

The Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs



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FOREWORD

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES CENTER

(TRANS. M. KARIMI)

The Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS) is the expression of a characteristic approach by the Moroccan monarchy: the consultative approach that draws on the teachings of Muslim public law. Deeply anchored in society, and claiming a two-fold legitimacy, temporal and spiritual, the monarchy has, throughout the centuries, molded the national sociopolitical landscape. A permanent dialectic game unfolds between it and the society that it leads, a continuous interaction that symbolizes this sacred union, attested as it is by the Act of allegiance, which is renewed every year, gauge of the stability of the Moroccan regime. In this respect, Article 19 of the Moroccan Constitution acts as an inescapable guardrail for the guarantee as well as the perpetuation of this stability.

If this relation is immutable, it is; nonetheless, not under the lee of change, for that matter. Because it acts as a catalyst and urges on evolution, the monarchy needs institutional foundations whereby it stimulates development, accompanies transitions and confronts challenges. In fact, it ought to anchor society in authenticity, and to immerse it in modernity.

For thematic questions, as much as for transversal subjects, a heavy tendency arises thus in connection with the treatment of the great

problems that Morocco is called out by. At the dawn of the 1990's, and in the thick of it, considering the worldwide geopolitical upheavals then, but also the internal socio-political dynamics, one witnessed the creation of several advisory councils that translate this Royal will to act on reality in accordance with a participative and prospective vision: *the Consultative Council for Human Rights* (1990), *the National Council for Youth and Future* (1990), *the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture* (2001), *the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad* (2007), etc. This institutional abundance testifies to the imaginative forces of the Moroccan monarchy, forces that establish consensus, resets the political universe, and regulates the juridico-institutional landscape.

Created in 2006 by the King, pursuant to Article 19 of the Moroccan Constitution, CORCAS is « (...) *the Supreme Representative of the Nation and the Symbol of the unity thereof. He shall be the guarantor of the perpetuation and the continuity of the State.* » And is the « (...) *guarantor of the independence of the Nation and the territorial integrity of the Kingdom within all its rightful boundaries*», which expresses a *continuum*. In 1981, the late King Hassan II put in place an advisory Council relative to the Sahara affairs, itself falling within the line of an *ad hoc* Royal Council that was created in 1979. In 1999, following the enthroning of King Mohammed VI, a Royal commission in charge of securing follow-up on affairs in the provinces of the South was set up. With the dynamics triggered off by the Moroccan Autonomy Project, new perspective are coming up in the horizon, and CORCAS, in its new version, is vested with new missions, and endowed with new powers. The fact of the matter is to make of it, from now on, an efficient institution, one that is founded upon the notion of

proximity, and that of field work. The King took good care then to recall in Laâyoune, on 25 March 2006, the date when CORCAS was created, and 141 members appointed that: *«building on the experience of the Council, in its initial set-up, I have decided to give fresh momentum to this organ, in its new composition (...)»*. It is in this particular case a question of enhancing the image of CORCAS, to turn it into an active institution, as well as a propositional force, notably within the perspective of actively defending the territorial integrity of Morocco. On the same occasion, the Sovereign emphatically stated that: *«I also want you to turn the Council into an institution, which contributes effectively to the development of the southern provinces, and to make it a successful tool for rallying people and for making proposals, building on the genius of the valiant sons of the Sahara»*.

With CORCAS, an essential milestone for the anchorage of the culture of dialogue has been laid in place. The Sovereign invites the Sahrawi populations to pragmatically make their contribution regarding the questions in connection with the territorial integrity, as well as the economic, social and cultural development of the provinces of the South. Essentially, the point is that CORCAS should adopt a truly participative and inclusive approach, one that could mobilize energies and actuate righteous circles.

After it had been constituted upon a representative and balanced base, certainly by making use at an early stage of the designation procedure, CORCAS proceeded to the consultation of the tribes and the elected representatives with a view to elaborating an Autonomy project in the Sahara Region. Democracy and development is the tandem that will steer the action of CORCAS. The latter will then be an inescapable

tool for the implementation of: « (...) *advanced regionalization, especially as the latter is the cornerstone of the modern State* (...) »¹.

On the diplomatic plane, CORCAS is supposed to defend the dossier of Morocco's territorial integrity abroad. In the person of its President, CORCAS takes part of the Moroccan delegation for negotiations with the Polisario. As a result, the thesis of the Polisario, self-proclaimed as the exclusive and legitimate representative of the "Sahrawi people," was soon overturned. In fact, the Moroccan Sahrawis are represented at the level of all the institutions of the Kingdom. They are also seen to be granted a supplementary channel of expression—CORCAS.

A space of democracy as it is, a catalyst of social and economic development, a protector of the Hassani cultural patrimony, a defender of Human rights, a diplomatic actor are some of the many appellations that underline the multi-functional nature of CORCAS, as well as the transversal orientation of its missions, which are extended and testify to a host of new stakes in connection with the Sahara question. One could think that CORCAS constitutes the nucleus of the future Autonomous Sahara Region, in case the latter is put in place. The terrain has; however, to be prepared as of today, and CORCAS is, in fact, at the heart of a dynamic long-term process. In this case, CORCAS acts as an "intermediary body" between the State and the provinces of the South, which is a gauge of counterweight, and the balance of Powers.

The architectural organization of CORCAS is divided up into five specialized commissions. The members of CORCAS are urged to cater

¹ Thus did the Sovereign express himself during the speech of 6 November 2006.

to several dossiers that are specified in the founding Dahir. The following are in order:

- ❖ Social affairs, human development, and the environment;
- ❖ The defense of Human rights, of public freedoms, and the sequestered populations of the camps;
- ❖ Economic affairs, education, and training ;
- ❖ The promotion of *Hassani* culture, information and communication ;
- ❖ Foreign affairs and cooperation.

Why CORCAS? What is its approach and objectives, and what is the contribution that it could bring in order to trigger off a righteous cycle within the provinces of the South, as well as the settlement of the Sahara dispute, including the discharge of its liabilities? What is its role on matters pertaining to the active defense of the territorial integrity of Morocco, its missions and activities, and the perspectives of its action, in light of the dynamics released by the Moroccan Autonomy Plan? So many questions and many problematic, that this original and special dossier seeks to address from different angles. For the International Studies Center and its team of researchers, this issue came up in terms of methodological and paradigmatic challenges. It was a question in fact of forging organizing concepts in order to define, classify, explain and prove, to use Durkheimian taxonomy².

In sum, CORCAS is the expression of a political rhetoric in the sense that this interface acts, not only as a sound box for the grievances expressed, and an all azimuth catalyst of development, but also, and above all, as an instrument of persuasion.

² Cf. Emile DURKHEIM, *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique*, Editions Flammarion, 1988, p. 21

THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE CREATION OF CORCAS: THE FOUNDING ROYAL SPEECHES AND AN ANALYTICAL READING OF THE DAHIR RELATIVE TO THE CREATION OF CORCAS

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The Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS) is a new structure destined to replace the Council of *Chioukhs* (public notables). Created as it was at the end of the Royal visit to the provinces of the Sahara from 20 to 25 March 2006, this institution operates within the framework of a new vision of the management of public affairs in general, and the Moroccan Sahara affair in particular.

Side by side with the administration in action, which is generally organized in ministries and public institutions, there figures at the central level a number of consultative organs in charge of providing council to the government. CORCAS, which draws its characteristics from these organs, operates outside traditional administrative hierarchy; it is placed next to the King in view of its essentially political nature. Its founding principles are announced in the Royal

speech of 25 March 2006³. The Dahir (decree) of its creation⁴, dated on the same day, not only specifies its principles, but translates them into juridical provisions.

It is precisely this general philosophy of CORCAS, as well as the political regime applicable to the latter, that we will address in two successive parts.

