

The New EU Agenda for the Southern Mediterranean: Prospects for Morocco¹

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Over 25 years after the launch of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) in the 1995 Barcelona Conference, the Mediterranean geographical area continues to be subject to the reflection and conceptualisation of the European Union (EU) with the aim of firmly establishing this strategic neighbourhood relationship and addressing the progress of the inherent challenges.

Since then several initiatives have marked the Euro-Mediterranean framework as stages on the path that claimed to be the result of a joint reflection, i.e. a dialogue between the two shores of the Mediterranean on the future of relations between the EU and its southern neighbourhood.

Thus, in the case of Morocco, the Association Agreement signed with the EU in 2000 preceded by several years the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 and the implementation of an Advanced Status of Morocco in the Mediterranean space in 2008. Indeed, this evolving process reflects the EU's concern to define a framework adapted to manage its relations with the southern neighbourhood – following the consecutive enlargements of the EU – but also and mainly to reposition itself politically and strategically on the southern side. Actively engaged in the different Euro-Mediterranean fora (Mediterranean Forum, Forum 5+5), Morocco in its turn has always sought a differentiated treatment in its relations with the EU. The consolidation of the *acquis* and the opening of prospects toward co-responsibility and co-decision are among the main components of the Moroccan approach in order to advance the Euro-Mediterranean integration process.

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1. The interviews used in this articles were conducted by Youssef El Jai, Research Assistant in Economics, PNCS.

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The geopolitical changes in the region led the EU to reassess in 2011 and 2015 the contents and the mode of management of the ENP in order to address the challenges posed by a changing neighbourhood. Nevertheless this concern with adaptation and renewal went hand in hand with a questioning of the southern countries over their weak involvement in the conceptualisation and monitoring of the EMP and the limited effectiveness of their inclusion to ensure a space of common values and shared prosperity. We could henceforth ponder the effectiveness of the partnership approach of the ENP, notably after the successive reassessments in 2011 and 2015, and evaluate in a second step the scope of the new European offer presented in February 2021 as a “renewal”. Finally, and in the framework of this new European agenda for the southern neighbourhood, could we consider the opportunity of defining the spheres of innovative and promising cooperation that can achieve a convergence of approach and strengthen the effort to “renew” Morocco-EU relations?

Contextualisation of Morocco-EU Relations in the Framework of the ENP

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The adoption in 2008 of the Advanced Status and the signing in March 2015 of its Action Plan for its implementation have defined the shared ambition of consolidating the multi-dimensional nature of the partnership. Structured around four axes (equitable access to social services, democratic governance and the rule of law, employment and inclusive growth, and strengthening the capabilities of civil society), the priorities of the Morocco-EU partnership have profited from a financial support that should amount to €1.4 billion between 2014 and 2020 in the framework of the new financial European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), which stemmed from the guidelines included in the Communication of 25 May 2011, advocating a “more funds for more reform” approach.

Following the judgement issued in 2015 by the Court of the EU on the Association Agreement between the EU and Morocco, the political dialogue with the EU would be suspended until 2019.

Signed in November in 2014, the Single Support Framework reflects the EU’s recognition of the singularity of its partnership with Morocco (support for the reforms started in 2011) and emphasises the appropriateness of the cooperation chosen by the EU with Morocco’s strategic priorities. These guidelines also match the objectives of the Framework Agreement on the “Advanced Status and its Action Plan”. Morocco has also benefitted from additional budgetary allocations in the framework of the Multi-Country Programme, allocated according to the progress made in consolidating democracy (European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, Development Cooperation Instrument...).

However, and following the judgement issued in December 2015 by the Court of Justice of the European Union for the annulment of the Council decision of 8 March

2012 concerning the conclusion of a deal amending the Association Agreement between the EU and Morocco, the latter suspended the political dialogue with the EU until January 2019. The partnership dynamic affected by this hiatus could not experience a qualitative development despite the continuation of sectoral cooperation. Due to lack of formal political consultations, the partnership did not therefore define any new priority, while the Single Support Framework had expired and a new revision of the ENP had been published in November 2015. Acknowledging the boundaries of the preceding 2011 strategy, based on the principle of “more funds for more reforms”, the 2015 revision advocated a new approach characterised by more flexibility (differentiation) and the intensification of local ownership. With respect to Morocco, the Single Support Framework was extended by the Commission until 2018 and the Advanced Status prolonged until 2020.

