

REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL OBSERVER MISSION TO SAHARA 2021

By the EU-AU youth



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STRAS'DAKHLA

Strasbourg
Dakhla
Laâyoune



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PREFACE



*Pour un nouveau bilatéralisme
UE-UtA par les jeunes*

PREFACE

In this 21st century, the world is living at the rhythm of multiple health and social uncertainties with profound changes, both environmental and geopolitical. Consequently, it is more necessary than ever for young people to have the tools of analysis, deciphering and quality expertise in the field experience on geopolitical and geostrategic issues.

The very idea that young European and African students, whose average age is 22, have decided to take an interest in the crises that are straining the inter-state and intercontinental relations of their environment, sufficiently demonstrates their desire to no longer be spectators, but actors in a world in full transformation.

Before going further, my retrospective glance would like to remind you that the British in 1884, created the first Think Tank, the Fabian Society, followed in 1920 by the Royal Institute of International Affairs, better known as Chatham House.

The multidisciplinary program Stras'Dakhla Student is in line with this same logic and has the ambition to position itself tomorrow as an autonomous analysis ground able to transcend media influences and to surpass debates that bring into play several interests.

By combining social and family education with academic and semi-professional training, the participants of the multidisciplinary program Stras'Dakhla Student, were able, thanks to a field experience carried out from October 31 to November 6, 2021 in the cities of Dakhla and Laâyoune, to get their own idea of the territorial crisis in the Sahara. This 6-day mission allowed the young participants to

discover a very relevant organic and functional model, which allows for responsiveness and coherence in the execution of development programs in these two cities and their regions.

Thus, you will understand as you read this report, that the young European and African participants of this multidisciplinary program Stras'Dakhla Student, have expressed both their apprehensions before the field visit, their findings and more rewarding still, their recommendations addressed both to the Moroccan authorities and to all the regional and international actors who play a role in the pacification of this region and therefore the first beneficiaries are the populations.

In the long term, Stras'Dakhla Student will have to serve as an example of a platform of reflection able to gather young people from different horizons, thinkers and actors from Europe and Africa interested in the origins and exits of the territorial crises, not as presented in the media with partisan profiling, but as existing on the ground, in the mesh of history, factual reality and the will of the concerned populations.

For this first experience of international observation made by the Youth Organization for the European and African Union, I wanted a totally impartial report whose work will be based exclusively on the facts observed and justified by the territorial actors of the regions of Dakhla and Laayoune. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the 20 young people who made the trip to the Sahara and who subsequently worked, in one way or another, on

the preparation of this international observation report.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the Moroccan government, especially to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Mr. Nasser BOURRITA. I would like to express my gratitude to H.E. Mr. Driss El KAISSI, Consul General of the Kingdom of Morocco in Strasbourg and to the administrative staff of Sciences Po Strasbourg.

Gabriel MVOGO

***President of the Youth Organization
for the European and African Union***

***General coordinator of Stras'Dakhla
Student 2021 program***

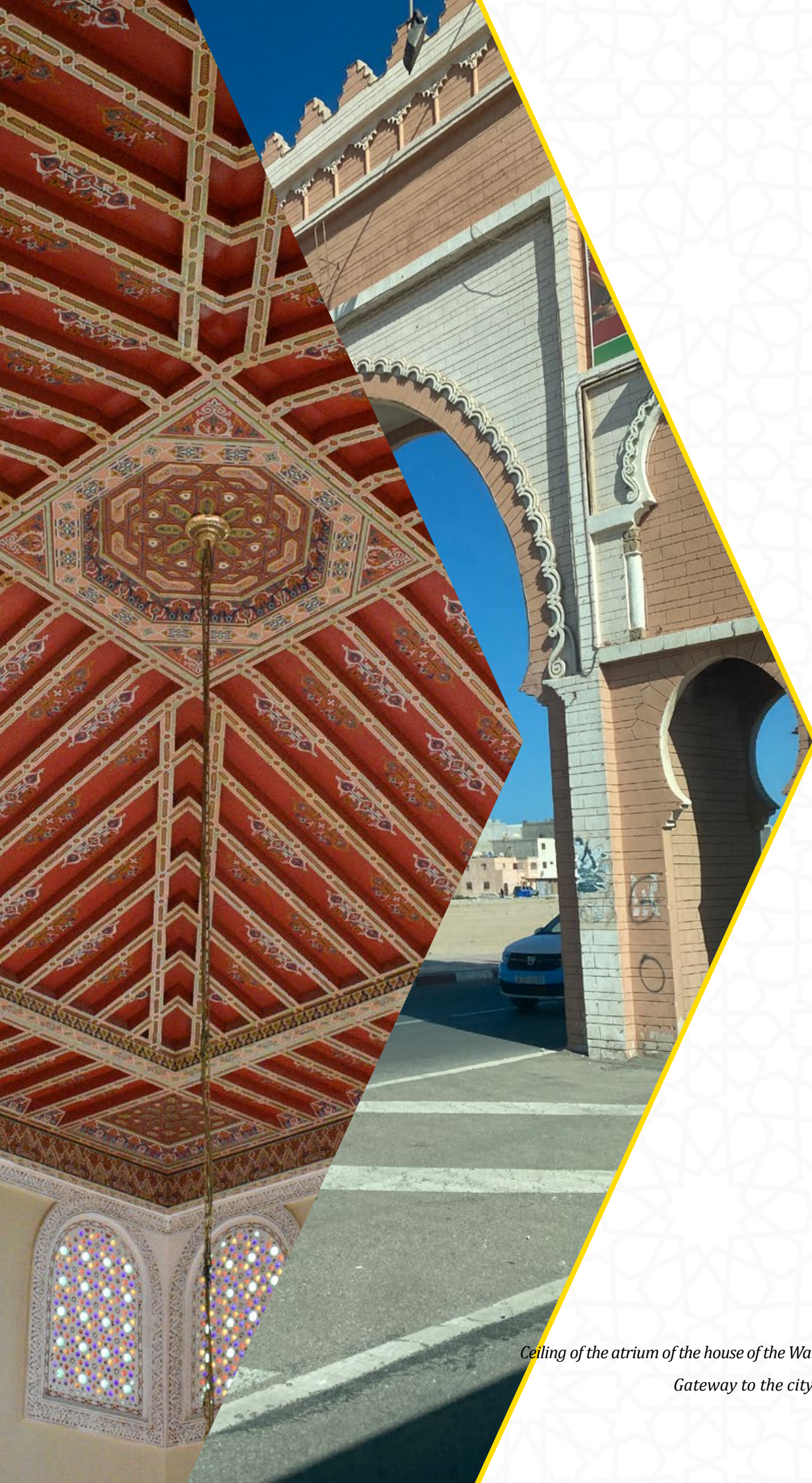


Mr. Gabriel MVOGO

***President of the Youth Organization for
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This report is a documentation tool for all persons or organizations interested in the development of the regions of Dakhla and Laayoune. It does not engage the responsibilities of the persons and institutions mentioned, nor those of the European Union or the African Union.

HISTORIC INTRODUCTION



Ceiling of the atrium of the house of the Wali of Dakhla ©OJUEA

Gateway to the city of Dakhla ©OJUEA

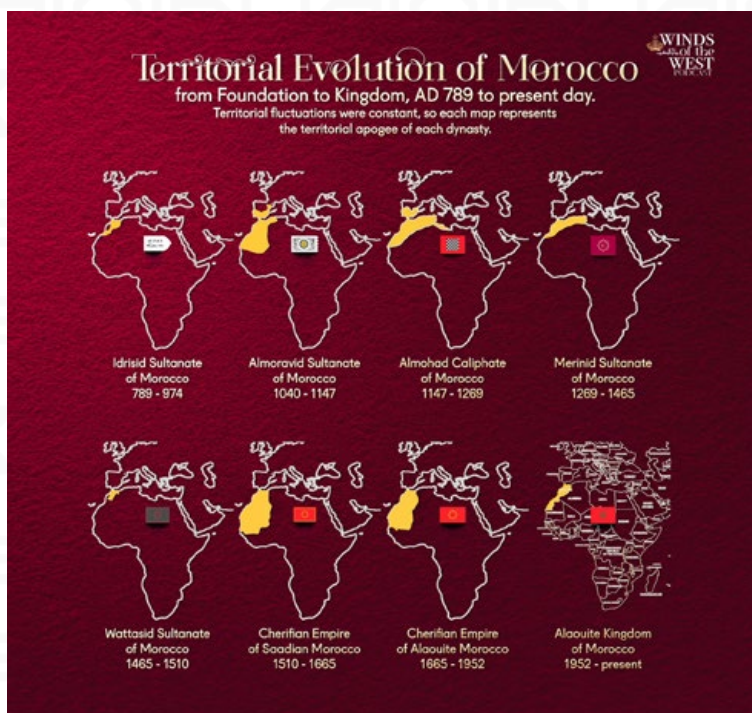
HISTORIC INTRODUCTION

In view of the information war being waged around the Moroccan Sahara and the diplomatic crisis between the Kingdom of Morocco and Algeria, the Youth Organization for the European and African Union took the initiative to find out more about the regional dispute over the Sahara. This initiative was welcomed in August 2021 by the Moroccan authorities, who subsequently agreed to an observation mission in the cities of Dakhla and Laayoune, respectively large cities in the south of the country. For this purpose, the program was named STRAS'DAKHLA 2021. This evocative name recalls above all, the willingness of the EU-AU Youth to create a bridge between the students of Strasbourg and those of Dakhla and Laayoune. Enjoying all the guarantees of independence in the final report that will emerge from this observation mission, the EU-AU YOUTH began their working visit on November 1, 2021 in Dakhla, where we had the honor to be welcomed by Mr. Lamine BENOMAR, Wali and Representative of His Majesty King Mohamed VI in Dakhla.

