

# Spain-Maghreb. Heading Toward More Structured Relations

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Relations in 2003 between Spain and the three central countries of the Maghreb have been characterised by their greater complexity and increasingly strong links, and the ties have been completed with the Spanish president's official visit to Libya. Though much of the initiative that was set in motion by Spanish diplomacy in the area was aimed at re-establishing good relations with Morocco, damaged by the Perejil/Leila Island incident, there were nevertheless also significant gestures toward Algeria, which has come to occupy a more prominent position amongst the Spanish priorities for this region, and the Maghrebi aspects of European policy towards North Africa have been taken up once again. Spain's active participation in the first 5+5 Summit, held in Tunis in early December, was the most visible, though not the only manifestation of the more ambitious relationship with the Maghreb that seems to be coming to the forefront in the design of Spanish foreign policy toward the western Mediterranean.

The second half of 2002 revealed the extent of the damage to the relations between Spain and Morocco following disagreements related to fishing, and rising tension over responsibility for the increase in the numbers of illegal immigrants arriving in Spain across the Strait of Gibraltar. The occupation of the tiny island of Perejil, renamed Leila, by Moroccan soldiers on 11th July and their subsequent forced eviction by Spanish troops six days later was the culmination of a long crisis. Relations between Spain and Morocco were not under such strain since the famous Green March of 1975. With both countries' ambassadors being recalled for a period of several months, diplomatic relations remained at this low

point, interspersed with repeated incidents, such as Morocco's accusations that Spain had invaded its air space and territorial waters, and Spain's allegations that Morocco was encouraging uncontrolled and illegal migration to the Iberian Peninsula.

It is nevertheless important to note that this decline in diplomatic relations had no major consequences that affected the Spanish companies established in Morocco, nor did it impinge on trade between the two countries, which continued as before, and even improved. This limited impact of the political crisis on economic ties was interpreted as evidence of the existence of a cushion of common interests between the two countries that is thick enough to be able to withstand the buffeting of diplomatic clashes. Apart from a few investments more directly associated with the Moroccan public sector and a small number of development cooperation projects which require official procedures and supports, the economic private sector continued to operate between the two countries, though the rhythm was somewhat reduced, as new investments were held in abeyance pending the resolution of political uncertainties.

The first sign of the determination to re-establish diplomatic normality came in December 2002 when the King of Morocco, Mohammed VI, made the unilateral offer of the opportunity to fish in the waters off the Moroccan Atlantic coast to the Galician fishermen whose livelihood had been affected by the oil spillage from the ship *Prestige*. Even though the proposal had only a limited effect, it opened the door for a visit by the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs, whose reception by Mohammed VI in Agadir on 30th January 2003 brought the crisis to an end. The respective ambassadors returned to their posts and the two governments agreed to set up a number of joint committees in order to consider bilateral matters, among them their economic ties, a shared management of migration, the establishment of the limits in territorial waters,

## BARCELONA IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Barcelona backs and is present in networks that promote cooperation between Mediterranean cities:

- Euromediterranean Committee of Eurocities
- MedCities. Barcelona has performed technical secretariat duties since 1996.
- Euromediterranean Association for Urban Strategic Planning - ESPUR. Barcelona is a promoting member of this Mediterranean network and carries out the functions of its technical secretariat.

Barcelona is also active in the field of bilateral cooperation in the Mediterranean area and, specifically, in:

### Algiers

- Training courses

In 2003, courses were given on the management and promotion of local and regional tourism, on the management of sports facilities and on environmental inspection and assessment.

Barcelona City Council; Institute of Continuous Education of the Universitat Pompeu Fabra.

- Women's refuge

The capacity of the women's refuge was extended in 2003. The refuge provides assistance, shelter and reinsertion for women who have suffered any kind of violence, whether they are on their own or accompanied by children.

Barcelona City Council and Lleida Solidaria (NGO), in partnership with the SOS Femmes en Detresse association.

### Gaza and the West Bank

- Barcelona for Palestine campaign
- Shipping of emergency health material through the Red Crescent So-

ciety and the Union of Health Workers Committees, as well as the provision of health services in the West Bank.

Barcelona City Council, civil organisations, unions and political parties.