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Thanks to the Morocco-EU Association Council, in June 2019, new prospects beyond the Advanced Status were explored in order to achieve a “Euro-Moroccan partnership for shared prosperity”. Following a flexible approach adapted to the two parties, the Declaration issued by the Council also sought to be a preliminary stage to the definition of the strategic axes of Morocco-EU cooperation, which should be operative from 2020. Morocco and the EU are therefore committed to pursuing the joint reflection in order to reshape their contractual bond. Also and despite the period of inaction from 2015 to 2019, the principles stressed in the re-assessment of the ENP, i.e. differentiation and common ownership of the contractual framework, are at the core of the re-launch of the Morocco-EU partnership.

Towards a Renewed Partnership of the EU with the Southern Neighbourhood? Prospects for Morocco

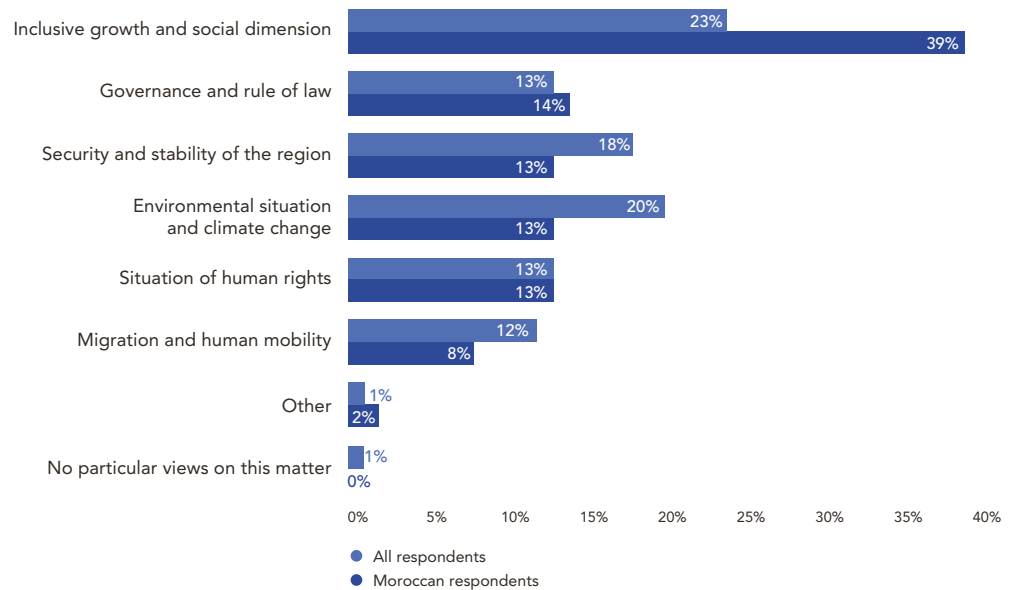
Based on the vision of the Green Deal, the European Commission introduced in the Joint Communication of 9 February 2021 a new southern neighbourhood proposal structured around five key fields: human development, good governance and the rule of law; resilience, prosperity and digital transition; peace and security; migration and mobility; and green transition. The new agenda aims at a green, digital, resilient and fair recovery, guided by the sustainable development programme by 2030, the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal. By placing the climate and environmental challenges at the core of its action, the new ENP puts forward a new philosophy in the revision of the Partnership: the acquis achieved in the previous phases will henceforth result in a substantial evolution and tangible prospects. It provides for specific proposals in each neighbourhood country that can be transformed into a new roadmap of bilateral relations.