In his introductory remarks, he addressed the young people of Europe and Africa in these terms: «Dear friends, it is essential to know the history, the past, to better understand the present. The EU-AU youth share the same opinion as Mr. Wali Lamine BENOMAR. It is for this reason that we cannot talk about the present in this report without a preliminary reminder of history.

At the extreme North-West of the African continent, the Kingdom of Morocco is a space of junction between the West and the East. In the words of the late King Hassan II, the country is like a tree rooted in Africa and breathing through its branches towards Europe. Today, Morocco is one of the oldest monarchies in the world with over 1200 years of history.

In its present geopolitics, after its return to the African Union, the Kingdom of Morocco is becoming more and more rooted in its African depth. This rooting symbolizes a form of return to the history and African origin of the Kingdom. His Majesty King Mohammed VI said it very well at the 28th



Territorial evolution of Morocco since the 8th century [1]

African Union (AU) Summit in Addis Ababa: «It is time to come home ... A family that we had not really left! Indeed, despite the years when we were absent from the African Union, our links, never broken, have remained strong, and the African brother countries have always been able to count on us.

To trace the Moroccan anchorage in the African continent, it is necessary to go back to the long history of the Kingdom and to the great dynasties that have reigned on Moroccan soil.

After the Romans who controlled all the shores of the Mediterranean, the Arabs, after the death of the Prophet Mohammed, settled in the Maghreb, bringing with them the Arabic language and above all Islam. Thus, the Cherifian dynasties of the Idrissides, the Almoravides, the Almohades, the Merinides, the Saadians until now the Alaouites ruled the Cherifian Kingdom of Morocco. The latter is thus one of the rarest countries in the Arab-Muslim world to have kept its sovereignty and independence for more than a millennium, from 789 to 1956. The parenthesis of the French and Spanish protectorate lasted only half a century, from 1912 to 1956. The continuity of the Moroccan state is preserved and thus, the links between the sovereign and the population.

The Idrisids dynasty (789-974)

Cherifian dynasty founder of the first Moroccan state. The Idrissides ruled Morocco from 789 to 985. This dynasty takes its name from Idriss I, an Arab prince from Ali and Fatima, the daughter of the prophet Mohamed. The latter took refuge in the Middle Atlas. Several Amazigh confederations rallied to him and put him at their head in 789. After his assassination between 791 and 792, his son, Idris II, founded the city of Fez which became the capital of the Kingdom in 807.

The Almoravid dynasty (1042-1146)

The reign of the Almoravids is recognized as a period of real civilizational and architectural development of the Kingdom. This dynasty served as an anchor for a large part of the African Muslim West. It played a major role in sub-Saharan and North African trade.

Les Almohades (1147-1232)

Issue du Haut Atlas, cette dynastie est fondée par Ibn Toumert. Avec son successeur Abd el Moumen ben Ali, les Almohades entrent en guerre contre les Almoravides. Ils règnent ensuite sur l'empire marocain pendant un demi-siècle, jusqu'à ce qu'ils soient eux-mêmes défaits face à la Reconquista du roi d'Aragon à la bataille de Las Navas de Tolosa en 1212, dans l'actuelle Espagne. Pendant ce règne, le Royaume du Maroc connaît son apogée territoriale.

The Marinid Sultanate (1258-1548)

The Marinid dynasty is a Berber dynasty founded by the Berber chief Abu Yahia. This ruler chased away the last Almohads and founded the Marinid dynasty. After some achievements in the artistic and cultural fields, the Merinids were overwhelmed by the Portuguese expansion. The latter occupied the port of Ceuta in 1415 and began to settle on the coast.

The Saadi Sultanate (1548-1660)

At the beginning of the 16th century, the Saadians, Berbers from the Draa Valley, founded their own dynasty. They declared a Holy War against the Portuguese. Thus, Agadir was taken back in 1541. The battle of the Three Kings, on August 4, 1578, marked the Portuguese retreat from Morocco.

Ahmed IV el-Mansour brought the Saadian dynasty to its peak. A victorious expedition against the African empire of Songhai, in 1591, allowed him to enrich his capital with Sudanese gold.

The Alawis (from 1636 to nowadays)

Originally from Tafilalet (South-East Morocco), they are considered descendants of Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed. It is the heir of this dynasty, King Mohammed VI, may God assist him, who rules Morocco today.

The son of the founder, Moulay Ismail, contemporary of Louis XIV, moved his capital to Meknes, 60 kilometers from Fez and not far from the ancient Volubilis. He repelled various European offensives and fought against the rebellious Berber tribes of the mountains. He was responsible for the embellishment of his capital and in particular for the construction of the famous monumental Bab el Mansour gate, built in 1732.

This brief introduction to the history of the Kingdom of Morocco shows two important things to understand the current geopolitics of the country. The first is that Morocco is an ancient Kingdom with a people

still attached to its sovereigns. The Bay'a oath of allegiance, which the Walis and governors of the different regions of the Kingdom took, symbolizes loyalty and obedience to the King.

This tradition is still practiced today, proof of the historical continuity of the Moroccan state. The second conclusion is that the four most important dynasties in the history of the Kingdom came from the southern regions: the Saadians, the Almohads, the Almoravids and the current ruling dynasty, the Alawites.

This chronology attests to the deep roots of Morocco in Africa for centuries.

The image of the Sahara, as reported in the world press, is far from the reality that we have seen in the field. Indeed, our team, like many young people in Europe, had preconceived images before this mission to Dakhla and Laayoune.



Gate of Bab El Mansour (Meknes) [2]

RECEIVED IDEAS

Geopolitical apprehensions

We had some apprehensions about the security of the region. The region we were in is known in a vast majority of Western countries as «Western Sahara». A highly controversial name between Morocco and Algeria, diplomatic relations have been strained for several years. Moreover, according to the articles we had read before our departure, we thought we were arriving in a «lawless» area, dangerous and sparsely populated, as it was dominated by terrorist and mafia gangs [3]. As we imagined it, the presence of the Moroccan authorities in this region was precarious and limited.

Economic and social apprehensions

We expected to arrive in a desert area, composed of different nomadic tribes, the opposite of the regions in the north of Morocco. We had the image of an obviously rural area, but devoid of infrastructure, and not very conducive to investment and development. Also, Morocco being a conservative religious country, we expected to witness an essentially patriarchal society.

Geopolitical realities

We were able to see the effective sovereignty of the Kingdom. The Sahara is considered an integral part of the Kingdom of Morocco by the latter, and many government institutions are present there, such as ministries.

We also found that the cities of Dakhla and Laayoune were not dangerous. We were able to walk through the streets and markets without a guide or other accompanying person. It is true that there is a conflict with the Polisario Front, but since the construction of the 'Wall of Sands' in the 1980s, only sporadic skirmishes in the eastern regions occur.

Economic and social realities

We were not at all aware of the modernity and urbanization of these southern regions. This is why we were pleasantly surprised by the technological progress of the infrastructure, especially the universities.

Morocco has been investing massively in these regions for years to promote their economic and social development, proof of its involvement in the area. We were even able to observe the establishment of a special regime for the Saharawi populations, including a tax exemption despite free public services (health, education, transport).

Finally, women are at the center of the home and social life. This is a purely cultural fact, and the authorities who received us insisted on this point. However, we have witnessed their presence in the active life (as workers, traders, executives, etc...)

GENERAL OBSERVATION

This part summarizes all the information that was given during the visits, hearings and working sessions that the young people of the mission Stras' Dakhla Student 2021 carried out with the economic, social and political authorities of the southern regions.

OJUEA notes that the regions of Dakhla-Oued-Eddahab and Laâyoune Sakia-El Hamra represent priority development areas for the Kingdom of Morocco. The development that is taking place there is immense. The future needs generated by this dynamic seem to have been anticipated and provisional solutions are already being built. In short, economic, social and political development is thought of as an interdependent ecosystem, where every need has an anticipated solution.

FIRST PART

ECONOMY



PART 1-THE ECONOMY :

The creation of a new dynamic of growth

The regions we visited, those of Dakhla Oued Eddahab and Laâyoune-Sakia El Hamra, are regions of transition, between the north of Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa. We had the opportunity to meet the two Walis and Presidents of these regions.

About his region, Mr. Wali of the city of Laayoune Abdeslam BEKRATE recalls that «Laayoune-Sakia El Hamra is the largest region of Morocco and its economic weight is very important, because of its large population, and its international activities. Laâyoune is the most important fishing port in Morocco».

Mr. Lamine BENOMAR, Wali of the Dakhla-Oued Eddahab region reported on the good economic health of his region, noting a «growth rate of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 7 to 12% between 2012 and 2017 and one of the lowest unemployment rates in the Kingdom.»

The President of the region of Dakhla Oued Eddahab, Mr. Ynja KHATTAT, confirmed the previous statement, and added that Dakhla is a region in full transformation, stressing that its economic pole can serve as a model for other countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

The economic strategy of the Moroccan authorities in the southern regions takes four different forms. First, attracting foreign capital. Second, encouraging local employment. Also, ecological development. Finally, the construction of important infrastructure.

I. Attracting foreign capital

To attract foreign capital, the regions benefit from building a favorable business climate and the tourism sector.

1. Create a favourable business climate

The favorable business climate is a priority of Moroccan policy in the southern regions. It is reflected in the implementation of advantageous legislation, a strategy for attracting investors and institutional support.

1.1 An advantageous legislation

The regions of Laayoune-Sakia El Hamra and Dakhla-Oued Eddahab enjoy a tax advantage and tax exemption, which can sustain and boost investment in this area of the South.

