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**Morocco as emerging regional economic power?**

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*Abstract:*

*The Kingdom of Morocco has been trying to grow as a regional power for years by looking increasingly to Africa. It has taken a series of steps that bring it closer to that goal such as returning to the African Union, strengthening its relations with the Sahel and other international countries, undertaking military rearmament because of regional tensions, and embarking upon an intense pan-African foreign policy. Furthermore, thanks to the investment projects carried out within its borders, Morocco is modernizing many of its industrial, transport and agricultural infrastructures, which makes it a gateway to and from Africa.*

*Keywords:*

*Morocco, Rabat, sub-Saharan Africa, West Africa, infrastructures, cooperation, development, investment.*

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‘Morocco is a tree whose roots lie in Africa  
but whose leaves breathe in Europe’  
Hassan II of Morocco

## Introduction

Morocco was for several centuries of the Middle Ages an important enclave of the Trans-Saharan trade due to the caravan routes that left sub-Saharan Africa and reached the western end of the Sahara Desert. The ancient Moroccan city of Siyilmasa was one of the main trade axes of North Africa<sup>1</sup>. More recently, since the late twentieth century, Morocco has resumed its commercial and economic ties with its southern neighbours. 88 agreements were signed between Morocco and sub-Saharan African countries from 1972 to 1985 and in 1996 alone, 20 agreements were signed<sup>2</sup>. This showed Rabat’s willingness to strengthen ties with the African continent.

Today, Morocco is considered an emerging country with a highly stable economic-financial system in macroeconomic terms and low inflation levels. Since 2000, a year after the accession to the Throne of King Mohammed VI, the Moroccan economy has been experiencing a trend of sustained economic growth that is expected to continue. Its economy is characterized mainly by private investments, tourism, a progressive diversification of exports but with a high dependence on the agricultural sector<sup>3</sup>.

Furthermore, due to the impact caused by the COVID-19 outbreak its economy closed in negative numbers in 2020 with a fall in GDP of around 7%, according to the International Monetary Fund. Despite this, the country has managed to overcome the health and economic emergency by manufacturing its own artificial respirators and selling nearly 20 million masks to 11 countries around the world, including Spain, France, Italy, Belgium, Germany and Mexico<sup>4</sup>. Thus, Morocco has demonstrated its efficiency in producing and exporting such medical material, but also its desire in improving its image within the

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<sup>1</sup> NEZHA ALAOUI, M’hammdi. “Las relaciones económicas de Marruecos con sus vecinos subsaharianos”. *Revista Afkar/Ideas*. IEMed, no. 28, 2010, pp. 60-63. ISSN: 1697-0403. Available at: [https://www.iemed.org/observatori/arees-danalisi/arxius-adjunts/afkar/afkar-ideas-28-1/afkar28\\_Nezha\\_Alaoui\\_es.pdf](https://www.iemed.org/observatori/arees-danalisi/arxius-adjunts/afkar/afkar-ideas-28-1/afkar28_Nezha_Alaoui_es.pdf) Consultation date: 2 February 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Santander Trade Markets, 2021. *Marruecos: Política y Economía*. Export Entreprises. Available at: <https://santandertrade.com/es/portal/analizar-mercados/marruecos/politica-y-economia> Consultation date: 2 February 2021.

<sup>4</sup> “Las mascarillas marroquíes que arrasan por todo el mundo”, *Atalayar entre dos orillas*, 13 July 2020. Available at: <https://atalayar.com/content/las-mascarillas-marroqui%C3%A0des-que-arrasan-por-todo-el-mundo> Consultation date: 3 February 2021.

international community by promoting mask diplomacy.

At societal level, unemployment and poverty rates are high and per capita income is still low, although its powerful diaspora contributes to the growth and stability of the country by sending remittances, which today constitute about 7% of the national GDP. The Moroccan diaspora is estimated to comprise between 12% and 15% of the total population of Morocco and Moroccans living abroad are mainly concentrated in the EU countries (France, Spain and Italy)<sup>5</sup>.

