

The meaning of Morocco's return to the African Union

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Morocco's 2017 return to the African Union (AU) has created a rift between its supporters, mostly from Francophone West Africa, and those who oppose Morocco because of its claim over the Western Sahara. If Morocco wants to have a say in decisions on Africa's future, it should participate in AU structures in a constructive way and consolidate the gains made by its successful bilateral economic and cultural diplomacy on the continent.

Key points

- ▶ Morocco's return to the African Union (AU) in January 2017 was well prepared thanks to an extensive economic diplomacy campaign by King Mohammed VI.
- ▶ The unresolved question of independence for the Western Sahara is a major stumbling block in Morocco's bid to be accepted within the AU.
- ▶ There is strong opposition against Morocco from heavyweight countries like South Africa.
- ▶ Morocco could use a future membership of the AU Peace and Security Council to further its ideals.
- ▶ Morocco's bid to join ECOWAS could be seen as a 'bridge too far' given the strong arguments against such a move.
- ▶ In order to play a constructive role in the AU, Morocco should not boycott or try to disrupt meetings in protest against the presence of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.

Introduction

On 31 January 2017 Morocco's King Mohammed VI announced his country's return to the African Union (AU) after an absence of 32 years. In a speech at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, Mohammed VI told heads of state and government attending the 28th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly that Morocco was 'coming home' to its African family.¹

He stressed the fact that Morocco was 'one of Africa's most developed countries' and that a majority of African states had asked for Morocco to return to the organisation that it had left in November 1984. That departure had been in protest against the recognition of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) by the AU. Morocco disputes the claim of the SADR and its political leadership, the Polisario Front, to the Western Sahara.

Several powerful states including Algeria and South Africa opposed Morocco's return to the African Union

To be accepted as a member of the AU, Morocco had to get the support of a majority of AU members. Several powerful states including Algeria and South Africa opposed Morocco's return to the organisation. As a bare minimum, some of these states wanted Morocco's admission to be conditioned on its agreement not to work from inside the organisation to have the SADR expelled.

This did not happen, and Morocco was accepted unconditionally into the AU.² This left many questions unanswered. Some AU members have questioned Morocco's motivation for taking this momentous step. There are also concerns about the impact of Morocco's move on the AU's internal cohesion. Finally, given its history of obstructing international meetings where the SADR is present, and given its tense relationship with Algeria, uncertainty remains about what role Morocco will play in the AU.

This report explores the impact of Morocco's readmission to the AU. It sketches the context within which this took place, notably Morocco's economic and political links with the rest of Africa, its relations with Algeria and the impact of the dispute over the Western Sahara. (The Western Sahara conflict is not the report's primary focus.) Next, it assesses the reaction to Morocco's return to the AU and the actions taken by member states that opposed this move, using the example of South Africa. Finally, it makes recommendations on the way forward for Morocco and for the AU.

A well-prepared return

Most AU member states first took note of Morocco's intention to return to the organisation at the 27th AU summit in Kigali, Rwanda, in July 2016. Rumours circulated that King Mohammed VI would make an appearance at the summit, and copies of a statement by the Moroccan sovereign were distributed to the media. These rumours turned out to be a carefully planned strategy to test the strength of Morocco's support within the AU.

Morocco has many enemies in the AU, including influential countries like Algeria and South Africa that see Morocco as ‘an arrogant coloniser’ of the Western Sahara that strives to establish ‘a greater Morocco.’³ Only hours before the announcement at the 28th AU summit in Addis Ababa that Morocco’s request for admission had been accepted, diplomats from these countries still insisted that it was not a done deal. AU insiders noted that there was strong opposition, notably from Southern Africa,⁴ in discussions during the plenary session of the AU Assembly of heads of state and government.

Morocco and its allies (mainly in West Africa), however, carefully planned Morocco’s return to the AU. In the run-up to the request for admission, King Mohammed VI visited many African countries, notably the hosts of the 2016 and 2017 AU summits and influential countries that could play a role in persuading AU member states to support membership for Morocco.⁵

For example, Mohammed VI invited Rwanda’s President Paul Kagame to visit Morocco in June 2016, the month before the summit in Kigali, and undertook a three-day state visit to Rwanda that October, during which a number of bilateral agreements were signed.

In the run-up to the request for joining the AU, King Mohammed VI visited many African countries

In November 2016, ahead of the January 2017 summit in Addis Ababa, Mohammed VI also visited Ethiopia with a large business delegation. It was announced that the two countries were beginning construction of a US\$2.5 billion fertiliser plant that would provide in Ethiopia’s needs for agricultural production in years to come.⁶ The deal was signed by representatives of Morocco’s state-owned phosphate producer (the Office Chérifien des Phosphates) and the Ethiopian Minister of Public Enterprises.

Morocco also strengthened links with continental heavyweight Nigeria, through the signing, during a visit by Mohammed VI, of an agreement to construct a massive gas pipeline that could eventually benefit several countries in West Africa. Moroccan commentators often cite the pipeline project as a sterling example of Morocco’s contribution to development in Africa.⁷ Yet no

deadline has been set for the start or the expected completion of the project. A fertiliser project similar to the one launched in Ethiopia was also announced during this visit.

While these visits and announcements certainly helped to win friends for Morocco in the AU, some member states saw them as ‘chequebook diplomacy’ through which Morocco was simply buying its way back into the AU, an organisation that is still largely opposed to its actions in the Western Sahara. One former Southern African ambassador went as far as saying that ‘Morocco gets money from the Gulf States and it is now using that to buy votes in the AU.’⁸ A former high-ranking AU official, also remarked that ‘heads of state are being bought over by Morocco.’⁹

In addition to these high-level visits, Morocco’s hosting of the 22nd Conference of the Parties to the United Nations (UN) Framework Convention on Climate Change in Marrakech in November 2016 also allowed the country to showcase its infrastructure capacity to host big events. Around 30 African heads of state attended the meeting.

Growing economic ties with sub-Saharan Africa

Despite not being a member of the AU or any other functioning regional organisation,¹⁰ Morocco has managed to increase its economic presence in sub-Saharan Africa dramatically over the last few years.

Morocco’s economy has shown steady growth and, at the time of writing, was on track to grow 4.8% in 2017.¹¹ Moroccan companies are looking for new markets and investment opportunities, and as is the case with many international investors, sub-Saharan Africa seems the ideal place to find them. After having focused on the European market for a long time, Moroccan companies now direct 40% of their investments towards other African countries.

As of 2016, in terms of total capital investment in Africa, Morocco was the biggest African investor and the third largest overall, after China and the United Arab Emirates.¹² In terms of the number of projects, Morocco was the second biggest African investor, after South Africa, and the 10th biggest investor overall.¹³

Exports, however, are still largely directed towards the European market. Only 4% of its exports go to sub-Saharan Africa, mainly West Africa, although trade has

seen an increase of 9% annually since 2008.¹⁴ One of the main obstacles to exports is the high cost of transport; Morocco has few direct links by road, rail, freight or air with many of its trading partners on the continent.

The Moroccan trade office, in a June 2017 report on agricultural exports to Africa, suggested that much more can be done to maximise Morocco's trade potential. The report concluded that 'Africa is one of the most dynamic regions of the world,' with huge potential in the agricultural sector, mainly due to its growing population, urbanisation and the changing eating habits of the middle class:

Aware of the potential of the continent and in order to benefit from this African growth dynamic, in line with a fruitful South-South partnership, Morocco has several advantages from a geographical, cultural, historical, socio-economic and political perspective which can be used to strengthen its commercial ties with African countries. The royal impetus given to this inter-African cooperation, through a series of royal visits across the sub-Sahara region and crowned by Morocco's reintegration into the African Union during its 28th summit on 30 and 31 January 2017, opens up promising perspectives to all sectors of the economy, notably the agricultural sector.¹⁵

Religious links between Morocco and West Africa are strong thanks to the influence of one of the main Sufi brotherhoods, the Tidjaniya

Statements such as these show that economic expansion was a key motivation for Morocco to join the AU. In this context, the state and the king play a key role in the economy. Most big companies in Morocco are partially or entirely state-owned. The 'royal impetus' is thus crucial for creating new markets or concluding big agreements. The Moroccan monarch has near-absolute powers, despite regular parliamentary elections. The king can accept or reject the leader of the winning party in these elections – as was the case in September 2016 – and chairs a large number of state institutions. Foreign policy is strongly directed by the monarchy.