I. THE PHILOSOPHY UNDERPINNING THE CREATION OF CORCAS THROUGH THE ROYAL SPEECHES: THE DEMOCRATIC MANAGEMENT OF THE AFFAIRS OF THE SAHARA

From the outset, the Royal speech of 25 March 2006 announces the consistency of this policy: *« This move is a basic component of the efforts being made to foster the culture of dialogue, and thus pave the way for our citizens to help in this process and make practical proposals on all matters pertaining to our country's territorial integrity, and to the economic, social and cultural development of our beloved southern provinces »*.

It is thus a matter of associating the inhabitants of the provinces of the South, in the sense of dialogue, in all the decisions concerning territorial integrity and the development of the region. This quite simply means the abandonment of centralized management, and the transfer of larger competences, on matters of proposals and advisory opinions, to the local populations.

³ Speech of His Majesty the King to the nation, Laâyoune, 25 March 2006.

⁴ Dahir n°1-06-81 of 25 March 2006 relative to the creation of the Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs, B.O. n°5409 of 3 April 2006 (in Arabic).

In order to guarantee its credibility, as well as its efficiency and representativeness, CORCAS is composed of the dignitaries of tribes and members of parliament who are reputed for their sincere patriotism, as well as the pertinence of their judgment. The council is equally open to the actors of civil society as well as the lively national forces, notably women and the youth. Besides, in order to allow this organ to fully accomplish its missions, the government as well as all the institutions concerned, are called upon to extend their cooperation thereto.

One could confidently say that CORCAS is equally a structure for learning democracy, for the preparation and training of the local elites, who are called upon to run their own affairs within the framework of a broader autonomy.

CORCAS is also called upon to play an essential role in the consolidation as well as the upkeep of national unity and territorial integrity, all in accordance with a fundamentally democratic approach. It could thus express its opinion on the Moroccan proposal for autonomy statute concerning the provinces of the south.

The Royal speech delivered on the occasion of the Feast of the Throne⁵ takes back certain constants of this new democratic approach, notably « (...) *the setting up of the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs, with a new membership and an extended mandate, allowing for the forces that count in our southern provinces to be constantly involved. I asked the Council to submit its views on the proposed autonomy, and to suggest steps and initiatives likely to help achieve economic, social and cultural development in those parts of our country, which are so*

⁵ The speech of 30 July 2006.

dear to me. I also insisted the Council should remain open to various currents and trends, and that it should express the aspirations of all the sons of the region, those who live in the southern provinces as well as those who return to the ever-forgiving, ever-merciful homeland ».

The democratic management as well the realization of development constitute; therefore, the profound philosophy underlying the creation of CORCAS.

II. THE FUNCTIONS OF CORCAS THROUGH THE DAHIR OF CREATION

In view of its nature and broad competences, CORCAS exercises a number of functions.

A. A REPRESENTATION FUNCTION

CORCAS is a representative institution that is largely open to all kinds of potentialities. It is composed of two categories of members:

The first category is composed of members who have deliberative powers, and who are appointed for a four year period. The second category of members sits in the Council, and has a consultative voice.

As one could see, CORCAS is better structured than the old Council of *Chioukhs* which had no chairperson. Its composition is equally larger and more open. It also takes into account the rules of good governance in that it brings together colleges from diverse horizons.

Thus, in addition to elected members, the presence of members who represent civil society and socio-economic actors bestow upon this institution a triple nature: political, economic and social. The representation of the nationals who come from the provinces of the south is equally secured, especially that of the persons sequestered in Tindouf, who owing to their sequestration cannot voice their opinions. Women and the youth are equally represented in accordance with the Royal orientations. The composition of CORCAS remains to be open; it could include any person whose action may be useful to the accomplishment of the missions of the Council. No category of the population is then excluded a priori.

B. THE FUNCTION OF COUNSEL AND PROPOSAL

The Council renders opinions and makes proposals. It renders opinions when it is consulted by the King concerning all affairs in general, and particularly those relative to the defense of territorial integrity and national unity, as well as to the integrated human, economic and social development of the provinces of the south.

It is also entitled to submit proposals in connection with the initiatives, projects and measures relative to the following domains:

- ❖ The return and integration of all the Moroccans that are natives of the provinces of the south;
- ❖ The defense of territorial integrity and national unity, as well as the strengthening of national solidarity, be it at the level of the provinces of the south or the other regions of the Kingdom;
- ❖ The upkeep as well as advancement of the cultural, artistic and linguistic (*hassani*) patrimony, of the provinces of the south;
- ❖ The guaranteeing of a better future for youth by way of promoting education, training and job creation, in addition to the expression of

their ambitions and competencies within a context of dynamism and solidarity, at the national and the local levels alike;

- ❖ The advancement of woman's situation, as well as her integration in all domains;

- ❖ The reinforcement of the principles and rules relative to Human rights in the provinces of the South, all in conformity with the laws in force.

C. AN ACTION AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

The defense of territorial integrity and national unity is one of the primordial missions of CORCAS. The Dahir of creation provides for the participation of the Council, in coordination with the competent authorities, in the works of and meetings by the international institutions and organizations concerned with the territorial integrity and development of the provinces of the South. CORCAS, which has already made pronouncements regarding the autonomy statute, is thus associated to all the internationally oriented missions which it is tasked with, notably the defense of development and territorial integrity.

CONCLUSION

From the aforesaid, one could say that CORCAS, in view of its composition and prerogatives, constitutes a tool of choice for the concretization of a participative and democratic policy. CORCAS, far from being a classical administrative institution, aims at making the running of those affairs of a general interest more humane, more efficient and closer to home for the inhabitants. Indeed, dialogue, convergence as well as efficiency are the pillars that guarantee its success.

CORCAS AND SIMILAR INSTITUTIONS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY CCDH, IRCAM, CCME

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ABSTRACT

Ever since the dawn of the 1990's, Morocco has set in motion a multidimensional reform process. Among the great workshops that have been launched to this day, it is appropriate to cite that of Human rights ; not being able to remain indifferent to the different changes that have affected the international geopolitical scene, Morocco initiated a voluntarist type of policy in terms of which it triggered off an irreversible process that was to be crowned with the ratification of several international instruments in the area of Human rights, the adoption of a panoply of legislative texts, as well as the setting in place of a multitude of institutions whose ultimate objective is to guarantee, respect and promote the rights and liberties of citizens.

In fact, Morocco has profoundly modified its system of Human rights' protection by giving birth to the Advisory Council for Human Rights (henceforth CCDH). This institution was born of the care to offer citizens, more particularly Administration users, who find themselves

entangled within a rapport of inequity and disequilibrium in the face of an omnipotent and all-reaching Administration, a neatly more accessible protector than the judge, considering that administrative courts of law were not set in motion until March 1994. After having acceded to Power, HM King Mohammed VI deemed it necessary to review the provisions governing CCDH by proceeding to the broadening of its attributions, as well as endowing it with the consequential means permitting the achievement of the sought for results.

Morocco has crossed a new step on matters pertaining to the promotion of the rights of citizens by putting in place a new body that operates in the cultural domain ; namely, the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture (henceforth IRCAM). The Sovereign took the Initiative of creating this organ with a view to preserving the pluralist character of the national identity of the country, and reinforcing the different dimensions of democracy. In the same vein, one notes the Royal political determination to further reinforce regional democracy by proposing a broader autonomy for the provinces of the South in order to come to the definitive settlement of the Sahara conflict. In his speech dated 25 March 2006, during the nomination of the members of the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (henceforth CORCAS), the King reiterated his irreversible position to defend, at whatever price, the Moroccaness of the Sahara. Addressing the new members of this institution, the King entrusted them with several missions and tasks with a view to promoting sustainable human development, as well as reinforcing and anchoring local democracy in this region. The creation of CORCAS comes in as the logical reaction to the failure of the UN settlement plan for the dispute in the region. The principal mission

incumbent upon CORCAS is to assist the King, among other, with all the questions that pertain to the defense of the territorial integrity and national unity of the Kingdom, in this case defending the Moroccan Proposal for the resolution of this dispute through a political solution that is negotiated and accepted by the parties concerned.

