a civil society that is independent from the official authorities:

> Following the ascension of Mohammed VI, the predominant narrative under Hassan II of the king is good, his circle is bad was replaced with another narrative: the king is good, the political class is bad]…["they are all corrupt", which was a major piece of the monarchy legitimization process. As if the image of a king close to the people, efficient, and the source of all positive achievements of executive power could only materialize through a reversed mirror of "the political class", a quasi-constant scapegoat. (Bennani-Chraïbi 2017: 5)

The parties are perceived as the cause of the problem of "corruption", "nomadism", "incompetence", "balkanization" (Bennani-Chraïbi 2017: 5), while associations such as the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women and the Union of Women's Action succeeded in positioning themselves as the only defenders of women's rights other than political parties. This is also the case for Amazigh cultural associations. This responsiveness on the part of civil society drove the state to take over many issues to reassert its hegemony over public action (Sater 2017), through channelling socio-political demands within state councils such as the establishment of the National Human Rights Council in 1990. Civil society actors then started working together on this "upgrading" project promoted through international democracy programmes.

Nevertheless, civil society efforts can show only good intention rather than induce democracy, and they only reinforce authoritarianism (Khakee 2017). By playing the role of power centralizer, the monarchy has structured the political scene in a way that "Mohammed VI can be portrayed as the hero and protector of '*kiliminis*' from the '*bouzebal*'[6] of all sorts" (Bennani-Chraïbi 2017: 10). Unlike other political parties in the kingdom, the Justice and Development Party (PJD) is unique in having an activist base; this is what makes a party strong. However in today's Morocco, having significant electoral and activist bases is far less influential than having the ear of the royal court. Established political parties certainly need to get seats to be able to form governmental coalitions and have access to resources and regional and communal mandates. Nevertheless, even if they subjugate to the monarchy, they have no interest in achieving electoral results that would be asymmetrical to the results of other actors (Bennani-Chraïbi 2017: 12).

A party having an activist base is perceived as troublesome by the royal court. This is why the authorities attempted to orchestrate several scandals against the PJD, particularly during the elections of 2016 (Mouna 2016). The PJD seems to bother the monarchy with its internal democracy and activist base, but

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6   Kilimini is used in Moroccan dialect to designate those who come from wealthy backgrounds, and drawn from the French expression "qu'il est mignon", meaning "isn't he cute". Bouzebal is a character in the videos of Mohamed Nassib, who embodies the ordinary Moroccan.

> [e]ven if the PJD succeeded for a long time ago to converge its quest for obtaining royal blessing with the approval of its base, it is today subject to a normalization process. Similarly to the USFP [Socialist Union of Popular Forces] and other parties before it, it is torn between two competing tendencies: those who prioritize the internal democracy and "independence" of the party (who are also those who were removed from the government and who are able to mobilize the party's base); and those who insist on prioritizing "pragmatism" (who are those commended by the royal court). (Bennani-Chraïbi 2017: 12)

The purpose of co-optation by the monarchy is to build national consensus led by it and based on following principle: "the king is good, the political class is bad". However, civil society's momentum today has led to a diversification of criticism of socio-economic and political issues.

> [Civil society] formed of heterogeneous components, resorts to hybrid logics, in which elements relevant to the process of building citizenship are mixed with other elements that are foreign to this process. The phenomenon is highly heterogeneous. It does not have the homogeneity needed to be able to be actually meaningful. It also seems to have little to do with labour unions that are faced with massive dismantling. The said social movement cannot provide an alternative because it is divided. (Tozy et al. 2009: 27).

At the end of the day, every system relies on non-homogeneous rules of power. Having outlined this context, we will next briefly describe EU–Moroccan relations, before analysing the stakeholder consultations.