Historical, cultural and religious links

When asked about the motivations for Morocco's return to the AU, commentators in Morocco also invariably point out the strong religious, historical and cultural ties that link Morocco to the rest of Africa.¹⁶ Morocco has sustained these ties over the years through cultural festivals, exchange programmes, study opportunities and humanitarian aid.

Religious links between Morocco and West Africa, especially Senegal, are strong thanks to the influence of one of the main Sufi brotherhoods, the Tidjaniya. Some even consider the Tidjaniya brotherhood the 'secret weapon' of Morocco's soft power' due to the role it plays in influencing political elites



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‘from Kano [Nigeria] to Tivouane [Senegal]’.¹⁷ Members of the brotherhood, for example, undertake an annual pilgrimage to the Moroccan city of Fez, to visit the mausoleum of its founder, Ahmed Tidjani, who died there at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Tidjani was in fact born in Algeria, but Morocco has promoted Fez as the brotherhood’s spiritual headquarters.

One of the branches of the Tidjaniya, established by the followers of Senegalese spiritual leader El Hadj Abdoulaye Niassé, who call themselves *niassène*, extends as far as Ghana, northern Nigeria and Cameroon. Niassé, who was born in Senegal in 1845, and his descendants all kept close contact with Morocco, and the brotherhood is still seen today as building bridges between Africa and the Arab world.¹⁸

Morocco has shown commitment to peace in Africa through its participation in peacekeeping missions

These ties are reinforced through the many visits by King Mohammed VI and his predecessors to West Africa. Cultural events such as the annual Festival of Sacred Music in Fez and the Gnaoua World Music festival in Essaouira are also opportunities for artists and musicians from across Africa and beyond to share experiences.

Morocco has also shown commitment to peace in Africa through participation in peacekeeping missions, which has earned it some goodwill on the continent. Since independence it has participated in six UN peacekeeping operations, and still has troops in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

It has also tried to show that it is a generous purveyor of aid to the continent. Most recently, Morocco participated in aid to victims of a mudslide in Sierra Leone that claimed up to 500 lives. Moroccan military aircraft transported 66 tons of food, tents and other necessities to the survivors in August 2017.¹⁹ Following Morocco’s admission to the AU, King Mohammed VI also travelled to Juba, South Sudan, where he announced that Morocco would build a new hospital with 4 500 beds and send 20 Moroccan doctors and 18 nurses to South Sudan. This move was clearly intended to show his fellow African leaders that Morocco is willing to help war-torn countries.

Intolerance and xenophobia

The relationship between Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa is, however, more complex than the picture painted in official speeches. Economic migrants to Morocco often experience racism, discrimination and xenophobia. Relations between states are in fact often very different from relations between citizens.

Results of an opinion poll conducted by Afrobarometer and published in March 2017, showed that Moroccans were ‘significantly less supportive than other Africans of free cross-border movement’ and ‘considerably less welcoming than most other Africans of people of other religious, ethnic groups or nationalities.’²⁰

In the past few years, Morocco has tried to remedy this image by announcing several large-scale operations to regularise the legal status of undocumented immigrants. Up to 25 000 immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa received legal status at the end of 2016. However, many Moroccans still look down on Africans from outside Morocco and accuse them of taking jobs from Moroccans, who still struggle with high unemployment. Such attitudes could be an obstacle to the Moroccan government and monarchy’s quest to portray the country as pro-African.

Morocco is also considered a transit country for many sub-Saharan Africans who aspire to reach Europe – either by crossing the Mediterranean to Spain or France, or by scaling the high fences that surround the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on the Moroccan coast. Some sub-Saharan migrants stay in Morocco temporarily while they try to make money for the next leg of their journey. A few apply for refugee status in Morocco every year.²¹

Morocco is also an important source country for migrants to Europe. Relations with France, the former coloniser, are affected by this Moroccan diaspora, which dates back several decades. After independence in the 1960s thousands of Moroccan and Algerian men were recruited by France to work in heavy industries in France. A decree in the mid 1970s allowing the families of these migrant workers to join them led growing numbers of North Africans to settle in France.

The large number of Moroccans and people of Moroccan descent on French soil is a factor in France’s

close relationship with Morocco, particularly on the issue of the Western Sahara.²² France also has strong relations with Algeria, albeit conflicted at times due to the bitter legacy of that country's war for independence from France.

An African heavyweight?

Morocco clearly sees itself as a major player on the African continent. As discussed above, it is one of the largest investors in sub-Saharan Africa. However, in terms of GDP, it lags far behind countries such as South Africa, Nigeria and Egypt.

The AU in 2015 identified Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Algeria and Angola as its strongest economies and thus responsible for the biggest contributions to the AU budget. (Angola replaced Libya on that list.) Nigeria had the largest economy in 2016 (US\$405 billion), followed by Egypt (US\$332.7 billion), South Africa (US\$295.5 billion) and Algeria (US\$159 billion). Morocco's economy was valued significantly lower (US\$103.6 billion) but still ahead of Angola (US\$95 billion),²³ the latter having suffered heavily from the drop in oil prices. Other leading economies included Ethiopia (US\$72 billion) and Kenya (US\$70.5 billion).

Morocco could continue to exercise considerable soft power if it contributes constructively to the AU, as it has committed to do

Morocco is well placed to join the group of major contributors to the AU. Its main selling point would be its business links with the continent, as well as its 'soft power' in contributing to peacekeeping, disaster aid, development projects in least developed countries and a host of continental institutions and conferences.

Morocco could in future continue to exercise considerable soft power if it contributes constructively to the AU, as it has committed to do. The contention around the Western Sahara, however, will continue to hamper Morocco's standing on the continent.

The Western Sahara dispute

A former Moroccan minister interviewed for this study described the dispute over the Western Sahara as a thorn in Morocco's side (*un clou dans le pied*, literally a nail in the foot).²⁴ He added that Algeria was responsible for this problem – a widely held opinion in Morocco, where the huge neighbour to the east is often held responsible for the troubles in the Western Sahara (or, from a Moroccan perspective, simply the Sahara).

The Western Sahara, which borders Morocco in the north, Algeria in the east and Mauritania in the south, is designated by the UN as a non-self-governing territory, one of 17 such territories in the world. A former Spanish colony, it



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is claimed both by Morocco and by the SADR under the leadership of the Polisario Front.

Morocco bases its claim to the Western Sahara on the historical reign of Moroccan kings over this territory, and claims that the Sahrawi, the indigenous people of the Western Sahara, are one of many Moroccan tribes (like, for example, the Berbers).

The Polisario Front, on the other hand, maintains that Morocco's rule is illegal – pointing out that the borders of almost all post-colonial African states continue to be based on those drawn during the colonial era, during which the Western Sahara was regarded as a separate state by all colonial powers.

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The Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the predecessor of the AU, did indeed rule that colonial-era borders would be respected by its member states, to avoid opening a Pandora's box of territorial claims in Africa's many multi-ethnic states.²⁵ The AU has maintained this position, and has referenced it in almost all its statements and summit meetings since the start of the dispute over the Western Sahara.²⁶ The AU has been a consistent supporter of the SADR since its admission to the AU in 1984, often describing the Sahrawi cause as 'the last anti-colonial struggle.'²⁷

It can be argued that the Western Sahara and its inhabitants are the victims of an unfortunate historical circumstance. While many African colonies achieved independence in the late 1950s or 1960s, it remained under the control of Spain (ruled by the dictator Francisco Franco until his death in 1975). After Spain's withdrawal in 1976, the former Spanish Sahara was governed by both Morocco and Mauritania. Mauritania relinquished its claim in 1979.

