

No pain, no gain

The partnership between the EU and Morocco must be filled with life

By **Kristina Kausch**

Friday, 5 March 2010

<http://www.globeurope.com/standpoint/no-pain-no-gain>

This weekend, the ‘advanced status’ of partnership between the EU and Morocco is about to undergo its first major overhaul. The first EU-Morocco summit in Granada on 6-7 March aims to put some flesh on the skinny frame of the *statut avancé*. Granted to Morocco by the EU in October 2008 via the adoption of a sort of generally formulated roadmap, the new status foresees a substantial intensification of bilateral diplomatic and trade relations between the EU and Morocco.

So far, the value added by the *statut* has been above all the attractive political label which singles out Morocco as a reform champion. The Moroccan regime has been advertising this trophy very successfully in the region, and the EU has deliberately let it play that card. As the dust of this symbolic coronation is starting to settle, however, the EU must now ensure that its key interests – including central commitments on advanced political reforms – are being anchored in a detailed, measurable and coherent roadmap worthy of this name.

Spanish fears are great – and largely unfounded – that their country will shoulder all the costs of the necessary period of adaptation for the economic integration of Morocco into EU markets. Southern European member states must begin to leave behind their self-centred slide-rule mentality and look at the greater integration with Morocco from a wider, Europeanist perspective. Being the first country to be granted this new status under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), Morocco becomes a key EU foreign policy laboratory in which the Union will hopefully develop a new, more attractive formula for its relations with neighbouring countries in the South where EU membership is not an option.

Enlargement has been the EU’s main foreign policy tool and its biggest success story. Its underlying rationale of ensuring lasting peace, prosperity, democracy and security through integration has been the European Union’s one congenial legacy. But what powerful incentives can we offer to those countries that are not eligible for membership? To varying degrees, the Southern Mediterranean countries from Syria to Morocco seem stuck in an authoritarian stasis. In this light, Morocco’s ‘advanced status’ can also be seen as an attempt to re-draft the EU’s success formula in the more reluctant parts of its neighbourhood.

Does Morocco deserve an ‘advanced status’? Not only over the revealing episode involving the illegal expulsion of Saharawi activist Aminatou Haidar from Laâyoune at

the end of last year, many in Europe have been raising their eyebrows over the EU's explicit coronation of an authoritarian regime that for many reason does not deserve to be labelled 'advanced'. In fact, the general concept of the 'advanced status is still fairly raw, and the EU has no official criteria to determine what a country needs to be entitled to this 'advanced' level of relations.

One thing is clear: if human rights and democracy criteria are to be applied, progress must be measurable via objective criteria. A non-measurable application of these principles only supports the public relations of authoritarian regime's façade democracy. The overdue in-depth reforms of the Moroccan political institutions, insinuated by the Royal Palace in numerous solemn speeches, remain pure discourse. The European Commission knows this and increasingly stresses this structural time bomb in its various writings on Morocco, including undesired effects on key EU interests. Unfortunately, these Commission assessments do not appear to meaningfully inform EU policy-making. Ironically, the EU-Morocco summit in Granada follows the closure of the pioneer of Morocco's independent press, the political magazine *Le Journal*, just a few months earlier."

However, Morocco is not the only one not doing its homework and still needing to match discourse with action. EU member states have not been able or willing to provide incentives strong enough to increase their leverage over Morocco. What Morocco wants has been well known for years. The full opening of the EU internal market for Moroccan agricultural products and visa facilitation for Moroccan workers rank highly on its list. Yet for many years now, these have been precisely the things that protectionist European leaders are reluctant to provide. In December 2009, the two sides concluded four years of negotiations with an EU-Morocco agri-food and fisheries agreement. Put very simply, the agreement gives EU exporters wide access to Moroccan markets, while for Morocco substantial constraints to selling its most competitive agricultural products in the EU remain in place because European politicians need to protect Spanish tomatoes and French courgettes. European agricultural protectionism is of course understandable, yet it is also a factor that substantially reduces EU leverage in negotiations with Morocco over other EU interests. The primacy of member states' national interests over long-term EU ones is not something specific to the ENP, and will hardly improve with the current EU leadership chaos.

In February 2010, the European Commission's representative in Morocco, Eneko Landaburu, urged the Moroccans to a framework of convergence to concretise and fill the *statut* with meaning before it loses credibility: 'If you do not act quickly, the discourse about the advanced status will collapse like a soufflé'. But this fragile 'soufflé' is being cooked on both sides of the Strait of Gibraltar. If the bubble of 'advanced status' discourse is not very quickly being filled with concrete, measurable commitments from both sides, the concept risks being discredited. It would be a shame if this promising example of forward-looking policy design ended up being put to the files as just another EU paper tiger.

Kristina Kausch is a Research Fellow at FRIDE, a think tank in Madrid. She specialises in European foreign policy towards the Mediterranean / North Africa. A longer version of this argument will be published soon on FRIDE's website: [here](#).