When asked about the taxation of the city of Laayoune, Mr. Wali Abdeslam BEKRATE explained that these tax benefits are mainly provided for companies to settle, «in order to find the balance at their genesis. He said that the taxes are borne by the general budget. As for Mohammed JIFER, Director of the Regional Investment Center of Laayoune, he also mentions this advantageous taxation as a criterion for the establishment of new economic actors in the region.

To this end, economic operators who settle in the area are given a particularly advantageous tax regime: there is no income tax or wealth tax. As a result, the companies concerned have a better cash flow, which favors

investments. Also, this differentiating factor increases the competitiveness of companies located in the two regions of Laâyoune-Sakia El Hamra and Dakhla-Oued Ed-Dahab.

1.2 Attracting investors in a sustainable way

It is in this case to create a dynamic settlement of executives and investors and their families.

As director of the Regional Investment Center (C.R.I) of Laayoune, Mr. Mohammed JIFER is pleased with the results obtained, stating that there are already many families who have come to the region to work. Indeed, a residential offer adapted to this population is needed. Beyond the social housing, there are important urban planning projects that will be built.

The first idea of this settlement dynamic is therefore to facilitate access to land and thus offer a pleasant living environment. There is a real effort to attract not only investors, but also their families.

The two regions of Dakhla-Oued Ed-Dahab and Laâyoune-Sakia El Hamra and more particularly their R.I.C seek to strengthen the residential rental dedicated to this category of researchers, executives and tourists.

The second idea supported by this dynamic is the development of health and social services. Mr. Wali of the city of Laayoune, Abdeslam BEKRATE mentioned an «exceptional level of development in Laayoune, thanks to a program implemented in 2006 of 77 billion dirhams. Thus, the cities meet the modern urban challenges, thanks to socio-educational and sports spaces, the construction of new roads, etc..

Also, Mr. Wali of the city of Laayoune Abdeslam BEKRATE mentioned

the project to create new university health centers, such as a faculty of medicine, whose construction will be completed by the end of 2021, and which will soon host its very first class of medicine, as well as a University Hospital Center.

Finally, still in this perspective of attracting executives, investors and their families, the development of accessibility to the region is an important component. Indeed, Mr. Wali of Laayoune has referred to the project to establish an expressway to Agadir, and a national road to Dakhla. The need to attract investment is also reflected in the institutional mobilization of Regional Investment Centers (R.I.C).

1.3 The role of the Regional Investment Centers

As a public institution with legal personality and financial autonomy, the Regional Investment Center is responsible for implementing the State's policy on investment promotion at regional level, under the principle of decentralization. The latter came into being following an ambitious reform aimed at strengthening the role of investment in the region's entrepreneurship.

We met Mr. Mounir HOUARI, Director of the R.I.C of Dakhla. For him, it is a question of «making public investment a lever to accompany the private sector by strengthening these infrastructures, key to success for the establishment of investors.

The R.I.C have several prerogatives:

- The promotion of the territorial offer through a multidimensional and sectoral marketing strategy.
- The accompaniment of the investors in preliminary phase until the achievement (and post achievement).
- The service offer of the R.I.C segmented: small, medium and large companies

2. Tourism

Due to its geographical location close to the ocean, the city of Dakhla experiences about 300 days of wind per year. Thanks to this oceanic climate, the practice of windsurfing and kitesurfing has been able to develop supported by schools and centers for learning these water sports. Now, Dakhla is a well known and appreciated place for beginners and advanced tourists.

Also, excursions are possible thanks to the rental of jeeps, quads or motorcycles in order to discover the innumerable natural treasures of the desert such as the White Dune or the lakes of Imlil. For the region of Laayoune, many treks are organized to go to Bedouin camps, to visit the salt depression of Oum Dbâ or to discover the labyrinth of dunes of the Amgriou desert.

The business hotel industry is also a developing sector. Near Laayoune, at the Phosboucraa Foundation, a hotel complex is under construction, as well as a cultural center and a shopping and craft village.

In addition, social and environmental infrastructures are planned around these centers: an academic and research center focusing on issues related to the Saharan environment will be opened.

II. Encouraging local employment

1. An employment policy for local talent

The implementation of a policy of employing local talent in both regions is a key factor in promoting economic growth.

This policy takes shape in particular through the establishment of public/private partnership agreements. Indeed, during the opening ceremony of the World Global Summit-Sahara Edition, we had the privilege to attend, under the honorary presidency of Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Meryem, the signing of a framework agreement of public / private partnership «Startup South» for the digital inclusion of young entrepreneurs in the southern

regions of the Kingdom. The Southern Development Agency is the leader of the signatory Consortium.

To encourage the employment of local talent in the region, the Regional Investment Center of Dakhla is also investing in several projects.

First, in the field of agriculture, where the challenges are many, the establishment of a trade center has as its main objective to train talent, mentor youth and prepare them for employment. The goal is to ensure that the training provided is in line with the needs of the job market.

The Regional Investment Center of Dakhla also answered the question of inclusiveness. Regarding the inclusion of immigrants in the region, one of the main obstacles would be funding. As for the inclusion of women, the C.R.I of Dakhla says that a support system exists. The aim is to help them transform their concepts into financial models, they also operate informally. However, for the moment, this does not cover all the populations. Work is underway with elected officials on this issue. Despite limited means, the R.I.C of Dakhla claims to want to create inspiring success stories.

The construction of a blockchain was also discussed during the exchanges with the Regional Investment Center of Dakhla. This is a project that is, for the moment, only at 50% of its progress. It should create local jobs by training staff able to work on this technology. Moreover, the R.I.C of Dakhla has made a point of remembering that the recruitment process is done mainly on the skills. There is no discrimination in hiring that would favor candidates from the southern region.

Mohammed JIFER, Director of the Regional Investment Center of Laayoune, said that to reduce unemployment, it is necessary to invest in the creation of major projects (construction of ports, upgrades, wind farms) to create and support local employment.

Indeed, in terms of infrastructure, the R.I.C of Laayoune promotes the

implementation of ambitious projects such as the development of port activity and phosphate excavation. On the other hand, the African Sustainable Agriculture Research Institute (ASARI) includes local farmers in its research and development projects on renewable energy.

2. Supporting self-employed entrepreneurs

The Regional Investment Center of Dakhla has answered most of our questions about its role in supporting self-entrepreneurs in the region. In order to promote entrepreneurship among young people, Mr. Mounir HOUARI said that a transmission of information via invitations and communiqués was carried out among the youngest while taking into consideration the difficulties of language barriers. The R.I.C has, through a process of accompanying projects, regained the confidence of young people who, until now, were in the informal sectors.

As for the economic development of the region, the Director affirms that «economic development must benefit the entire population. It is necessary to integrate a territorial equity, by accompanying small and medium-sized enterprises on the whole territory».

Mr. Mounir HOUARI also indicated that the new generation of Regional Investment Centers aimed to be the single point of contact for investors and to enable them to succeed in the digital transformation of their companies to gain efficiency. Indeed, the use of digital technology allows significant economies of scale. In addition, the R.I.C has a role of economic impetus which is reflected in the establishment of platforms such as Dakhlaconnect.com which can thus gather all macro- and micro-economic data to inform companies seeking to develop a market in Dakhla.

The support of young self-entrepreneurs is a priority for the R.I.C of Laayoune. A support system for young project

holders has been set up. The condition sine qua non to be eligible is to be a company with less than five years of existence. The primary purpose of this device is the eradication of unemployment and to make young people a lever of value creation at the regional level.

III. An ecological development

1. Sustainable energy

1.1 Solar Energy

The Walis of Dakhla and Laayoune have insisted on increasing the production of solar energy in the region. To this end, several public streetlights are powered by solar energy. The Noor-Laâyoune solar power plant project, launched in April 2017 by His Majesty King Mohammed VI and piloted by Masen, the Moroccan Agency for Sustainable Energy, has installed 2,000 MW of solar sources.

1.2 Wind energy

Concerning wind energy, the Wali of Dakhla presented us the project of the American startup Soluna Technologies Ltd, concerning the creation of a gigantic 900 megawatts wind farm of 10 000 hectares, as well as a colocated modular data farm (computer data processing center).

More than \$2.5 billion was invested to complete the project, approximately 400 jobs were created in the region, boosting the local economy, and also promoting a green technology. This wind farm will be useful for Blockchain technologies. The majority of the electricity produced by this field will be exported to Europe, where growing environmental legislation will increase the demand for green electricity.

2. Irrigation system

We had the opportunity to visit the African Sustainable Agriculture Research Institute, part of the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University of Laayoune. This university center dedicates its research to the protection of natural resources through agro-biotechnology. The center is developing a water and energy program and aims to ensure a rational management of irrigation for agriculture.

In addition, as part of the Green Morocco Plan defining a new policy of agricultural recovery of the Kingdom, the Wali of the region of Dakhla Oued Eddahab presented us the project of green agriculture. This is an innovative plan to desalinate sea water for the irrigation of more than 5,000 hectares in Dakhla, productive from 2022, according to estimates. The effectiveness of this project will be measured through the extension of areas suitable for agriculture, which will increase production to about 500,000 tons per year of produce. Morocco will, in this sense, be able to export more goods - mainly to Europe - but also create several jobs to meet the growth of this sector.

3. Desalination stations

The Wali of the region of Laayoune has also presented the promotion of green agriculture, enabled by the project of desalination of sea water. The emergence of this project is explained by the desire to preserve the large, untouched water table that lies beneath the Sahara.

Therefore, the desalination plant of Laayoune that we visited meets several criteria. Firstly, it must be able to supply the entire water needs of the inhabitants of Laayoune. The supply will be directed only for the direct consumption of the inhabitants for any other use (public watering, agriculture), with the use of wastewater treatment plants.

Then, this dynamic must serve to not use the water tables of the Sahara, because they are not renewable. The Wali of the region of Laayoune stressed the ambition of the region to promote renewable energy.