In short, Morocco has a great potential to develop and grow as a country. In order to achieve this, it has taken the following steps: taking measures to attract foreign direct investment, building large infrastructures within the country, intensifying its foreign policy towards sub-Saharan Africa and strengthening its relations with the West in areas such as security and defense. It is also worth noting that Morocco has a strategic position for trade between West Africa, Europe and the Middle East. When addressing these and more issues it will be sought to answer the research question of this analysis, *Morocco as emerging regional economic power?*

### **The Kingdom of Morocco strengthens its ties with the African continent**

On January 30, 2017, on the 28th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) —the former Organization of African Unity (OAU)— Morocco re-joined this international organization after three decades outside it, more specifically since 1984 when the AU recognized the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic as a full member. Morocco's return was supported by 39 of the 54 states that made it up<sup>6</sup>.

Along these lines, it should also be pointed out that on May 30, 2019, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement came into force. The aim of this agreement will be to turn Africa into one of the largest economic markets in the world, consisting of 55 African states, which is estimated at more than 1.2 billion people to date,

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<sup>5</sup> "Morocco has a sizeable diaspora living worldwide", *Oxford Business Group*, 2016. Available at: <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/analysis/home-and-away-country-has-sizeable-diaspora-living-worldwide> Consultation date: 3 February 2021.

<sup>6</sup> AMIRAH FERNÁNDEZ, Haizam. "Marruecos vuelve a la Unión Africana entre interrogantes", *Real Instituto Elcano*, 2017. Available at: <https://blog.realinstitutoelcano.org/marruecos-vuelve-a-la-union-africana-entre-interrogantes/> Consultation date: 4 February 2021.

whilst ensuring the free movement of persons, goods, and services<sup>7</sup>. Morocco, one of the signatory countries of such agreement, is favourably disposed towards the achievement of a genuine economic integration with the rest of African countries, since the Maghreb economic area, composed of the member countries of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), has not reached the expected levels of integration.

At the same time, the strengthening of relations between Morocco and the Sahel region is noteworthy. The Kingdom of Morocco is aware of the geostrategic importance of the Sahel as it is a territory that connects sub-Saharan Africa with the Maghreb and due to this fact, the first impact that Morocco receives comes both from the migratory movements that leave from the Sahelian countries to the north and from the presence of groups of jihadist terrorists in those countries. These would be two of the main reasons why Morocco is strongly involved in providing its support to help relieve the situation of instability and multidimensional crisis affecting the Sahel<sup>8</sup>.

The main contribution of Morocco to the G-5 Sahel Joint Force, which includes Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad, focuses on the security field as Morocco has conducted military training of a large number of military personnel and senior commanders from these countries. Furthermore, the religious formation of imams from West Africa has been made possible thanks to Moroccan institutions such as Mohamed VI Foundation for African Ulema, which help to spread a more tolerant and moderate view of Islam<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, Morocco and the Sahel G-5 countries have signed many bilateral cooperation agreements covering fields such as education, social development, food security, youth employment, climate change, water and electricity management, among others.

Moroccan support to the Sahel has enabled Morocco to become a new player in the region on security matters related to neutralizing terrorist movements. The general rearmament of the area has led to a gradual increase in Moroccan military spending due

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<sup>7</sup> NARANJO, José. "África da el primer paso para impulsar un mercado común", *El País*, 30 de mayo de 2019. Available at: [https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/05/29/actualidad/1559148296\\_723458.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/05/29/actualidad/1559148296_723458.html) Consultation date 5 February 2021.

<sup>8</sup> MORALES TRUEBA, Adolfo. *Aproximación occidental y africana al problema del Sahel*. Documento de Opinión IEEE 26/2011. Available at: [http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_opinion/2011/DIEEEO26\\_2011Sahel.pdf](http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2011/DIEEEO26_2011Sahel.pdf) Consultation date 6 February 2021.

