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**The Arab Maghreb Union Weaknesses and theirs impacts on the Euro-Mediterranean Relations**

**Les faiblesses de l'Union du Maghreb arabe et leurs impacts sur les relations euro-méditerranéennes**

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Abstract :

In 1989, Marrakech (Morocco) saw the creation of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), an agreement between the heads of state of Morocco, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Mauritania. This historic agreement, promised to promote political and economic unity between the Maghreb countries with a total population of around 100 million. In addition, its main aim was to create a union, which can negotiate with the European Union, which has always considered the south of the Mediterranean as an area of strategic interest. At the crossroads of North and South, East and West.

In this article, we aim to provide a clear definition and facts of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership that emerged from the 1995 Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Conference, in an evolving context of privileged relations between countries not unions.

Key words: Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the European Union, Euro-Mediterranean partnership

Résumé:

En 1989, Marrakech (Maroc) a assisté à la création de l'Union du Maghreb arabe (UMA), un accord entre les chefs d'État du Maroc, de la Libye, de l'Algérie, de la Tunisie et de la Mauritanie. Cet accord historique, promettait de promouvoir l'unité politique et économique entre les pays du Maghreb, dont la population totale est d'environ 100 millions d'habitants. En outre, son principal objectif était de créer une union, qui puisse négocier avec l'Union européenne, qui a toujours considéré le sud de la Méditerranée comme une zone d'intérêt stratégique. Au carrefour du Nord et du Sud, de l'Est et de l'Ouest.

Dans cet article, nous voulons donner une définition claire et des faits du partenariat euro-méditerranéen qui a émergé de la conférence euro-méditerranéenne de Barcelone en 1995, dans un contexte évolutif de relations privilégiées entre pays non unions.

Mots clés : Union du Maghreb arabe (UMA), Union européenne, partenariat euro-méditerranéen

الملخص:

تم الاعلان عن قيام اتحاد المغرب العربي في 17 فيفري 1989 بمدينة مراكش، من قبل خمس دول هي: المغرب والجزائر وتونس وليبيا وموريتانيا وتتمتع هذه الأقطار بموقع جغرافي ذي أهمية بالغة، له أربعة أبعاد واستراتيجية مختلفة كما تفتتح الدول المغاربية على المجال المتوسطي، ولها ارتباط بأوروبا على الضفة الشمالية

للبحر الأبيض المتوسط وتمتد جنوباً إلى جذورها الإفريقية، وشرقاً تحتضن بعدها الشرق أوسطي العربي و

كما يبلغ تعداد سكان المنطقة نحو 100 مليون نسمة، 50% منهم سواعده مهينة للعمل، تجمعها وحدة الدين والمذهب، وبينهم تنوع ثقافي وحضاري ذو روافد متعددة، أمازيغية وعربية، هذه الخصوصيات جعلت الاتحاد الأوروبي يحرص على إقامة علاقات وطيدة مع هذه الدول الواقعة في جنوب المتوسط لكن من الملاحظ انه منذ إطلاق ما يسمى بإعلان برشلونة عام 1995 لم تتحقق نتائج ملموسة. فما هي طبيعة هذه العلاقات وما هي أسباب ضعفها؟

الكلمات المفتاحية: اتحاد المغرب العربي، الاتحاد الأوروبي، التعاون الأورومتوسطي

## . INTRODUCTION

The Maghreb or Maghreb region, is located in North Africa, refers in the broadest sense to the countries of the "setting sun". Which is Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania and a territory in the process of decolonization, the Western Sahara. In its Together, they make up a distinct portion. Historical, linguistic and religious factors gave it its own model, which distinguishes it from Sub-Saharan Africa or Black Africa and, at the same time links with the Arab-Islamic world, on the Asian continent.

Indeed, the Maghreb has a common ethnic background, a common religion, Islam. The Arabic language, with the barber's, these common elements made it possible to rebuild basic components of cohesion in the region when, because of European colonization, the peoples of the Maghreb

were divided by different administrations and interests. However, the path towards integration has not been easy. After many failed attempts, on 17 February 1989 the heads of state of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania signed the Treaty establishing the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) in Marrakech (Morocco), establishing its headquarters in Tunisia. After a short period of success, which came to a successful end in 1994 when Egypt - which does not belong to the Maghreb - asked to become an observer.