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The public survey conducted by the IEMed with a sample of the Moroccan population highlights that they see inclusive growth and climate change as challenges and opportunities common to the two partners.

While the findings of the Survey show that economic inclusion and climate change are the main common challenges in the region, the responses of the Moroccan experts attach greater importance to economic inclusion as a challenge (graph 1) and an opportunity (graph 2).

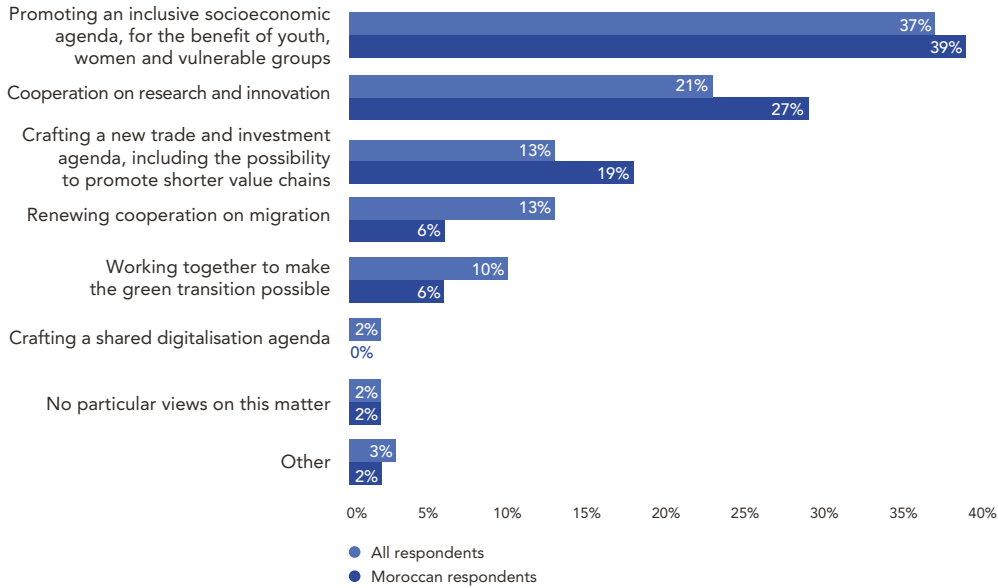
Graph 1: Q.1 For which of the following challenges are greater efforts needed?
(Ranked as first option)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the EuroMeSCo Euromed Survey

In terms of opportunities for both the EU and the neighbouring countries, the promotion of a socially-inclusive agenda is considered the main priority. It is worth noting that the responses from Moroccan experts also underline the importance of cooperation in terms of research and innovation.

Graph 2: Q.2 What are the main opportunities that the European Union and its southern partners should jointly seize? (Ranked as first option)



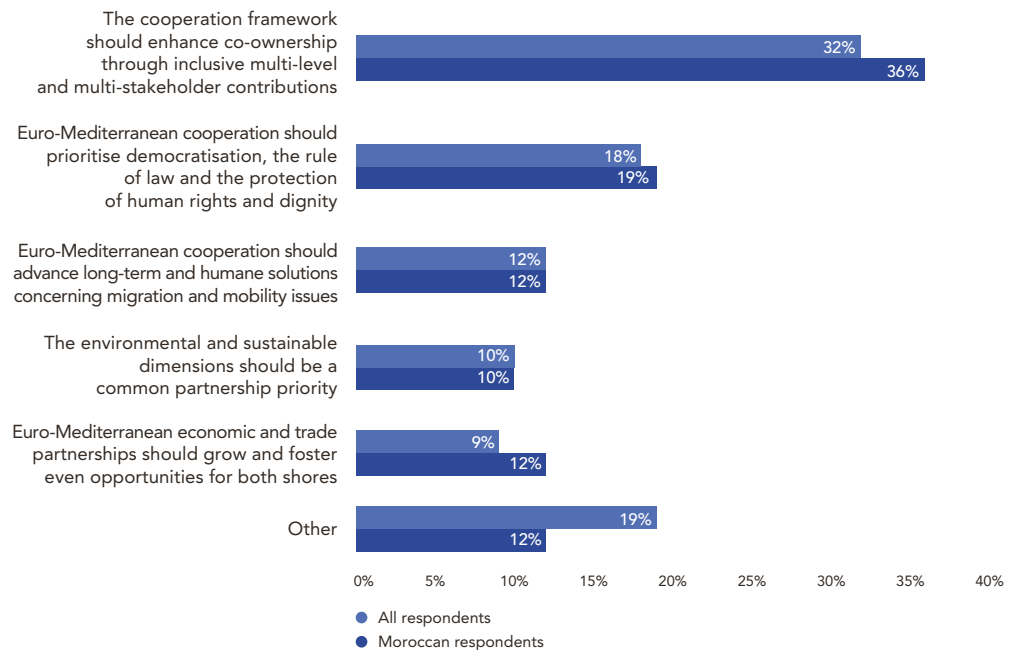
Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the EuroMeSCo Euromed Survey

