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EU lauds relations with Morocco

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One year after Morocco became the only southern Mediterranean nation to receive "advanced status" with the European Union, Moroccan and EU officials touted the partnership's progress.

By Naoufel Cherkaoui for Magharebia in Rabat - 11/12/09

The special relationship between the European Union and Morocco received a vote of confidence this week in Brussels.

Speaking on Tuesday (December 8th) after the **8th session** of the EU-Morocco Association Council, French Secretary of State Pierre Lellouche noted the "positive dynamism" shown by Morocco in the partnership.

The one-year assessment of Morocco's "advanced status" with the EU was highly positive. Representatives commended the kingdom for reform initiatives, including a nationwide economic development programme.

"Partnership with Morocco acquires special significance for the EU, given the role played by Morocco... In the whole of the Mediterranean region", the EU statement said.

Moroccan Foreign Minister Taleb Fassi-Fihri, who attended the Brussels meeting, said participants discussed progress made since the last meeting of the Association Council in 2008.

Fassi-Fihri added that both sides discussed Sahara issues, Middle Eastern and African stability, Morocco's special status with the EU, and the Mediterranean Union project.

Morocco believes strongly in the last initiative, the minister noted, "since we need a good regional union on the level of the Mediterranean".

EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said that five years of special neighbourhood policy with Morocco have yielded advancements in the political, economic, agricultural and environmental arenas.

Ferrero-Waldner highlighted the importance of further trade negotiations on services and agriculture in order to realise "an in-depth and comprehensive free-trade agreement".

"The most important thing Morocco did to enhance relations with the EU was [economic] reform," Casablanca economics professor Nour El-Din Saoudi told Magharebia.

Specific successes, he said, include "respecting the 3 to 4% budget deficit, resuming structural reforms" and making efforts to "minimise tax pressure" and reform the judiciary and education.

Additionally, Morocco has taken concrete steps to improve the quality of tourism services. To this end, Saoudi continued, "Morocco is continuing to follow the plans laid out, as well as major workshops like the Tangier Mediterranean Special Agency (TMSA)."

Concerning the Union for the Mediterranean, Saoudi contends that its importance lies in working out the conflicts between the countries of the Maghreb. The most important, he said, is closed border between Morocco and Algeria; an obstacle hindering the activation of true union among Maghreb states.

Solving this conflict, Saoudi concluded, will serve to expand the economic reach of Morocco in the Maghreb region.



[Dominique Faget/AFP/Getty Images] EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner says her organisation seeks a comprehensive free-trade agreement with Morocco.