**In order to analyze this research the following problematic is being raised:**

**“What were the circumstances of AMU's creation and how did they influence Euro-Mediterranean relations?”**

**To answer this problematic we discuss the following axis:**

**1- The AMU and the circumstances of its establishment.**

**2- The main Weaknesses of the AMU**

### **3- The impact of these weaknesses on the AMU's relation with the European Union**

#### **2. The dream of Maghreb union:**

The idea of unity occupies an important place in the imagination of the Arab-Islamic peoples, nourished throughout history by the legacy of the Islamic religion and by the imperial formations that followed its implantation in the Arabian Peninsula.

From the earliest times, the adoption of the Islamic faith brought with it a sense of unity that was consolidated as a great pillar of social cohesion in the face of the tribal disintegration characteristic of pre-Islamic society. Every Muslim forms part of the Umma - the Islamic community or nation - an ideal, which, although it has not been easy to achieve throughout history, has nourished the myth of the superiority of Islamic civilization and its invincible union.

Besides this feeling of unity -not territorial-given by the belonging to the Ummah, there was another stereotype of unity -territorial-given by the socio-political organization of the Arab-Islamic Empire. The Muslim conquests not only pursued the objective of propagating the new Faith, but also, of establishing an Islamic political order and constituting an empire

The Islamic empire spread from Arabia to the west, incorporating Egypt first, and later all of North Africa and southern Spain. Between the 9th and 11th centuries, it reached historical spheres in which Arab culture flourished with advances in astronomy, mathematics, literature and medicine. This period, which has earned it the title of "golden age" of Islam, was the basis for talking about a past of splendor and

trying to recover it.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, between the 11th and 13th centuries, the feeling of regional unity in the Maghreb, following the reign of two dynasties. Initially, the Almoravid dynasty -a name that means "those who unite to defend religion"- dominated between 1061 and 1147, Morocco, Mauritania up to the Senegal river in the south and up to half of Algeria in the northeast. Subsequently, the Almohad dynasty - "the Unitarians" - managed to bring about the political unity of the entire Maghreb for the first time in history between 1147 and 1269<sup>2</sup>.

All these facts made it possible to recover the idea of regional integration linked to a past of splendor that is now incorporated into the discourse of the Maghreb's ruling classes. Therefore, this ideal takes on an ideological dimension as an instrument for glorifying past greatness and promoting the elements that naturally unite the region.

#### **3. The impact of colonization on regional union:**

The Ottoman domination, to some extent, but mainly the European colonization, drowned the principle of regional identity cohesion. Indeed, from the 16th century to the 20 th century, the region was divided between the Ottoman Empire-which extended across North Africa from Egypt to Algeria-and the Spanish kingdom, which subjected some of its areas of the North African coast. With the Ottoman administrative division different entities began to be defined which, having a certain degree of decentralization, shaped the state constructions of the contemporary Maghreb.

From then on, one could already recognize the Algerian, Tunisian, and Libyan and, to the exclusion of the Moroccan entities, since it was not subjected to Turkish rule<sup>3</sup>.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Ottoman rule in the region began to be replaced by European colonialism. France had conquered Algeria (1830), occupied Mauritania (1855) and established a protectorate over Tunisia (1881). In 1884, the Conference of Berlin legalized the "sharing of Africa" and the European colonial powers were granted a portion of territory in the North of the continent: So, France shared with Spain the colonization of Morocco (1912). In the same year, the Treaty of Alicante assigned the North from Morocco - "what was left"- to Spain. In 1912, Italy set up in Libya, after emerging victorious from the Turkish-Italian war

The former division that the colonial powers made on a map and according to their own economic and political interests was the fact that the country's strategic location gave rise to border disputes and territorial claims that still remain. France set the limits at its convenience while the ideal of Greater Morocco-defended by the by the nationalist Istiqlal party - covered a further geography including the Spanish territories of the Western Sahara and today's Mauritania.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, the Maghreb region, victim of a "multi-style" colonization by Spaniards, Italians and French, never recovered its initial unity. Furthermore, the inherited border disputes have permanently upset the regional balance, creating conditions that are not conducive to regional integration.

