

ANALYZING MOROCCAN MIGRATION DIPLOMACY IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

ANALYSE DE LA DIPLOMATIE MIGRATOIRE MAROCAINE DANS LE CONTEXTE DE LA POLITIQUE EUROPEENNE DE VOISINAGE

Abderrazak BAIBAH[□]

University of Mohammed the First

Abdelkader ECH-CHARFI[□]

University of Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdella

Abstract:

The intricate tapestry of international relations and diplomacy is often shaped by the movement of people across borders, a phenomenon that has garnered significant attention in the realm of global politics. Among the nations navigating this complex landscape, Morocco stands out for its strategic approach to migration diplomacy, especially in the context of its interactions with neighboring countries. This article aims to delve into the nuanced analysis of Moroccan migration diplomacy, exploring its implications, strategies, and outcomes in relation to the kingdom's neighborhood policies. By examining the multifaceted dimensions of Morocco's diplomatic engagements, from bilateral agreements to broader regional frameworks, this study seeks to shed light on the role of migration in shaping geopolitical dynamics and fostering cooperation in the North African and Mediterranean contexts. Through this exploration, the article contributes to the broader discourse on migration diplomacy, offering insights into its potential as a tool for enhancing diplomatic relations and regional stability.

Keywords: Morocco, Migration Diplomacy, European Neighbourhood Policy, bilateral agreements, geopolitical dynamics, geographic position.

Resumé :

Le réseau complexe des relations internationales et de la diplomatie est souvent façonnée par le mouvement des personnes à travers les frontières, un phénomène qui a suscité une grande attention dans le domaine de la politique mondiale. Parmi les nations qui naviguent dans ce paysage complexe, le Maroc se distingue par son approche stratégique de la diplomatie migratoire, en particulier dans le contexte de ses interactions avec les pays voisins. Cet article vise à approfondir l'analyse nuancée de la diplomatie migratoire marocaine, en explorant ses implications, ses stratégies et ses résultats en rapport avec les politiques de voisinage du royaume. En examinant les multiples dimensions des engagements diplomatiques du Maroc, des accords bilatéraux aux cadres régionaux plus larges, cette étude cherche à mettre en lumière le rôle de la migration dans le façonnement de la dynamique géopolitique et la promotion de la coopération dans les contextes nord-africain et méditerranéen. Grâce à cette exploration, l'article contribue au discours plus large sur la diplomatie migratoire, en offrant un aperçu de son potentiel en tant qu'outil d'amélioration des relations diplomatiques et de la stabilité régionale.

Mots-clés : Maroc, diplomatie migratoire, politique européenne de voisinage, accords bilatéraux, dynamique géopolitique, position géographique.

[□] PHD Student in the Faculty of Letters and Human Science, University of Mohammed the First –Morocco-Oujda.
Gmail : Abderrazak.baibah@ump.ac.ma

[□] PHD Student in the Faculty of Letters and Human Science Dhar EL mahraz, University of Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdella –Morocco-Fes.
Gmail : Abdelkader.Ech-charfi@usmba.ac.ma

INTRODUCTION

Moroccan migration diplomacy has increasingly become a focal point of analysis within the broader context of its neighbourhood policies and relations with the European Union (EU). Situated at the crossroads of Africa and Europe, Morocco's strategic geographical position, coupled with its historical, cultural, and economic ties to both continents, positions it uniquely as a pivotal actor in migration discourse. This introduction seeks to explore the nuanced and multifaceted approach Morocco has adopted towards migration diplomacy, particularly in light of its neighbourhood policies and the implications for its relations with the EU. At the heart of Morocco's migration diplomacy lies a sophisticated blend of cooperation and negotiation, underpinned by its broader policy of neighbourliness. This policy, which emphasizes mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and cooperation with neighbouring countries, has shaped Morocco's approach to managing migration flows, not only with its immediate neighbours but also in its strategic partnership with the EU. The establishment of the African Migration Observatory in Morocco, for instance, underscores the kingdom's proactive stance in leading regional efforts to manage migration more effectively, enhancing its role as a mediator and leader in African-EU migration dialogues.