Meanwhile Morocco's King Hassan II had brought the issue before the International Court of Justice. The court ruling on 19 October 1975 was seen by Morocco as a victory that argued against the Sahrawi people's quest for independence.²⁸ In November of that year, Hassan II

organised the so-called Marche Verte (Green March), during which 350 000 Moroccans settled in the territory.

The Polisario Front then waged war against Morocco, with the help of neighbouring Algeria, until 1988, when a truce was signed – mediated by the UN. It was agreed that a referendum would be held on Western Sahara's status. The UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was established in 1991 to oversee the ceasefire agreement and organise the referendum.

The referendum never took place, basically due to a dispute over who should be allowed to vote. The Polisario Front argued that only the original inhabitants of the Western Sahara should be allowed to vote, while the Moroccan government argued that all residents, including those who had been encouraged to settle there after the take-over by the government (through the Marche Verte and other efforts), should be allowed to vote. Successive attempts to draw up voters' lists, UN resolutions and international mediations, have not been able to settle the dispute.

Morocco describes its most recent offer as including substantial autonomy for the Western Sahara, but the hardliners in the Polisario Front insist on full independence.

Meanwhile, human rights abuses against campaigners for the Sahrawi cause in the Western Sahara continue. Demonstrations by Sahrawi activists are routinely broken up by police and demonstrators jailed or banned from entering Morocco.²⁹ Solidarity groups worldwide continue to campaign for the Sahrawi cause.

Tense relations between Algeria and Morocco

Morocco's large, oil-producing neighbour Algeria has always supported the Polisario Front and its struggle for independence. Algeria has for over 30 years housed tens of thousands of refugees from the Western Sahara in camps at Tindouf,³⁰ near the border of the disputed territory, and is one of the staunchest supporters of the SADR in international forums.

The hostile relations between Morocco and Algeria are complex and have a long history. This includes contestation over the border between the two countries as demarcated by the French colonial authorities and strong ideological opposition during the Cold War era.

This hostility has had severe consequences, including the closing of the border between the two countries and the breakdown of the Maghreb Arab Union.

Some have speculated that Morocco's decision to apply to return to the AU at this point, after such a long absence, occurred because Algeria is now in a weaker position than in previous years and would not be able to put up a strong fight to keep its neighbour out of the organisation. The absence of Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika at the past few AU summits due to illness could have worked in Morocco's favour.

The fact that Algeria and South Africa could not muster enough support within the AU to get the decision postponed to an extraordinary summit, or to make Morocco's admission conditional on its acceptance of the SADR, was clearly a failure of both countries' diplomacy. South Africa has also been severely weakened by its internal political problems.

Algeria's foreign minister, Ramtane Lamamra, a former AU commissioner for peace and security, welcomed the January 2017 AU decision admitting Morocco, saying that Morocco should have a seat in the AU by virtue of its geography and its history.³¹

Some observers saw Morocco's re-admission as the result of a trade-off between Algeria and Morocco in which Algeria's candidate for the post of commissioner of peace and security, Smail Chergui, would be re-elected for another term in exchange for Morocco's admission. This, however, remains speculation. Chergui's election by the AU's executive council of ministers required several rounds of voting before the Algerian beat Nigeria's candidate, Fatima Mohammed.

Whatever the case may be, the rift between Algeria and Morocco in the AU is very damaging and is expected to influence the role of both countries in the institution going forward.

A changed continental context

Morocco's bid to re-join the AU, and its success, were due to more than just Morocco's aggressive economic diplomacy and its longstanding ties with the rest of the continent. It came at a time when the priority across much of Africa had shifted from ideology to pragmatic economic self-interest; in this climate, support for the anti-colonial mission of organisations such as the Polisario Front has diminished. Instead of supporting the

Western Sahara on principle, states such as Ethiopia and Rwanda are inclined to ask: what's in it for us?

The Polisario Front and the SADR get most of their support from Algeria, South Africa and several other states in Southern Africa. Most of these are governed by former liberation movements such as the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale*), the ANC (African National Congress) in South Africa, the MPLA (*Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*) and ZANU PF (the Zimbabwe National Union – Patriotic Front) in Zimbabwe. These states are strongly rooted in an anti-colonial ideology in which former colonial powers (France in this case) are often accused of wanting to weaken and divide the continent to further their own economic, political and military interests.

Many of these governing liberation movements are, however, experiencing crises of internal renewal and lack of legitimacy due to rigged elections, such as in Zimbabwe, or diminishing support, such as in South Africa. The fall in commodity prices has also negatively affected the economies of Algeria and South Africa, diminishing their influence. South Africa, for various reasons that include xenophobia and a reputation for trying to exert pressure on other AU members, has also lost a lot of its influence in the AU.³²

The priority across much of Africa had shifted from ideology to pragmatic economic self-interest

Added to Africa's increasingly business-oriented approach is the increasing importance of security and the fight against terrorism. Morocco is seen internationally as a strong ally of UN Security Council members such as France and the United States in the fight against terrorism. Sahelian countries like Mauritania and Senegal are also conscious of the threat of terrorism, which has had a devastating effect in neighbouring Mali, Niger and Chad.³³

Finally, some states, for example Nigeria, are now less inclined to support the Western Sahara because of the renewed secessionist threats in their own backyards. Nigeria has experienced a resurgence of independence movements from the south-eastern region of Biafra. It certainly does not want to encourage supporters

of Igbo independence by supporting independence movements elsewhere.

Some analysts believe that the war in South Sudan has also helped Morocco's cause since it demonstrates the failure of secession.³⁴

A difficult road to AU membership

Morocco's return to the AU was not easy. It was preceded by considerable tension between member states and uncertainty within the organisation about the legal steps required.

Initially, the AU stated in a press release that according to Article 29 of the AU Constitutive Act, a state could become a member of the AU or return to it through a simple majority of favourable replies to a written note from the AU Commission (AUC) chairperson. During a briefing by the AU legal counsel to the Peace and Security Council (PSC) on 21 August 2016 however, it was pointed out that decisions on admitting a new member state lie with the Assembly of heads of state and government. This could require a two-thirds majority vote. The legal counsel also pointed out that any new state must agree to adhere to the principles of the AU Constitutive Act.³⁵

Some of Morocco's opponents believed that Morocco's adhesion could be blocked or stalled on this point, given that anti-colonialism figures so strongly in the principles of the AU.

In the end, such arguments did not hold sway. Morocco's parliament adopted the AU Constitutive Act on 20 January 2017, and according to the final statement of the Assembly of the 28th AU summit, Morocco was admitted on the basis of Article 9c and Article 29 of the Constitutive Act.³⁶

The run-up to Morocco's adhesion also led to conflict between Morocco and AUC Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma. The former South African minister was seen as anti-Moroccan from the time of her election in 2012. Dlamini Zuma officially received Morocco's request for adhesion on 23 September 2016 during a meeting with Taib Fassi Fihri, advisor to King Mohammed VI. The *note verbale* sent to member states to solicit their reaction to Morocco's request was dated 3 November, prompting accusations from Morocco that she was trying to stall the process.³⁷

Together with other factors mentioned above, notably Morocco's economic diplomacy in the run-up to the decision, the departure of Dlamini Zuma as AUC chairperson certainly played a role in Morocco's fairly smooth return to the AU. Dlamini Zuma was initially supposed to step down in July 2016, but this was postponed until January 2017 after heads of state failed to agree on her successor.