- Barcelona Peace Park

Urban rehabilitation of dilapidated areas. Inauguration has been postponed due to the fact that the Arab-Israeli conflict has affected the project's implementation.

Barcelona City Council and Gaza City Council.

- Green House

Creation of a women's training centre in the city of Bethlehem, with a view to strengthening their role in Palestinian society. Specific attention is provided for women affected by breast cancer.

Barcelona City Council and Patient's Friends Society (Palestinian NGO).

### Tetouan

- Rehabilitation of Tetouan's Koraat Sbaa district: establishment of a city strategy for boosting districts' participatory rehabilitation, to be extended to Morocco's medium-sized cities.

Development of a methodological framework geared to rehabilitation, administration and the prevention of unofficial settlements in Morocco's medium-sized cities, constituted on the basis of the Koraat Sbaa pilot project, which began in 2001 and ended in 2003.

UN-HABITAT, Morocco's National Shelter Upgrading Agency (ANHI), MedCities and the City Council of Rio de Janeiro. Barcelona City Council acts as an Implementation Agency alongside the Tetouan Urban Agency.

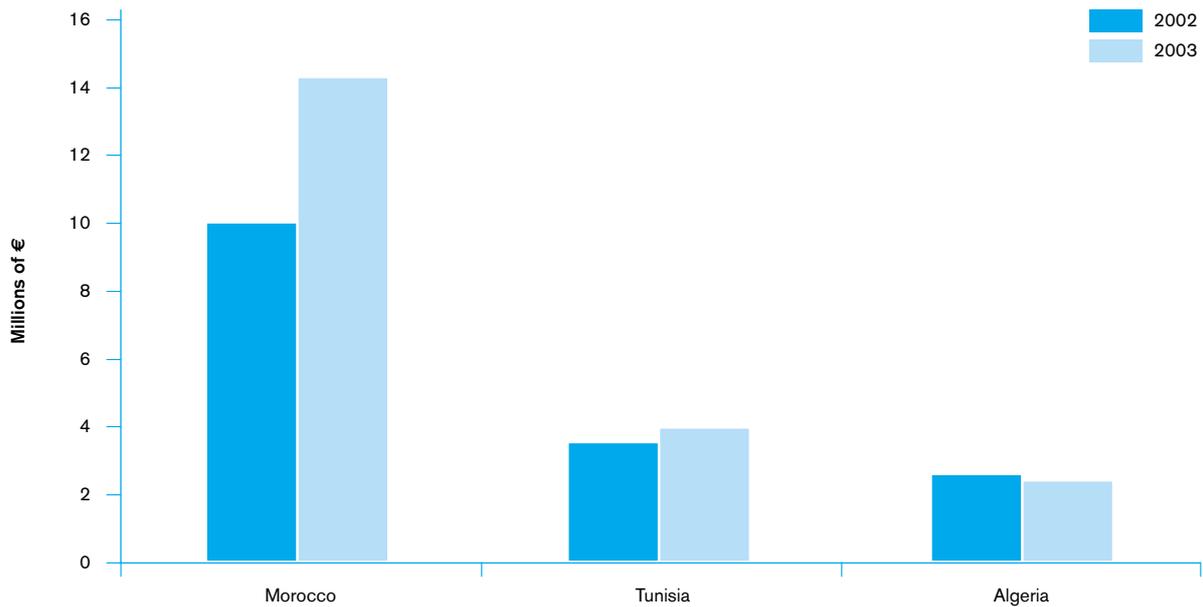
Magda Pallejà  
Generalitat of Catalonia

and the issue of the Western Sahara. The countries have now recovered from the Perejil Island crisis, but differences and tension concerning bilateral matters of considerable importance still remain, in particular regarding the control of illegal immigration and the very different standpoints of the two governments on resolving the conflict of the Western Sahara.

Even though certain advances were registered on the issue of migration towards the close of 2003, with Morocco's increased willingness to share greater responsibility for the control of illegal immigration, disparities remain between the two countries' positions. While Spain emphasises Morocco's involvement in policies to contain illegal emigration, the government in Rabat argues that it lacks the resources and ability to exercise this control without a more comprehensive plan that would include regulating migration in the broader framework of the relations between the EU and the Maghreb. Morocco states that it is no longer just a country of origin within the Mediterranean migration system, but also a transit country through which increasingly large numbers of emigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa pass. The difficulty of arriving at lasting bilateral accords demonstrates the need for a more comprehensive framework for controlling migration that covers the

entire Euro-Mediterranean region, a challenge that would consume a great deal of the agendas of the 5+5 meetings.