<sup>9</sup> FAKIR, Intissar. "Morocco Looks South", *Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center*, 23 January 2019. Available at: <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/78189> Consultation date 7 February 2021.

to the climate of instability that affects not only the Sahel but also the Maghreb region<sup>10</sup>. The political differences and tensions between Morocco and Algeria<sup>11</sup> as well as the crisis in Libya and the intervention of Rabat in the Yemen conflict —supporting Saudi Arabia— have led, therefore, to the rearmament of Morocco<sup>12</sup>.

According to data provided by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Morocco's military spending would have increased from \$2,408 million in 2007 to \$3,461 million in 2017<sup>13</sup>. Regarding the acquisition of military equipment, 'since 2010, France and the U.S.A. are the main arm suppliers to Morocco, followed by China and the Netherlands', according to the Central Intelligence Agency<sup>14</sup>.

### Infrastructure projects in Morocco

The ambitious transport and infrastructure Moroccan projects reflect Morocco's interest and potential to become a major trading hub linking West Africa to Europe and the Middle East. These economic infrastructure projects give to Morocco a relevant role in the scenario of global competition for the leadership of value chains in the transport corridor from Africa to Western Europe<sup>15</sup>.

In other words, both the logistics infrastructure investment projects carried out in Morocco as well as its maritime and air connections have strengthened the country's position as an entrance and exit gateway to Africa and have also enabled it to improve its socio-economic reality.

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<sup>10</sup> ECHEVARRÍA JESÚS, Carlos. *La vigencia del terrorismo yihadista en el Magreb*. Documento de Opinión IEEE 16/2019. Available at: [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_opinion/2019/DIEEEO16\\_CARECH-Yihad\\_21feb.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2019/DIEEEO16_CARECH-Yihad_21feb.pdf) Consultation date 8 February 2021.

<sup>11</sup> MORAL MARTÍN, Pablo. *Marruecos y Argelia: el pulso por la primacía en el Magreb*. Documento de Opinión IEEE 36/2017. Available at: [http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_opinion/2017/DIEEEO36-2017\\_Marruecos\\_Argelia\\_Magreb\\_PabloMoral.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2017/DIEEEO36-2017_Marruecos_Argelia_Magreb_PabloMoral.pdf) Consultation date 8 February 2021.

<sup>12</sup> "Marruecos ha aumentado un 50% su gasto de defensa en una década", *Instituto de Seguridad y Cultura*, 7 de septiembre de 2018. Available at: <https://seguridadycultura.org/marruecos-ha-aumentado-un-50-su-gasto-de-defensa-en-una-decada/> Consultation date 8 February 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Datos extraídos de la página web oficial del Banco Mundial. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.CD?locations=MA>

<sup>14</sup> "Morocco. In The World Factbook", *Central Intelligence Agency*, 2021. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/morocco/#military-and-security> Consultation date 9 February 2021.

<sup>15</sup> TANCHUM, Michaël. "Morocco's Africa-to-Europe Commercial Corridor: Gatekeeper of an emerging trans-regional strategic architecture", *Austria Institut für Europa- und Sicherheitspolitik (AIES) Fokus*, 8 July 2020. Available at: <https://www.aies.at/publikationen/2020/fokus-20-08.php> Consultation date 10 February 2021.

In recent years, Morocco's interest in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) has been demonstrated by the improvement of its position in the world rankings. For example, according to the report *Where to invest in Africa*, prepared by the South African holding company Rand Merchant Bank, Morocco was ranked second as one of the best countries to invest in Africa in 2020<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, according to World Bank estimates, Morocco is the fifth largest economy in Africa after Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt and Algeria.

In addition, another reason why Morocco is considered the second-best option to invest in the continent is related to its economic projection, as the International Monetary Fund forecasts an approximate growth of its real GDP of 4.9% by 2021. The return of Morocco to the African Union and its formal request to join to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) are also considered positive factors for investing in Morocco. Apart from these factors, it should be mentioned the enactment of the Finance Law 2017 and the creation of the Moroccan Agency for Investment and Export Development as other ways of stimulating the investment climate within the country<sup>17</sup>.