An integral part of the Moroccan Nation, the Moroccan nationals living abroad deserve some particular attention, considering the diverse problems and challenges that they have to confront on a daily basis in their host countries. In fact, the growing interest accorded to the Moroccan nationals living abroad (MRE) goes back a long way. Several successive governments in Morocco had within them departments that would attend to their dossier. The Sovereign has recalled at several points the primordial importance that must be accorded to this community. In 2007, the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad (CCME) was accordingly put in place.

Indeed, there exist many points of resemblance between the different institutions that have thus been created; namely, CCDH, IRCAM, CORCAS and CCME. They all contribute towards the reinforcement of the Rule of Law, as well as the anchoring of culture and democracy.

The founding texts of the aforementioned institutions all unambiguously specify the primordial tasks that fall within the responsibility of each body. The different bodies created are all at the disposal of the Head of State, who refers them to the questions that fall within their competence whenever necessary.

In an earnest attempt to preserve both the administrative as well as financial autonomy of the different institutions, the founding texts contain some specific provisions.

Indeed, CCDH, IRCAM, CORCAS and CCME are autonomous organs; they remain subservient to the Royal institution, and are only answerable to the King himself.

The entire set of prerogatives attributed to the different bodies necessitates the enhancement of the powers of the organ in charge of the Direction. In contrast, every which Council is obliged to submit to the Sovereign an in-depth annual report relating all the activities realized, as well as all the programs and actions planned for. This instrument allows the King to enquire about the state of Human rights, and to closely monitor the results recorded in this domain.

Indeed, though they constitute consultative organs capable only of submitting proposals and opinions, the Councils occupy a fully-fledged part, and could even be considered as the keystone of the system of Human rights' protection in Morocco. In point of fact, the State has, by creating organs such as these, laid the foundations for its entry into a new era that is based on the scrupulous respect for human dignity, the advancement of Human rights, as well as the consolidation of the Rule of Law. Many things have indeed been achieved ever since their establishment.

Hence, the reason behind the creation of CCDH, IRCAM, CORCAS and CCME is to intervene in the domain of Human rights, a vital, sensitive, as well as complex domain, the ultimate goal being to remedy to all juridical defaults, and to reinvigorate the mechanisms of

protection governing the rights in question. The work of these bodies consists of assisting the King with the accomplishment of his State responsibilities and tasks, by taking stock of the juridical arsenal governing the area of competence proper to each body.

More specifically, CORCAS assumes three closely intertwined missions; in addition to the defense of the Moroccaness of the Sahara, the preservation and promotion of cultural patrimony within the framework of the diversely unified and rich national identity, it contributes to the socio-economic development of the provinces of the South. In fact, the Council has devoted two ordinary sessions in order to look into the thorny problems that the population of this region suffers from.

The Sahara provinces take then advantage of all the programs, as well as the opportunities of development in place, in exact proportions with the other regions of Morocco. Yet, the Government ought to redouble its efforts towards securing the best conditions for the safe return, as well as smooth reintegration of the Moroccans sequestered in Tindouf. Our compatriots ought; therefore, to put in place the requisite infrastructure (education, healthcare, transportation, housing, employment, etc.) that would allow the latter to lead a life of dignity within democratic, unified and interdependent Morocco.

The defense of the supreme interests of the State is incumbent upon different operators (the King, the Government, the Parliament, the political parties, the associations, etc.). Territorial integrity constitutes *the* most important national priority for the sake of which the members of CORCAS, besides the previously cited bodies, ought to mobilize. Already, CCDH, in accord with its multidimensional tasks, has created

a work group focusing on the situation of the Sahrawis illegally confined in the camps of Tindouf. The achievement of this group has been mitigated, which urged the need to face up to its shortcomings by creating an organ that has wider scopes of power, and which is exclusively devoted to the dossier of the Sahara conflict, especially after the recent development that this question has come to witness. While it actively participates in the negotiation processes, CORCAS continues to plead for the cessation of the suffering incurred on the Sahrawis persecuted in Tindouf, as well as for their immediate return to the country.

With a view to moving ahead towards a definitive settlement of the Sahara conflict, Morocco has come up with a peaceful solution that hinges around the autonomy of the provinces of the South within the framework of Moroccan sovereignty. In consideration of the historical import and implications of this decision, CORCAS met twice in extraordinary sessions for the express purpose of debating as well as finalizing the proposal for the Project of autonomy accorded to the provinces of the South⁶.

Directly and actively involved as it is in the process of resolving the Sahara conflict, CORCAS has not ceased to plead during all the sessions it held, ordinary and extraordinary ones alike, for the immediate return of all the Sahrawis who are confined against their own volition in the camps of Tindouf, on Algerian soil. And while defending with great ardor and enthusiasm the Moroccanity of the

⁶ The first part of the extraordinary session was held in Rabat on 25, 26 and 27 May 2006; the second part on 4 and 5 December 2006 in the same venue. Cf. <http://www.corcas.com>.

Sahara, the members of CORCAS have on several occasions addressed unceasing calls in the destination of the Direction of the Polisario so as to make the logic of reason and history prevail, and to have them by the same token rejoin the mother-Country by adopting the autonomy Initiative as the unique, realistic, as well as realizable solution which firmly establishes right, dignity, reconciliation and reunification.

In sum, CCDH, IRCAM, CORCAS and CCME are all considered to be the major artisans, so to speak, of the reforms that have been undertaken in Morocco ever since the 1990's. As per Royal instructions, these bodies have launched a process of reforms that aim at remedying to whatever extant shortcomings, with a view to definitively settling the dossier in suspense. Their achievement is certainly quite edifying to the extent that the image of Morocco has, on the international plane, been quite transformed in a fairly short lapse of time. For some years now, we have been witnessing the proliferation of many an organ that operates within vital, as well as varied sectors. This is a healthy sign on condition; however, that a large consultation between the different operators is guaranteed, and that a harmonious management of the objectives to be attained is maintained. The success of these Councils depends on the efficiency and dynamism of the members that compose them. In fact, the founding texts vest these bodies with large competences, and endow them with consequential assets to help them with the accomplishment of their tasks. The members ought to exercise their functions in all independence, and in all impartiality; they ought not to remain passive. The Councils have been created with the aim of assisting the Head of State with his State tasks and responsibilities. This obviously implies that the members should take the Initiative, and move ahead towards undertaking more concrete actions.

CORCAS: A SPACE OF DEMOCRACY AT THE SERVICE OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE MOROCCAN SAHARA

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ABSTRACT

Being *Amir Al Muminin* –the Commander of the Faithful--, the King also reveals to be of a temporal legitimacy that makes of him the first actor in Morocco. Sound judgment and dialogue have indeed always characterized the Royal method in the treatment of the big national and international dossiers. Such wisdom is the product of an approach adopted in Muslim public law: the *Choura* (consultation). Here is one of the fundamental traits of the Moroccan political regime—its capacity to create around it a constellation of institutions whose objective is to provide advice and opinion in upward direction. In the same vein, ever since the beginning of the 1990's, the Moroccan sociopolitical scene came to see, under Royal behest, several institutions of the same type. Those were the days of great geopolitical mutations on a planetary scale. Also, owing to his perspicacity, the late King Hassan II took care to anticipate change, and to cushion its potential negative effects. Thus did we come to witness the creation of the *Advisory Council for Human Rights* (1990), the *National Council*

for Youth and the Future (1990), and later *the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture* (2001) and, in 2006, *the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs* (CORCAS), in addition to a host of other institutions that join forces and mobilize energies. The creation of CORCAS partakes thus of a prospective vision, as well as a profoundly democratic approach.