With regard to the Western Sahara, the governments in Madrid and Rabat have expressed very different viewpoints on the Baker II Plan, which has been supported by Spain and accepted in principle by the Polisario Front and the government in Algiers, but rejected outright by Morocco. Spain argues that its position has not altered and that its support for James Baker's plan is in accordance with its traditional support of the idea of consulting the people in order to determine, in conclusion, the future of the Western Sahara. However, the Spanish diplomatic position is at variance with the change in attitude of other key players in the western Mediterranean region, in particular that of France, which gives its full backing to Rabat. Everything leads to the conclusion that the Spanish position, which coincides with that of the United States and which is supported by the UN Security Council, is the starting point for complex negotiations with Morocco and that it is directed at a certain equidistance between Rabat and Algiers, thereby allowing for a broader diplomatic initiative in the area. The trips by the president of the Spanish government to the three countries in the Maghreb at the



Source: Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI), General Subdirectorate of Cooperation with Mediterranean and East European countries.

**CATALONIA'S EXTERNAL ACTION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN**

The external action of the Generalitat of Catalonia has been notable for its interest in the Mediterranean, both through the actions of the Government itself and of the public bodies in which it takes part. Among these can be highlighted the following: COPCA (Consortium for the Commercial Promotion of Catalonia) in the economic field, with 5 offices in the Mediterranean: Casablanca, Istanbul, Milan, Lyon and Cairo (the latter was inaugurated in January 2003); the Institut Ramon Llull in the cultural field, which in the last year has created three new posts for readerships in Catalan in Ljubljana (Slovenia), Casablanca (Morocco) and Catania (Italy), bringing to 23 the total in the countries of the Mediterranean. This is apart from the activities of specific consortia such as the European Institute of the Mediterranean, supported by the Generalitat of Catalonia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the City Council of Barcelona, with the objective of promoting research, debate and diffusion of the main issues in the Mediterranean agenda.

Catalonia has traditionally shown a growing interest in the Northwest Mediterranean, as demonstrated by its participation in regional cooperation initiatives, for example the Euroregion, the Mediterranean Technology Arc or the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CRPM). As regards the southern Mediterranean, the Maghreb is, without a doubt, the area that has received most attention from Catalan institutions in the recent past. Its geographical proximity, the existence of historical links, the increasing economic and cultural exchanges, as well as immigration, are all

factors explaining this interest. An example of this process was the creation in 2003 of the Catalan Development Cooperation Agency, which has as one of its priorities the Mediterranean area and especially the Maghreb. This growing interest from Catalonia in the countries of the Maghreb was given expression in January 2003, in the adoption by the government of the Generalitat of the Catalonia-Morocco programme. This programme seeks to promote economic and commercial relations, cooperation in development as well as to encourage institutional relations, and resulted in the creation of an office in Casablanca. On the other hand, of the various sectoral spheres in which Mediterranean relations have become closer during this period, should be mentioned agriculture, education and youth policies.

- Generalitat de Catalunya  
<http://www.gencat.net/presidencia/>  
<http://www.gencat.net/governacio-ri/>
- Consorci de Promoció Comercial de Catalunya  
<http://www.copca.com/>
- Institut Ramon Llull  
<http://www.llull.com/llull/>
- European Institute of the Mediterranean  
<http://www.iemed.org>

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end of 2003 – to Tunis in order to take part in the 5+5 Summit, and to Algiers and Rabat for important bilateral meetings – exemplify a certain willingness to develop a policy for the Maghreb that will replace the tendency of recent years to make the Spanish presence in the region pivot on its relations with Morocco. This new direction in Spanish policy in the western Mediterranean, in order to be more credible, will have to be supported by an economic and cul-

tural presence in other Maghreb countries similar to those that already function in Morocco. The asymmetrical nature of the relations between Spain and the three countries of the Maghreb will in all likelihood persist for years, meaning that the Maghrebi perspective cannot be seen as an alternative to relations with Morocco, but rather as complementary, something which presupposes improved relations with the government in Rabat.