In the sector of national infrastructures and within the framework of the Kingdom's 2030 National Port Strategy, the Tangier-Med port, located in the Strait of Gibraltar, is expected to continue growing and become a reference logistics hub in the Mediterranean Sea and Africa. Regarding its size, this port covers 1,000 hectares and the port industrial area 16 million m<sup>2</sup>. It can also storage of up to 9 million containers, 7 million passengers, 700,000 trucks and 1 million vehicles<sup>18</sup>. The Tangier-Med port is connected to 186 international ports from all over the world, including 38 African ports, and 20% of world's trade flows through it every year<sup>19</sup>.

According to the *Global Free Zones of the Year 2020* published by the Financial Times, Tangier-Med's free zone has come to occupy second place in the world ranking of the best free zones for foreign direct investment. More than 900 export-oriented companies

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<sup>16</sup> "África: los mejores países para invertir en 2020, según Rand Merchant Bank", *PROEXCA*, 21 February 2020. Available at: <https://proexca.es/afrika-los-mejores-paises-para-invertir-en-2020-segun-rand-merchant-bank/> Consultation date 10 February 2021.

<sup>17</sup> CABALLERO ECHEVARRÍA, Fernando. *Escenario de seguridad Magreb 2040*. Documento de Investigación IEEE 13/2018. Available at: [http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs\\_investig/2018/DIEEEEINV13-2018\\_Seguridad\\_Magreb\\_2040\\_CaballeroEcheaerria.pdf](http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_investig/2018/DIEEEEINV13-2018_Seguridad_Magreb_2040_CaballeroEcheaerria.pdf) Consultation date 11 February 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Información extraída de la página web oficial de Tánger Med. Available at: <https://www.tangermed.ma/es/>

<sup>19</sup> HERNÁNDEZ, Henar. "Tanger Med, el proyecto marroquí que aspira a dominar el Mediterráneo", *Atalayar entre dos orillas*, 8 July 2019. Available at: <https://atalayar.com/content/tanger-med-el-proyecto-marroqui%C3%AD-que-aspira-dominar-el-mediterr%C3%A1neo> Consultation date 11 February 2021.

from the automotive, textile, aeronautical, commercial, and logistic sectors have been located inside this free zone. The construction of Tangier Med has amounted to 8 billion euros of investment, more than half of which come from private initiative and the rest from public investment<sup>20</sup>.

Additionally, about 400 kilometres east of Tangier Med is the port of Nador West Med, another industrial-port platform still under construction, which will serve as a catalyst for the development of the eastern region and for maritime trade in the Mediterranean. At the head of this construction, estimated at approximately \$7.9 billion, there is a consortium with Moroccan, Luxembourg, and Turkish participation<sup>21</sup>. Regarding its annual capacities, Nador West Med port will be able to 'storage of up to 5 million containers and 3 million miscellaneous goods and process 25 million tons of hydrocarbons and 7 million tons of coal'<sup>22</sup>.

However, apart from the new ports of Tangier-Med and Nador West Med, leading port enclaves on the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, the traditional ports of Casablanca and Jorf Lasfar are also noteworthy. Indeed, 85% of Morocco's maritime trade transits through the Casablanca, Jorf Lasfar and Tangier-Med ports<sup>23</sup>. The last Moroccan port to be underlined is known as Atlantic Dakhla, which is budgeted at 1 billion euros. Its financing comes from European and US<sup>24</sup> funds which are expected to boost the development of regional sectors such as fisheries, agriculture, energy, tourism, manufacturing industries, among others<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> G. MAESTRO, Goyo. "Tanger Med se convierte en el puerto con más capacidad de carga del Mediterráneo", *La Razón*, 28 June 2019. Available at: <https://www.larazon.es/internacional/tanger-med-se-convierte-en-el-puerto-con-mas-capacidad-de-carga-del-mediterraneo-BP23972267/> Consultation date 11 February 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Upgrades to ports set to turn Morocco into a regional shipment hub", *Oxford Business Group*, 2020. Available at: <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/analysis/wider-berth-government-upgrading-country%E2%80%99s-ports-eye-transforming-morocco-regional-shipment-hub> Consultation date 12 February 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Información extraída de la página web oficial de Nador West Med. Available at: <https://www.nadorwestmed.ma/fr/projets>

