

## **The role of nongovernmental actors in the development of relationships between Morocco and Spain**

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The ongoing study on the relationship between Morocco and Spain: levers of a strategy for sustainable cooperation is based on the observation that despite the good relations between the two countries, often illustrated in the official speech, the two countries are not protected from transient pressures which have certainly deeper effect on Moroccan public. It is of common sense, realism and pragmatism that efforts shall be made to enhance and develop these relations. Since the 80s of the past century, and due to economic, social and governmental interdependence between the two countries, the officials never ceased stressing on the need of closer bilateral ties, which can be obtained by deepening economic interdependence, institutionalizing political dialogue and strengthening the participation of civil societies.

Civil society reflects the vitality of a democratic country and this is a citizen participation indicator and democratic participative activities.

According to Putnam, civil society is a fundamental mechanism of social articulation. This is an indicator of quality and social policy. Its importance is measured by the degree of commitment assumed by civic values conveyed and developed by the rigor and consistency of the control over government actions. Because it is an actor of civic engagement, and because it operates within the political system, it is part of the political society, although not belonging directly to the formal structures of the state. The actors of civil society have a vocation which is that of causing change through the influence that they are able to exercise over political, economic or media powers or through direct intervention. They have the ability to make favorable public debate and create awareness and generate memberships. In the globalized world we live in a civil society that leads to increasingly transnational and transborder actions. In fact, we are speaking nowadays of global civil society.

For all these reasons, Morocco and Spain, and all those who want the relations between the two countries to be improved and strengthened, can bet on non-governmental actors.

In Morocco we have a long tradition of active citizen action. The citizens' movement has existed for decades, for example, the first women's association was created in the 40s of last century.

Moroccan civil society is well structured and has a capacity for action and is of considerable influence. It develops more and more transnational activities (at the international, Arab or Maghribian levels: active in the world social forum in the alterglobalist movement ...). This is primarily a force of opposition, yet an important player in terms of awareness or advocacy on all matters relating to the public and in terms of monitoring of public policies. This is what the Civil Society Index (CSI) just confirmed. Indeed, this index was made public on Wednesday, March 16<sup>th</sup>. This index is an indicator to understand and assess the state of civil society in a

given country. It also allows the development of a dynamic civil society to channel such society toward priority areas. In Morocco, the project was led by the associative space with support from UNDP.

It shows that the Moroccan associative tissue benefits from a wider audience like Parliament, government and even political parties, with whom it combines its actions by acting either as a relay or as a force of opposition. Actors of civil society, with their proximity to the population, their independence and civic engagement for human development, take advantage of major assets to support a large part of people's legitimate concerns.

They also show that despite the dynamic Moroccan civil society has known in recent years, particularly since the 80s of last century, its role remains undervalued by the public. Moroccan civil society has a commendable independence due to the fact that it is financially independent. However, therein lays the major obstacle to its action. Associations are generated by volunteering; for more than half receive no State funding and support from foreign donors is limited.

The Moroccan associative is quite homologated with that of other countries, including Spain, with which it is required to work for the good of the relationships that combine the two countries. All associative networks constitute a social capital which Morocco and Spain can and should make it profitable for better relations between them.

Spanish civil society is also a significant social capital. It has gone through a significant boost thanks to the democratic transition, according to Victor Perez Diaz, author of Civil Society, public sphere and private sphere. There has been an achievement in the Associative tissue in Spain between the two millennia. Before, there was in Spain an important part of associations of poor quality or "uncivil", with an unequal ability to influence or encourage debate and create public opinion.

Trade unions and cultural and sports associations made up the column spine of associations. In recent years, civil society addresses new problems posed by the globalized society of 21<sup>st</sup> century bustling beyond national borders. In Morocco we know something thereabout.

How the two civil societies perceive themselves? Are there any contacts or actions in common?