Ironically, some AU diplomats stated that the candidature of Chad's Moussa Faki Mahamat for the position of chairperson of the AUC was initially intended to counter Morocco's bid, since he was seen as Algeria's candidate.³⁸ It was also reported that the 2016 chairperson of the AU, President Idriss Déby of Chad, chose to hand over to his successor, Guinea's President Alpha Conde, on the first day of the summit, in order to avoid being accused of bias in the Assembly's debate on Morocco's re-admission.

South Africa in the end accepted the majority view that Morocco should be allowed to join

Faki was elected chairperson of the AUC after a tight race with Kenya's foreign minister, Amina Mohamed. Conde has meanwhile proved to be a conciliatory figure as AU chairperson. The former opposition leader and ally of South Africa's president Jacob Zuma – often referred to as 'Professor' due to his credentials as a pan-Africanist intellectual – attempted, during his closing speech at the summit, to make an overture to Algeria and South Africa, the two heavyweights who had clearly lost the battle to keep Morocco out of the AU. Conde paid tribute to the ANC and to Algeria for their contribution to liberation struggles in Africa.

South Africa's reaction

During the debate over the adhesion of Morocco, several states – including Zimbabwe, Angola, Lesotho, and Equatorial Guinea – voiced their opposition against Morocco's adhesion and their support for the Western Sahara. South Africa in the end accepted the majority view that Morocco should be allowed to join, even if only on the basis of its geographical location. Following the January 2017 summit, however, there was strong reaction against Morocco from civil society and the ruling ANC.

South Africa's support for the Western Sahara and the Polisario Front dates back to the anti-apartheid struggle, when leaders of the ANC in exile, including Nelson Mandela, forged strong links with the Polisario Front in exile in Algeria. After the end of apartheid in 1994, Mandela and the ANC assured the Polisario Front's leader, Mohammed Abdelaziz, that Pretoria would officially recognise the SADR.

Diplomatic links between South Africa and the SADR were, however, only established in 2004, during the presidency of Thabo Mbeki. In protest, Morocco withdrew its ambassador from South Africa and has been represented by a chargé d'affaires in Pretoria ever since.

Meanwhile, Algeria is one of South Africa's strongest diplomatic allies on the continent. President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria forged close links with Mbeki; the two were founding members of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. Political and economic relations between South Africa and Algeria continue to be strong.

Anti-Moroccan sentiment in South Africa was arguably at its peak during the strong competition between Morocco and South Africa to host the 2010 World Cup Soccer final. Morocco was accused of being racist, anti-African and a coloniser that didn't deserve to host Africa's first World Cup. South Africa's bid finally won, but not before a lot of damage was done to the relationship between the two countries.

France was accused of using its neo-colonial power to convince its former colonies in Francophone Africa to support Morocco and divide the AU

Since then, Morocco's policy of boycotting international meetings attended by the SADR, notably the 2001 UN World Conference against Racism in Durban, did not endear the country to South African officials and opinion leaders.

South Africa's opposition to Morocco's bid to re-join the AU thus did not come as a surprise. After Morocco's admission, South African government officials expressed their disappointment,³⁹ and the ruling ANC called the return of Morocco to the AU regrettable.⁴⁰ In a debate on this issue at the University of Johannesburg,⁴¹ France was accused of using its neo-colonial power to convince its former colonies in Francophone Africa to support Morocco and divide the AU.

Anti-Moroccan sentiment in South Africa following Morocco's return to the AU also had severe economic consequences for Morocco when a vessel of the state-owned Office Chérifien des Phosphates (OCP), the *NM Cherry Blossom*, was seized by South African authorities through a maritime court order in the Algoa bay harbour in mid-2017 on the basis that the phosphate it was transporting was from the illegally occupied Western Sahara.⁴²

As part of documents before the court that decided on the injunction against the OCP, an article by South African Minister of International Relations and



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Cooperation Maite Nkoana-Mashabane in support of the Western Sahara was quoted by the lawyers for the Western Sahara.⁴³ Nkoana-Mashabane's article had coincided with the visit of the leader of the Polisario Front, Brahim Ghali, to South Africa in January 2017. Ghali paid a second visit to the country in October 2017 to attend a meeting of the Pan-African Parliament in Midrand, Johannesburg.

The merits of the *Cherry Blossom* case were never brought to court. The OCP, which issued a strongly worded statement rejecting the South African court's jurisdiction and claiming that the phosphate was mined in territory belonging to Morocco, declined to pursue the matter further.

The SADR representative in South Africa, ambassador Radhi S. Bachir, said that he appreciated the firm stance taken by the South African government and political parties.⁴⁴ He also praised the South African government's 'active position in support of the completion of decolonisation in SADC [the Southern African Development Community] and BRICS [Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa]. At the time of writing the various parties involved in the dispute were still wrangling over the fate of the vessel and its cargo.

It remains to be seen, however, to what extent South Africa is willing to campaign against Morocco and in support of the SADR given its focus on its own internal problems.

Meanwhile, in August 2017, the SADC summit in Pretoria also decided to organise a Solidarity Conference in support of the SADR. The proposal for this conference that was submitted to SADC heads of state also asked the SADC to 'support the self-determination of the peoples of Western Sahara' and advocate for 'the end of the illegal exploitation of the natural resources of the Western Sahara' by Morocco.⁴⁵

Doubt over Morocco's real intentions

Many of Morocco's opponents in the AU, especially those in South Africa, have claimed that Morocco's main motivation for returning to the organisation is to seek the expulsion of the SADR and settle the SADR's status once and for all.

At the 27th AU summit in Kigali, Rwanda, reports in the pan-African weekly *Jeune Afrique* suggested that Senegal had circulated a petition for member states

to ask for the expulsion of the SADR. Reportedly 28 countries signed the petition.⁴⁶ While the AU Constitutive Act does not provide for the expulsion of a member, the Act can be amended through a two-thirds majority of member states. Thus, expulsion of the SADR would require at least 36 votes in the Assembly.

At this stage this looks unlikely. Reports of the petition to expel the SADR angered many member states, particularly from Southern Africa, and could have seriously damaged Morocco's chances of admission. Since then, the expulsion of the SADR has not been mentioned officially by Morocco.

Expulsion of the SADR would require at least 36 votes in the African Union Assembly

In speeches by King Mohammed VI on 31 January 2017 and by his brother, Prince Moulay Rachid, on 4 July 2017, no mention was made of the Western Sahara issue. The king struck a conciliatory tone in his speech, saying that Morocco was aware that opinion over its admission to the AU was not unanimous. He said that Morocco's intention was not to 'divide – as some have insinuated' but rather to participate fully in the pan-African project.

Morocco's apparent decision to put on hold its plans to get the SADR expelled from the AU came as a surprise to many AU watchers. In an article in 2013, for example, scholar Badr Zerdhoud argued in favour of Morocco's return to the AU, but postulated that if that happened it would 'probably signify the settlement of the Western Sahara question and the normalisation of relations with Algeria.'⁴⁷

Not everyone is convinced of Morocco's intentions. If the purpose was not to expel the SADR, why did Morocco, after more than three decades, decide to return to the AU? Was it the personal ambition of the head of state or merely a pragmatic move by a country that had tried but failed to reinforce links with the Mediterranean rim countries?

Commentators have argued that in Morocco all major decisions on foreign policy are made by the monarchy and without its full commitment this return would not have happened. Mohammed VI has been described as

an Africanist – who travels to African countries not only on official business but also for frequent private visits, which sometimes last several days, if not weeks – and whose personal ambition likely drove Morocco's return to the AU.⁴⁸

An insider who knows the inner workings of the king's foreign policy has said that he believes Mohammed VI is a realist and was convinced of the need to make some concessions to achieve the ultimate goal of returning to the organisation that his father, Hassan II, left more than three decades ago. It took a great amount of pragmatism, for example, to visit countries in Africa that officially recognise the SADR like Ethiopia, Nigeria and Rwanda, he argued. 'We are not in the 1980s. Morocco is today much stronger politically and economically. The King has full support inside the country,' he said.⁴⁹

The same insider said that Morocco's return at this juncture was in part to appease its allies and partners in West Africa, which had become increasingly insistent on this point. 'Many African countries asked us to come back. They said at least then you can defend yourself and we don't have to do that. You can fight from the inside against the ideological positions [of] others.'