<sup>23</sup> FERRERA, Pablo. "Marruecos se acerca al ecuador de su estrategia portuaria 2030", *Atalayar entre dos orillas*, 19 December 2020. Available at: <https://atalayar.com/content/marruecos-se-acerca-al-ecuador-de-su-estrategia-portuaria-2030> Consultation date 13 February 2021.

<sup>24</sup> R.L.P. "Las mareantes cifras del Dakhla Atlántico, el puerto que más daño hará a Canarias", *ABC*, 26 July 2019. Available at: [https://www.abc.es/espana/canarias/abci-mareantes-cifras-dakhla-atlantico-puerto-mas-dano-hara-canarias-201907260817\\_noticia.html#disqus\\_thread](https://www.abc.es/espana/canarias/abci-mareantes-cifras-dakhla-atlantico-puerto-mas-dano-hara-canarias-201907260817_noticia.html#disqus_thread) Consultation date 13 February 2021.

<sup>25</sup> "Nuevo puerto de Dakhla Atlantique", *Ministerio de Equipamiento, Transporte, Logística y Agua de Marruecos*. En: Puertos y Dominio Público Marítimo, 31 October 2020. Available at: <http://www.equipement.gov.ma/ports/Grands-Projets/Pages/Nouveau-port-de-Dakhla-Atlantique.aspx>

On the other hand, there are different sorts of transport infrastructures apart from the industrial ports that have been mentioned. Other examples include the roads and motorways network that has been built and expanded in order to facilitate the connection with the country's commercial centres and urban areas as well as the first high-speed train, known as *Al Boraq*, which is a pioneer in the Maghreb region but also in Africa and that connects the metropolises of Tangier and Casablanca, with stops in Rabat and Kenitra<sup>26</sup>. On the one hand, Morocco and France became involved in financing the railway line with a share of 27% and 51%, respectively, and, on the other hand, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia and Kuwait took part in with the remaining 22% through development funds<sup>27</sup>. The purpose of this railway network will be to create a commercial transport corridor from the north of the country to the southern border with Mauritania.

Another emblematic land transport infrastructure is the Mohamed VI bridge, which was inaugurated in 2016 and it is the largest cable-stayed bridge in Africa with 950 meters long that connects the capital, Rabat, with the city of Salé. Its budget is around 72 million euros, and it has received funding from the European Investment Bank (EIB)<sup>28</sup>. This construction, carried out by a Chinese company, has enabled to divert the Rabat motorway to shorten the distance between the two cities and reduce traffic congestion.

In the energy field, the Moroccan Agency for Sustainable Energy (MASEN) has been the responsible for managing the development of the four-plant solar power complex placed in Noor-Ouarzazate, which has become the largest concentrated solar power plant in Africa and one of the largest in the world<sup>29</sup>. According to the World Bank, Morocco's purpose for 2030 is to produce 52 % of its electricity through renewable energy and the

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Consultation date 13 February 2021.

<sup>26</sup> "SM el Rey y el presidente francés inauguran el tren de alta velocidad «Al Boraq» que une Tánger a Casablanca", *Embajada del Reino de Marruecos en Madrid*, 2018. Available at: <http://www.embajada-marruecos.es/sm-el-rey-y-el-presidente-frances-inauguran-el-tren-de-alta-velocidad-al-boraq-que-une-tanger-a-casablanca/> Consultation date 14 February 2021.