In Laâyoune, on 25 March 2006, King Mohammed VI proceeded to the nomination of the members of CORCAS. There already existed during the reign of the late King Hassan II a similar council which, generally, remained without any real power, especially because the international conjuncture at that time was quite difficult. With the new dynamic that has been set in motion following the launch of the Moroccan Project of Autonomy, new perspectives are coming up on the horizon, and CORCAS, in its new configuration, is seen to be attributed new missions, and vested with new powers. Indeed, CORCAS turns out to be an inescapable tool for the implementation of « (...) *an advanced regionalization, especially as the latter is the cornerstone of the modern State* (...) »⁷.

CORCAS, in the person of its president, took part in the Moroccan delegation that presented the Moroccan Project of Autonomy to the countries of influence, including Arab countries. The tour was completed with the presentation of the Moroccan Project of Autonomy to the Security Council, on 11 April 2007. The thesis advanced by the Polisario, which proclaimed itself as “the exclusive and legitimate representative” of “the Sahrawi people,” soon burst asunder.

⁷ Thus did the Sovereign put it in the speech of 6 November 2006.

CORCAS was created pursuant to Article 19 of the Moroccan Constitution. Following as it does a participative approach; it is the expression of democratic management at the regional and local planes. In view of this, and within the Royal perspective, CORCAS is a propositional force which has proven to be efficient in furthering the development of the provinces of the South, defending territorial integrity, as well as preserving the cultural identity of the Sahara.

CORCAS has for a mission to put forward opinions to the King on all the questions pertaining to the Sahara. It works in concert with such active institutions as the 'Agency for the Economic and Social Promotion and Development of the Provinces of the South,' in line with a community-based integrative approach. It more or less reflects the future architecture of the institutions to be established in the Autonomous Sahara Region. It will hence be the major mainspring for the implementation of the Moroccan Autonomy Project, a Plan that seeks to set in motion, in the Sahara, a global, integrated as well as sustainable development plan.

CORCAS is composed, for a four-year mandate, of 141 members, of whom 14 are females, who have a deliberative power, and are selected from among the members of parliament, the presidents of regional Councils, the presidents of the provincial assemblies, the presidents of professional Chambers, the members to have been elected by the Sahrawi tribes during the former Council; the *chioukhs* (heads) of tribes, the members of tribes, NGO', the representatives of the foreign nationals who come from the provinces of the south, as well as those who rejoined the homeland, as well as other personalities reputed for their competence and impartiality (Article 4). It also includes other members in an advisory capacity; namely, the ministers of Interior and

of Foreign Affairs, as well as their representatives, the *walis* and governors of the provinces of the south, the Director of the 'Agency for the Economic and Social Promotion and Development of the Provinces of the South,' and the Directors of the Regional Centers for Investment in these provinces.

CORCAS has put in place five specialized Committees:

- ❖ A Committee for social affairs, human development and the environment ;
- ❖ A Committee for foreign affairs and cooperation ;
- ❖ A Committee for the defense of Human rights, public freedoms as well as the populations of the camps;
- ❖ A Committee for economic affairs, education and training;
- ❖ A Committee for the promotion of *Hassani* culture, information and communication.

In sum, CORCAS constitutes the central nucleus for the constitution of the future Autonomous Sahara Region. It is then a field of experimentation that aims to bring this pilot experience to fruition, not only in Morocco but also throughout the Arab world. This transitional undertaking will certainly take some time, but it appears to be irreversible, considering the expectations of the local populations, who are so motivated to take their future in their own hands through the autonomous running of their own local affairs.

CORCAS: TERRITORIAL CORPORATISM AND THE MEDIATION OF INTERESTS OF THE SAHARA

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ABSTRACT

The present article does not aim at re-launching reflection on the organization or the different attributions of CORCAS (the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs), but rather seeks to highlight a point which seems to have raised little interest among the analysts and exegetes of this entity in so far as it constitutes a body that articulates on intermediary grounds the interests and aspirations of a particular social category. More explicitly, it is a question of harnessing, through the action of CORCAS, a new dynamic that has in the last few years unceasingly marked the development of the Moroccan State: neo-corporatism (or democratic corporatism), which is a mode of institutionalized as well as extra-parliamentary articulation of social interests.

The domains of actions undertaken by CORCAS are varied; they embrace panoply of missions ranging from its consultative function to

the King of Morocco, all the way to direct diplomatic action, passing by the actions of proximity and the training of local elites. It remains to say that a « corporatist pact » is to be read between the lines, as far as the manner in which this body acts and reacts is concerned. This pact between CORCAS, bearer of complaints and petitions, and a State, provider of allocations and support, is imbricated, as it were, within the very texts of the Sahrawi body. The Dahir establishing CORCAS vests the latter with a host of functions that make of it a true « territorial corporation », one that acts for the count of a population that has specific needs and aspirations. As its organizational structure, set as it is in five specialized commissions, indicates, the 141 members of CORCAS are invited over to alternately take care of dossiers pertaining to human development and the environment; defense and Human rights; public liberties and the populations of the camps; economic affairs; education and training; the promotion of hassani culture; information and communication; foreign affairs and cooperation.

In mediating between the power of the State and the populations, CORCAS sets to work its « intermediary bodies », so dear to Montesquieu, who saw in these a real counterweight and a guarantee of the balance of powers. It is also a sign of the authentic application of « the principle of subsidiarity » according to which the institutional level appropriate for intervention has always to be that which is, territorially speaking, situated closest to the populations. The action of CORCAS strengthens thus the hypothesis that the practices relating to the corporatist mediation of social interests have started to seize the realm of rapports between the State and society.

Originally, corporatism described a social and economic doctrine that was based on the gathering together of different professional bodies within institutions that defend their rights. By further extension, this term also designates the use of economic, social and political powers for the express purpose of creating influential corporations that are capable of securing a better articulation of social claims. In Morocco, it is quite possible to talk about a «corporatism in preparation» in the sense that there begins to be institutionalized a «global scene of direct negotiation» between the State and the different groups that manifest particular interests. Once they intervene, these negotiations take up a formalized as well as a contractual character, and result in a more and more neat impact on governmental, social and economic policies, in particular. Whether it is a question of a «social dialogue», of CORCAS, the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture (IRCAM); the High-Authority for Audio-Visual Communication (HACA), the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad (CCME), public-private partnerships; or the civil collectivities for defense and development, the fact is that these special social categories find in the public arenas of negotiation a complementary space for collective action. Equally important here is the fact that Sahrawi social and cultural structures lend themselves quite perfectly to this type of collective action—corporatism, i.e.

The premises underlying corporatism can be perfectly verified at the level of political exchange between the Moroccan central power and the Saharan entity, including its tribal and lineage variants. Akin to the act of allegiance, or *bey'a*, the corporatist pact has the value of a historical argument that attests to the permanence of political ties between the Cherifian Kingdom and the Sahara. The history of the

latter is fraught with facts that indicate the movement and the sojourn of the Alaouite sovereigns –themselves natives of the Sahara– in the different localities of the South in order to receive complaints, put an end to injustices and speed up affairs.

At the time of independence, this «corporatist pact» between the Throne and the population of the Moroccan Sahara came to undergo characteristic extensions in the Saharan Councils established by the two last sovereigns of Morocco. The fact remains; however, that upon the creation of CORCAS, King Mohammed VI did not only reactivate the former Council of *chioukhs* (public notables) that had been put in place a quarter of a century earlier by his own father. Certainly, «the Hassanian CORCAS», which was created in 1981 and is composed of 85 members, all of whom natives of Sahrawi tribes, assumed rather lightly analogous functions (as the mouth-piece of the populations), and intervened within the context of the completion of national territorial integrity. Yet, it so happens that the current CORCAS is a lot more equipped than the previous council of *chioukhs*, both in terms of decision-making powers, its means of action, and the qualifications of its leadership and administration. Indeed, the assets that it has on hand qualify CORCAS to play a true role as «a territorial corporation», one that is modern comparable to the functions routinely assumed by a regional parliament. The composition of CORCAS is also spread out, at the generational and socio-professional levels, on wisely dosed proportions, ones that entitle it to attain full operation in terms of listening capacity, the thorough knowledge of local dossiers, as well as communication with the populations in their lived daily routine. The principle of voluntary work (the mission of the members of the Council being unremunerated) and the rather short mandate of the members (four years) further corroborate the citizen-informed

vocation of this body. Likewise, the combination of the elective principle (for the representatives of tribes) along with the Royal nomination (of the other members) highlights the double legitimacy, of the Council, at the same time upward and downward, popular and State-informed.