Moreover, Morocco's migration diplomacy is intricately linked to its broader diplomatic objectives, including the sensitive issue of Western Sahara. The manner in which Morocco leverages its cooperation in migration management to advance its national interests in territorial disputes illustrates the strategic depth of its diplomatic endeavours. This approach has implications for Morocco's relations with EU member states, particularly Spain, with which it shares significant migration and territorial concerns. This analysis aims to dissect the layers of Morocco's migration diplomacy, examining how its neighbourhood policies facilitate or complicate its diplomatic relations with the EU. It will explore the balance Morocco seeks to strike between advancing its national interests and maintaining robust partnerships with EU countries, within the complex and often contentious arena of migration management. Through this lens, the intricate dance of diplomacy, negotiation, and cooperation that defines Morocco's engagement with its neighbours and the EU will be brought into sharper focus, offering insights into the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in the realm of migration diplomacy.

I. THE GEOGRAPHIQUE POSITION OF MOROCCO AS AN INTRODUCTION OF THE DIPLOMACY OF MIGRATION

1. Historical Evolution of Moroccan Diplomacy

The roots of Moroccan diplomacy can be traced back to the 7th century, when the Alaouite dynasty established the Moroccan sultanate and began forging international alliances. During this period, Morocco actively engaged with neighbouring empires, such as the Ottoman Turks and Iberian powers, seeking to maintain its independence and expand its sphere of influence, as well Morocco's bilateral relations with Western African countries are not of recent origin. These relations date back centuries to the time of different ruling dynasties that governed Morocco, such as the Almoravids and Almohads, as well as the current Alawi dynasty that has ruled since 1666¹.

a) 19th Century: Navigating Colonial Pressures

The 19th century saw Morocco under increasing pressure from European powers, notably France, Spain, and the United Kingdom, which were expanding their colonial empires in Africa. The Moroccan Sultanate sought to maintain its independence through diplomatic

¹ EL-KATIRI, 2015.

manoeuvring among these competing powers. The Treaty of Tangier in 1844, following the Franco-Moroccan War, marked a significant moment in Moroccan diplomacy, as it attempted to stabilize relations and delineate spheres of influence, but it also signalled the beginning of increased European intervention in Moroccan affairs².

b) Early 20th Century: The Protectorate Era

The early 20th century was a critical period for Morocco, leading to the establishment of the French and Spanish protectorates, which fundamentally altered the kingdom's sovereignty and international relations. The Algeiras Conference in 1906 formalized the control of European powers over Moroccan affairs, culminating in the Treaty of Fez in 1912, which established the French Protectorate in most of Morocco, with Spain receiving control over the northern and southern regions³.

c) Mid-20th Century: Independence and Emergence of Migration Diplomacy

The mid-20th century witnessed a surge in nationalist movements within Morocco, aiming for independence from colonial rule. Diplomacy played a crucial role in achieving this goal, with Morocco regaining its independence from France and Spain in 1956. This marked a new era in Moroccan diplomacy as the kingdom sought to reassert its sovereignty and establish itself as a modern nation-state on the international stage. Post-independence, Morocco became an active participant in the Non-Aligned Movement, emphasizing its sovereignty and desire to navigate Cold War tensions without aligning strictly with either the Western or Eastern blocs⁴. In the late 20th century, as European countries faced increasing migration pressures, Morocco emerged as a critical partner due to its geographical proximity to Europe and its role as a transit country for sub-Saharan African migrants aiming to reach Europe. The 1990s, in particular, marked a turning point where Morocco began to engage more actively in migration diplomacy, negotiating with European countries to manage migration flows while also protecting the rights and welfare of Moroccan nationals abroad⁵.

d) Early 21st Century: Bilateral and Regional Agreements:

The early 2000s saw a proliferation of bilateral and regional agreements aimed at managing migration flows between Morocco and European countries, most notably Spain and Italy. These agreements often included provisions for the readmission of irregular migrants, border management cooperation, and the facilitation of legal migration channels. For instance, the 2000 Morocco-Spain Treaty represented a landmark in migration diplomacy, establishing mechanisms for cooperation on migration management and the readmission of irregular migrants⁶. A significant milestone in Moroccan migration diplomacy was the implementation of a new national immigration and asylum policy in 2013. This policy reform, prompted by the King's instructions, aimed to address the challenges associated with irregular migration, while also offering protections to refugees and asylum seekers within Morocco. The policy was notable for its humanitarian approach and represented a shift towards more progressive migration management practices⁷.