4. Overview of EU–Morocco Relations

The legal framework of EU–Morocco relation was established by the Association Agreement (AA) signed in 1996 and entered into force in 2000.[7] The EU and Morocco signed an Action Plan in 2005 under the auspices of the ENP, and in 2008 Morocco was the first of the Southern countries to gain "advanced status", a roadmap to enhance cooperation in the political domain, to encourage "trade liberalization" through a reform of Morocco's legal and regulatory framework to meet EU standards, and to allow Morocco's involvement in community programs. In the aftermath of 2011 uprisings, the ENP was revised to include a major focus on institution-building, governance and human rights along with a proposal to launch Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs). Morocco began negotiations to establish a DCFTA in March 2013. So far, four rounds of negotiations have taken place, the most recent in April 2014. The idea of the DCFTA is to stretch market opening and trade liberalization beyond the goods sector. The talks were stalled by the EU's unilateral modification in April 2014 of the calculation method used to determine the entry price to the EU market of fruits and vegetables, and by the legal contestation raised by the Polisario Front against the legitimacy of EU–Moroccan agreement in matter of agriculture and fisheries. Finally, in 2013 Morocco signed a Mobility Partnership

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(European Commission 2013). Within the deal, the possibility to grant labour migration and visa facilitation is linked to an array of conditions among which are the negotiation of a readmission agreement and concerted cooperation on border control and sea surveillance. The discussion of a readmission agreement between EU and Morocco dates back to 2000 but negotiations were discontinued and reprise in 2013: the main roadblock is still the third country nationals clause which would commit Morocco to readmit also third country nationals in transit through Morocco (Carrera et al. 2016).

Thus, the relationship between the EU and Morocco is based on presumption and counter-presidency, where several files mingle: human rights, trade, migration, terrorism, etc. This makes the relationship complex and uncertain, as the interests of some are not those of others. However, although Morocco negotiates alone against a Union, it knows in advance that its stability is essential for the EU because of its geographical proximity.

5. Comprehensive Analysis of Actors' Perspectives

5.1 The Disparity of the Mediterranean

In this report, EU policy has served as the main entry point to examine dynamics of the flow of ideas and knowledge in the region. The actors' discourse leads us to the notion of a "Mediterranean myth" (Moisseron 2012: 16). The concept of Mediterranean is not a clear notion for our interviewees. They regard it as an abstract space, primarily dedicated to countries of the north. The gap between countries south and north of the Mediterranean consolidates the image of a closed space for the former and an open one for the latter. Therefore, the example of human rights and migration flow is used to identify that disparity of the space. The EU had for many years been close to authoritarian regimes of countries south of the Mediterranean. This policy has certainly changed but doubts remain:

> By toppling some of the regions' long standing dictatorships and forcing others to pursue an agenda of domestic reforms, the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 effectively drew an end to this relationship. While the popular revolts appear to have opened the door to a more modern, free and democratic Arab world, they also called the EU's role as a regional power and reference point in a changing region into question. Not only has the EU's image been considerably tainted by its long-standing relationship with autocratic Arab rulers, but it also no longer provides the only model for the proto-democratic states of the southern Mediterranean that are witnessing a revival of Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamic trends. The EU has reacted to these changes by advocating a radical shift in the contents of its Mediterranean policies with the aim of creating a "democracy partnership" that legitimises itself through its support for the ongoing transition processes in the EU's southern neighbourhood. (Behr 2012: 76)

The EU's ambivalence regarding political contestations that erupted starting in 2010 has led to mistrust among the majority of civil actors. Based on the discourse of these actors, we can deduce their perception of the EU and what they consider the major issues in the southern countries of the Mediterranean. The majority of these countries are unstable economically and socially. They suffer the consequences of the crisis of countries of the north, particularly when

it comes to transferring issues of the north onto the south. Countries of the south are perceived as prioritizing stability at the expense of freedom. However, this approach is an argument held by the west which considered these regimes to be in its favour, according to our interviewees:

Relationships between north and south are asymmetrical, and the EU profits from these relationships until today, it subcontracts its problems to countries of the south, as it is the case with migration. (Interviewee 1, youth association representative)