The scope of the powers that CORCAS is vested with transcends the sheer«consultative» dimension. This readily transpires from the founding Dahir itself, for it recognizes an autonomous «deliberative» power for the Council. Illustrative of this is the Moroccan Project of Autonomy for the Sahara Region, the final shape of which has been carefully elaborated and submitted to the King by the members of CORCAS. Better still, it is the representatives of the governmental Authorities that are seen to be invested at CORCAS with a consultative power.

Ever since its creation, CORCAS has undertaken several moves and made many a consultation. Indeed, the dynamism that CORCAS has proven to have has soon been recognized and given award; the national prize for digital administration «*e-mtiaz* », which is held every year by the Ministry in charge of the Modernization of Public Sectors, and won by the Council in Casablanca on 13 June 2007, opportunely comes in to render homage to the quality of services offered by this national body, notably in the area of its community-based policy, as well as its communication services that are based upon a bunch of six pluri-linguistic electronic gateways⁸.

⁸ Gateways provided mainly in Arabic, French, English, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Russian as well as Italian: www.corcas.com, www.sahara-online.net, www.sahara-culture.com, www.sahara-villes.com, www.sahara-développement.com and www.sahara-social.com.

CORCAS: A PILLAR OF THE DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS OF THE KINGDOM

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During his tour in the provinces of the South in March 2006, H.M. King Mohammed VI announced the creation of the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS), a competent institution tasked with interfering in everything in connection with the Sahara region.

The creation of this Council is an integral part of a global philosophy that Morocco has adopted for some years now, a philosophy of transition which is meant to propel the country towards the path of progress and democracy.

In fact, in order to come to the establishment of the Rule of law to which all Moroccans aspire, Morocco has opted for a transitory process that is based upon the putting in place of institutions capable enough to secure a positive outcome of the efforts deployed in this direction.

Within this framework, the creation of CORCAS comes in to bring this process to fruition, opening by the same token the passage of the

Moroccan State from a more or less centralized structure on to a regionalized regime that recognizes the autonomy of the Sahara region, and further consolidates the progress made by Morocco in the area of democracy and the decentralization of public life.

Within this perspective, the putting in place of CORCAS comes in as the junction of two primordial objectives of the Cherifian Kingdom; namely, to assist Morocco in its efforts towards consolidating its territorial integrity, on the one hand, and to take a new step towards the construction of a Moroccan democracy which is founded upon a participative approach, as well as on the values of proximity between the governors and the governed, on the other.

This two-fold aim of the Saharan Council translates into three missions that it has been tasked with, and that could be disengaged from the Royal speech of 25 March 2006 which announces its foundation, as well as from the Decree relative to its creation.

To begin with, the first task of CORCAS has been to elaborate the autonomy project, and to incorporate therein all the legitimate claims of the Moroccans of the south, watching all the while over the preservation of the national unity and the territorial integrity of the Kingdom (I).

Then, it came to be responsible for mobilizing towards putting an end to the separatist claims of the Polisario Front by raising the authentic voice of Sahrawis, a voice that has been washed away for upwards of three decades now behind the secessionist propaganda (II).

Finally, the Council had to serve as a laboratory within which the Sahrawi elites would acquire some crucial experience for the management of their own affairs in an autonomous manner (III).

I. CORCAS, AN ORGAN OF THE CONCEPTION OF THE AUTONOMY PROJECT IN THE SAHARA

After thirty years of a Sahara conflict that it has not ceased to get bogged down into, the Security Council of the United Nations (UN), by prolonging, on 28 April 2006, the mandate of the UN Mission for the Organization of a Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) by six months, calls for a political settlement within a spirit of dialogue. Morocco, by positioning itself within this spirit, Morocco presents a project of autonomy that has come as the fruit of a consensus on the part of the political class, as well as other actors in civil society, with the first priority to the citizens of the Sahara by way of CORCAS.

An approach such as this one expresses the participative, inclusive as well as democratic path that the Sovereign would like to follow in order to guarantee the success and perennity of the Moroccan project. Thus, numerous dialogues have been engaged in at the national level following the Royal speech of 6 November 2005⁹, wherein he announced his decision to consult « (...) *the political parties, in consideration of their fundamental role in the great national issues (...)*», as well as «*all the international authorities and organizations*» and of course, « (...) *the populations and the elected members of the region (of the Sahara), notably the heads of tribes*».

⁹ Speech of H.M. the King on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Green March.

Thus, among the organs called upon to make some pronouncement on the Moroccan Project of Autonomy in the Sahara, a place of precedence has been reserved for the Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs, since it is the first representative of those first ones to be concerned by the project. In point of fact, it is quite legitimate that the latter should be the first ones to participate in the conception of autonomy in the Sahara region. This is indeed what makes the fact that this autonomy constitutes a concretization of the right of this fraction of the Moroccan people to complete their self-determination.

The primacy of the role performed by CORCAS in the elaboration of the autonomy project has been quite clearly highlighted in the speech of 25 March 2006 (the founding speech), when His Majesty declares that he calls upon « *[his] loyal subjects, in our southern provinces, to engage a serious, careful reflection and put forward their views on the self-rule project, within the framework of the Kingdom's sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity* ».

The Moroccan Initiative for Negotiating an Autonomy Statute in the Sahara Region has been submitted to the UN Security Council on 11 April 2007. According to this proposal, the autonomy under question will be had within the framework of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Kingdom. It will go in conformity with international criteria, all the while allowing as it does the Sahrawis to run their own affairs via legislative, executive as well as judiciary authorities. The region will hence have an executive power that is exercised by a head of government who is elected by a regional Parliament, as well as vested by the Sovereign. As far as the Parliament is concerned, some part of its members will be elected by the tribes themselves, the rest

via universal suffrage. The regulations decreed by the institution will be put in practice by some regional courts of law whose task is to legislate on local affairs.

The Autonomy Project also provides for the presence in the region of a Government Delegate whose mission will be to see to it that the attributes of sovereignty are respected. In question here is the Commandery of the Faithful (*Imarat Al Muminin*), national security, defense, foreign relations as well as the judiciary system (the regional courts of law will cater to local affairs). Added to these are the flag, the currency and the national anthem.

At the economic plane, the regional authorities will have an exclusive competence; they will decide upon issues pertaining to economic development, investments, tourism, agriculture, and fishing, etc. At this level, the Sahara autonomous region will be largely independent from the central powers to be. The budget of the region in turn, will accrue from several sources of revenue, from local duties and taxes, at first. Then, a part of the revenues proceeding from the region and collected by the State will be poured back to the region. There are also the resources to be deemed necessary within the framework of national solidarity. As to the revenues proceeding from the exploitation of natural resources, the fact is that they will be shared out between the region and the State. The rates and levels pertaining therein will be fixed during negotiations.

The proposal equally provides for the right of return for the entire number of Moroccans who are presently sequestered in the Tindouf camps, within the framework of a general amnesty.

Finally, all the apparatus provided for will be the object of a referendum that unfolds pursuant to the principle of self-determination as well as to the United Nations Charter.

In this regard, the contribution of CORCAS in the elaboration of the Moroccan project has given the latter a dose of credibility that turned out to be vital for its approbation by the international community, which expressed itself through Resolution 1754, of 30 April 2007. The latter, in a gesture that gives intensive homage to the work undertaken by Morocco, and in insisting on the requisite recognition of these efforts in the settlement of the problem, expresses a central idea: the caducity of the Baker Plan II (2003), henceforward abandoned as a solution. In this respect, the autonomy plan proposed by Morocco constitutes, as far as the international community is concerned, the basic groundwork for negotiation. Herein the Security Council Resolution does in no way contradict the principles of the United Nations, for an autonomy that is conceived by the Sahrawis themselves is quite obviously a form of self-determination. This is precisely the reason why CORCAS has the duty of playing the role of the representative of the Sahrawi populations upon the international scene.