#### **4. The west Sahara issue and its impact**

#### **on the Maghreb Arab union :**

After independence, achieved in 1956 by Morocco and Tunisia and in 1962 by Algeria, rivalries were inevitable. Most of the conflicts at the time were related to the claim of Greater Morocco or to the limits of Algeria, which, as it later decolonized, included areas that already belonged to its neighbor.

In September 1969 Morocco recognized Mauritania, whose territories were considered to belong to Greater Morocco, and shortly afterwards renounced its claims to Algerian territories, but prepared its strategy aimed at the decolonization of the Spanish Sahara - an area rich in minerals and hydrocarbons. In 1975<sup>5</sup>, the tripartite agreements signed between Spain, Mauritania and Morocco established that, with the withdrawal of Spain, Mauritania and Morocco would control different portions of the territory. At the same time, a National Liberation Movement - the Polisario Front - self-proclaims a new state the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). In 1979, Morocco annexed the entire former colony. The control of this territory, confronted Morocco - which defends its claims under the thesis of the inviolability of borders - with Algeria that supports the thesis of the Polisario Front based on the principle of self-determination of peoples. Since then, the conflict has entered in a deadlock given by the expectation of a referendum on self-determination, which is not taking place, because of disagreements between the parties with regard to the population to be decided<sup>6</sup>.

#### **5. The birth of the Arab Maghreb Union:**

After the colonial experience, the idea of unity was perceived as "the golden age that has the force of a myth inscribed in the conscience of the peoples of the region». The League of Arab States (LAS) had already tried to give shape to this ideal since its inception in 1945, but the lack of success in this aim led it, in the 1980s, to encourage the creation of sub-regional economic blocs that could strengthen its role in favour of a common market<sup>7</sup>

It was against this background that the AMU was set up on 17 February 1989 with the aim of harmonizing the economic policies of the five Member States and establishing a common market in the Maghreb. Its founding Treaty underlined the "strong links that unite the peoples of the Arab Maghreb, which are founded on the community of history, religion and language", but it also established a progressive orientation towards a broader integration that would promote Arab unity and the participation of African states<sup>8</sup>. In this way, the construction of the Maghreb was considered a stage - to reach and overcome - in the overall process of Arab and African integration, giving It is also a sign of the importance of the objectives proposed and, of course, of their difficulty in being achieved.

It should also be noted that the Maghreb states attempted, through the creation of the AMU, to tackle the negotiations with their main partner, the European Economic Community (EEC), in a coordinated manner. They feared that, with the entry of Greece (1981), Spain, and Portugal (1985), the EEC would become self-sufficient in products, which was imported from the Maghreb and,

consequently, would be left without a secure market.

For Morocco and Tunisia, in particular, their dependence on trade with Europe justified in itself the concern that a single European market should be closed to the South. This is particularly relevant given that, while two-thirds of Maghrebi exports are destined for Community Europe, the European Union allocates two percent of its total exports to Morocco and Tunisia. Moreover, trade Intra-Maghreb trade did not exceed 3% of total trade, so creating a Maghreb Union under this limited "regionalization" alone is explained by the external boost of the European single market and by the lack of intra-regional replacement markets

The first years of the AMU's operation were characterized by deep enthusiasm, which led to the development of a significant number of provisions aimed at putting into operation the integration process. However, the initial impulse came to a virtual halt when these measures had to take shape concrete in reality. Formal issues such as the excessive focus on the presidency of the Member States, the decision-making mechanism that required parliamentary ratification within six months, and the absence of a The fact that the Commission's decision to set up a fixed schedule for the implementation of the proposed commercial stages slowed down the dynamics of the Maghreb union .