A key aspect of Morocco's migration diplomacy has been its engagement with the European Union, culminating in the EU-Morocco Mobility Partnership signed in 2013. This partnership framework aimed to facilitate legal migration, address irregular migration, and

² PANNELL, 2000.

³ WOOLMAN, 1968.

⁴ ZARTMAN, 1897.

⁵ HASS, 2007.

⁶ ELMADMAD, 2008.

⁷ BERRIANE, HASS, & NATTER, 2015.

promote migrant integration and development benefits. It underscored Morocco's role as a strategic partner for the EU in migration matters, balancing the need for security and border management with commitments to human rights and mobility⁸.

Morocco's migration diplomacy has been a critical component of its foreign policy, particularly in its engagement with neighbouring countries and the broader European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) framework. Over the decades, the kingdom has navigated complex regional dynamics, leveraging its strategic position to shape migration flows and cultivate collaborative partnerships.

2. Geographical Consideration: A Prelude to Diplomatic Relations and Migration Dynamics with the EU

Morocco's geographic location, straddling the northwest corner of Africa with coastlines along both the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, has historically positioned it as a bridge between Europe and Africa. This unique positioning, particularly its proximity to the Strait of Gibraltar, has long influenced its diplomatic, economic, and security relations with the European Union (EU). The mere 14 kilometers that separate Morocco from Spain across the Strait of Gibraltar have not only facilitated trade and human movement but have also necessitated cooperation on issues ranging from migration to security and environmental protection. As such, the geographical positioning of countries like Turkey and Morocco has also been highlighted as a crucial factor in shaping their migration policies and diplomatic engagements (Norman, 2020), fostering a complex partnership that navigates the challenges and opportunities presented by its strategic position at the crossroads of two continents.

The evolution of Morocco-EU migration relations can be traced back to the early post-colonial period, with significant shifts occurring in response to global and regional socio-political changes. Initially, migration from Morocco to Europe was primarily labour-driven, facilitated by bilateral agreements designed to meet Europe's post-war labour demands. However, as economic and political landscapes evolved, so too did the nature of migration, with increased movements being driven by a complex amalgamation of factors including economic disparity, political instability, and environmental challenges. Furthermore, Morocco geographical features, such as its windiest regions in the extreme north and South Atlantic area, have implications for renewable energy potential; which can be a significant factor in diplomatic discussions with the EU⁹.

In response to these challenges, Morocco and the EU have engaged in a series of dialogues and agreements aimed at managing migration flows. A landmark in this evolving relationship is the EU-Morocco Mobility Partnership signed in 2013, which exemplifies a comprehensive approach to migration, addressing issues of legal migration, mobility, and migration's developmental impacts while also tackling the challenges of irregular migration¹⁰.

a) The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

The adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in Marrakech in December 2018 has significantly enhanced Morocco's role as a principal partner in migration management with the European Union (EU). Hosted in Marrakech, the UN forum saw the pact's adoption despite some countries' withdrawals, driven by anti-immigrant populism. The pact, while not legally binding, serves as a comprehensive framework for international cooperation on migration, emphasizing the importance of managing migration in a safe, orderly, and regular manner through its 23 objectives. These objectives aim to facilitate

⁸ CARRERA, DEN HERTOOG, & PARKIN, 2016.

⁹ BOULAKHBAR, et al., 2020.

¹⁰ EU-Morocco mobility Partnership, 2013.

legal migration, discourage illegal border crossings, and ensure the protection and respect of human rights for migrants. They underscore the need for better access to education and health for migrant children and protection from exploitation and violence¹¹.

The Global Compact for Migration reaffirms states' sovereign rights to determine their migration policies and govern migration within their jurisdictions, establishing a United Nations mechanism for technical, financial, and human resource contributions to support its implementation. This agreement outlines commitments for managing migration, promoting integration, and facilitating the return of migrants who cross borders illegally. Despite some countries opting out or expressing concerns, the adoption of the Global Compact for Migration was seen as a historic moment and a significant achievement for multilateralism. It provides a roadmap to prevent suffering and chaos associated with unregulated migration, emphasizing the importance of international cooperation in managing migration effectively.