Indeed, the inhabitants we met during our stay have shown an awareness of the natural wealth of their territory, but also of the fragility of their region, hence the importance of conserving water resources.

On the other hand, a drawback that our organization retained in this management of the wealth which wants to be virtuous and respectful of the environment, the problem of the rejection of certain waste directly in the sea arises.

IV. Ambitious infrastructures

During our various visits, our organization has observed that in the regions of Laayoune-Sakia El Hamra and Dakhla- Oued Eddahab, the development of a new growth dynamic was also through the construction of infrastructure necessary for the development of trade and economic flows.

1. Transport

Transportation plays a key role in the development of the region, mainly in the sense that it allows the movement of people and goods as well as the connection with other regions of Morocco and with its African neighbors.

1.1 Harbours

The activity of the two regions visited is based mainly on a harbour, that of Laayoune. It is a port complex with two uses: fishing and trade.

In terms of fishing, the harbour hosts 500 fishing vessels, including 200 boats dedicated to coastal fishing, according to Commander BEZZAZ, who was visiting the OJUEA delegation. It represents the first harbour in Morocco for coastal fishing.

In terms of trade, the harbour has four quays to accommodate vessels up to 120 meters long and 6.15 meters draft. Exports are mainly sand, salt, fish oil and fishery

products, while imports are mainly oil and gas. We also witnessed a reception of Russian gas during our visit on Wednesday, November 3, 2021. The harbour receives between 1.5 and 2 vessels per day. Commander BEZZAZ said that the commercial strategy of the harbour is mainly to supply the southern area and the region of Laayoune while reflecting a real desire to turn to Africa.

The harbour also lives from trade with Las Palmas, islands for which it launches a large number of ro-ro ships carrying large goods such as cars. Due to its permanent trade with the Canary Islands in Spain, the harbour is faced with a significant phenomenon of illegal migration and has therefore, for some years, strengthened its security measures with cameras and frequent rounds. The security of the harbour is ensured by several private service providers, as the harbour commander told us.

As soon as we arrived in the Sahara, we learned about one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects for the southern regions: the Dakhla Atlantic harbour. Indeed, on November 6, 2015, in his speech to the Nation on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Green March, His Majesty King Mohammed VI announced the construction of a harbour as part of the 2030 port strategy established by the Moroccan Ministry of Transport with a budget of more than 10 Billion Dirhams. Built on the site of Ntirift, 70 km north of Dakhla, this container port aims to match the capacity and performance of the port of Tangier to ensure links with several regions of the world. This project is of a very large scale and will most likely change the face of the region. As Mr. Lamine BENOMAR pointed out, «it is always around a harbour that a great metropolis develops». According to Erragheb HORMATALLAH, President of the Dakhla Communal Council, the work should start in December 2021. According to Mr. Ynja KHATTAT, the Dakhla Atlantic project reveals the willingness of the southern regions and the Kingdom of Morocco to «turn to Sub-Saharan Africa» to nurture an extensive growth of trade between African countries.

Despite the competition that this project represents for other national harbors, it brings mainly great economic opportunities for the regions of southern Morocco.

Thus, the Moroccan authorities are making the inter-connectivity of the southern regions via maritime routes a priority. It is also worth noting the efforts to develop the Sahara road network since, in addition to allowing the free movement of people, it also allows the routing of resources arriving by boat on the coastal cities.

1.2 Roads

The construction of roads is among the priorities of the Kingdom in the southern regions. The project of Laayoune-Agadir expressway and national road Laayoune-Dakhla is part of the investment priorities according to the director of the Regional Investment Center of Laayoune, Mohammed JIFER. According to Mr. Abdesslam BEKRAT, the objective is to «strengthen the North-South links through the infrastructure» that the region intends to develop in the coming years.

Finally, if the roads allow traffic over short and medium distances, it is important to highlight the burgeoning air network of Laayoune and Dakhla which greatly promotes the development of tourism in the region.

1.3 Airports

As for air transport, the two cities of Dakhla and Laayoune have an airport (Dakhla Airport and Laayoune International Airport - Hassan I respectively). They both have a capacity of 300,000 passengers per year. Their influx before the pandemic was estimated at 260,000 passengers per airport in 2019. The airports allow the two Saharan cities to be connected to the world's major metropolises in a short time. Dakhla airport, for example, has a direct line to Paris ORLY. For the rest, flights are mainly

to Morocco (Casablanca, Marrakech, Rabat) or to sub-Saharan Africa according to Erragheb HORMATALLAH, mayor of Dakhla.

Thus, we note significant investments by Moroccan authorities in transport infrastructure that are necessary to connect the Sahara with the rest of the world. At the same time, local authorities are supporting the establishment of a network of businesses and industries to ride the wave of economic growth and attractiveness made possible by these transport opportunities.

2. Business and Industry

Indeed, the regions of the South, then in full industrial and economic development, weave little by little the fabric of companies in order to carry and boost the growth of the territories.

2.1 Phosphate mine, conveying and processing plant

The region of Laayoune is particularly dynamic and competitive thanks to certain areas of intelligent specialization, as we were reminded by Mr. Mohammed JIFER, Director of the Regional Investment Center of Laayoune. One of these areas of competitiveness concerns phosphate (from mining to processing to transportation) which is mainly used to produce fertilizer.

Thus, the OCP group, through its subsidiary Phosboukraa, already runs a phosphate complex in Laayoune. It carries out the processing and export of phosphate rock from Boukraa as well as the production of fertilizer. Logistical transport is provided by an offshore wharf with a road bridge linking the coast to the wharf. However, this bridge has a low accessibility of only 30% due to the swell and the absence of dike. These elements would play the role of calming the currents and waves according to the representative of the Phosboukraa Foundation who received us on the wharf.

Therefore, a titanic project allowing a better adaptation to the weather conditions is provided within the plan of the technopole Fom El Oued. Indeed, it is planned to make it the largest conveyor in the world of fertilizer and phosphoric acid, according to representatives of the Foundation Phosboukraa.

This ambition is therefore part of a major program launched in 2016 for which the Region has allocated 17 MAD for industry and 3 MAD for the socio-cultural field: this technopole is part of a comprehensive and integrated approach to promote regional socio-economic development.

This large-scale project, which should be completed by 2024, includes the construction of a new harbour, a new wharf and a fertilizer factory. This new complex will notably use new processes in the value chain such as a storage and flotation unit in addition to the new stockpile inaugurated since 2018. The idea is also to build a clean technopole, through a total protection of the environment by setting the goal of «zero discharge» into the water without treatment, according to our hosts.

Indeed, Abdelmajid HAIMOUD, representative of the OCP, announced that 2 km of wharf would be planned by November 2022, towards the ocean, to facilitate the docking of ships; what we proposed to see during a future visit. The company can count on the young Sahrawis it hires (at least 30% of the total workforce) since this project is responsible for creating 5080 jobs in the region including 1200 direct jobs. This project is part of the Axe Sud program which aims to develop locally, to Africa and for Africa.

If the visit of the future technopole Fom El Oued and the ambitious projects of the Phosboukraa Foundation have demonstrated the strategy of intelligent specialization of the region of Laayoune, the same is true for the Sardinerie OCEAMIC, as it appears from our findings.

2.2 Fish exploitation

The OJUEA delegation was able to visit an example of a centerpiece of the economy of the region of Laayoune-Sakia El Hamra: the sardine cannery OCEAMIC. Controlling the entire production process was essential for the autonomy of the Moroccan economy, according to Mohammed JIFER, Director of the Investment Center of Laayoune. Thus, the factory of canned sardines, OCEAMIC is the perfect example. In less than 48 hours, the sardines, tuna and mackerel caught are cut, cooked, prepared and sealed in boxes to supply supermarkets like LIDL in Europe. During the tour of the work line, the EU-AU youth observed the thoroughness and rigor of all the health verification processes to arrive at a finished product. All the steps are constantly monitored through the removal of control elements, from the size of the fish cut, to the control of the tightness and pressure of the boxes through the cooking of the different fish, as explained to us by the operating agents of OCEAMIC during our visit.

To this end, developing transport networks for the delivery of exports makes sense, especially in the case where, as demonstrated in the previous economic outlook, the region of Laayoune-Sakia El Hamra has chosen to specialize its economy in fisheries products.

Finally, as good governance of the territories is the stake of a prosperous development of the regions, we could conclude this presentation of the economic situation in this southern region of Morocco, as the will to equalize and reach a prosperity similar to the northern regions.

SECOND PART

SOCIAL



Visit of a class at the ENCG Dakhla ©OJUEA

A student researcher at ASARI in Laayoune ©OJUEA

PART 2-THE SOCIAL :

Setting up appropriate structures for inclusive human development

I. Education

For your information, it is important to understand that the schools listed below will all be expanding and developing in the future.

1. Locally useful institutes: African Sustainable Agriculture Research Institute (ASARI)

The institute is oriented towards multidisciplinary research in strategic areas for the region and the African continent. In particular, it studies issues of sustainable food security, contributing to the well-being of the population, and the development of natural resources, production and animal nutrition. Its main mission is to contribute to the improvement of the well-being of the populations living in the remote and saline areas of the region.

As an institute with an international vocation, and more particularly turned towards the reinforcement of the links between Morocco and deep Africa, ASARI proposes to the students from the African continent trainings and internships in the promotion of sustainable agriculture. In this regard, becoming an African reference in bio-saline agriculture is one of the objectives of this Institute. It should be noted that ASARI currently brings together about twenty researchers and aims, in the long term, to reach the threshold of about sixty researchers.

To do this, the Institute wishes to strengthen the agricultural production system and to promote the development of human capacities, economic and social responsibility in order to accompany startup companies and breeders. One will note the development of local resources, in particular at the level of the camel exploitation, since one of the axes of research of the ASARI is directed towards the dromedary. Moreover, one of their actions consists in encouraging the creation of startups, starting from the observation that the young people are motivated to develop their projects in the region but that they only miss some essential knowledge to do it. Finally, in terms of inclusiveness, «challenges are converted into opportunities». Sahrawi women, for example, are fully integrated into the research work.