The real problem in countries of the south, from the point of view of countries of the north, is development, terrorism, violence and the economic crisis since 2008. Issues here are primarily related for us to the lack of education. Youth throw themselves quickly in the arms of fundamentalist ideas, drugs and violence. Our youth are excluded from development and culture, and this is why they seek alternative solutions which are often an easy way out. The cause of this situation is primarily the support given by countries of the north to oppressive regimes in the south. The allegation is that the colonial era did not end politically in our countries. (Interviewee 15, child and youth association representative)

Despite the diverging standpoints of the actors, they all agree on the problems suffered by countries of the south and even the causes of the problems:

Illiteracy, patriarchal mentality, exclusion and religious conservatism, which regard women as born only to do house chores, are the causes of our problems. But the main problem remains the lack of democracy that allows considering human rights violations as normal. This is the very nature of political systems in Arab countries. (Interviewee 6, women's rights organization representative)

Just by looking at what happened in Morocco at the time of the *Hirak* in the Rif. It is a problem due to the lack of democracy, a true democracy rooted in politics, economy, and culture at the same time. [...] We saw that Europe did not budge. Europe supports our oppressive regimes because it wants to protect its interests; it considers the stability of these regimes as more important than democracy. (Interviewee 9, human rights organization representative)

The lack of development on the economic level and on the cultural and educational levels is seen as the cause feeding issues such as terrorism, violence and immigration. On the other side, there are those who think that priority should be given to the issue of the dependence of countries of the south on countries of the north. Based on the actors' discourse, it appears that countries of the south are not the masters of their own fate. The economic factor remains crucial, because countries of the north control the economies and wealth of countries of the south. This dependence of southern economies on northern economies has a direct impact on the distribution of wealth. The peoples of the southern side of the Mediterranean are not consulted; no one asks them for their opinion on economic choices; political will is censored. The solution resides in democracy; it is the only way to give people the possibility to choose their fate.

What draws our attention here is the contradictory views about the EU and its relationship with Morocco. On one hand, one interviewee stated that with "the support of the EU, many women's

rights associations were able to establish support centres" (Interviewee 21, progressive women's rights organization representative). This view of a funder working on development projects, particularly those related to promoting women's and human rights, is not perceived only in positive fashion. The political stance of civil actors determines this point of view:

> The liberal model is dominant in Morocco, individual freedom is seen as negative influence on people in general and the family in particular, and this is what the EU supports in Morocco unfortunately. In this context, the EU is seen as a bad partner, particularly financing projects based on this kind of thinking, which affects family cohesion. (Interviewee 14, Islamist student movement representative)

This suspicious view of the EU is not exclusive to Islamists. It is also shared by leftist civil actors. Progress in terms of respect of human rights is prioritized by all actors, but they are reluctant when it comes to the continuity of this change – change is perceived as complex and not linear.

> Morocco is an old country ruled by a new kind of power. Some things have changed, for example the *Hirak* in the Rif: in the past, if the same events occurred, thousands would have been killed, and the arrested activists are today the figures of the *Hirak*. There are certainly many changes in terms of respect for human rights. (Interviewee 23, human rights organization representative)

> After the year 2000, Europe established what we call the era of political assistance, particularly in the fields of justice and good governance, which did not yield any results. The evidence of that is in the indicators of the fields of education and justice, and the regression in the fields of transparency, human development and freedom of expression. We do not have a margin of freedom for debates and the media is controlled by people in power who do not fulfil their responsibilities. We had the opportunity to witness a real political transition with the February 20 Movement, but this transition was aborted. We are witnessing now a period of elimination of competences and elites. Political parties have been also eliminated, universities that used to produce the elite are also rendered meaningless. Morocco's relationship with the human rights issue went through many phases. It all started with the last decade of Hassan II's rule (1991 to 1999); we witnessed the beginning of freedom of the press and Morocco's recognition of fundamental rights. This was all done to pave the way for Mohammed VI's ascension to power. Following this process, the establishment of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission was also an opportunity to break with the past. However, the attacks of 2003 were used as a pretext to go back to the old ways. This was confirmed by the events of 2011 with the February 20 Movement. We are witnessing now regression in terms of civil and political rights, the EU is protecting its interests with the state, and therefore it ignores the situation. (Interviewee 24, human rights collective representative)