Furthermore, other ingredients-both domestic and international-helped to keep the integration process on track. It was observed that the formalization of the AMU was not accompanied by the measures required by any integrationist initiative in the political and economic fields. In the

political sphere, the heads of state have not shown themselves willing to give up their powers, nor have they let the Union's own dynamic cut them back. In the economic and social field, there is another major weakness of the Union that can be summarized by "The impression is that the AMU is being signed quickly without the economic and social forces of these countries having previously promoted this union..."<sup>9</sup>

Public opinion in the Member States was not mobilized by this project; the employers did not appreciate the benefits of the union that could arise from a wider market in the face of the loss of the protection they enjoyed, large legislative differences, lack of infrastructure, non-convertibility of currencies, payment difficulties, etc.

Moreover, in the mid-1990s, the Maghrebi governments-except for Libya and Mauritania-adhered to the Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Project, launched by the European Community in 1995, with the aim of setting up a Mediterranean Free Trade Area by 2010.<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, it can be concluded that the AMU's inactivity was attributed to internal factors-both political and economic-and to a major external conditioning factor such as the Euro-Mediterranean model. Far from encouraging regional integration, the Euro-Mediterranean model has led to its dismantling by establishing relations of an executive nature between three countries in the region-Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia and the European Union

## **6. Factors of the weakness of the Arab Maghreb Union**

### **6.1 The political factors:**

The profound differences in the conception of the State, in the type of regimes and political systems adopted, in the forms of government, in the economic models implemented, were not conducive to promoting minimum forms of cooperation leading to subsequent intra-Maghreb integration. Indeed, as the Maghreb countries gained their independence; they adopted very different forms of government. In 1956, Morocco became a monarchy The Alawite dynasty, who proclaimed themselves direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, got its basic element in the constitution of legitimacy. In Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba succeeded, between 1956 and 1961, overthrowing the monarchy and establishing a presidentialist republic who had his Neo-Destur party as the only political force in the country. Mauritania has been an Islamic republic since independence in 1960, when he began his political career under a socialist regime. In 1962, Algeria formed a People's Democratic Republic under a socialist one-party regime - the National Liberation Front - a system that lasted until 1989, when a new constitution introduced a multiparty system. Libya, after the coup d'état led by Colonel Khaddafi in 1969, is transformed from 1977 in a People's Arab Jamahiriya (or "Mass State") and Socialist, a product of the particular vision of its leader's world.<sup>11</sup>

At the time , the "single party was the most widespread system in the region, as it was, in the opinion of some leaders, the one that best suited the

social, tribal and family structure of this society. In all cases, a modern state was formed - with the corresponding separation of functions - but a strong one. This situation was maintained throughout the seventies - with development plans - and, at the end of the eighties, although the adoption of neoliberal policies and adjustment plans introduced some democratic reforms, these were of little relevance

Finally, it should also be considered that the integration process has plunged the Maghrebi states into a debate between two contradictory logics: that of building the nation state and that of regional integration. Certainly, the process of forming the Arab or African states in general is unfinished if, compared to European states<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, the Maghreb state is a model of a strong state that does not concede the power units that call for progress in any integration process, either internally or in relations with its partners.

## 6.2 The economic Factors:

The structural weakness of the AMU to perform the different stages that the integration process demanded was due to some economic variables that generated a low level of trade relations between its members

After gaining independence, the Maghreb governments set about implementing development policies based on import-substitution industrialization, agricultural reform and the accumulation of capital from

the external sector. Under this model, the Maghreb economies highly dependent on exports of primary products to the EEC - began to take off autonomously.

The push for industrial development produced significant achievements, especially considering the extremely low level from which it started. However, Maghreb industrialization did not reach to overcome the level of transformation of natural resources, and just in the 1990s, the emergence of an export-oriented manufacturing industry (mainly textiles and clothing) was highlighted.<sup>13</sup> More Even so, the industrial system has developed with a strong lack of coordination with the rest of the economy, a high level of technological dependence and the absorption of huge financial resources.