Testimony of a breeder reported in the video presentation of ASARI: When the Institute was being built, strategic planning workshops were conducted to define the axes now defined by inviting farmers and breeders to express themselves first. Then scientists became involved, followed by the cooperatives.

The research areas are now grouped into two programs: firstly, an agro-biotechnology program (bio-saline agriculture, development of natural resources, camel value chain) and secondly, a program focused on water and energy. About fifteen projects are being tested, such as the installation of an educational farm in Boukraâ to provide guidance

on how to produce locally the plants and vegetables needed. ASARI also has experimental platforms. The researchers work in particular around the cactus, because of its abundance.

The plant having been invaded by a parasite: the cochineal, which devastated the production at the national level, ASARI must accompany the farmers in the process of replanting.

2. Ambitious and dynamic institutes: ENCG Dakhla

During this observation visit, the young EU-AU were received by the Director of the National School of Commerce and Management of Dakhla, (ENCG), Professor Aziz SAID. This is a public institution created in 2016 with the objective of training high-level executives. This training extends over 5 years and has about 700 students (about 120 per class). The governance brings together various bodies, including the Board of Directors for operational and financial monitoring. A committee approach has also been put in place. The admission to the ENCG Dakhla is done on competition (TAFEM). Also, exchanges are planned with the ESC Clermont in France.

Questionnaire filled in by a 3rd year student of ENCG Dakhla, Bassma Harroucha, treasurer of the Association Students' Association (ADE): The association at ENCG DAKHLA: the development of the individual and the region at the heart of students' concerns

There is a large network of associations which reflects the concerns of the city in terms of development. It is characterized by clubs offering various activities, such as the SHADOWS club which aims to manage all social activities in DAKHLA such as waste collection, offers donations to orphan organizations. There is also the Enactus club which aims to encourage small profit-making projects in DAKHLA.

In the area of personal development, there are associations such as the Great Debaters Club. Its main purpose is to ensure effective cross-functional communication

with students who suffer from public speaking jitters and to develop students' personalities.

About her motivation to join the ADE, the student added: «I always participate in extracurricular activities, and I am the treasurer of our Student Association, our goal being to ensure a good correlation between the students and the school administration. In addition, each member of our team is specialized in a task, whether it is the organization of events within the school, conferences, parties...or the responsibility of each club, or the internal and external communication for sponsorship. I chose to join this association to bring an added value to our school, both professionally and personally. In my opinion, this commitment is important on the one hand for my personal development, thanks to the formative experience due to the group work and on the other hand, to speak and defend our rights on behalf of all the students.»

In terms of career plans, the student aspires to work abroad, but if she can't, she says she's content to work in the Dakhla area. For the moment, she does not have a defined professional project.

Finally, on the issue of the distance between the city and the school: «For our first year, it was so difficult to live far from my parents, I found several problems including the search for premises, financial problems and even the change of environment has negatively impacted the morale (...) for transport too, it is not provided at the ENCG so we are obliged to take a cab or hitchhike. A bus will soon be set up to connect the city center to the ENCG Dakhla, which is effectively out of the way.

3. Excellent technical training (Dakhla Higher School of Technology)

Answers to the questionnaire submitted to the Director of EST, Zouhir MAHANI (15/11/2021): The School was inaugurated in July 2021, and opened its doors for its first class in 2021 (the intake capacity is, for the moment, up to 87 students). It is the equivalent of an IUT in France. The EST is still in a prospecting period. The first class is scheduled to graduate in June 2023, so there is no feedback yet on the opportunities and careers undertaken by the students following their studies. On the other hand, an agro-industry track is currently being planned.

Regarding the selection process, admission to EST Dakhla is based on the grade obtained in the baccalaureate. This selection is done at the national level. Concerning the partnerships of EST Dakhla, on the international level, first of all, there is not yet any exchange program specific to the institution but the possibility can be envisaged to join the exchange programs of the University (Erasmus +). Secondly, in terms of professional integration, EST Dakhla has concluded an agreement with the National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Skills to offer support and preparation for professional integration of its future graduates.

As far as inclusion is concerned, although there are currently no students with disabilities enrolled at the school, the teaching premises have passages for people with reduced mobility, and the planned extensions have elevators.

II. A stronger social anchorage of women

The President of the Dakhla region stressed that «culturally in the Sahara, the woman leads the family». Moreover, «the schooling rate is very high, girls have better results than men. Also, women are increasingly valued in the public space. This is demonstrated by the construction of infrastructure dedicated to women in the field of sports training in Laayoune, with a space reserved for childcare to facilitate access to sport.

III. An intelligent urban planning

The regions of Dakhla Oued Eddahab and Laâyoune-Sakia El Hamra perceive very clearly the issues of territorial development for which they are responsible.

This understanding of the issues is illustrated in two main points:

-On the one hand, there is the establishment of a regional development program and strategy that consists of the presentation of a regional scheme of national land use.

To this end, the President of the region of Dakhla Oued Eddahab Mr. Ynja KHATTAT mentioned the Regional Development Program (RDP) and the Strategy and regional scheme of land use planning set up. The regional land use plan specifies the long and medium term orientations of the sustainable development of the regional territory of Dakhla and its planning principles. This includes the construction of roads, public lighting, the development of pavements, green spaces, the creation of local land.

The President of the region of Laayoune also mentioned the program of urban upgrading of under-equipped neighborhoods in the region, which is realized through the development of green spaces (19,000 trees have been planted), a rate of electrification of 100% in the region, 100% of drinking water and

also the establishment of a company for waste management and recycling. There is a «strong environmental commitment». There is also an infrastructure program: sanitation project in test phase and operation

As for the Regional Council of Dakhla, he mentioned the Regional Development Plan which gives particular importance to the residential supply that continues to increase in the region. A housing project of 1,500 units will provide a better living environment and decent housing for families in need. In addition, an international polyclinic has also been programmed, the construction of which is still underway and meets international standards.

-On the other hand, there is the implementation of a new generation of urban projects to revitalize the cities. This is the idea of «building the city of tomorrow», through urban projects promoting sustainable development and strengthening the connectivity and mobility of the city.

During our exchange with Mounir HOUARI, the Director of the Regional Investment Center of Dakhla, was mentioned the project to create the new urban pole Dakhla Smart City. The city which aims to be sustainable will be based on the method of collective intelligence using new technologies. The objective is to improve the quality of life of the region's citizens. The modes of transport, public infrastructure, networks (electricity, internet, water, gas) and online services are concerned by this new mode of management of the city.

THIRD PART

POLITICAL SITUATION



M Lamine BENAOMAR, Wali de la région de Dakhla ©OJUEA
M Abdeslam BEKRATE, Wali de la région de Laayoune ©OJUEA

PART 3 - POLITICAL SITUATION:

Demonstrated stability within a broader tumultuous context

OJUEA considers the political issue of the Sahara to be essential to fully understand the challenges of the region. It encompasses security, governance and diplomatic considerations.

I. Sécuriser le Sahara

First of all, the OJUEA notes that the Moroccan authorities are making a point of securing the Sahara. Mr. Wali of Dakhla, Lamine BENOMAR, confirmed that the security of the region is now essential to development. Considering our findings on the economic development of these regions, we can say that this link does exist.

But security and humanitarian issues remain. Mr. BENOMAR reported the problems of trafficking in the region, including human trafficking. In addition, the populations living in the Tindouf camps in Algeria remain largely dependent on humanitarian aid from the United Nations. This situation was confirmed to us by Mr. Ynja KHATTAT, president of the region of Dakhla Oued Eddahab. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees provides this aid [4].

1. The Sahara wall

To secure the Sahara, the Moroccan authorities have built a set of secure posts in the desert to protect the territory. Mr. Abdeslam BEKRATE, the Wali of the region of Laayoune, confirmed the existence of this device.

This «Sahara Wall», also called «Wall of the Sands» was built between 1980 and 1987. It extends over 2720 kilometers and consists of several forts approximately every five kilometers. Its main objective is to prevent violent incursions by the Polisario Front into the southern regions [5].



The Sahara wall [6]

2. International cooperation

Morocco cooperates with other international organizations to ensure the security of the region.

First of all, at the UN level with the peacekeeping mission MINURSO, whose headquarters are in Laayoune. This mission currently has 482 personnel, including 245 military personnel [7]. In addition, Mr. BEKRATE informed the OJUEA that the UN had previously set up shuttles between the areas under Moroccan authority and the Polisario camps, to allow relatives to visit each other. These have now been discontinued.

His counterpart in Dakhla told OJUEA that Morocco hosted Operation African Lion in June of this year. This military exercise saw Moroccan forces maneuvering jointly alongside U.S., Tunisian, and Senegalese soldiers.

In sum, alongside the United Nations and its Western and African partners, Morocco ensures the security of the Sahara regions with many other actors. Indeed, many issues are linked to the Sahel and Saharan regions.

3. Challenges related to the Sahel

During its meetings, the OJUEA noted that the Sahel was the subject of security and migration issues. The Wali of Laayoune confirmed that the Sahel is now one of the most dangerous regions in the world. It is a huge area composed of countries with few resources.

4. Security

Mr. BENOMAR also told OJUEA that the Tuareg populations of northern Mauritania are influenced by the Polisario Front. Mr. BEKRATE mentioned a global terrorist issue.

Terrorism is indeed the main issue that links Europe and Africa in the Sahel. Thus, as the Wali of Laayoune pointed out, Morocco is closely observing the Barkhane operation and the actions of the G5-Sahel

force. The security of the Kingdom's borders is a major concern for the authorities and is linked to the issue of terrorism.