Clearly, apart from fighting its detractors on the issue of the Western Sahara, the single most important factor is that Morocco wants to be recognised as an African heavyweight and the only way to do this is from within the AU. Being part of the AU means Morocco is no longer the black sheep of the continent. As a member of the AU, it gains in prestige and legitimacy. Furthermore, its economic, political and cultural links with other African countries will be reinforced by having a seat at the table in the AU and in its numerous institutions.

The way forward for Morocco

Morocco has for a long time practiced a policy of boycotting any international meeting to which the SADR is invited. This has had huge implications for its ability to interact with the African continent and international bodies. For example, successive EU–AU meetings had to be renamed as EU–Africa meetings because of the insistence of the Europeans that Morocco be invited even if it is not an AU member. This repeatedly created friction between the two organisations.

In November 2017, the first truly EU–AU summit took place in Abidjan with Morocco as a full-fledged member

of the AU. Lobbying behind the scenes in the run-up to the summit to make sure the SADR was not invited by the host, Cote d'Ivoire, however, placed a question mark over the success of this summit.⁵⁰ In the end, the summit went ahead with the full participation of Morocco and King Mohammed VI, as well as the SADR's President Ghali.

It remains to be seen whether Morocco now fully accepts sitting in the AU alongside the SADR, realising that the price to pay for refusing to do so is too high. Some observers insist that Morocco now realises that 'empty chair politics' is no longer sustainable.⁵¹ One influential former minister said Morocco now realises the disadvantages of boycott politics: 'The Arab countries sit with Israel in the UN, even though they don't recognise Israel. The United States sit with North Korea.'⁵²

Morocco walked out of important meetings to protest the presence of the SADR

Yet it remains doubtful whether Morocco is willing to make the same compromises in other instances as it has made in the AU Assembly. Even after officially applying to join the AU and while King Mohammed VI was conducting a charm offensive around the continent, Morocco walked out of important meetings to protest the presence of the SADR.

In November 2016, Morocco, together with seven Arab countries, walked out of the 4th Arab–Africa summit in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, in protest over the presence of a delegation of the Polisario Front. In March 2017, a high-level meeting jointly organised by the AU and the UN Economic Commission for Africa, as part of the Commission's 50th Conference of Ministers in Dakar, Senegal, also had to be postponed because Morocco refused to participate in the presence of the representative of the SADR, an AU member state.⁵³ Morocco argues that the SADR is not a UN member and thus does not have the right to sit in these meetings, even though it is a member of the AU.

In August 2017, Morocco disrupted a ministerial meeting of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development in Mozambique to try to prevent the SADR delegation from entering the conference building. In the

end the SADR was allowed to participate in the meeting. The government of Mozambique condemned the interference in the conference and said that Morocco had violated ‘the principles that govern healthy relations between states.’⁵⁴

Morocco denies that it is dividing the continent by obstructing important international meetings, and says it wants to play a constructive role.⁵⁵ These incidents prove the contrary. Meanwhile, Moroccan foreign minister Nasser Bourita, speaking at the AU on 4 July 2017, said Morocco discourages states from recognising the SADR ‘on a bilateral basis.’ The SADR was initially recognised by over 80 countries worldwide, of which 38 have since cancelled or withdrawn this recognition.⁵⁶

It remains to be seen how Morocco will manage to convince states not to recognise the SADR. Important AU states such as Ethiopia, Nigeria and Rwanda have maintained their recognition of the SADR even after recent visits by King Mohammed VI and the signing of bilateral cooperation agreements. Zambia also announced, one week after a visit by Mohammed VI in February 2017, that it was not withdrawing its recognition of the SADR.⁵⁷

The way forward for the AU

The AUC and the PSC will have to reflect on how to manage relations with Morocco and with the UN Security Council going forward.

For a long time the AU has been at loggerheads with the Security Council over the Western Sahara issue. The AU has largely been sidelined from the discussions in New York, dominated by France and the United States. Morocco is seen as an important ally of Europe and the United States in the fight against terrorism in North Africa and the Sahel.

This apparent bias was clearly illustrated in the debate over the renewal of the mandate of the MINURSO in April 2016.⁵⁸ Earlier, then-UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon provoked the ire of Moroccans when he referred to the Western Sahara as an ‘occupied territory’ while on a visit to the Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf. Morocco reacted furiously and withdrew its financial support and 83 civilian staff members from the MINURSO.

The AUC chairperson and the PSC asked for Morocco to be sanctioned for this move, but after much debate,

the Security Council adopted a compromise resolution on 29 April 2016,⁵⁹ proposed by the United States, the penholder that was responsible for drafting the resolution on this issue. No strong condemnation of Morocco was included in the resolution. Of the three African non-permanent representatives, Senegal, a strong supporter of Morocco, and Egypt voted for the resolution, while Angola abstained.

Morocco is trying to make the case that discussions about the Western Sahara should take place in the UN

The PSC was further aggrieved that the AU special envoy for Western Sahara, former Mozambican president Joachim Chissano, was not allowed to address the Security Council. Chissano has since been promoted to AU high representative for the Western Sahara.

AU members who support the SADR are hoping that Morocco’s membership in the AU will end this stalemate between the continental organisation and the Security Council. The wording of the final decision to re-admit Morocco to the AU in January 2017 is telling in this regard. At the end of the 28th summit, AU heads of state welcomed Morocco back as a member, saying that its membership:

provides the opportunity to reunite the African community of states around the pan-African core values of the Founders of solidarity, unity, freedom and equality, in accordance with the principles and objectives of the Constitutive Act. This will strengthen the ability of the AU to find African solutions to African problems.⁶⁰

Clearly, one of the ‘African problems’ referred to in that statement was the dispute over the Western Sahara.

Morocco is trying to make the case that discussions about the Western Sahara should take place in the UN, not the AU. This has already caused some friction within the organisation.

In March 2017, the PSC, chaired for the month by South Africa, placed the issue of Western Sahara on the agenda for 20 March. Morocco was invited to attend the meeting but sent a *note verbale* to the PSC Secretariat that the question of the Western Sahara was

being discussed within the confines of the UN and that the AU should adopt a neutral position. The refusal by Morocco to attend the PSC meeting was strongly criticised by observers.⁶¹

At the 29th AU summit in July 2017, Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita again emphasised this point and strongly asserted that any negotiations over the future of the Western Sahara should be the exclusive domain of the UN and that AU Assembly resolutions should indicate support for the UN process. He said most AU members, including the two parties to the Western Sahara conflict, have chosen to hold the talks in New York. 'Both parties chose the UN, so let's stay at the UN,' he said.

Morocco could bid to replace Algeria on the PSC during elections conducted by the AU Executive Council at the upcoming summit

Bourita also emphasised that there is 'only one special envoy for the Western Sahara,' referring to the UN envoy, and expressed his satisfaction that there was no mention of Chissano in the final draft of the Assembly decisions. Bourita said that the 'provocative language' used 'almost automatically' in AU resolutions over many years, such as referring to Western Sahara as 'the occupied territory,' would no longer be a feature of AU documents.⁶²

Discussions over the wording to be used in the final drafts of the 29th AU summit reports kept officials busy behind closed doors for several hours during the summit, to the frustration of many delegates. In the end, the draft decisions⁶³ of the Assembly stated that the Assembly 'welcomes the commitment of the UN secretary general to finding a solution to the conflict and urged the SADR and Morocco to enter into direct talks. The draft called on the two parties to cooperate with AU institutions, the AUC and the AU High Representative for Western Sahara.