On the other hand, the concentration of resources in the industrial sector led to the failure of the agricultural reforms undertaken. This was accompanied by the limited amount of agricultural land, population growth and the intensity of the rural migration, all of which led to a significant deterioration in the agricultural balance

As a result, the implementation of the developmental model did not lead to horizontal economic cooperation and intra-Maghreb trade remained at very low levels. This was linked to the small size of local markets, the weakness of national economies - unattractive to foreign investment - and the weakness of communications.<sup>14</sup>



At the end of the eighties, the Maghreb governments had to impose a stabilization strategy under the terms recommended by international organizations. From the developmentalist model, which in the 1960s led the State to assume a central role as the driving force of the economy, it moved to a model of openness. This proposed, by three conditions for success: the need to generate macroeconomic stability, the reduction of the role of the state in the economy through privatization and economic deregulation and, finally, greater openness to the outside world through the lowering of trade barriers and encouragement of foreign investment.

Macroeconomic stability brought with it structural adjustment measures that began to be implemented progressively, with immediate consequences on the performance of the economy and the living conditions of the majority of the population. Indeed, the results of the adjustment measures did not allow the described weaknesses to be overcome. Moreover, it can be said that:

- Export volumes grew, but were accompanied by a significant decrease in international prices of the region's exportable products, which implied a decrease in income from this sector.

- These countries diversified their export products very little during the adjustment period. In return, it was found that an increase in concentration (and therefore dependence) around a smaller number of primary products: of agricultural activity, in Morocco

and Tunisia; extractive and mining activity in Algeria and Libya (hydrocarbons) and, in Morocco and Tunisia (phosphates).<sup>15</sup>

- Imports - mainly of food - increased despite the restrictive measures of the Adjustment Programs, leading to a balance of payments deficit and a worsening of the external debt situation.

It can be concluded, then, that the failure of the developmentalist model had an impact on the consolidation of conditions that were not conducive to intraregional trade, and the implementation of structural adjustment measures in the 1990s did not generate an improvement in the existing conditions. Under these perspectives, it can be stated that the integrationist initiative of the AMU was a little rushed, due to the low economic complementarity between the Member States

### **7. The Impact of the weakness of the AMU on the Euro-Mediterranean relations:**

At the beginning of the 1990s, the European Community tried to initiate relations with the AMU within the context of the Renewed Mediterranean Policy (1990-1995). In 1990 and 1991, the European Commission proposed the creation of a free trade area and one year later, it defined the principles on which relations between the two bodies should be based.

Because of these initiatives, the AMU was unable to establish a common policy. It had certainly not made progress towards the formation of a Customs Union and,

consequently, no agreements reflecting a unified trade policy could be reached. Far from it, the member countries negotiated individually, exposing the weakness of the AMU in coordinating "one voice".

Various events fed its internal fragility like the crisis in Algeria which delayed the negotiation process between its members and, the measures taken by the UN Security Council against Libya in 1991, accusing it of the attacks on the Pan Am and initiated an economic blockade on this country. Adding to that, Morocco - already isolated by its position toward the Western Sahara Conflict - took its own course and start negotiating on his own without waiting for the progress of AMU.

Around 1995, while the Maghreb body was showing its first signs of weakening, the Euro-Mediterranean context showed it a new scenario that emerged from the Barcelona Conference

The Barcelona Conference, held on 28 and 29 November 1995, aimed to analyze the prospects for cooperation between the fifteen members of the European Union and the twelve other states of the Mediterranean basin. On the Maghreb side, the AMU participated as a special guest, and Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria as full members. Mauritania had observer status and Libya was excluded as the blockade measures still affected that country.