Mr. BEKRATE confirmed to OJUEA that on a more general level, the Kingdom participates in international operations in other regions of Africa, such as the Central African Republic [9].

Security issues have multiple resonances. Among them, migration.

5. Migration

OJUEA notes that the Sahara regions are becoming a migratory buffer zone between sub-Saharan Africa and northern Morocco and thus Europe. The Wali of Dakhla confirmed this reading of the Moroccan authorities.

The Wali of Laâyoune has put forward the number of 400 migrants who try to cross the ocean to the Canary Islands every day. The Canary Islands, part of the Kingdom of Spain, are indeed a bridge to the Schengen area and the European Union.

The Wali of Laayoune explains that global warming will push even more Africans to seek asylum in the north of the continent. We understand that the Sahara regions will become even more crucial for Europe and Africa. Monsieur BEKRATE also sees a problem for human rights. Indeed, illegal migration is often accompanied by human trafficking in the Sahel.

In sum, OJUEA notes that Morocco is establishing international partnerships to manage multiple security issues. These are related to the Polisario Front issue, migration, and terrorism.

Similarly, we note that the Walis play a prominent role in managing security issues in the Sahara regions. Far from being limited to a sound knowledge of the issues, they have an important responsibility in the operational response. However, the role of the Walis is not limited to security issues. They have more general political prerogatives regarding the mode of governance of the regions of Dakhla Oued Eddahab and Laâyoune Sakia El Hamra.

II. Governing and cohabiting

The young people of the mission Stras' Dakhla Student 2021 have observed a model of governance that allows a good cohabitation. This cohabitation is done first between the different levels of governance of public authorities through decentralization. It then applies to the issue of the Kingdom's multi-confessionality. Similarly, civil society is widely involved in decision-making processes. Finally, women and men share power and an effort is made to reintegrate former Polisario Front members.

1. The decentralization

During its meetings, OJUEA noted that decentralization in the Sahara is very strong.

The Wali of Laayoune reported that more and more responsibility is being given to the presidents of the regions rather than to the Walis. The latter are indeed the representatives of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, while the former represent the local communities. For example, in 2015, the Walis lost the competence to organize the region's budget. Similarly, they were deprived of the prerogative of prior control of acts taken by the presidents of the region. Also, as mentioned by Mr. Wali, the autonomy regime is becoming more and more important in the Kingdom. Mr. Mohammed JIFER, Director of the C.R.I of Laayoune, told us that greater institutional reforms in favor of administrative deconcentration are planned for 2035.

The Sahara is thus emerging as a particular model of autonomy. This administrative and political decentralization has even more resonance given the history of relations between this region and the Kingdom of Morocco.

The Stras' Dakhla program has also noted the historical importance of multi-confessionality in Morocco.

2. Multi-confessionality

Mr. BERKATE reminded the OJUEA that the Moroccan Constitution of 2011 explicitly enshrines multi-confessionality. In this regard, we note that its Article 3 guarantees «the free exercise of religions to all» [10]. This free exercise is, for example, notable for Judaism and Christianity.

2.1 Judaism

The Wali of Laayoune stated that «For Moroccans, being Jewish is not a race, it is a faith. He also explained that the Jewish spiritual heritage of the Kingdom is visible throughout the country. Despite this, less than 0.1% of Moroccans are Jewish [11]. This difference between population share and visibility shows the importance given to religious minorities in the Kingdom. This conclusion also applies to Christianity.

2.1 The Christianity

Mr. Erragheb HORMATALLAH, mayor of Dakhla, confirmed to OJUEA the presence of a Catholic church in Dakhla. The director of this place is a Muslim from

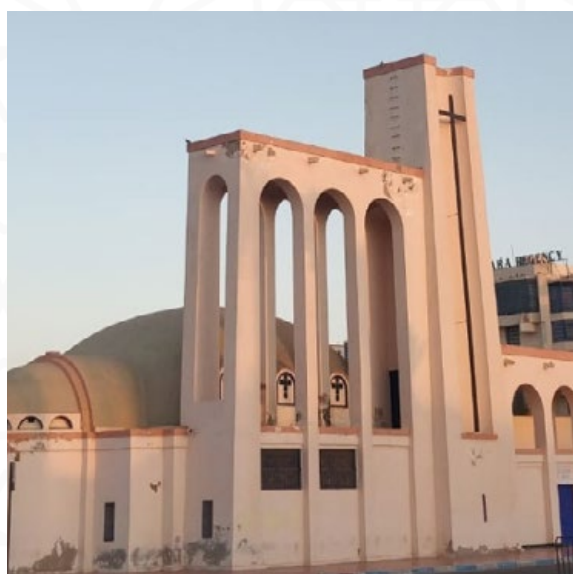


*Façade de l'ancienne synagogue d'Oujda.
[12]*

the city. His role is to ensure the protection of this institution.

As with the Jews, Christians represent less than 0.1% of the Moroccan population. But their visibility is very real [13].

We note the interpenetration and dialogue of faiths in Morocco. Far from being mutually exclusive, they help each other. In sum, the Moroccan authorities are developing the principle of the nation in the Sahara. Before being a follower of a given faith, the citizen is first of all a Moroccan.



Église Catholique Notre Dame du Mont Carmel de Dakhla [14]

Indeed, Moroccans from all social strata are mobilized in the political decision. The civil society is widely consulted.

2.2 The civil consultation

According to the Wali of Laayoune, Morocco has made the choice of freedom and political participation. As far as we have seen, this has been confirmed.

3. Political plurality

Mr. Bekrate pointed out that political pluralism has been constitutionally guaranteed since 1958. Indeed, we note that Article 7 of the Moroccan constitution regulates party pluralism and specifically

prohibits the existence of a single party in its paragraph 2. At a more local level, the President of the region of Dakhla Oued Eddahab confirmed to OJUEA that the three commissions of the region include associations from all political parties.

In other words, considering the theoretical frameworks of political science, both the regime and the political system of the Kingdom of Morocco guarantee political pluralism. We have seen this at a minimum in the Saharan regions.

These regions are also the scene of a particular development model, which combines long-term, short-term and civil consultation.

4. The co-constructed plan development model

The development of the regions of Laayoune and Dakhla Oued Eddahab is at the heart of regional policies. Thus, plans are built with this objective. These plans have two particularities. First, they overlap long-term and short-term development. Second, they are developed in dialogue with civil society.

4.1 The principle of the two-phase plane

The implementation of a biphasic plan was first noted by the OJUEA in these Saharan regions. The President of the Dakhla region informed us of this. The two-phase plan is a dual development plan that combines a short and a long time frame.

Indeed, each regional mandate of six years has its own development plan. At the same time, a 25-year development plan is introduced. It encompasses all the plans for each term. Mr. JIFER told us that this biphasic approach also exists for each economic sector identified as a priority by the authorities to achieve the desired development.

In addition, civil society is involved in the construction of these plans, both in the short and longer term.

4.2 The civil consultation

Mr. Ynja Khattat explained to OJUEA that development plans, especially those of the long term, are built with an intense participation of the citizens of the region. Indeed, the associative fabric is very strong there and the public power supports it. For example, between 2017 and 2018, 450 associations participated in the region's aid programs.

Also, we were informed that many unions exist in the Saharan regions. Among them, the employers' association plays a very important role. The region's commissions bring together these different civil entities.

We note that the Kingdom of Morocco is proposing innovative governance by setting up these two-phase plans. We also note that civil society is very much involved in their elaboration, in order to allow a concordance between political objectives and local needs.

Moreover, a specific category of citizens is highlighted in this political governance: women.

4.3 The place of women

It has already been mentioned in this report that women play an important role in the South. Indeed, we note that they are very present in politics. For example, the Vice President of the Proverbial Council of Dakhla informs us that in the territorial councils, a quota of one third of women is imposed. The OECD confirms this statement [16]. In addition, Morocco also has women presidents of municipalities and regions, as well as ministers and presidents of commissions [17] [18].

Thus, women in the Kingdom are an integral part of the management of public affairs. Another category of people is also very much integrated into the political life of these regions: the former members of the Polisario Front.

4.4 Reintegrating the populations of the Tindouf camps

The mission Stras' Dakhla Student 2021 found that several former members of the Polisario Front have important responsibilities in the regions of Dakhla Oued Eddahab and Laayoune. Mr. BENOMAR, Wali of Dakhla, informed us first. He mentioned the monetary and food aid granted to the Front's defectors. His counterpart from Laayoune, Mr. BEKRATE, confirmed that Morocco considers them all citizens of the Kingdom.

For example, Mr. Ynja KHATTAT, president of the region of Dakhla Oued Eddahab is himself a former member of Polisario. The first deputy of the previous mandate was also. Mr. KHATTAT confirmed again the existence of aid to needy families who leave the Front. He told us that 12,000 former Polisario members have already «returned to the cities». Among them, some have even become local and national elected officials.

We note that the Moroccan authorities have chosen the path of reintegration rather than repression.

In the Saharan regions, multipartyism, plurality of opinions and the integration of intermediary bodies (unions, associations, etc.), women and former belligerents into local governance seem to be real. In general, we note that all types of actors are consulted before major political decisions are made. However, not everything has been achieved yet. The youth of our organization note that the diplomatic situation around the Sahara remains very complex.

III. A complex diplomatic situation

We note that the Moroccan authorities have a real presence and governance in the regions we visited. But this state of affairs is not yet recognized by all states. In our Euro-African prism, we distinguish two categories of states. First, those that have fully recognized Moroccan sovereignty over the Saharan regions. Second, those that are still in a hesitation phase.

1. A recognition of Moroccan sovereignty

In recent years, a turning point has been reached in the recognition of the Moroccan identity of the southern regions. Indeed, to date, 25 countries have opened or announced their intention to open Consulates General in Laayoune and Dakhla. These are mainly African and Middle Eastern countries [19] [20].