According to the actors' discourse, the EU is somehow responsible for this situation. These actors, while criticizing the south/north asymmetrical reports and the alienation of power from the south to the north, create a discourse favouring this alienation, by demanding monitoring of the southern countries that do not respect human rights. They sometimes consider that EU funding promotes the culture of human rights and other times they consider that this funding

reinforces political authoritarianism:

> The EU policy, particularly in the field of human rights, did yield results, but it should be mentioned that many initiatives are implemented through the government, namely through the ministry of family and women's affairs. These funds do not actually achieve their objective as they are distributed based on political calculations. (Interviewee 6, women's association representative)

However, other actors like the National Human Rights Council question this supervision, as they consider that it is based on a culturalist approach:

> Europe holds a culturalist view towards countries of the south in general, and towards us specifically. It is thought that we are not fit for the human rights culture under the pretext that Islam is impediment. Hence, Europeans think that we are establishing human rights institutions because they force us to do so. It does not occur to them that the human rights issue is our fight because it is we who have suffered and been put in jail. It is both founded on a superiority point of view and contempt towards what we are trying to achieve. I am not saying that the situation is perfect, but we have established a genuinely autonomous institution monitoring the respect of human rights which works on both the national and international levels. (Interviewee 8, para-governmental organization representative)

These actors' discourse allows us to understand how the human rights issue has shifted today from being a debate to becoming a political issue. This shift is evidenced by the number of associations of all kinds defending economic, civil, political and gender rights. All of these associations suffer from the lack of professionalism and financial independence mentioned above.

5.2 Political Model in the Region

Questions on political models – how they affect the issue of gender; and the definition of democratic citizenship and human rights – also seemed to spark confusion in the responses.

> There is no political model in the region. Tunisia, for example, is a young democracy that does not seem to function and even the economic situation is bad. Morocco, on the other hand, is an authoritarian country, and uses the idea of security to portray a positive image of itself. (Interviewee 9, human rights organization representative)

> There are two models in our region. The first is the Islamic model supported by the Americans and the second is the Arab model represented in the Baath regime. The only valid model is the Amazigh model as it is the only one to present a stance favouring equality between men and women. (Interviewee 20, human rights organization representative)

> There is no political model in the region. The EU model is not accepted by all citizens. In addition, the EU is not beneficial to all of its member countries. It is no longer regarded as an economic model. (Interviewee 22, human rights organization representative)

There is no model; countries of the north are also losing their authority to decide due to the pervasive power of financial institutions and multinational companies. People have lost the power to stand against this bureaucratic power. (Interviewee 24, human rights collective representative)

According to the actors' discourse, the political gap between north and south does not make it possible to consider the north a viable model.

Furthermore, the Turkish model, despite being an example of regression in terms of human rights, constitutes a political model as it succeeded in combining secularism and religion, and is mentioned as an economically viable model. With the exception of Islamists and a few other actors working in the field of youth rights who advocate and accept the Turkish model, other interviewees are confused. Thus, some think that the dominant model is the liberal model, and others think that the authoritarian nature of the Moroccan regime makes the dominant political model one based on nepotism, torn between modernity and tradition. It is modern when this suits it, and traditional when it can profit from tradition. However, the actors agree that political actors suffer from a lack of ideas. They mentioned the death of political parties. This justifies for some the presence of the monarchy on the political scene, aiming to fill this void:

Political parties are not a model for economic and political democracy, the only model in the country is the king who takes the lead in development projects. (Interviewee 19, human rights collective representative)

The EU is seen as enforcing this context:

The EU finances the associations and political actors as well; however, political actors use these funds to gain power. Contrary to political actors, associations do not want power. Furthermore, civil actors retain historical relationships, for instance the associations of the north are funded by Spain, and the associations of the centre are funded by the EU. However, marginal actors are excluded from these funds. (Interviewee 6, women's association representative)

