

Seminar

The role of non-state actors in the development of Morocco-Spain relations

Introductory speech

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Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great pleasure that we welcome you today to the IRES to be present during this seminar dedicated to discuss the “Role of Non government actors in the development of Morocco-Spain relations”

Let me reiterate that this event is part of the study conducted by IRES and is entitled “Relations between Morocco and Spain: The levers of a strategy for sustainable cooperation”. It is a result of a program called “Global competitiveness and positioning of Morocco in the globalized system”. The purpose of this study is to examine in depth the strengths and weaknesses of the relations between the two countries and identify levers for change to materialize their cooperation potential.

This event also comes after a debate initiated by IRES in September 2010 on the status and prospects of Morocco-Spain relations, attended by eminent Moroccan and Spanish personalities. The conclusions of this debate have helped us to highlight the following:

- The negative image of Morocco and Moroccans in Spain, which contrasts with the progress made by Morocco on the political, economic and social development. In addition to the fact that Morocco is considered in Spain as a matter of domestic politics that the media uses in every opportunity to confront the Spanish government, some civil society actors display an anti-bias attitude against Morocco, especially after the 2004 events in Madrid.
- The lack of a communication policy renovated to know today's Morocco and societal dynamics. This failure is compounded by the small staff of Moroccans journalists in the Spanish media, which does not allow them to use their influence to address perceptions and redress the prevailing discourse.
- It is of importance to strengthen the human dimension of the Hispano-Moroccan relations, while working for a collaborative migration policy that promotes the integration of Moroccan emigrants and strengthens their contribution to development projects. Morocco will also plead with Spain for the implementation of an active policy of equality between foreigners and nationals.
- The need for Spain and Morocco to rewrite their common history, like what has been done by other countries (France- Germany, Japan, Korea, Russia-Poland), through the creation of a Morocco-Spain history Academy, taking support therefore on the UNESCO expertise and the Council of Europe standards. The interest of this practice, which is inherently long, is that it is not confined to two countries only, but should be the prelude to a deeper Occident / Islam review reports.
- The Moroccan-Spanish relations have, overall, an important Mediterranean content and include, specifically, a European policy dimension, illustrated in the fact that Spain is an essential partner for the strengthening of ties between Morocco and the EU in terms of the advanced status.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The current context, marked by rising political and social claims of the Arab populations, shows that the populations in both shores of the Mediterranean share the same values of democracy, freedoms and human rights. This leaves us with the suggestion that strengthening bonds between civil society actors and intellectuals from both sides would lead to an appreciable contribution. Such contribution will allow us to safely anchor the changes being achieved. It is all for the benefit of the entire region.

In order to fight against prejudice and stereotypes, the role of civil society and intellectuals in both countries deserves to be further strengthened. This can be achieved through operating on the basis of a proximity that is suitable to reach a wide audience and by taking advantage of the shared values and the common cultural heritage. Their contribution would be appropriate to preserve the historical memory of both countries and to make the stereotypes vanish.

Hence, for us to tackle these different aspects, it seems necessary to:

- Understand the ways in which Moroccan and Spanish non government actors operate to promote dialogue and rapprochement between the two countries;
- Identify the influence of these actors on opinion leaders and Spanish policy makers to redress the hostile positions or at least to reduce the huge difference in attitudes;
- Identify areas of intervention and resources mobilization to improve the overall image of Morocco in Spain;
- To see how the dynamics of change that Morocco is currently experiencing, with the start of the comprehensive constitutional reform and advanced regionalization project, is likely to give a strong impetus to the partnership between Morocco and Spain.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Those are the outlines of the theme that we propose for consideration as part of the seminar. The presence today of a panel of Moroccan and Spanish experts, made up of diplomats, senior NGO leaders, academics and private sector representatives, provides an ideal framework to bring a fresh perspective to appreciate the contribution of non-governmental actors to the strengthening of partnership relations between Morocco and Spain.

Before embarking with this seminar, I want to thank all stakeholders and participants for accepting our invitation. I wish you every success in your work and I am sure we will live through a very fruitful discussion.