From the official point of view, Morocco has welcomed the Communication of 9 February 2021 as well as its flagship projects, which also meet the priorities of its development policy and the four axes defined in the Morocco-EU “Joint Political Declaration” adopted in June 2019. However, the intentions expressed by Morocco through the declarations and exchanges with the different European leaders prioritise the need to avoid the ENP being solely conceived through the financial prism and for it to aspire to rebuild a balanced and effective partnership with greater involvement of the neighbourhood countries in the decisions.

Coinciding with this element, the Survey shows how the revision of the cooperation framework and the improvement of its governance are seen as the goals to be achieved by 2030.

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Graph 3: Q.8 What should change by 2030 in order for you to assess that the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation has delivered? (Categories developed from the open-ended answers)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the EuroMeSCo Euromed Survey

Morocco wishes its Advanced Status with the EU to also be expressed in the support for joint actions on issues such as the environment, security, migration and regional integration.

For this reason, Morocco wishes its Advanced Status with the EU to not only be expressed in the support for economic and social development programmes but also to ensure a permanent dialogue and joint actions on issues such as the environment, security, migration and regional integration. In this regard in the region, Morocco has most agreements, links and common ground with the European policies and priorities. Thus, the challenge of this new phase of Euro-Moroccan relations is to jointly identify and decide on the support of the EU to back the transition of the Moroccan economy and its orientation towards more sustainable and inclusive modes of production.