II. CORCAS, AN INTERPRETER OF THE SAHRAWI POPULATIONS BEFORE INTERNATIONAL BODIES

The Dahir (decree) relative to the creation of CORCAS stipulates that the latter is called upon to assist H.M. the King with regards to all the issues relative to the defense, the territorial integrity and national unity of the Kingdom, and to accomplish all the missions that his Majesty tasks it with in this domain. Within this framework, it could undertake

whatever action such as to promote the national cause on the international scene and, by the same gesture, participate, in coordination with the competent authorities, in visiting with the international institutions and organs likely to be attuned to the Sahara dispute.

In the same vein, on the occasion of the Royal speech of 25 March 2006 pertaining to the creation of CORCAS, H.M. the King implicitly invited the populations of the Sahara not only to adhere to the idea of autonomy, but also to come to its defense at international bodies. *« Given your patriotism and deep loyalty to the Kingdom's immutable values, I ask you to serve as the mouthpiece of your brothers in international bodies and forums, shedding light on the just cause of our territorial integrity (...) ».*

However, in order to claim the statute of the representative of the Sahrawi populations at the international plane, CORCAS had to shelter under its dome, as it were, all the components and all the ethno-cultural sensibilities of the region. This worrisome care for representation transpires in the very structure and composition of the new council. CORCAS is, indeed, dedicated to providing a substitute for the Council of *Chioukhs* (notables) that was created back in 1981 with 85 members coming from the local tribes, but which had remained idle up to then. However, the new body has at its disposal an array of means of competences that allow for securing a better advancement. It is henceforth led by a chairperson who is assisted by a Secretary General, both of whom are appointed by the King. The two men ought to manage a quite large structure with the support of nine elected vice-presidents who make up the organ's board.

In their turn, the 141 members of the Council, who are appointed for a four-year period, have been nominated in such a way as to guarantee the representation of all the local officials of the region, be they from the structure of the traditional local power; or from the modern structures of the national State. In addition to the *chioukhs*, the representatives of tribes, the presidents of the regional Councils or provincial assemblies, the members of the Council also include among their rungs both actors from civil society and members in “advisory capacity,” ones who emanate from the State, such as the ministers of Interior, of Foreign Affairs, the *walis*, the governors of the provinces of the South; or the presidents of professional Chambers, too. Some key personalities or ones known for their experience ought to equally figure among the members of the Council. Worthy of note, besides, is the fact that women (10%) and the youth (15%), who are present in non negligible portions, represent in their turn a quarter of the entire body. The composition of the Council remains to be open, however; other members could take part therein when need be.

The role that CORCAS plays, being as it is the representative of the Sahrawi populations who are loyal to the territorial integrity of Morocco, derives also from the favorable reception reserved by the international community to the autonomy plan, to which conception the representatives of these Sahrawis have largely contributed. In fact, CORCAS is the representative of two thirds of the Sahrawis that have chosen to defend the integrity of their country, Morocco. The latter, who are greater in number than they are actually believed, according to the estimates to be had in the absence of a census, and who are sequestered in Tindouf, have an important contribution to make towards advancing the Moroccan cause, owing to their full knowledge

of their dossier as well as the sense of confidence that family and tribal relationships could set in here and there.

The credibility of the representativeness of CORCAS finds confirmation each time it addresses an international organization or the government of a third State, and above all non-governmental organizations (NGO's), who play a primordial role in the settlement of the Sahara conflict, particularly regarding the protection of the rights of the sequestered of Tindouf¹⁰. One of the manifestations of the recognition given to the credibility of the Sahrawi Council by the international community took place within the UN Security Council during the debates that had preceded the adoption of Resolution 1754 of 30 April 2007, when the representative of Qatar asked to receive the President of CORCAS as the representative of the Sahrawi population.

Contrary to the Polisario, which presents itself as the representative of the sequestered of Tindouf (who have; however, never appointed it as such), CORCAS is put in place on the basis of the only criteria that all Sahrawis recognize; namely, the tribal representation to which a significant dose of modernity has been given, as it comprises the representation of civil society, the youth and women.

At the level of foreign relations, CORCAS constitutes a gigantic step in the course between Algeria and Morocco over diplomacy and communication. It is a frank and straightforward response to the pretensions of the separatist Front which considers itself as the authentic representative of Sahrawis. In this regard, CORCAS manifests a universal representativeness which covers the entire

¹⁰ A sample of the letters sent by CORCAS to NGO's is available for consultation on this website: http://www.yabiladi.com/docs/lettre_corcas_fr.pdf.

Sahrawi population, whereas the Polisario is not even capable to honestly show evidence of a verifiable representativeness of the Sahrawis that it holds hostage in Tindouf, and among whom much dissidence has been manifested ever since the constitution of CORCAS, and the announcement of the Moroccan Autonomy Project in 2003.

Besides, the Moroccan Initiative had the merit of establishing recognition for the specificities of the Sahara region as well as for its population, which won it the benediction of the international community. Nevertheless, the passage to a statute of an autonomous region takes place in a gradual manner; an effort of adaptation has therefore, to be deployed. This is precisely where the primordial role of CORCAS lies in.

III. CORCAS : A PRECURSOR OF THE AUTONOMOUS MANAGEMENT OF THE SAHARA REGION

« I also want you to turn the Council into an institution, which contributes effectively to the development of the southern provinces, and to make it a successful tool for rallying people and for making proposals, building on the genius of the valiant sons of the Sahara ». It was thus that H.M. King Mohammed VI addressed the members of CORCAS during the speech of 25 March 2006. The Council finds itself called upon to submit advisory opinions on both the general and specific questions that pertain to the integrated human, economic and social development of the provinces of the South. To this end, the Council could propose any project susceptible of securing the development of the Sahara region in coordination with any national, local, public or private, institution, and to suggest activities that aim to

preserve and promote the cultural, linguistic and artistic (Hassani) patrimony of the provinces of the South.

The prerogatives that CORCAS is seen to be endowed with are to be appreciated in light of the provisions of « *Moroccan Initiative for Negotiating an Autonomy Statute for the Sahara Region* ». In fact, as has already been highlighted, the Moroccan Initiative offers the Sahrawi populations the possibility of democratically running their own political, economic, social as well as cultural affairs, independently from the central authorities, through regional institutions that hold some exclusive powers, notably in the economic domain. Within this perspective, CORCAS is akin to a host of regional policies that will allow the local elites to have an idea about the kinds of responsibilities that the autonomous management of the region would engender.

Without pretending to the role of government, the Sahrawi Council could be considered as an institution of good governance « (...) *based on expanding people's participation in the management of regional affairs, bringing about new elites capable of shouldering responsibility, and providing the legal and material means to achieve these objectives in order to serve citizens, preserve their dignity and foster public interest* », as the Sovereign asserted in his speech of 25 March 2006.

The autonomy of CORCAS has been established by the decree relative to its creation, through a set of measures consecrated to guarantee direct contact between the Sahrawi Council and H.M. the King. It is indeed within this perspective that CORCAS will make sure it presents

an annual report to the King concerning its results as well as perspectives. It will also be granted a budget that proceeds from the Royal Court for the purpose of covering its operation costs.

And in order to fully accomplish its task, CORCAS will be assisted by a number of governmental bodies whose area of operation intersects with the missions of the Council. It was thus that the *Agency for the Economic and Social Development of the Provinces of the South of the Kingdom* has been designated as an advisory member of the council, as well as all the *walis*, the Authorities of the region; or the administrations of the ministries of interior and of foreign affairs. In sum, the Council serves as a link between the Administration and the population of the Sahara. Its task is to allow for a better implementation of governmental policy so that it is adapted to the real needs of the region, and so that the entire population is made aware of the fact that it is also concerned by the progress that has been achieved in the provinces of the South in particular, and Morocco, in general.