The "death" of political parties and trade unions played a role in the birth of protest movements that do not fall within traditional politics, as with the *Hirak* of the Rif and Jrada, in addition to the women workers movement of SICOM, a company in Meknes. This movement resulted in a trade union protest which drew the attention of the American union movement. The latter sent a letter to the government demanding clarifications about the case of one hundred women who lost their jobs. This movement calls into question trade union work, and condemns the silence of political parties and their co-option by the authorities. Trade unions are under the mercy of authorities, and this is why the case of SICOM women workers in Meknes received a lot of media attention. Political demands were not subsequently advanced by the parties. The SICOM or SICOMEK (its new name) case is testimony to both the failure of political actors to act, and the corrupt lobbying power within the decision-making apparatus. The political parties who supported the movement were primarily the leftist USFP party and the extreme left Democratic Way party.

Following the factory shut down, we launched a strike. The authorities arranged for a meeting between the boss and the representatives of the union. The conditions set

for resumption of work included: to stop the strikes and popular protests immediately, to stop union work, and the termination of employment of four union representatives. We are supported by the American trade union and a Tunisian union which came to protest with us. (Interviewee 7, Union movement representative)

Based on the remarks of our interviewees, we conclude that it is not the margin of freedom that is shrinking; but rather the political platform available. Political parties and trade unions as intermediaries have abandoned protests. Liberal economy affects not only state institutions but also political parties and trade unions. It is also important to indicate that the presidents of major unions in Morocco have retired decades ago. As a result of their lobbying, they succeeded in blocking any attempt to pass reforms that end their mandate upon retirement.

5.3 The EU and Agents of Change

In tackling the stance and role of the EU with our interviewees, we noticed that their discourse is ambivalent. The actors often have to readjust their discourse: they think that the EU provides physical, economic and technological assistance and at the same time strengthens the dominant political power. This assistance allows citizens to act within civil society to be able to stand against human rights violations. However, despite all of that, EU policy does not seek to be involved in the growth and development of countries of the south; it is simply protecting its economic interests and protecting its borders. The interviewees emphasized that the EU should treat countries of the south fairly, particularly on the economic level.

> The EU does not intervene when its interests are not affected. We have witnessed what happened in the Rif, and how the EU did nothing, however, we cannot deny the importance of the EU in Morocco in terms of respect of human rights. (Interviewee 9, human rights organization representative)

> There are two kinds of assistance, on the one hand the EU aid which promotes human rights, and aid from oil-producing countries who seek to hinder our societies' progress using particular ideas. (Interviewee 12, student rights organization representative)

> Of all actions taken by the EU, only a few succeed in achieving their goals, however, the most important one is to be able to interrogate Morocco before the European parliament about the funds granted to the country. However, other actions have a negative impact, for instance, transforming Morocco into Europe's policeman. (Interviewee 10, women's association representative)

> Every year, the EU makes a call for proposals for different issues. This allows associations to acquire new experiences. These projects focus on the issues of migration and illiteracy. This cooperation serves the interest of the EU first and foremost. The EU works on issues such as diversity, freedom of women and religious freedom because they serve its interest. (Interviewee 19, human rights collective representative)

The EU looks like an institution that funds civil society making the rise of development agents possible, and at the same time it looks like an institution seeking to protect its interests. This relationship based on proximity and distrust towards the EU is explained by what a few actors call Europe's double-dealing. The EU funds civil society but also funds other state

institutions that are the impediment to development, as state action is structured from a security perspective. This point of view held by civil actors can be explained by the structure of these actors in Morocco. When dealing with civil society, the state uses its power to control groups it does not take into consideration when aiming for consensus, as it is the case with the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (according to our interviewee). Corruption, favouritism and nepotism are also part of the structure of this civil society, and these set the rules in the struggle for power. Thus, this ambivalent discourse regarding the EU is evidence of the competition for resources among the different actors, including the state.