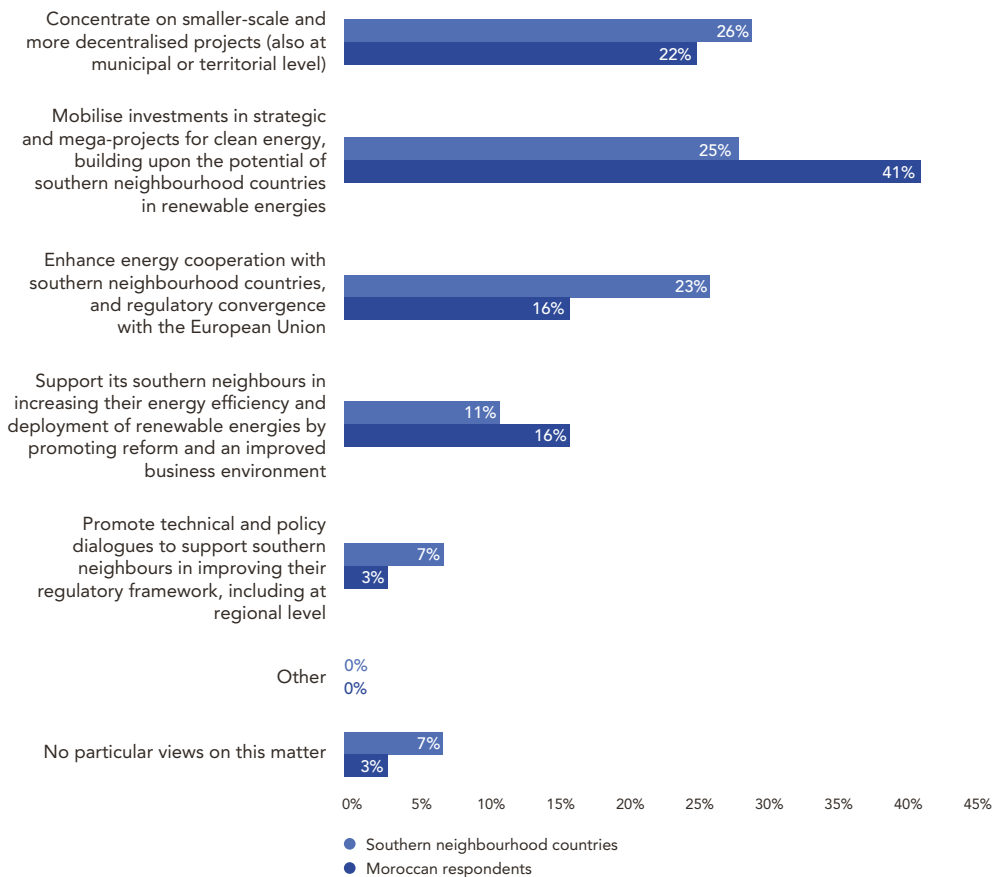
Already engaged in the transformation of its production processes to address the impact of climate change, Morocco could benefit through the new ENP from opportunities to catalyse the green, digital and smart transformation of its economy. In the framework of the transition in Europe towards a more sustainable agriculture, the Green Deal therefore offers promising prospects for the Moroccan agricultural sector. Morocco, after having extensively invested in its Plan Maroc Vert, is preparing the implementation of its new "Stratégie Génération Verte 2020-2030", which would open access to the European market, without limitation of quotas, if the revision of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was effectively implemented. The transition towards a green carbon-free industry could also open prospects for

innovative cooperation. Morocco is firmly engaged in the green transition of its industry by choosing the decarbonisation of its production modes. The main axes of the Industrial Recovery Plan 2021-2023 include the positioning of the Kingdom as a carbon-free and circular industrial base. Morocco has also launched support programmes aimed at industrial enterprises to develop carbon-free production modes and back the emergence of green industrial chains and the reduction of pollution. Finally, the transition towards clean energy is a sector of convergence between Morocco and the EU. Morocco’s pro-active energy strategy for 2030 assigns a central place to renewable energies and energy efficiency.

The transition towards clean energy opens new prospects for innovative cooperation and is a sector of convergence between Morocco and the EU.

In this respect, the responses from the Moroccan experts also reveal the central role of renewable energies, clearly differing from the responses from the countries in the rest of the region (graph 4).

Graph 4: Q.18 What should the European Union do to accompany the energy transition of the southern neighbourhood countries? (Ranked as first option)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the EuroMeSCo Euromed Survey

Beyond the major renewable energy projects with their significant potential for solar and wind energies, Morocco aspires to become a key actor in the development of green hydrogen due to its geographical location, energy interconnections and exceptional renewable energy resources.

With green hydrogen, a technological solution to decarbonise industry, the EU could support the creation of an energy ecosystem and open the way to a substantially innovative partnership.

Green hydrogen is in this respect a technological solution to decarbonise industry, notably in the production of fertilisers. The EU could in this perspective support the creation of an energy ecosystem around common objectives, as well as translating the points of convergence of the Moroccan-European approaches and priorities, thereby opening the way to a substantially innovative partnership. This dynamic could also influence the respective trajectories of the EU with the partner countries and boost cooperation with the southern neighbourhood in a framework marked by the challenge of innovation, sustainability and growth.

While the Barcelona Declaration aimed to create an area of peace and shared prosperity, over two decades later the Mediterranean region is facing the challenges aggravated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges demand a new reflection as well as the principle of resilience in all approaches and highlight the need to work for more solidarity, in line with the founding principles of the EMP.