By taking into consideration the socio-cultural specificities of the Moroccans of the Sahara, the actions undertaken by CORCAS in the area of human and economic development will give the citizens of the provinces of the South an idea on public life within the framework of autonomy, and will serve to convince them of the latter's good foundation.

Thus perceived, the task of the Council aims at giving credibility to the projects dedicated to the promotion of the region, and to express the Royal will, which all the Moroccan people have, to turn Morocco into a model worthy of following on matters of democracy and the respect for Human rights. In this regard, the Council is entitled to undertake

whatever action susceptible of promoting the principles and rules relative to Human rights in the provinces of the South, and to « *[highlight] the achievements made by Morocco, as well as the reforms it has been introducing to forge ahead with sustainable human development and to promote democracy* ».

From a purely institutional viewpoint, and in view of its care for representativeness, CORCAS would be able to constitute the structure of the eventual regional Parliament which will be borne out of autonomy. In fact, representing as it does the three regions of the Sahara, Guelmim Smara, Laâyoune Boujdour and Dakhla, the latter offers a springboard towards adapting the local political elites to the new responsibilities that the exercise of power in the region entails. With the edification of CORCAS, the Sahrawi citizens have already started to democratically run their proper affairs. As its President maintains, the activity of the Council constitutes a type of “*training on a large scale.*”

CONCLUSION

Being in full possession of the credibility requisite for the representation of the Sahrawi populations, CORCAS constitutes the best spokesman for these populations. In point of fact, the content of the Moroccan Initiative for Negotiating an Autonomy Statute for the Sahara Region, whose principal author is the Sahrawi Council itself, reflects the loyalty of this Council to the people that it represents, because one cannot imagine any autonomy larger than the one that has been proposed. It is now the turn of the international community to bring forth the real will of the Sahrawis by recognizing CORCAS as the sole credible representative of the Moroccan Sahrawi citizens.

THE APTITUDE OF CORCAS TO BE AN ACCOMMODATION AND RECONCILIATION SPACE FOR THE REPATRIATES AND SEQUESTERED OF TINDOUF

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The contribution to a peaceful settlement of the question of the Moroccan Sahara has been, among other, behind the creation of the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS). The Polisario Front has always presented itself as the unique representative of the Sahrawi population. Yet, the creation of CORCAS allows for a clearer understanding of this question, essentially *vis-à-vis* national and international public opinion wherein the propaganda led by the enemies of the territorial integrity of Morocco has for a long time now harbored this thesis, the refutation of which passes through the examination of the doubly representative character of CORCAS (I).

Besides, following the recovery by Morocco of its Sahrawi provinces, the conflict, initially armed with the separatists of the Polisario, took a new turn ever since the cease-fire that was put in place on 6 September 1991, and above all beginning with the proposal of the statute of

autonomy initiated by Morocco, towards a peaceful settlement. A major objective behind this settlement has been the return to the mother-land of the Sahrawi populations that are sequestered in Algerian territory, a situation that presupposes a massive, planned as well as ordered return (II).

I. CORCAS, A DOUBLY REPRESENTATIVE SPACE

The representativeness of the Polisario will be examined at two levels: that of Morocco's constitutional and political system, within the framework of which this body exercises its functions, and that of the native populations of the Sahrawi provinces. At these two levels, CORCAS has a doubly representative character: it is representative of both the Royal institution (A) and the Sahrawi population (B).

A. CORCAS AND THE REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE ROYAL INSTITUTION

To look into the representativeness of the Royal institution by CORCAS necessitates a reminder of certain fundamentals of the Moroccan constitutional and political regime. In fact, Morocco, as stated in the first Article of the Constitution of 1996, is a «*Monarchy*». Yet, in Morocco, the monarchy rests on certain fundamentals that it imports to recall here in order to establish a clearer link between the Royal institution and CORCAS.

1. « IMARAT AL-MUMININ » AS A FUNDAMENT OF THE MOROCCAN MONARCHY

If the first article of the Constitution defines Morocco as being a « *democratic, social and constitutional Monarchy* », Article 19 stipulates that the King is « *Amir Al-Muminin* » (the Commander of the Faithful). The origin of Imarat Al-Muminin (ed. the commandery of the faithful) dates back to the earliest times of Islam. The Prophet Mohammed was deputized by people who would fulfill the conditions of intellectual capacity, moral and material rectitude, and were accepted by the community of Muslims. This constituted a sort of «*government*» that was set up by the Prophet. Aboubakr held a place of privilege in such a government, so much so that he would receive delegation from the Prophet, notably in order to lead prayer. The companions of the Prophet deduced there-from that the Prophet conferred supreme delegation upon him, and it was in application of such goodwill that they designated him for succession.

In order not to be qualified as the successor of the successor of the Prophet, Omar was named « *Amir Al- Muminin* ».

Being a « Muslim State », (Preamble of the Constitution), and the King being the descendent of the Prophet, the institution of Imarat Al-Muminin, integrated as it is within the Moroccan constitutional order, confers upon the Sovereign several attributes which are principally listed in Article 19 of the Constitution. Hence, the King is « (...) *the Supreme Representative of the Nation and the Symbol of the unity thereof. He shall be the guarantor of the perpetuation and the continuity of the State. As Defender of the Faith, He shall ensure the*

respect for the Constitution. He shall be the Protector of the rights and liberties of the citizens, social groups and organisations.

The King shall be the guarantor of the independence of the Nation and the territorial integrity of the Kingdom within all its rightfull boundaries».

It is in light of these attributes of the Monarch that the representative character of CORCAS should be examined.

2. CORCAS AS A BODY OF THE MONARCHICAL POWER

Both the rationale and the overall orientation of the dahir relative CORCAS allow for relating this body to the Royal institution, which explains the representative character of the latter.

In the rationale, to begin with, mention is made clear of the institution of Imarat Al-Muminin. There is also a mention of the ties of allegiance - or *beâa* -, an institution whose origins equally date back to the time of the Prophet, which ties the inhabitants of the Sahara with the Alaouite throne, the self-same ties of allegiance that the International Court of Justice makes mention of in its advisory opinion.

Finally, the rationale describes CORCAS as a proposal force as well as an efficient institution in the emergence of the Sahrawi provinces, and the struggle for their Moroccanity, knowing that the King, in the terms of the Constitution itself, is the guarantor of the Kingdom's territorial integrity.

It is; however, the articles that follow the rationale which allow for a better understanding of the representative character of the Royal institution, as attributed to CORCAS.

3. THE ROYAL PREROGATIVES AND CORCAS

The dahir relative to the creation of CORCAS links this Council to the Royal institution by means of two principal mechanisms: the attributions of the Council and the nominations.

a. THE ROYAL PREROGATIVE TO TURN CORCAS INTO A CONSULTATIVE BODY

The character that CORCAS has for being a consultative body to the King emerges from its denomination itself (Royal Advisory Council for Saharan affairs). This character is reaffirmed by Article 1 of the dahir, which entrusts it with the mission of assisting His Majesty with all the affairs relative to the territorial integrity and national unity of the Kingdom, with the promotion and socio-economic development of the provinces of the South, as well as with the protection of their cultural identity.

Article 2 of the dahir lists all the proper attributions that confer upon the Council the role of either a simple consultative organ, or that of a body in charge of a mission by the King. It is undeniable that CORCAS represents the Royal institution in the areas and domains of intervention fixed for it.

b. THE ROYAL PRÉROGATIVE TO NOMINATE THE MEMBERS OF CORCAS

The president of CORCAS is nominated by the King (Article 3). The same applies to the members having a deliberative capacity, who are nominated for a four-year period from among the members of Parliament, the presidents of regional councils, the presidents of provincial assemblies, and presidents of professional chambers of the southern provinces during the fulfillment of their mandate. The Council also includes members who were elected for the former Council by their tribes, «Chioukhs» of tribes, members of associations belonging to civil society and youth organizations in the southern provinces, representatives of Moroccan natives of the southern provinces living abroad, representatives of the Tindouf sequestered populations, representatives of socio-economic operators and bodies, as well as a host of other personalities known for their lucidity and honesty (Article 4 of dahir).