At the end of 2020, another rupture occurs. As Mr. BENOMAR told us, the United States in turn recognized Moroccan sovereignty over these regions.

He also indicated that France is an ally of Morocco on the Sahara issue. It is therefore likely that France will soon recognize the Moroccan sovereignty of this region.

The fact remains that most of the countries that have recognized Moroccan sovereignty in these regions are African or American. Europe is still in an in-between phase.

2. Europe in the middle on the Sahara issue

2.1 Germany

The main European country that has difficulty recognizing this sovereignty is undoubtedly Germany. For example, it has asked the United States to explain its choice to recognize Moroccan sovereignty at the UN. The OJUEA notes that this may constitute an administrative obstacle that complicates the consensus of the 27 members of the European Union around this recognition.

But Morocco has other strong partners in Europe, hence the ambiguity of the European position.

2.2 Spain and France

France and Spain are the largest European partners of Morocco. Mr. BEKRATE, the Wali of Laâyoune, confirms that these two countries maintain the most active relations with the Kingdom of Morocco.

But because of internal differences within the European continent, Mr. BENOMAR believes that Europe as a unified political entity remains, in general, rather reluctant to recognize Moroccan sovereignty. This does not prevent the regions of the South from maintaining para-diplomatic relations with Europe.

2.3 Parallel diplomacy

Some initiatives of parallel diplomacy are then put in place. The mayor of Dakhla told OJUEA that the cities of Dakhla and Strasbourg in France are twinned.

We note that countries have an interest in cooperating with the regions of the South. However, diplomatic reasons sometimes override this material interest. It appears that the States cooperate with these regions through the back door. But we assume that once the German lock is broken, Europe will soon recognize Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara. The new coalition in power, however, does not seem to be willing to take this step.

In this diplomatic tumult, multilateralism is emerging despite everything.

3. Towards a center of multilaterality?

L'OJUEA a constaté que la ville de Dakhla accueille des fora multilatéraux. Le Global Women Summit 2021 - Sahara Edition, en est un exemple frappant. Ce sommet, sur le modèle des UN Global Compact, a accueilli des représentants de multiples nationalités. Encore une fois, nous constatons que la bataille diplomatique n'empêche pas le développement d'activités de haut niveau dans ce même domaine.



CONSTAT GLOBAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Laayoune's Souk©OJUEA

*Traditional dancer at the opening of the
Global Woman Summit in Dahkla ©OJUEA*

General observations and recommendations

The mission Stras' Dakhla Student 2021 notes that the regions of Southern Morocco are experiencing strong economic, social and political development. Economic growth is the driving force behind this development. It is accompanied by social needs that have their answer and a political effort that allows the proper development of the regions of Laayoune and Dakhla Oued Eddahab.

In short, a whole interdependent and functional ecosystem is being built. Development is real and the needs it will create are understood, anticipated and some already have their solution. Anticipation thus seems to be the watchword of Moroccan policy in the Sahara. In other words, not only are the necessary resources invested, but they are also well used.

To date, the Dakhla and Laayoune regions have served as a laboratory for a decentralized system in a region with conflict potential. Most conflicts in Africa are related to a question of territorial inequality, combined with considerations of minority and majority. These reasons are economic, ethnic, religious, etc.

Morocco, despite the diversity of its territory, manages to maintain stability. Indeed, the Kingdom's system makes it possible to establish the same level of development throughout its territory, particularly through the development of heavy infrastructure. Thus, the southern regions, despite their recent reintegration into the Kingdom, will eventually benefit from the same public services and economic development as the north of the country.

The OJUEA proposes a reflection on the opportunity to transpose this model to other countries. While respecting their local cultures, other African and European countries could benefit from being inspired by the Moroccan model.

I. Our observations

Exchanges with the various authorities and site visits have enabled the Youth Organization for the European and African Union to make a series of observations that should be presented in summary form, both on the economic, social and political aspects.

1. On the economic level

1.1 Tourism: a significantly promising development lever, which can have perverse effects on regional identity

OJUEA notes that the conditions are in place to promote the region and attract tourists. Infrastructure is in place, the hotel industry is growing, and the region is served by both road and air links. Finally, many trades related to tourism are already established.

The natural characteristics of the region allow it to offer a wide range of tourist activities: desert excursions, cottages, kitesurfing, quad biking, etc. The development of the South via the bivouac for tourists is mainly promoted and relayed in dedicated sites, with the institutional support of the Regional Council of Tourism of Dakhla.

Here is an example of advertising on the site «Excursions - Dakhla Tourism» which seemed to us very evocative: «Finally, for more tranquility, choose one of the beautiful excursions from Dakhla towards the Moroccan desert. Go and meet the shepherds, among the herds of camels and sheep. The region is ideal for bivouacs.

Nevertheless, it seems important to us to diversify the tourism offer and not to be satisfied with the natural assets of the region in order to attract other categories of national or foreign tourists. The cultural offer is also to be developed and diversified whether it is by museums, cinemas, musical

events and festivals, in order to make the world discover this fascinating regional culture.

During the visits in the city of Dakhla, we also noted that most of the people we met, like the Director of the C.R.I, express their will to make Dakhla, thanks to tourism, a lever of development.

1.2 Urbanism, innovation and modernity: a trio whose contours need to be clarified

Among the innovations that have impressed us, the example of the covered market seems interesting. The relocation of itinerant merchants to the covered market has many advantages, including greater security, better hygiene, more space, and lower costs for merchants in terms of premises and electricity. However, the covered market is far from the city. Shoppers must take transportation to get there, which leads to lower prices (from 5 dirhams in town to 2 dirhams at the market). Finally, it should be noted that the covered market breaks with 40 years of tradition. Thus, the arrival of modernity can sometimes be perceived by the locals as a loss of local culture.

From our point of view, this remains an innovation, however, we were not able to observe the market in a period of affluence, especially since it was a spontaneous visit, specially organized for our visit to the region.

1.3 Environment and sustainable development: a perceptible commitment, which must be intensified in certain respects.

Many efforts have been put in place to respond to the challenges of sustainable development, with for example the promotion of renewable energy and environmental sustainability. This is an aspect that has often been addressed during the various meetings, as we have noted. ASARI (African Sustainable Agriculture Research Institute), an African research institute on sustainable agriculture and the protection of natural resources with agro-biotechnology is a tangible example. In addition, the presence

of many solar panels at the National School of Commerce and Management (ENCG) of Dakhla or Laayoune testify to this desire. The desalination plant of Laayoune also represents a concrete achievement of this commitment to the environment.

However, we have also noticed during our travels that many desert spaces were sometimes transformed into places of deposit of household waste and some garbage.

1.4 Local employment: rapid involvement of youth as a result of relatively favourable economic realities.

OJUEA notes, after having exchanged with young Saharawis, that the search for a job is often one of the priorities as soon as they obtain their baccalaureate. For financial reasons, they prefer the vocational path despite the free higher education, especially at the National School of Business and Management. While this trend allows for significant integration of young people into the local professional milieu, rapid access to employment can have consequences on the academic future of young people with the limitation of higher education paths.

2. On the social level

2.1 In the field of health: a gourmet culinary tradition, which deserves to be preserved while conceding some precautions.

During its various visits, OJUEA had the opportunity to taste the local cuisine, known for its spicy, sweet and salty tastes. These culinary characteristics, rich in flavors, differ from what we traditionally know in Europe.

Morocco has significant levels of health risks among the population related to diet. That said, we would not want this change to come at the expense of the region's culinary traditions either.

2.2 In the field of education: a diversified and accessible training offer, which remains unattractive to young people due to various biases.

Regarding accessibility to higher education institutions and public transport, OJUEA was able to note during its visit to the Ecole Normale de Commerce et de Gestion de Dakhla and the Polytechnic University that these two institutions are currently located on the outskirts of the city center and therefore difficult to access. It is important to develop and strengthen the implementation of public transport or to provide students with regular shuttles between the city center and the educational institutions. Furthermore, we noted the absence of commercial activities, restaurants, cafés or leisure facilities in the vicinity, which would give life to the campus.

During our visit to the National School of Commerce and Management (ENCG) of Dakhla, we also noticed that the majority of students come from other regions in the North of Morocco. Only 30% of the students are of Sahrawi origin. After having exchanged with them on this point, our members understood that many young Saharawis prefer the professional path after their baccalaureate for financial reasons. Indeed, despite the free higher education at the ENCG, some graduates can not afford to continue their studies because they must enter the workforce and earn a salary quickly.

Students reported that travel between the campus and their homes was complicated. There is little or no public transportation, so they may have to pay for cabs every day. A student's budget is fragile and these practices tend to prevent access to higher education.

2.3 On the cultural level: a strong adhesion of the population to the Moroccan identity which does not exclude some marks of religious diversity.

From exchanges with Sahrawis on the ground, OJUEA notes that the people are attached to their Moroccan identity, whose culture they fully embrace. Moreover, examples of multi-faith have continued to pleasantly surprise our organization. The presence of a Christian church in Dakhla, notably the church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Dakhla, is the most symbolic testimony of this.

3. On the political level

3.1 Role of women / Gender equality: Towards a feminization of the political sphere in the Sahara?

OJUEA has observed a real willingness to integrate women into the political and economic life of the country. Traditionally, women in the southern regions have an important social role and are a strong and respected figure. The locals presented the culture of this southern region to us as one where women traditionally play the role of head of the family, almost dominating. This domination extends to the educational level, with a higher rate of schooling among women and better results on average than men, as the President of the Dakhla region, Mr. EL KHATTAT, pointed out.