<sup>27</sup> "Marruecos apunta a convertirse en el centro de las comunicaciones entre África occidental, Europa y Oriente Medio", *Atalayar entre dos orillas*, 8 July 2020. Available at: <https://atalayar.com/content/marruecos-apunta-convertirse-en-el-centro-de-las-comunicaciones-entre-%C3%A1frica-occidenta> Consultation date 15 February 2021.

<sup>28</sup> PEREGIL, Francisco. "Mohamed VI se apoya en enormes infraestructuras para diseñar el Marruecos del futuro", *El País*, 29 July 2019. Available at: [https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/07/28/actualidad/1564327010\\_522214.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/07/28/actualidad/1564327010_522214.html) Consultation date 16 February 2021.

<sup>29</sup> "Marruecos está preparado para hacer historia con la primera planta de energía solar en su tipo", *The World Bank Group*, 20 November 2015. Available at: <https://www.bancomundial.org/es/news/feature/2015/11/20/morocco-to-make-history-with-first-of-its-kind-solar-plant> Consultation date 16 February 2021.



Noor-Ouarzazate solar complex will supply electricity to more than one million Moroccans and there is also a possibility for exporting part of it to Europe. This project has been financed multilaterally through loans from the World Bank, the African Development Bank (ADB) and other European financial institutions. Additionally, the Noor-Midelt solar power installation is equally relevant because once it is completed it will be the second largest in Morocco<sup>30</sup>.

### **Growing trade relations between Morocco and Africa**

Morocco's wish in narrowing differences and deepening ties with its African counterparts is by no means recent, as it has been taking steady steps in this direction since the early 2000s. Since the accession to the throne of Mohammed VI in 1999, the King has pursued a vigorous and dynamic pan-African diplomacy that has led him to undertake more than forty official trips to more than thirty countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Some of those countries visited are Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Gabon, Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Rwanda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Ghana and the Republic of Guinea<sup>31</sup>.

These official trips were originally intended to establish trade agreements, strengthen economic ties, and facilitate Morocco's outward foreign direct investment in those countries. This economic diplomacy has become over time a powerful soft power instrument or source through which multisectoral cooperation agreements have been signed. Moreover, investment projects have also been funded and it has been reinforced what is known as South-South cooperation<sup>32</sup>.

There are, by the same token, other types and modes of cooperation such as bilateral, multilateral and triangular cooperation. In the first one, the main tool used between Morocco and the other African countries are the public or private partnerships

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<sup>30</sup> "World Bank Approves Additional Financing for Morocco to Develop a Second Solar Power Complex", *World Bank Organization*, The World Bank Group, 11 June 2018. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/06/11/additional-financing-for-morocco-to-develop-a-second-solar-power-complex> Consultation date 16 February 2021.

<sup>31</sup> COLOGÁN Y GONZÁLEZ-MASSIEU, Jorge. "La política de cooperación al desarrollo del Reino de Marruecos: nuevo actor emergente de la Cooperación Sur-Sur en África". *Revista De Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos*. Taller de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos, Departamento de Estudios Árabes e Islámicos, no. 22, 2017, pp. 55-76. ISSN: 1887-4460. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.15366/reim2017.22.003> Consultation date 17 February 2021.

<sup>32</sup> EL HOUDAIGUI, Rachid. "La politique étrangère de Mohammed VI ou la renaissance d'une 'puissance relationnelle'". En AAVV (2010): *Une décennie de réformes au Maroc (1999-2009)*, *Centre d'Études Internationales*. Paris : Karthala, 2010, p. 9.

agreements<sup>33</sup>. Another significant tool to highlight is the direct funding of infrastructures and the voluntary donations made by Rabat<sup>34</sup>.

An example of bilateral cooperation is the mega-project signed between Morocco and Nigeria in 2017 for the construction of a transnational submarine gas pipeline. It is expected to have a length of more than 5,000 kilometres—it will be one of the longest in the world—and will connect Nigeria to Morocco along the Atlantic Coast. Moreover, it could be able to reach Europe via Spain from Morocco. Regarding its financing, sovereign wealth funds from both countries have been involved, but new investors are being sought. Finally, its construction will take place in different phases and once it is finished it will be able to provide gas to every coastal country in West Africa<sup>35</sup>.