Morocco's proactive role in hosting the conference and its participation in the adoption of the pact underscores its commitment to leading by example in migration management. This has positioned Morocco as a key strategic partner for the EU in addressing migration challenges, not only at a bilateral level but also in broad international context. The pact enhances Morocco's standing as a crucial intermediary between Africa and Europe, facilitating dialogue and cooperation on migration issue that effect both continents.

b) African Migration Observatory

The establishment of the African Migration Observatory significantly enhances Morocco's leadership role in migration management within Africa, bolstering its diplomatic standing in exchanges with European Union (EU) partners. The African Migration Observatory aims a comprehensive understanding of migration patterns, health, and social integration of African immigrants. This development reshapes Morocco's diplomatic vision, marking a pivot towards leveraging its strategic position in migration discussions to influence broader geopolitical dynamics, particularly with regard to the contentious issue of Western Sahara. As articulated in a royal speech, Morocco's future partnerships will be influenced by how nations perceive and engage with the question of Moroccan territory, notably Western Sahara. This stance suggests a nuanced approach to diplomacy, where migration management becomes a tool for advancing national interests in territorial disputes.

The strategic use of migration as a diplomatic lever, especially in relations with Spain, underscores the complex interplay between migration policies and broader diplomatic relations. Morocco's potential facilitation of migrant access to the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta serves as a poignant example of how migration dynamics can influence diplomatic stances on critical issues such as territorial sovereignty. Its involves a dual approach, aiming to build connections with the European political space while also capitalizing on its African identity and ties to neighbouring African countries¹². This approach reflects a broader strategy of leveraging Morocco's pivotal role in migration management to press for concessions or shifts in policy from EU partners, particularly on matters of significant national interest.

However, this strategy also highlights the potential for tensions within Morocco-EU relations, especially with Spain. The intertwining of migration management with the dispute over Western Sahara could strain Morocco's relations with EU partners, necessitating a delicate balance between advancing national interests and maintaining cooperative ties with the EU. The challenge lies in navigating these diplomatic waters without undermining the broader framework of Morocco-EU collaboration, especially in areas of mutual interest such as security, economic development, and regional stability.

¹¹ EURACTIV, 2018.

¹² GAZZOTI, 2021.

In conclusion, the African Migration Observatory not only solidifies Morocco's leadership in migration management within Africa but also empowers Morocco to adopt a more assertive stance in diplomatic exchanges with the EU. This shift in diplomatic vision, as highlighted by the royal speech, underscores the strategic use of migration policy as a lever in broader geopolitical negotiations. The implications for Morocco-EU relations, particularly with Spain, underscore the intricate linkages between migration management and diplomatic strategies in contemporary international relations.

II. EVOLUTION OF MOROCCO'S FOREIGN POLICY

1. Morocco's foreign policy regarding migration

The evolution of Morocco's foreign policy is a reflection of the country's dynamic response to the ever-changing regional and global dynamics, particularly with migration management emerging as a significant component within this evolving framework. Morocco has demonstrated adept navigation through a complex geopolitical landscape over the years, effectively balancing its strategic interests with regional stability and international cooperation, showcasing its diplomatic finesse and adaptability. As an example Morocco's current engagement in West Africa is multifaceted; it focuses on security cooperation, economic development, strengthening cultural ties, and capacity building¹³.

Historically, Morocco's foreign policy has been marked by a strong focus on preserving territorial integrity, nurturing diplomatic ties, and fostering economic growth within its borders. Initially, approaches to managing migration primarily revolved around stringent border control and security measures aimed at addressing concerns related to irregular migration and transnational security threats. However, as migration patterns evolved and regional challenges intensified, Morocco gradually transitioned towards adopting a more holistic and inclusive approach to migration management.