The Economic Chapter of the Final Declaration proposed the progressive creation of a Mediterranean Free Trade Zone by 2010, in which the signing of Association Agreements was the cornerstone of the Project. In this new framework of Euro-Mediterranean relations, the EU continued to give priority to bilateral links in the

process of concertation, which was described as "the mixed Maghreb-Europe area". It should be noted then that the AMU is losing its sense not only from the perspective of its progress in internal process but also, from the community intentions of recovering a reasonably united space of dialogue.<sup>16</sup>

Since the Barcelona Conference, seven new Euro-Mediterranean Conferences have followed: Malta (1997), Stuttgart (1999), Marseille (2000), Brussels (2001), Valencia (2002), Naples (2003) and Luxembourg (2005)<sup>17</sup> where efforts were made to make gradual progress in the strengthening of bilateral trade relations with the region, in particular with those of the central Maghreb: Tunisia concluded its negotiations in June 1995, the same year it signed the Agreement Association which came into effect in March 1998; Morocco, concluded negotiations in November 1995, signed the Association in February 1996, which entered into operation in March 2000. Algeria concluded negotiations in December 2001 and signed the Association Agreement in June 2002.<sup>18</sup> Finally, Libya remained absent from the Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue, although once UN sanctions were lifted, it was invited to participate with observer status

Therefore, the EU's Euro-Mediterranean proposal generated a "boom box" system in which the (EU) negotiated bilaterally with the members of the AMU (Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco), but these remained uncoordinated with each other. In other words, the aim was not to establish a multilaterally founded free trade area but to create one through an accumulation of bilateral agreements with the southern countries, even though the agreements were drawn up on the same basis. As a result,

although the formulators of the Euro-Mediterranean model aimed for a uniform impact of these agreements, owing to the very differences between the Maghreb states and the characteristics of the negotiations, harmonization between the North African extremes is perceived as very difficult. Perhaps the paradox lies in hoping that the Maghreb States will be able to coordinate their policies trade with the European Union, when in fact they did not do so with each other.

Consequently, in the context of an AMU, which, for internal reasons, had halted its integration process by failing to agree on a common trade policy, the Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Project, by bilateralizing its members' links with the European Union<sup>19</sup>, contributed to its dismantling.

## 8. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that in the Maghreb there is an identity based on a common history, language and religion, and that the idea of unity occupies an important place in the imagination of its people. Belonging to the Ummah or to the same "great nation", the legacy of a past of splendor of Arab civilization.

Maghreb united under the Islam religion, feeds this affirmation. Furthermore, "the union of peoples" is a very important value for Arab-Islamic societies, especially if compared to Western societies, which are more rational and practical.

However, it is possible to see how this support of natural cohesion did not arise when it came to promoting the UMA. In this sense, the reality of the Maghreb showed certain conditions that did not provide an

adequate framework for the integrationist processes in the region.

Finally, the strong state model that was imposed after independence was reticent to give up the sovereignty issues that every integrationist dynamic demands. Furthermore, intra-Maghreb relations have been characterized by an alternation of conflicts and conciliations: border disputes, extreme nationalism and ideological disagreements-the result of different political and economic systems-favoured strategic alliances dictated by the correlation of forces in the region.

The permanent differences in personal relations between the Heads of State brought the negotiations to a standstill in 1995. Once again, the dream of making the Greater Maghreb a reality vanished as an opportunity for these countries to overcome the development problems they had been facing since post-independence and which the international situation at the end of the eighties was intensifying even more.

Similarly, economic weaknesses of a structural nature did not allow for progress in the implementation of trade policies. Poor industrial development was associated with insufficient agriculture, a poor domestic market, little economic complementarity, differences in development (large and small countries, agricultural production and hydrocarbons), among other factors.

Moreover, since the EU could not find in the AMU a valid partner, in 1995 its policies were clearly aimed at bilateralising relations with the North African partners. It was a way to secure the supply of basic materials, while at the same time providing a

safe market for their exports, therefore contributing to the stagnation of the regional initiative. In this context of "practical versus ideological predominance", the central Maghreb countries looked at Brussels independently, denying their neighbors, which gave the European Commission strong negotiation position.

Integration in the Maghreb seems to be a "common need" but suffers from political frictions and structural weaknesses that are not corrected every time their leaders try to relaunch it. Only By building or seeking common interests over certain individual sectors, it will be possible to make progress in an integration process that helps change the economic situation, transforming what are now disadvantages into advantages that make it possible to improve the conditions of the Maghreb's peoples.

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