Also, women are increasingly taken into account in the public space, as shown by the part reserved for women in the sports training center of Laayoune and the installation of a nursery at this location. Similarly, the role of women in politics is changing. Women are holding political positions. We met with the Vice President of the Dakhla region and the Vice President of the Laayoune communal council. These women are examples of Moroccan women who climb the ladder and participate in the political associative fabric.

However, it is obvious that there is still progress to be made in terms of gender

equality. When women politicians are given the opportunity to speak, they sometimes refuse to take the floor or participate in photos, acting shy, as if they did not feel legitimate to do so. If women are always present next to men, they speak very little. In public institutions, our organization has observed that women are present but hardly have the right to speak. On the rare occasions when they did, they refused to speak and were very discreet. Speaking French less well than the men, they found it difficult to express themselves to us.

As for the world of work, the OJUEA had the pleasure of discovering the organization within a sardine canning factory. Unfortunately, we found that women were mostly in menial positions. It might be appropriate to look at their real place in more depth.

Finally, for the Global Women Summit, there was only one woman on the opening panel and five men.

3.2 Financial power of local authorities: the budgetary autonomy of local authorities is guaranteed by the Moroccan state, but it may be useful to revisit it.

Whether in the region of Dakhla or Laayoune, the Presidents of the regions have told us that all of the regions have informed us that all the investments and constructions in these regions are not financed by the taxes of the inhabitants since they do not pay taxes in these regions compared to the other regions of the Kingdom. These investments and the development of these regions are either financed by the state or by royal initiatives.

OJUEA understands that this way of operating is more efficient initially, but questions its sustainability in the long and medium term. It is necessary to establish financial independence for these regions.

For the moment, several advantages are currently granted to the populations of the southern regions in view of their particular situation, such as tax exemptions.

What will happen to these privileges if the Sahara officially becomes (UN recognition) an integral part of the Kingdom of Morocco? Will the Saharawis be subject to the same regime and have the same rights and duties as other Moroccan citizens, or will they keep certain specificities due to the Sahara's regional autonomy? These are all questions that need to be answered.

3.3 Security: a slightly perceptible militarization

For an area internationally known as a risk zone (red zone on France's diplomatic map), OJUEA was surprised by the low level of militarization in the two major cities. There were no armed soldiers in the streets, nor were there any military devices (human screening and car checkpoints). As such, we did not notice any security stops, no ID checks, and no signs that the area was dangerous. Although benefiting from all the civil protocol respect put in place by the national and local authorities, it is important to specify that the populations on the spot do not live in fear of conflict, contrary to what is generally observed in this type of zones and similar context in Africa or elsewhere in the world.

As we did not have the opportunity to visit military installations or meet with senior officers in the region, we are not in a position to say more about the security situation in these regions of southern Morocco.

3.4 On the diplomatic front : an extensive deployment, which attests to a marked policy of international openness

Our organization notes the current construction of a multilateral diplomatic pole with several events among which the Global Women Summit, Sahara Edition.

In this last summit, different public-private partnerships were highlighted. For example: the signing of an agreement of this nature between the local authorities and Bayer, Huawei, InWi, Phosboucraa, Banque Populaire and OCP on digital entrepreneurship of young people in the

Sahara regions. Multiple stands of these different companies presented their products in the hall of the Palais des Congrès.

Regarding the field of international cooperation, we note that the planes of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) regularly use the infrastructure of the airport of Laayoune, which is under Moroccan sovereignty.

Unfortunately, we did not visit the diplomatic representations of countries that have already recognized Morocco's sovereignty in these regions. However, the OJUEA welcomes the integration of the consular authorities in place, namely His Excellencies the Consul General of the Republic of Guinea Bissau, the Consul General of the Kingdom of Eswatini and the Consul General of the Republic of Zambia. These various observations call for some recommendations on the part of the OJUEA.

II. Our recommendations

Based on their findings, numerous exchanges collected and their field culture, the Youth Organization for the European and African Union (OJUEA) proposes to the authorities some recommendations on the most relevant aspects identified. 27 recommendations are thus set out and divided into political, social and economic aspects.

1. Recommendations on the policy side

1.1 In the field of tourism

-The emphasis on tourism and the assets of the cities, particularly Dakhla, is an encouraging sign of openness and progress. However, OJUEA warns that the rapid transformation and modernization of the city could lead to the loss of the desert and picturesque charm of the region (shaping a Sahelian model that combines modernity and tradition while respecting local colors).

-Put in place protective legislation for elements recognized as belonging to the Saharan heritage, without using labels as «tourist attractors». Beware of the «folklorization» of the Saharawi way of life during the development of tourism, the risk being to lose the soul of these regions as the director of the C.R.I of Dakhla indicated to us.

-One solution would be to rely on local tourism in order to keep the charm and natural beauty of the southern cities: through traditional restaurants with the customs of the region instead of fast-food restaurants, cooperatives to promote the products of the region instead of supermarkets and shopping malls ...

1.2 In terms of innovation/modernity and urban planning

-Evaluate the costs of the bus for students, develop the principle of shuttles between the school (Ecole Supérieure de Technologie Dakhla + Ecole Normale Supérieure de Dakhla) and the city center for a denser transport offer, the two schools being able to cooperate on this point.

-Construction of university halls of residence that can accommodate at least 50% of the rate of students registered in the two different regions. (Measure to promote the academic attractiveness of the southern regions).

-Public transport in cities such as Dakhla or Laayoune must be able to be put forward to adopt from now on the characteristics of a smart city, new and sustainable by reducing the number of cars. It would be a question here of focusing on the routes taken within the city to set up transport dedicated to the city-market route at affordable prices and to improve access for all.

-As far as waste management is concerned, we recommend, in the name of the preservation of the biodiversity that has been positively observed, a sensitization of the citizens to these issues, a cleaning campaign as well as a centralized and plural

solution of waste collection to compensate for the different current deficiencies.

1.3 In terms of environment and sustainable development

-The green transition in which the regions of the South wish to engage must involve public transport and the transport of resources by rail. To this end, the train is a means of transportation that pollutes little and allows for rapid connection between two economic centers. Despite the climatic realities of the region, OJUEA proposes the construction of a railroad that will connect Dakhla to Laayoune. The creation of multimodal platforms around the harbour Dakhla Atlantic can also be considered.

-Create, in the southern regions, an international forum on environment, development and technology: Morocco can share with other countries its innovative solutions on sustainable development in arid environments.

-It is important to establish and strengthen partnerships between the various economic actors, the state and civil society, in order to work for the preservation of the environment and the strengthening of biodiversity in the regions of Dakhla Oued Eddahab and Laâyoune Sakia El Hamra.

-The ecological transition being well promoted, the OJUEA encourages continuity in this direction and proposes to prioritize their sustainability.

1.4 In the field of employment

-Continue to encourage local employment while allowing foreigners to benefit from the ideas and solutions developed in the Sahara.

Transform the sub-Saharan migratory flow to the Canary Islands (Spain) into an economic force for the region. The long-term goal is to anticipate the opportunities offered by the African Continental Free Trade Area. Training and integration of young migrants or children of emigration

would facilitate their integration into Moroccan society and in particular Saharawi society. Thus, we will move from the current social assistance to social and economic integration for the benefit of their country of origin and the host country.

-Create exchange programs with European universities and institutions in the technical and public administration fields with the objective of a bilateral exchange of best practices in governance and scientific research.

1.5 In terms of gender equality and women's empowerment

-OJUEA recommends that consideration be given to ways to strengthen women's confidence in their legitimacy to intervene in the public political space; to ensure that women in politics are on the same level as men in their interventions.

-OJUEA therefore proposes that the effort that has been initiated to promote gender equality within institutions be intensified by encouraging women to be more engaged in public panels and involved in decision making.

1.6 In terms of youth participation in decision-making

At multi-stakeholder summits such as the Global Women's Summit, it seems necessary to go beyond the accessibility of private companies. OJUEA insists that ministries and public authorities should also have booths and contact points at such events. It is important to encourage informal and spontaneous exchange between the authorities and young people.

1.7 Diplomatic and security issues

-Maintain multilateral meetings such as the Global Women Summit

-Encourage the organization of international youth summits, such as the

Europe-Africa Meetings (lesrea.org) or pan-African events such as the celebration of World Africa Day.

-Create an environment conducive to direct exchanges between diplomats from the South and young Saharawis. This will contribute to their openness in the world and the influence of their region. This process can be done through conferences «youth and diplomats».

Speakers, EJOS)

-While taking into consideration the educational context of the regions of Dakhla and Laayoune, implement a voluntary program of learning French or English for women and young girls (elected officials, business leaders, students, etc.) to anticipate the interactions related to the development prospects announced in the said regions.

2. Recommendations on the social component

2.1 In the field of health

-Although food habits are a strong element of identity, the OJUEA, in line with the recommendations of the World Health Organization, recommends raising awareness among young and old to ensure a healthy and balanced diet.

2.2 In the field of education

The possibility of low-cost accommodation directly on campus could be considered to overcome the discouragement of young people due to the distance from university sites, or even the construction of new university halls of residence.

In order to encourage young Saharawis to obtain higher education degrees, the authorities could consider a ten-year program of scholarships awarded on social criteria, each lasting three years. (Corresponding to BAC+3)

In the idea of a strategy for young graduates to come and settle in the southern regions of the Kingdom, the strengthening of the cultural offer adapted to these socio-professional classes should be considered.

-Organize training sessions on public speaking for elected women or business leaders as well as capacity building workshops. (School for Young Sahrawi

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Camel in the Sahara desert near Laayoune©OJUEA

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This report is a documentation tool for all persons or organizations interested in the development of the regions of Dakhla and Laayoune. It does not engage the responsibilities of the persons and institutions mentioned, nor those of the European Union or the African Union.

UEVA YOUTH DELEGATION



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EU-UEA YOUTH DELEGATION

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