In relation to multilateral cooperation, the Kingdom of Morocco has an active presence in various international organizations. For example, it held the presidency of the G-77 group in 2003 and not only did it defend the interests of developing countries, but it also promoted cooperation among sub-Saharan African States<sup>36</sup>.

Finally, regarding triangular cooperation, the Moroccan Agency for International Cooperation oversees looking for the actors that can provide financial support to the other two involved countries, namely Morocco and another state from the global south. The partnerships agreements among Japan, Morocco and French-speaking countries in Africa on matters related to sea fishing, agriculture, port management, water sanitation, women's and children's health are an example of such cooperation<sup>37</sup>.

In the economic sphere, given the progressive growth of the continent Morocco is leading its efforts into Africa. In the last decade, Africa has experienced a sustained economic growth of almost 5% and it has become a pole of global growth due to the presence and role that other powers such as China and several international companies play within it<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> COLOGÁN Y GONZÁLEZ-MASSIEU, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>34</sup> COLOGÁN Y GONZÁLEZ-MASSIEU, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>35</sup> ROCA, Ramón. "Un 'megagasoducto' submarino de 20.000 millones de inversión conectaría Nigeria con España", *El Periódico de la Energía*, 28 March 2018. Available at: <https://elperiodicodelaenergia.com/un-megagasoducto-submarino-de-20-000-millones-de-inversion-conectaria-nigeria-con-espana/> Consultation date 19 February 2021.

<sup>36</sup> COLOGÁN Y GONZÁLEZ-MASSIEU, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>37</sup> COLOGÁN Y GONZÁLEZ-MASSIEU, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>38</sup> CAMPS-FEBRER, Blanca y MATEOS MARTÍN, Óscar. "Marruecos y su nueva Política Exterior hacia África. Continuidades, Discontinuidades y Perspectivas". *Comillas Journal of International Relations*. España: Universidad Pontificia Comillas, no.13, 2018, pp. 63-77. DOI: 10.14422/cir.i13.y2018.005. Available at: <https://revistas.comillas.edu/index.php/internationalrelations/article/view/10697/10090>

In trade terms, between 1999 and 2014 Morocco achieved steady annual growth of 14.7% with sub-Saharan Africa<sup>39</sup>. However, sub-Saharan Africa's share in Morocco's foreign trade remains low in comparison with other Moroccan trade partners such as the European Union and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries. Proof of the foregoing is that in 2015 Morocco's total trade volume with the EU was 56.7% and with MENA region 15.3%, while with sub-Saharan Africa it only reached 3.4%<sup>40</sup>. The reasons for this are due to the lack of developed transport infrastructures, the limited diversification of Moroccan exports, the non-adaptation to demand of sub-Saharan products and the restrictive nature of trade regimes in West African countries<sup>41</sup>.

On the contrary, Morocco's outward foreign direct investment (FDI) in sub-Saharan Africa has been high and figures show this: between 2008 and 2013, FDI outflows from Morocco accounted for about 63%, reaching a peak of 88.2% in 2010<sup>42</sup>; nevertheless in 2015 the result stood at 40% and it rose again to 85% in 2016, according to estimates by the African Development Bank. Taking these percentages into consideration it can be said that Morocco is currently the second-largest African investor in the continent behind South Africa and the top investor in West Africa<sup>43</sup>.

In addition, its portfolio of investments includes high value-added sectors such as banking, telecommunications or industrial. Yet the banking sector is the main recipient of Moroccan investment flows. Indeed, between 2008 and 2013, it represented 41.6%. In line with the above, both the Attijariwafa and the Banque Centrale Populaire (BCP), two of the most important Moroccan banking groups, joined the ranking of the top ten financial

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Consultation date 21 February 2021.