The question remains whether Morocco will in future attend such discussions by the PSC, which regularly puts the Western Sahara conflict on its agenda – and, if it does not attend, what influence (if any) the PSC in its current form will have over Morocco.

In addition, if Morocco serves as a member of the Security Council at some future date, it will be part of the A3, the three non-permanent Security Council members – a grouping that the AU would like to see as representing the continent and voting together on issues of concern to Africa. At this stage, as with the Security Council resolution of 29 April 2016 referred to above, this is not the case.

Morocco and the PSC

The 15-member elected PSC,⁶⁴ the highest decision-making body of the AU on peace and security issues between meetings of the Assembly, has been the object of much confusion within policy circles in Morocco. Officials and



MOROCCO HAS BEEN ATTACKED BY TERRORISTS FROM ALGERIA-BASED AL-QAIDA IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB

observers have described the PSC as ‘dominated by Algeria,’ which has either ‘chaired’ or ‘headed’ the PSC for the last 15 years⁶⁵ – but it is in fact the AU’s Peace and Security Department that has been chaired by a commissioner from Algeria since the creation of the AU in 2002.

The current commissioner, Chergui, was re-elected for another four years in January 2017, as mentioned earlier. The PSC secretariat is housed within the AU Peace and Security Department.

Of the 15 members, 10 are elected for a two-year term and the other five for a three-year term. Members with a two-year term will have to stand for re-election in January 2018, when an opportunity would arise for Morocco to become a member of the PSC.

North Africa has two seats on the PSC, currently occupied by Egypt (with a three-year term) and Algeria (with an expiring two-year term). Morocco could bid to replace Algeria during elections conducted by the AU Executive Council during the upcoming summit.

Being a member of the PSC would give Morocco the opportunity to participate in decision making

Algeria has so far served for 11 years on the PSC (three terms of three years and the current term of two years). The other two candidates are Libya, which has served for seven years on the PSC, most recently a two-year term that ended in 2016, and Tunisia, which has only served for two years, from 2008 to 2010.

Being a member of the PSC would give Morocco the opportunity to participate in decision making on crucial peace and security issues. These include the conflicts in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where Morocco has peacekeepers, and South Sudan, where it has promised to give humanitarian aid, as well as the fight against terrorism, which is very close to home. Morocco has been the victim of terror attacks by the Algeria-based Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and is on high alert due to the spate of terror attacks in the Sahel region.

Morocco could, however, also use this opportunity to block discussion of the Western Sahara, in line with its

strategy to confine this issue to the Security Council, where it arguably has more support.

Morocco’s bid to join ECOWAS

Emboldened by its acceptance into the AU, Morocco in June 2017 applied for membership in the Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS) – arguably one of the most active AU Regional Economic Communities, in terms of both political and economic integration. ECOWAS has successfully implemented a protocol ensuring the free circulation of people and goods and has a fairly good record of upholding the principles of democracy and free and fair elections.

Morocco’s application was accepted in principle during the ECOWAS summit in Liberia on 4 June 2017 and it expected to fully integrate into the organisation in December 2017. In the end, this did not happen and the ECOWAS leaders decided to mandate the heads of state of Togo, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Nigeria to look into the issue of Morocco’s membership.⁶⁶

This request for membership is certainly problematic from a political and geographical point of view. Mauritania withdrew from the organisation in 2000, and thus Morocco has no territorial border with ECOWAS states.⁶⁷ Those who support Morocco’s admission to ECOWAS, however, argue that ‘cultural continuity’ between Morocco and West Africa should carry more weight than territorial continuity.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Tunisia, which is even further removed geographically, has also asked for observer status in ECOWAS.

Morocco and Tunisia could argue that not all AU Regional Economic Communities are strictly geographically defined. SADC, for example, decided at its 37th summit in August 2017 to admit the Comoros, located in the Indian Ocean, as its 16th member. The Seychelles, also in the Indian Ocean, is also part of SADC. Some states have overlapping membership, such as Tanzania, which is part of both SADC and the East African Community.

The question can be asked, however, if Morocco becomes a member of ECOWAS, what then becomes of the Maghreb Arab Union, currently inactive but officially one of the AU’s Regional Economic Communities? It will certainly be up to the AU at some point to streamline the Regional Economic Communities to ensure greater institutional coherency.

Conclusion

Clearly, Morocco has a lot to offer the AU. As an economic heavyweight on the continent, it can contribute significantly to the AU budget, which has been under severe pressure for several years. An attempt to rectify this situation by imposing a 0.2% levy on all non-African imports has still not been implemented and lacks buy-in from all AU member states.⁶⁹

In addition, Morocco has shown that it has the capacity and infrastructure to host important summits and conferences, such as the 22nd Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Marrakech in November 2016, which was hailed as a success.

Continuing to boycott meetings due to the presence of the SADR would be counterproductive

Following its return to the AU, Morocco was asked to prepare a proposal to the Assembly of the 29th summit on the issue of migration, given its strategic position and history in this regard as both a host country and a source of migrants to Europe, as noted earlier. As part of the proposal, Morocco offered to host a major African conference on migration – potentially an important step towards developing the long-awaited African Common Position on Migration. Morocco currently co-chairs, with Germany, the Global Forum on Migration and Development.

As indicated earlier, Morocco also participates in peacekeeping missions on the continent, under the auspices of the UN. With increasing demand for the AU to take charge of resolving African conflicts, Morocco can in future play an important role in this regard, notably in the fight against terrorism. It is currently the co-chair, with the Netherlands, of the Global Counterterrorism Forum, a joint initiative by the European Union and 29 countries around the world.

Morocco could also, for example, be a valuable member of the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa, based in Addis Ababa.

In addition, the challenges faced by African countries due to climate change are likely to increase. Morocco

has vast experience with renewable energy and has already embarked on exchange schemes to impart this knowledge to other African countries. It has also managed to build modern infrastructure despite the harsh climatic conditions in many parts of the country.

For Morocco to play this positive role on the continent, however, it would be crucial to mend relations with member states and to participate in AU meetings constructively. Continuing to boycott or disrupt international meetings due to the presence of SADR delegates would also be counterproductive to Morocco's efforts to win over its detractors in the AU.

From the point of view of the AU, it is important for the AU and AUC chairpersons to play a unifying role to help overcome the rift created by Morocco's return to the organisation. Insisting that the issue of the Western Sahara is discussed cordially and within structures such as the PSC will, however, take considerable political will on the part of the AU leadership.

This is clearly not the first time that the AU has faced the challenge of unresolved disputes between member states, personalities, and geographical and language blocs. But it cannot afford to be divided now. It faces many challenges, notably to ensure greater self-financing, streamline its organisation, and shoulder the responsibility for peace and security on the continent. Morocco's adherence could have a positive impact if these rifts can be overcome and talks about the Western Sahara show significant progress.