Relations between the two civil societies have developed and diversified since the 90s of the last century. Efforts have been made to the reconciliation and a better knowledge of the existing civil potentials in both countries. In 2003 a very laudable initiative was undertaken by the Three Cultures Foundation which was then chaired by André Azoulay. A meeting between Moroccan civil society and that of Andalusia took place in Seville, where dozens of associations and non-governmental actors involved in different sectors had met, and where interesting workshops were held to create synergies. Unfortunately they did not continue their actions. However we have discovered that:

1. The widespread negative image of Morocco in Spain is also reflected in the mirror of Spanish civil society: insufficient knowledge, prejudices and stereotypes;
2. The general context has a direct relationship between the two countries, marked by ups and downs;

3. The Sahara issue and the question of the territorial unity of Morocco persist and act as a filter of Spanish opinion of Morocco regarding the Moroccan Sahara and the Moroccan opinion of Spain regarding the Sahara and presidios. These questions remain as a condition to the relations between civil society actors.
4. Nevertheless: Moroccan immigration, the Spanish tourists in Morocco, development of bilateral relations, Spanish public policy for promoting cooperation with Morocco, the European and Euro Mediterranean policy, all are elements when tackled by the civil society, constitute a favorable context.

For both Spanish and Moroccans, this implies an offering of new possibilities for further action. For Moroccans, this suggests a new type of relationship with their Spanish counterparts. However, political tensions resurface and often sides are taken. Also, the lack of unequal conditions for cooperation offered to Spanish actors who continue to do what Moroccans are not allowed to do, due to human rights or other, restrict the development of cooperation between the two civil societies. This also leads to continuous talks about the actions of Spanish actors in Morocco while it is never the other way around.

The literature produced by Spanish in terms of Spanish citizen action vis-avis Morocco, tells us much about the types of actors, their position in relation to certain issues, the fields of action in which they invest and their intervention methods.

Very briefly, taking into account the multiplicity of actors involved, one notices that Spanish civil society is mobilized around the following issues: The development cooperation, migration issues and Sahara issue. Also they are mobilized a little towards the promotion of bilateral relations.

- Development Cooperation: If we take into account the Plan Director of Spanish Cooperation 2008-2012, Morocco for Spain is a priority country in terms of major Spanish public funding institutions, (central government, and autonomous regions). Many NGOs have chosen Morocco as an action field. According to Spanish studies, their work did not enjoy sufficient visibility and Morocco is considered a complex country. To my knowledge there are no studies of either side on the Moroccan identity, the real objectives, types and arrangements intervention and the results of the actions of these associations on Moroccan territory.
- The migration issue: There are multiple initiatives, be they Spanish or only articulated with Moroccan associations. However, are there any common intervention strategies?
- Sahara issue: It is a movement of pro Sahrawi and anti Moroccan, for and in which dozens of associations and a large number of players everywhere are seeking for decades to denounce what they describe as illegal occupying force of the Sahara. That is, Morocco is creating amalgams like the problem of the Sahara; hence Morocco is not a democratic country. Spanish excessive activism in this area cannot be perceived and interpreted by the Moroccan civil society but in relation to a colonial past and a conservative ideology that we know. This activism has a significant popular base in Spain. It has been repeatedly led to tensions between the two countries. For instance, the unfortunate symbolic pro Sahara self-determination referendum organized in Andalusia in 2001 and many others and it interferes a lot in Morocco's image and has an influence over citizen's action vis-à-vis our country.

- In some Spanish literature, one refers to the absence of legal, statutory local circumstances as blocking the Spanish Civil Action in Morocco. Moroccan Citizens in general have questions about the limits of certain Spanish activism where lack of objectivity even in the application and defense of human rights is obvious. They also complain about the lack of trans-border Moroccan activism in favor of national territory issues.
- The promotion of bilateral relations: It is a subject which has been for the past years about citizens' actions and good initiatives which is certainly limited and ephemeral, to the reconciliation between the two countries and their respective companies. Some are Spanish, others are Hispano-Moroccan. I will quote to illustrate the first group: Alcantara Association for the development of relations between Morocco and Spain in Granada and Tetouan- Tangier, Association of Hispano-Moroccan Friendship Azahra (Asturias), the association of Asadaka- Amistad by peoples of Spain and Morocco (Madrid). Promoting reconciliation between the two peoples through mutual knowledge, upgrading of the historical and common cultural heritage is the objective of Andalusian Legacy for example.

The challenges ahead are very significant

For Spanish:

- Do not get contaminated by the more dominant perceptions
- Assume the difficulties linked to the Moroccan context specificities

For Moroccan:

- Overcoming negative perceptions prevailing in Spain.
- Find new ways of cooperation with civil Spanish society.
- Having more mobility to Spain because there is no balance of fairness between the two sides due to the visa problem that restricts the mobility of Moroccan actors who are not a part of the government.
- Establishing a common citizen strategy that may affect public opinion in Spain.
- Winning a space to speak in Spain.