The transition towards a comprehensive migration management strategy aligned with broader shifts in Morocco's foreign policy objectives, driven by a combination of domestic political transformations, mounting international pressures, and evolving regional dynamics. Morocco's realization of the necessity for a multifaceted approach to effectively tackle migration challenges was further reinforced by its aspiration to consolidate its position as a regional leader and bolster its global standing on diplomatic fronts, where its institutional dimension was strengthened in 1990 with the creation of a department and a foundation responsible for Moroccans residing abroad (MRE)¹⁴.

Morocco resembles a tree. Its nourishing roots are in Africa, its trunk is the Maghreb. It breathes through leaves that belong to Europe¹⁵. At the core of this evolutionary process lay the formulation of Morocco's Neighbours policy, strategically designed to cultivate stronger bonds with neighbouring nations while jointly addressing common issues, including migration. The Neighbours policy served as a pivotal platform for fostering both bilateral and multilateral collaborations on migration concerns, emphasizing the significance of dialogue, cooperation, and reciprocal support among participating nations.

Within the ambit of this policy framework, Morocco has proactively engaged in bilateral partnerships with neighbouring countries to collectively address migration-related hurdles, Like the partnership with Germany on the issue of migration between 2015 and 2017¹⁶. These collaborations have encompassed various initiatives such as coordinated border patrols,

¹³ EL-KATIRI, 2015.

¹⁴ MEKNASSI, 2019.

¹⁵ AOMAR, 2009.

¹⁶ MAROCAINSDUMONDE, 2024.

exchange of critical information, and capacity-building endeavours targeted at fortifying border security and streamlining the management of migration flows. Moreover, Morocco has been actively involved in regional and international dialogues to synchronize responses to migration challenges and foster enhanced cooperation among all stakeholders.

The evolution of Morocco's foreign policy regarding migration management has been distinguished by a well-balanced approach that carefully considers both security imperatives and humanitarian aspects. While placing a premium on border security enforcement and countering irregular migration activities, Morocco has concurrently endeavoured to uphold its international commitments and safeguard the rights of migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers. This dual-pronged strategy has entailed initiatives to enhance reception facilities, streamline asylum procedures, expand access to essential services and protection, and facilitate the social integration of migrants, and a good example of this is the intense cooperation between France and Morocco in executing extradition judgments and in other areas involving judicial cooperation¹⁷.

Despite notable progress, Morocco confronts a host of challenges in effectively managing migration within the Neighbours policy framework. These challenges encompass persistent security threats, socioeconomic inequalities, and the intricate nature of irregular migration pathways. Furthermore, the constantly evolving patterns of migration and the persistent external pressures continue to present ongoing hurdles for Morocco to achieve its foreign policy objectives, for over two decades, Moroccan made governance reforms to protect and promote human rights. In this context¹⁸.

Looking forward, the trajectory of Morocco's foreign policy is anticipated to undergo further transformations in response to emerging migration challenges and the shifting dynamics at the regional level. The nation will need to recalibrate its strategies, deepen collaboration with neighbouring states and international allies, and explore innovative methodologies to adeptly address migration complexities. Ultimately, Morocco's approach to migration management within the Neighbours policy framework is poised to play a pivotal role in shaping regional stability and fostering heightened levels of international cooperation.

2. Bilateral and Multilateral Cooperation

The Migration policies of Morocco have significantly since the mid-1990s, with a shift towards more restrictive laws and increased border controls as part of its collaboration with the European Union (EU)¹⁹. Today, the gathering is convened to illuminate Morocco's unwavering dedication to tackling one of the most urgent global issues of our era: migration. This discourse delves into the imperative need to underscore Morocco's proactive stance in fostering bilateral and multilateral collaboration with neighbouring nations and international allies in addressing migration challenges. Morocco finds itself positioned at the intersection of diverse migration pathways, thus demonstrating a keen awareness of the intricate complexities and humanitarian aspects associated with migration phenomena. Acknowledging the necessity for united efforts, Morocco has embarked on a collaborative journey, establishing bilateral alliances with neighbouring states to directly confront the complexities posed by migration. Morocco effectively become the first non-European country to be recognized in bilateral agreements with the EU, particularly in combatting money laundering and terrorist financing (Naheem, 2020).

Through these bilateral partnerships, Morocco has actively participated in fruitful dialogues and collaborative ventures with its neighbouring counterparts, with the aim of bolstering border security, managing migration patterns, and promoting regional stability.