The discussions we had with the actors allowed us to understand how discourse is structured depending on the donors. They said "the EU gave", "it chose". This discourse is the result of the inability of the majority of actors to build cases in order to attract funds. It shows us that donors target certain structures and exclude others. Hence, to answer our question: Which projects should the EU fund?, many actors recommended to foster the professionalism of civil society in order to transform the sector into an autonomous and professional one, through organizing training courses.

Conclusion

While certain actors with an Islamist tendency consider the Turkish model a good one for Morocco because it has succeeded in combining modernity and tradition, others stated that the model of constitutional monarchy is perfect for Morocco, guided by the English model rather than the Spanish one which is considered very corrupt. However, the majority of these actors believe that respect for human rights has suffered a setback. The repression of the *Hirak* in the Rif and Jrada and the wave of human rights violations provide evidence of this setback. This shows these actors that Morocco has not abandoned the security approach.

Both political and civil society actors operate based on the "patronage" model, which seems to be the organizational model towards which resources and actions converge. Civil society does not think like an autonomous actor working within its own networks; it rather acts, obeys and negotiates a space abandoned by political parties. This encourages many parties to use its structures during electoral periods and the practice has negative consequences as it ends up discrediting the work conducted by civil society (Velasco de Castro 2016). In order to strengthen civil society, here are some aspects that we think are important:
- Help civil society to access professionalization in order to obtain autonomy.
- The question of human rights clashes today with the legal apparatus; the latter marks a resistance in terms of change. The EU is now funding the modernization of Moroccan justice, but it is important to invest in the humans themselves that constitute a real obstacle: judges, lawyers, prosecutors, etc.
- Involve civil society in school curricula with the aim of strengthening the culture of human rights and respect for difference.
- Protect the right to information and to speak. Today's lawsuits against journalists and socio-economic rights activists are mainly due to lax European partners in the political system.
- The multiplication of forms of socio-economic protest because of the increase in prices, has highlighted the lack of structure for consumer rights. This supposes a revalorization and a reinforcement of civil society, which protects the socio-economic rights of the population.

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List of Interviewees

Second round of interviews

Interviewee 1. Youth association, male representative, Meknes, 16 March 2018

Interviewee 2. Association of labor law, male representative, Meknes, 19 March 2018

Interviewee 3. Association of unemployed graduates, male representative, Ain Tawejetate, 13 March 2018

Interviewee 4. Political actor, female representative, Meknès, 30 March 2018

Interviewee 5. Tribal association, male representative, Hajeb, 5 May 2018

Interviewee 6. Women's rights organization, female representative, Meknes, 30 April 2018

Interviewee 7. Union movement, female representative, Meknes, 4 April 2018

Interviewee 8. Para-governmental organization, male representative, Rabat, 3 May 2018

First round of interviews

Interviewee 9. Human rights organization, female representative Rabat, 19 October 2017

Interviewee 10. Women's association, male representative, Fes, 14 October 2017

Interviewee 11. Islamist movement, male representative, Meknes, 23 September 2017

Interviewee 12. Student rights organization, male representative, Meknes, 6 September 2017

Interviewee 13. Democracy and peace organization, male representative, Meknes, 16 October 2017

Interviewee 14. Islamist student movement, male representative, Meknes, 12 October 2017

Interviewee 15. Child and youth association, male representative, Meknes, 5 October 2017

Interviewee 16. Citizenship and human rights organization, male representative, Kenitra, 9 October 2017

Interviewee 17. Human rights organization, male representative, Rabat, 21 October 2017

Interviewee 18. Human rights organization, male representative, Rabat, 22 October 2017

Interviewee 19. Human rights collective, male representative, Rabat, 22 October 2017

Interviewee 20. Human rights organization, male representative, Rabat, 18 October 2017

Interviewee 21. Progressive women's rights organization, female representative, Casablanca, 22 October 2017

Interviewee 22. Human rights organization, male representative, Rabat, 21 October 2017

Interviewee 23. Political reflection association, male representative, 29 September 2017

Interviewee 24. Human rights collective, female representative, Rabat, 22 October 2017

Interviewee 25. Altermondialist association, male representative, Fes, 17 October 2017

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