

Europe should strengthen its relations with Morocco

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Opinion Plus

Morocco is a strong EU ally in tackling two important problems: illegal immigration and terrorism', writes Yossi Lempkowicz.

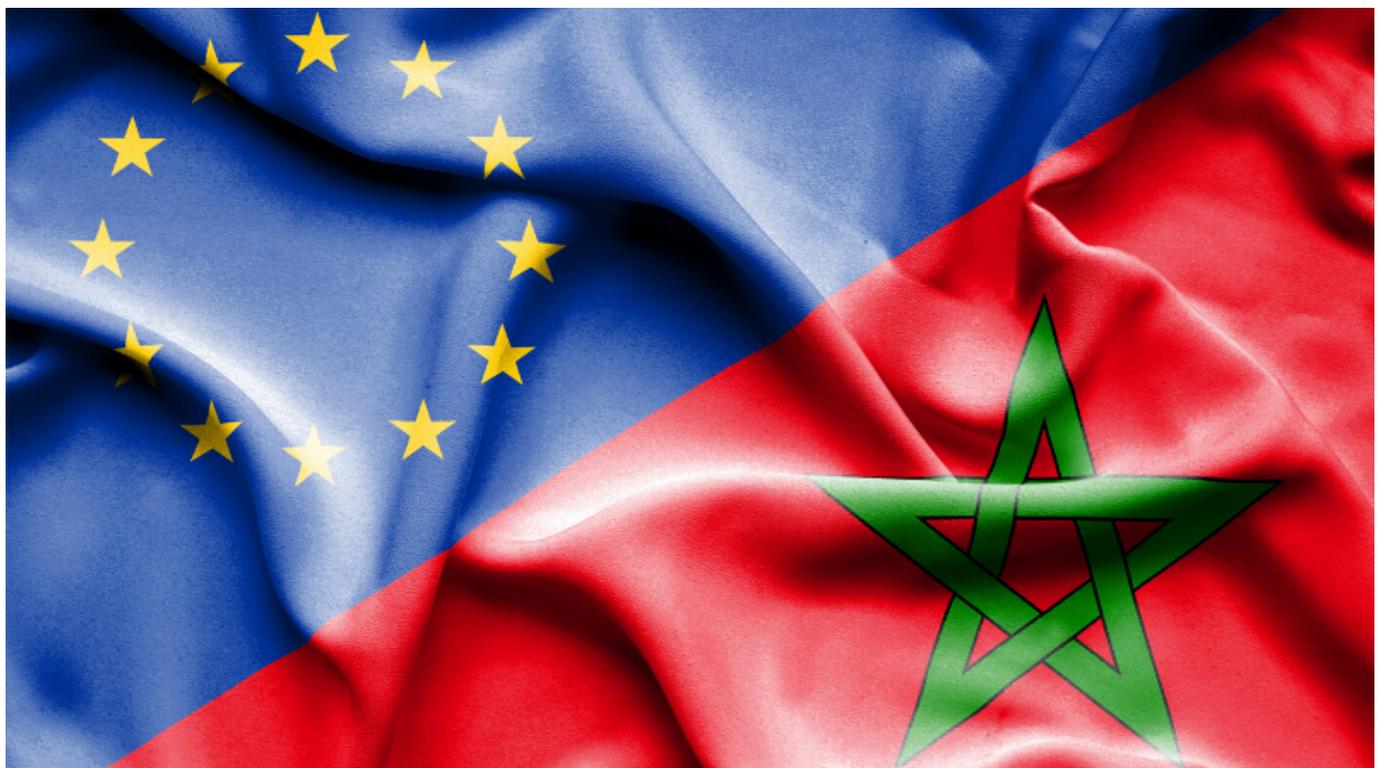


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The new EU leadership that will take office in December will have to tackle two important problems: illegal immigration and the fight against terrorism.

In this context, one country plays a pivotal role, it is Morocco, a strong ally and neighbour of the European Union.

Morocco is an example of political stability in a turbulent southern neighbourhood and has been a reliable and effective partner in controlling of terrorism and migration in the region.

Moreover, it has sought to position itself as a bridgehead between Europe and sub-Saharan Africa in

recent years as it became one of the major political players within the African Union organisation.

Last July, the country moved closer to obtaining a “privileged” relationship with the EU following successful talks.

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On this occasion, the EU praised Morocco’s handling of the conflict over Western Sahara - which remains unsolved for more than 40 years.

The EU “welcomes the serious and credible efforts of Morocco to obtain a peace settlement (in the conflict)”, a statement said at the time.

The Sahara conflict, which also involves Morocco’s neighbour, Algeria, which supports the Polisario Front - a Sahrawi rebel national liberation movement aiming to end Moroccan presence in the Western Sahara - is in the hands of the United Nations as it is trying to build peace between all the parties involved.

The two major Maghreb countries have had their common border closed for almost 30 years. Because of the conflict, in terms of economic development, this situation for people in Morocco and Algeria represents a loss of almost two percent of their purchasing power.

In February, the European Parliament endorsed the new EU-Morocco Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement.

The agreement includes agricultural products from the Sahara and its territorial waters.

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However, as a new European Parliament has been elected, the eventual creation within this parliament of a Polisario or Western Sahara intergroup would be ‘untimely political’ and dangerous for the balance and peace in the Saharan and Sahelian region which is confronted with terrorist attacks that have multiplied in recent months and where terrorist groups abound.

Rather than seeking to create new tensions, MEPs must do everything to situation and avoid jeopardising the peace process in the Sahara conflict which is now revived under the auspices of the United Nations.

The creation of a Sahara intergroup would also hurt the interest of Europe’s partnership with Morocco.

Such an intergroup would not stop wanting to question the EU-Morocco agreement approved by the European Parliament, including a majority of members of the Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group.

OLAF, the EU anti-fraud office, and the European Commission have both reported a recurrent diversion of EU food aid to the Tindouf camps in Algeria which are controlled by the Polisario.

Will the European Parliament's Budget Control Committee investigate this misappropriation of EU funds?

"As the European Parliament has become a major player on international relations on the EU scene, its role should rather be to strengthen EU-Morocco relations"

Instead of inflaming the conflict, Europe must do everything possible to calm the situation and remain neutral.

The European political stance on this matter has constantly sought to avoid interfering in the debates between the protagonists, leaving it up to the UN to play its role of referee and work with everyone around the negotiating table - Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Polisario and representatives in Laayoune - and Dakhka, and find an acceptable solution.

Europe should also send the right signals to both Morocco and Algeria - which is going through changes - to establish means of real cooperation on all levels for the interest of both peoples and Europe.

A Sahraoui intergroup in the European Parliament would send a wrong signal to Morocco, a strong ally to Europe, just months after the signing of an important agreement between the two parties.

As the European Parliament has become a major player on international relations on the EU scene, its role should rather be to strengthen EU-Morocco relations.

About the author

Yossi Lempkowicz is an EU foreign affairs analyst and editor of the European Jewish Press.

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