¹⁷ GUIRAUDON, 2008.

¹⁸ JAMAL, 2021.

¹⁹ HASS, NATTER , & VEZZOLI, 2018.

Ranging from joint endeavours such as border patrols to the establishment of information exchange mechanisms, Morocco has showcased a steadfast commitment to practical solutions that prioritize both security imperatives and humanitarian concerns. Furthermore, Morocco's engagement in regional and global platforms has played a pivotal role in amplifying its endeavours to address migration challenges on a broader scale. By actively participating in initiatives like the Rabat Process and the Global Forum on Migration and Development, Morocco has facilitated dialogues, shared best practices, and nurtured cooperation with a diverse array of stakeholders.

Within these forums, Morocco has not only shared its expertise but has also advocated for innovative strategies in migration management, underpinned by principles of solidarity, responsibility-sharing, and the protection of human rights. For this reason, Morocco also developed in 2014 the National Immigration and Asylum Strategy (SNIA)²⁰. By championing a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of migration, Morocco has positioned itself as a significant player in shaping the global narrative on migration governance. Additionally, Morocco's involvement in multilateral ventures such as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration underscores its steadfast commitment to upholding the tenets of international cooperation and shared responsibility. By endorsing the Global Compact, Morocco has reaffirmed its pledge to promote a more compassionate and sustainable approach to migration governance, rooted in principles of dignity, equality, and the protection of migrants' rights.

Upon reflection of Morocco's collaborative efforts in addressing migration challenges through bilateral and multilateral channels, it becomes apparent that cooperation lies at the core of effective migration management. In an era of increasing interconnectedness, no country can effectively tackle migration issues in solitude. Only through concerted action, guided by principles of partnership and solidarity, can we forge a more inclusive and just future for all individuals. In summary, Morocco's proactive involvement in bilateral partnerships with neighbouring nations and active engagement in regional and global forums serves as a testament to its dedication to seeking comprehensive and enduring solutions to migration challenges. As we persist in our collective endeavours to address migration concerns.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Morocco's migration diplomacy, framed within its broader neighbourhood policies, exemplifies a sophisticated, multifaceted approach to international relations that balances national interests with cooperative regional dynamics. The kingdom's strategic geographical position, bridging Africa and Europe, has not only made it a pivotal actor in migration discussions but has also provided it with unique leverage in its diplomatic engagements with the European Union (EU) and neighbouring countries. Through initiatives like the African Migration Observatory, Morocco has demonstrated leadership in managing migration flows across the continent, enhancing its role as a mediator and advocate for comprehensive, data-driven migration policies. Morocco's adept navigation of migration diplomacy is further highlighted by its ability to link these efforts with broader geopolitical objectives, such as the issue of Western Sahara. This strategic intertwining of migration management with territorial concerns underscores the complex interplay between domestic priorities and international diplomacy. Moreover, Morocco's approach to leveraging its migration cooperation as a tool in negotiations with the EU, particularly with countries like Spain, reveals the depth of its diplomatic strategy, where migration serves as both a bridge and a bargaining chip in advancing its national interests.

²⁰ JAMAL, 2021.

However, this approach also presents challenges, particularly in maintaining a delicate balance between leveraging migration diplomacy and sustaining constructive relationships with EU partners. The evolving nature of migration flows, coupled with shifting political landscapes in both Europe and Africa, necessitates continuous adaptation and re-evaluation of strategies. As Morocco navigates these complex dynamics, its commitment to a policy of neighbourliness and cooperation remains central, guiding its efforts to foster dialogue, mutual respect, and shared solutions to common challenges. Looking forward, Morocco's role in migration diplomacy is likely to continue evolving, reflecting broader trends in international relations, migration dynamics, and regional cooperation. The kingdom's ability to adapt, lead, and negotiate within this fluid context will be crucial in shaping the future of its relationships with both its neighbours and the EU. As Morocco continues to leverage its strategic position and diplomatic acumen, it stands as a key player in the ongoing discourse on migration, regional stability, and international cooperation, highlighting the intricate connections between domestic priorities and global diplomacy.

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