Notes

- 1 Royaume du Maroc, Departement de la Communication 31 January 2017, www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-royaux/texte-integral-du-discours-prononce-par-sm-le-roi-mohammed-vi-devant-le-28eme-sommet.
- 2 Whether Morocco's membership of the AU should be labelled a 'return' to the organisation or a new 'admission' is a matter of some disagreement. Some argue that Morocco joined the AU, which was created in 2002, as a new member. Others, however, argue that the AU is the legal successor to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), of which Morocco was a founding member. Most other AU members (excluding South Sudan) automatically became members of the AU after the dissolution of the OAU in 2001; this favours the point of view that Morocco returned to or re-joined the AU.
- 3 Dangor, M. former South African ambassador to Libya, at a seminar attended by the author, University of Johannesburg, 6 April 2017.
- 4 Author interviews with ambassadors, diplomatic staff and AU officials at the AU summit on 30 January 2017.
- 5 In his speech on 31 January King Mohammed VI stated that he had made 46 visits to 25 African countries since acceding to the throne in 1999. Altogether 949 agreements were signed.
- 6 Morocco is one of the world's leading producers of phosphate, a key ingredient in many fertilisers. Details of the deal can be found here: www.maroc.ma/en/news/hm-king-ethiopian-pm-launch-project-build-fertilizer-production-platform-ethiopia-chair-signing.
- 7 Author interview with Khadija Boutkhili, professor at the Institute for African Relations, Mohammed V University, Rabat, on 8 July 2017.
- 8 Author interview with former ambassador on 31 January 2017 in Addis Ababa.
- 9 Author interview with former high-ranking AU official on 11 July 2017 in Rabat.
- 10 Morocco is a member of the Maghreb Arab Union, which was established in 1989 and comprises Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania; but because of the rift between Morocco and Algeria, this organisation is not functional. Its last meetings were held in 2008.
- 11 Announcement by Morocco's Minister of Finance Mohamed Boussaid quoted in M Diawara, Maroc: 2017 sous le signe d'une embellie économique, *Le Point Afrique*, 1 August 2017, http://afrique.lepoint.fr/economie/maroc-2017-sous-le-signe-d-une-embellie-economique-01-08-2017-2147394_2258.php
- 12 Financial Times, *2017 Africa Investment Report – Investing for inclusive growth* http://forms.fdiintelligence.com/africainvestmentreport/files/Africa_Investment_Report-2017.pdf.
- 13 Moroccan investment in Africa, in terms of number of projects, grew by 21% between 2015 and 2016, while that of South Africa declined by 17%. Over 60% of Morocco's investment in the rest of Africa is directed towards West Africa, with Côte d'Ivoire attracting the most Moroccan projects. Morocco is the second biggest investor in Côte d'Ivoire, after France, with capital expenditure of US\$213 million in 2016. Most of Morocco's investments are in banking (Attijariwafa is one of Africa's largest banks), telecommunications (mainly through Maroc Telecoms), industry and real estate.
- 14 Figures from the Moroccan trade office are reported here: <http://m.le360.ma/afrique/maroc-senegal/economie/2017/07/10/13304-maroc-afriqueles-echanges-commerciaux-en-hausse-de-91-entre-2008-et-2016-13304>. Morocco's biggest trading partners are Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and Ethiopia (mostly exports of Moroccan fertiliser). The export of agricultural products rose 13% annually, comprising mostly cereals, tea, coffee, cheese and fresh fruit and vegetables. More than half of the fresh produce goes to neighbouring Mauritania, followed by Senegal, Nigeria and Mali.
- 15 A study done by the Moroccan trade office shows huge potential for agricultural exports to the rest of the continent: www.finances.gov.ma/Docs/depf/2017/Export%20agroalimentaire%20Afrique.pdf.
- 16 Author interviews with former ministers, members of parliament and academics in Morocco, 7–13 July 2017.
- 17 Y A Akdim, La Tidjaniyya, arme secrete du soft power marocain en afrique, *Le Monde*, 29 April 2016, http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2016/04/29/la-tidjaniyya-arme-secrete-du-soft-power-marocain-en-afrique_4911069_3210.html
- 18 Details of the life of Al Hadj Abdoulaye Niassé and his brotherhood can be found here: www.asfiyahi.org/Tidjaniya-dans-le-Monde-Les-Niassenes-de-Kaolack-et-le-rayonnement-de-la-Tidjaniyya_a537.html.
- 19 L'Economiste, Sierra Leone: le Maroc envoie de l'aide humanitaire, 20 August 2017, www.leconomiste.com/flash-infos/sierra-leone-le-maroc-envoie-de-l-aide-humanitaire.
- 20 D Jacobs and T Isbell, Afrobarometer Dispatches 137, 27 March 2017, Rejoining the AU – Moroccans bring decidedly mixed attitudes towards regional integration <http://afrobarometer.org/publications/ad137-rejoining-au-moroccans-bring-decidedly-mixed-attitudes-toward-regional>. The survey showed that around 33% of Moroccans would 'somewhat dislike' or 'strongly dislike' having foreigners or immigrants as neighbours; in comparison, the average across 36 countries participating in the survey was 18%. Only 40% of Moroccans supported free cross-border movement, while the average across 36 countries surveyed was 56%.
- 21 According to the UN High Commission for Refugees, there are currently just over 6 000 refugees and asylum seekers in Morocco. Over 3 000 of them, however, are from Syria (2 927), Yemen (461) and Iraq (131). The others are mostly from sub-Saharan African countries like Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic; www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/567162f79/morocco-fact-sheet.html.
- 22 Relations between France and Morocco date back to the 15th century. Various agreements between France and the Moroccan kings were signed from the mid-19th century, and Morocco was a French protectorate from 1912 to independence in 1956. During and after the colonial era, Morocco served France's foreign policy interests in several ways, notably by siding with France in World War II and participating in the 1990/1991 Gulf War. Morocco has remained one of the pillars of France's Africa policy ever since. France has at various times supported Morocco's claim over the Western Sahara – despite objections from Algeria, France's other former colony in North