<sup>39</sup> LO, Moubarak, et al. "Relations Maroc-Afrique subsaharienne: quel bilan pour les 15 dernières années?", *OCP Policy Center*, 23 November 2016, p. 60. Available at: <https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/OCPPC-RP1610v2.pdf> Consultation date 22 February 2021.

<sup>40</sup> BERAHAB, Rim. "Relations between Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa: What is the potential for trade and foreign direct investment?", *OCP Policy Center*, February 2017, p. 1. Available at: <https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/OCPPC-PB1704vEn.pdf> Consultation date 22 February 2021.

<sup>41</sup> NAMANE, Walid & GHARBAOUI, Soufian. "What Morocco's Apparent Pivot to Sub-Saharan Africa Means", *The Johns Hopkins SAIS-Delma Institute Partnership on Geo-Economic Multiplicity*, 15 March 2017. Available at: <https://emerge85.io/insights/what-moroccos-apparent-pivot-to-sub-saharan-africa-means/> Consultation date 23 February 2021.

<sup>42</sup> LO, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>43</sup> LOUW-VAUDRAN, Liesl. "La Expansión de Marruecos en África, Impulsada por Imperativos Económicos", *Anuario Internacional CIDOB*, 2019. Available at: <http://anuariocidob.org/la-expansion-de-marruecos-en-africa-impulsada-por-imperativos-economicos/> Consultation date 25 February 2021.

institutions in Africa in 2013<sup>44</sup>.

Many of these Moroccan companies have acquired a great technical know-how thanks to its direct contact with other African companies and institutions, which has given Morocco a competitive advantage. In the field of telecommunications, the case of Maroc Telecom is noteworthy, as it is the main Moroccan company in the sector that has managed to expand in other African countries and acquire shares in other national operators<sup>45</sup>.

Finally, the group OCP (formerly Office Chérifien des Phosphates) is a world-leading Moroccan state-owned company with exclusive access to the exploitation and marketing of 70% of the world's phosphate reserves, which Morocco exports to the whole world<sup>46</sup>. According to the African Economic Outlook 2017, the company OCP is the fifth largest investor in Africa and its outward investment amounted to 4.2 billion dollars between 2015 and 2016<sup>47</sup>.

## Conclusions

To summarize, Morocco's infrastructures development has improved its land, maritime and air connections with a view to increasing the transit of people and goods that already position it as a major communications hub in North Africa. Moreover, Rabat has also aimed to strengthen its geopolitical position and project its own influence into Africa.

Secondly, Morocco's commitment to becoming a power on the continent has also involved linking up with Africa's largest political organization, which will help it to try to secure support for its own interests as a nation. Similarly, closer economic ties with other African countries have made Morocco a relevant continental player as an emerging market.

Overall, in the new geopolitical reconfiguration of the planet, and within the framework of

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<sup>44</sup> ADRIAN RAYMOND, Paul. "Moroccan expands clout in sub-saharan africa", *Aljazeera*, 15 April 2014. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2014/4/15/morocco-expands-clout-in-sub-saharan-africa> Consultation date 25 February 2021.

<sup>45</sup> SÁNCHEZ SERNEGUE, Carolina. "Marruecos puerta de África 2018". ICEX España Exportación e Inversiones, E.P.E., M.P., 26 February 2018, p. 20. Available at: <https://www.icex.es/icex/es/navegacion-principal/todos-nuestros-servicios/informacion-de-mercados/paises/navegacion-principal/el-mercado/estudios-informes/DOC2018781266.html?idPais=MA> Consultation date 26 February 2021.

<sup>46</sup> Información extraída de la página web oficial del grupo OCP. Available at: <https://www.ocpgroup.ma/>

<sup>47</sup> African Development Bank, OECD and United Nations Development Programme, 2017. *African Economic Outlook 2017 - Entrepreneurship and Industrialisation*. OECD Development Centre. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/aeo-2017-en> Consultation date 26 February 2021.

a continent that is increasingly active and with more specific weight and interest on a global scale such as Africa, Morocco's bid to become a powerful regional power seems to be taking firm steps in this direction.

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