- Africa, with which it maintains a more complex relationship than the one with Morocco.
- 23 World Bank, Gross Domestic Product 2016, <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/GDP.pdf>
 - 24 Author interview 11 July 2017 in Assilah, Morocco.
 - 25 Many post-colonial states struggle with the arbitrary nature of borders drawn up by the 1878 Berlin Conference. However, these borders are largely still respected. In just a few cases, after years of post-independence civil war, followed by a referendum, new states have been created after independence. This was the case in Eritrea, which broke away from Ethiopia in 1993, and South Sudan, which achieved independence from Sudan in 2011.
 - 26 The AU Constitutive Act stipulates 'the respect of borders existing on achievement of independence.' The African Charter on Human and People's Rights, adopted in 1986, which states that 'all peoples' have 'the unquestionable and inalienable right to self-determination,' is also often cited in this regard.
 - 27 R Bachir and A Gallous, Africa and the euphoria of decolonisation – Morocco's continued illegal occupation of the Western Sahara: the great stalemate, 10 July 2017, *Thabo Mbeki Foundation*, www.mbeki.org/2017/07/10/africa-and-the-euphoria-of-decolonisation-moroccos-continual-illegal-occupation-of-western-sahara-the-great-stalemate/
 - 28 The opposing interpretations of this ruling are an example of the intractability of this conflict. Bachir and Gallous (Ibid) for example emphasise the fact that the court found no legal ties existed between Morocco and the nomadic tribes of the Western Sahara before the Spanish colonisation. Morocco, however, points out that the court did establish the ethnic, religious and cultural links between the Moroccan sultan and the inhabitants of the area at the time. The verdict of the court can be found here: <http://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/61/6196.pdf>
 - 29 Organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have spoken out about these abuses, but Moroccan authorities have systematically prevented thorough investigation of these incidents by outside non-governmental organisations. MINURSO is one of the few UN missions without a human rights mandate, and the AU's Commission for Human and People's Rights has been stopped from conducting a mission despite calls by the AU Assembly and the PSC. In April 2016 the Commission renewed this call; www.achpr.org/sessions/58th/resolutions/340/.
 - 30 The UN High Commission for Refugees estimated in February 2017 that there were 90 000 refugees in Tindouf; <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Algeria%20Factsheet%20-%20February%202017.pdf>.
 - 31 R Lamamra, interview with Radio France International on 27 January 2017, Addis Ababa; www.rfi.fr/emission/20170127-ramtane-lamamra-maroc-union-africaine-algerie-polisario-SADR.
 - 32 M Schoeman, C Alden and A Kefale, It's time South Africa tuned into Africa's views about its role on the continent, *The Conversation*, 24 January 2017, <https://theconversation.com/its-time-south-africa-tuned-into-africas-views-about-its-role-on-the-continent-71019>.
 - 33 Mali is an exception amongst Francophone states when it comes to siding with Morocco in the AU. Due to its dependence on cooperation with Algeria to fight jihadist groups, often emanating from Algeria, it has abstained or sided with Algeria on this issue.
 - 34 Afro-Middle East Centre, Statehood in the era of securitisation: Morocco's accession to the African Union and its impact on Sahrawi self-determination, 9 Feb 2017, <http://amec.org.za/morocco/item/1521-statehood-in-the-era-of-securitisation-morocco-s-accession-to-the-african-union-and-its-impact-on-sahrawi-self-determination.html>.
 - 35 The return of Morocco to the AU was far more complex, from a political and legal point of view, than the admission of South Sudan following its independence from Sudan in 2011. There was a large measure of consensus around the admission of South Sudan, which was not the case with Morocco. See PSC Report, Morocco's plans to join the AU a legal conundrum, 9 September 2016, <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/on-the-agenda/moroccos-plans-to-join-the-au-a-legal-conundrum>.
 - 36 Final Decisions of the 28th Assembly: <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/uploads/Assembly%20AU%20January%202017FINALDECISIONS.pdf>.
 - 37 N Lamillili, Mohammed VI sollicite l'intervention d'Idriss Déby Itno et reporte sa visite en Ethiopie, *Jeune Afrique*, 31 October 2016, www.jeuneafrique.com/369477/politique/maroc-ua-mohammed-vi-sollicite-l-intervention-d-idriss-deby-itno-reporte-visite-ethiopie/ This report stated that King Mohammed VI had to call upon the AU chairperson, at the time President Idriss Déby of Chad, to convince Dlamini Zuma to send out the *note verbale* in time for the January 2017 summit.
 - 38 Author interview with a Southern African ambassador to the AU, 27 January 2017, Addis Ababa.
 - 39 In a speech in parliament, South Africa's deputy minister of international relations and cooperation, Luwellyn Landers, said that South Africa, most countries of the Southern African Development Community, Algeria and Uganda were opposed to Morocco joining the AU due to its violation of AU principles regarding the inalienable rights of the Sahrawi people to self-determination. He called for greater solidarity with the Sahrawi movement; www.dirco.gov.za/docs/speeches/2017/land0315.htm.
 - 40 ANC statement on 31 January 2017; www.anc.org.za/content/statement-african-national-congress-readmission-kingdom-morocco-african-union-au.
 - 41 Seminar held on 6 April 2017 attended by the author.
 - 42 L Louw-Vaudran, Morocco's exports from Western Sahara hang in the balance, *ISS Today*, 12 May 2017, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/moroccos-exports-from-western-sahara-hang-in-the-balance>
 - 43 M Nkoana-Mashabane, Independence of Western Sahara is an inalienable right, *Daily Maverick*, 4 January 2017, www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2017-01-04-op-ed-independence-of-western-sahara-is-an-inalienable-right/.
 - 44 Author interview, 22 October 2017.
 - 45 Final communiqué, 37th SADC summit: www.sadc.int/files/4715/0347/1755/37th_SADC_Summit_English_Communique.pdf.
 - 46 M Pauron and V Duhem, Union Africaine: le Maroc á la manoeuvre, 29 July 2016, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/344152/politique/union-africaine-maroc-a-manoeuvre/>

- 47 B Zerdhoud, 'The return of Morocco into the African Union: a simple aspiration of a single country or a collective desire?' *Journal of African Studies*, 2:1&2, 2013.
- 48 Author interview with Khalid Chergraoui, lecturer in political anthropology, Institute for African Relations, Mohammed VI University, Rabat, on 8 July 2017 in Assilah, Morocco.
- 49 Author interview, 11 July, 2017, Assilah, Morocco.
- 50 L Louw-Vaudran, New clash in the AU over Western Sahara, ISS Today, 25 October 2017, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/new-clash-in-the-au-over-western-sahara>.
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- 52 Author interview, 8 July 2017, Assilah, Morocco.
- 53 UN Economic Commission for Africa, 50th Session, press release, 25 March 2017, <https://www.uneca.org/cfm2017>.
- 54 Agência de Informação de Moçambique, Morocco and Sahara delegations clash at TICAD, *Club of Mozambique*, 28 August 2017, <http://clubofmozambique.com/news/moroccan-and-saharan-delegations-clash-at-ticad-aim-report/>.
- 55 King Mohammed VI told AU leaders in his speech on 31 January 2017 that he was aware that support for Morocco's adhesion was not unanimous, and that Morocco did not want to divide the continent but wanted to play an active role in the AU and 'move forward.'
- 56 There has been substantial disagreement over the number of countries supporting or recognising the SADR. Bourita stated at his press conference on 4 July 2017 that 35 countries worldwide recognise the SADR. Several sources, including Human Rights Watch, have stated that over 80 states have recognised the SADR. While 38 states that once recognised the SADR have withdrawn that recognition, under international law the recognition of a state cannot be cancelled unless that state ceases to exist.
- 57 A media report in 2016 that Zambia had cancelled its recognition of the SADR (www.lusakatimes.com/2017/02/27/zambia-withdraws-recognition-western-sahara/) was subsequently denied, and President Edgar Lungu welcomed the Sahrawi ambassador to Lusaka in February 2017 (www.daily-mail.co.zm/tag/western-sahara/).
- 58 UN Security Council Report, Western Sahara: mission mandate extended for 12 months, *What's in Blue*, 29 April 2016, <http://www.whatsinblue.org/2016/04/western-sahara-mandate-extended-for-12-months.php>
- 59 United Nations, Security Council extends mandate of UN mission for a referendum in Western Sahara, *UN meetings*, 29 April 2016, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12346.doc.htm>
- 60 Final decisions of the Assembly of the 28th summit, <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/uploads/Assembly%20AU%20January%202017FINALDECISIONS.pdf>.
- 61 Speakers at a seminar at the University of Johannesburg on 6 April 2017, attended by the author.
- 62 Bourita spoke at his press conference on 4 July 2017 about the paragraphs on Western Sahara in two separate documents: the six-monthly report of the Permanent Representatives' Committee, which once again called for a mission by the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights to the Western Sahara, and the report of the PSC on its activities and the state of peace and security in Africa, which was seen by the author. At the time of writing the final decisions of the 29th Assembly had not yet been published by the AU.
- 63 Draft decisions seen by the author.
- 64 The current members of the PSC are Nigeria, South Africa, Algeria, Botswana, Burundi, Chad, Egypt, Kenya, Niger, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Togo, Uganda and Zambia.
- 65 This view was expressed by Moroccan officials at the 29th AU summit in Addis Ababa, as well as by academics and experts attending the high-level OCP Forum on Peace and Security in Rabat, Morocco on 10–11 July 2017, interviewed by the author.
- 66 Final Communiqué of the 52nd Ordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, 16 December 2017, Abuja, Nigeria, <http://www.ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Final-Communiqu%C3%A9-52nd-ECOWAS-Summit-Abuja-16-Dec-17-Eng.pdf>
- 67 F Falana, Illegal request of Morocco to join ECOWAS, Sahara Reporters, 29 October 2017, <http://saharareporters.com/2017/10/29/illegal-request-morocco-join-ecowas-femi-falana>. Nigerian lawyer Femi Falana argues that the 1993 ECOWAS Revised Treaty stipulates that the organisation is aimed at promoting cooperation amongst West African states and therefore Morocco cannot be a member. He also states that all ECOWAS member states have ratified the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, which 'recognises the right of colonised peoples to self-determination' – which, according to him, includes the Sahrawi people of Western Sahara.
- 68 Statement by former ECOWAS official, Assilah, 8 July, at a discussion attended by the author.
- 69 African Union, Sankofa, Self-reliance through Institutional Reform, October 2017. <https://au.int/en/documents/20171031/sankofa-publication>. The team that is leading the new reform process pointed out that Morocco's membership in the AU significantly increases the financial potential of the organisation. Morocco, by virtue of its GDP, will be considered a Tier 1 member, together with South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, and Algeria; members in this category are expected to contribute 48% of the AU budget.

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