It is worth emphasizing that in addition to the fact of being nominated, the members listed by Article 4 are in their majority representatives of the local population; that is, elected members, which amply explains the representativeness of the Sahrawi populations, as well as the doubly representative character of CORCAS.

B. CORCAS AND THE REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE SAHRAWI POPULATIONS

Before examining the representativeness of the Sahrawi populations, it would be worthwhile to examine the ostensible representativeness claimed by the Polisario.

1. THE DECOMPOSITION OF THE POLISARIO THESIS AS THE « REPRESENTATIVE » OF THE SAHRAWI POPULATION

In its attempt to erect itself as a national liberation movement, the Polisario has, for quite a long time now, striven to make itself go for the unique representative of a so-called Sahrawi people, and it is for a long time now also that the Moroccan authorities have not been able to lift the veil on such a pretension. Today still, for evident political considerations that aim to pave the way to a peaceful settlement of the conflict, the Manhasset negotiations are entered into with the representatives of the Polisario. The reality has it otherwise, though; in the eyes of the institution of CORCAS, for other movements to surface up, either within or outside the Polisario, contributes to the falling apart of the thesis of the unique representative of the Sahrawi population.

Several arguments can be adduced here that would yield a better understanding of the representativeness of the Polisario.

a. THE PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATIONS SEQUESTERED IN TINDOUF OF WHICH THE POLISARIO CLAIMS REPRESENTATIVENESS, AND THAT OF THE POPULATIONS LIVING IN THE PROVINCES OF THE SOUTH

The direct negotiations for the peaceful settlement of the Sahara conflict have been the logical outcome of the failure accompanying the organization of a referendum, which was proposed and accepted by Morocco, and was due to take place in 1991, a failure due to the fact that the electoral basis could not be concretely and objectively

established, notably because of the obstructionist maneuvers of the Polisario itself.

Today, the Polisario and Algeria refuse the census of the populations in the camps of Tindouf (Algeria), even for humanitarian reasons, and even more so, for such competent international bodies as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or the High Commissioner for Human Rights. It is estimated; however, that the number of these populations amounts to 90.000, contrary to the number of 165 000 quoted by the Polisario, not to mention the fact that among the 90 000 there figure populations that are not natives of the Sahara, populations that, within the general context underpinning the beginning of the conflict, were regrouped in the camps of Tindouf in order to blow the figure into bigger proportions, and by the same gesture, exert pressure on Morocco. Were one to make abstraction of these facts, and even go as far as considering that the Polisario really represents the will of all these populations – which is far from being the established truth -, one would in no way ignore the number of populations in the provinces of the South.

Contrary to the opacity surrounding the number of sequestered in Tindouf, there exist in Morocco reliable statistics concerning the populations of Sahrawi origin living in the provinces of the South. These are estimated to total, according to some sources, 223.000. As can be observed, the difference is significantly big. Yet, a better appreciation of the representativeness in question would not be any closer to objectivity if it was not corroborated by other arguments, among which is the consideration of the aspirations of the sequestered populations themselves.

b. THE EMERGENCE OF MOVEMENTS OPPOSED TO THE POLISARIO

In camps set up on foreign territory, kept up by military force, and where the sequestered populations that are subject to propaganda and indoctrination barely eke out a living, it is not easy to see the emergence of dissident movements that are hostile to the line of conduct traced by the Polisario. Movements such as these have; nonetheless, seen the light of day.

Such is the example of the so-called «Khat Achahid» movement which claims a part of the representativeness of the Sahrawi populations, and calls upon the United Nations to enter into negotiations with it. The movement, it is worth noting, emerged from within the ranks of the Polisario itself. It however denounces the latter's corrupt Direction, considers the 12th congress in Tifariti held by the Polisario in December 2007 to be utterly illegitimate, and estimates that the Direction of the Polisario has absolutely no right to negotiate with Morocco on behalf of the Sahrawi population (communiqué published on 24 December 2007).

«Gjijimat» is such another movement. Upwards of a thousand persons held a congress in parallel with the 12th congress of the Polisario in Tifariti, and declared therein that they were favorable to the autonomy plan proposed by Morocco, when they had for a long time remained in favor of the independence of the Sahara.

Other movements exist that are in favor of the autonomy plan, but these often act within the framework of associations.

It would then be legitimate to inquire about the legitimacy of this supposedly «exclusive and unique representativeness» of the Polisario, all the more because defections among the ranks of this movement have been registered for a long time now.

c. DEFECTIONS IN THE RANKS OF THE POLISARIO

A great number of political operators who act on the national and international scene within the framework of the Sahara affair, had occupied first-rank positions within the Direction of the Polisario, but rejoined the mother-land. This was equally the case of many a sequestered Sahrawi. Some non-official figures estimate the number of the returnees to stand at between 6.000 and 7.000, all of whom could rejoin the mother land and to integrate the social, political and economic life of the country. Amply illustrative of this is the strong participation recorded among Sahrawis in the last legislative elections.

d. THE STRONG PARTICIPATION OF THE SAHRAWI POPULATIONS IN THE LAST LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

The legislative elections of 07 September 2007 had one of the lowest rates of participation ever. And despite some criticism, these elections were judged by independent observers to be credible. The revelation of these elections; however, has been the high rates of participation recorded in the provinces of the South, rates which went by far beyond those recorded in the other provinces. Indeed, of all the readings possible, the one that allows not for even a modicum of doubt has to do with the attachment of the populations of these provinces to the

political system of their country, far from the fallacious theses of the Polisario.

Being as they are numerically, that is, the most important, the examination of the question of the representativeness of these populations could not be carried out with reference to the Polisario, but in connection with another body; namely - CORCAS -.

2. THE REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE SAHRAWI POPULATIONS BY CORCAS

Two aspects of this kind of representativeness will hold our attention: an aspect relative to its composite as well as diversified nature, and another one of a symbolic order.

a. THE DIVERSIFIED NATURE OF THE REPRESENTATIVENESS OF CORCAS

The composite nature of the Council manifests itself at several levels:

❖ At the level of the members composing it: the Council is indeed composed of members, all of whom are Sahrawis, and many of whom have already acquired some representativeness through some mode of election, on the one hand, and other members directly nominated by the King, on the other.

❖ At the level of the attributed role; the Council is composed of members who enjoy a deliberative authority, as well as members who sit on in advisory capacity.

❖ At the level of the represented target populations; the Council integrates national, regional, provincial and local elected representatives, as well as persons who belong to diverse socio-economic horizons; or to associations, etc.

❖ The Council is also characterized by a horizontal integration of all the components – or almost—of the Sahrawi population. Among these members, the Council totals 10% of females and 15% of young males.

Equally important is the fact that the Council also integrates some ex-leaders of the Polisario, the members who were elected for the former council by their tribes, the *chioukhs* (ed. public notables) of tribes, the representatives of Moroccan natives of the southern provinces living abroad, as well as the representatives of the Tindouf sequestered populations (Article 4 of the dahir relative to (CORCAS).

b. THE SYMBOLIC CHARACTER OF THE REPRESENTATIVENESS

Some consider that only the direct election of the members of the Council by the Sahrawi populations would constitute a real gauge for representativeness; thinking in this way would imply an ignorance of the nature of the Moroccan political and constitutional regime, as well as of Morocco's internal juridical order.

In fact, whatever their quality (parliamentarians, socio-economic operators, etc.), all the members of the Council are nominated by the King, which translates the ties of allegiance that unite, through representatives, the populations of the Sahrawi provinces to the Alaouite throne.

Besides, the nature of the representativeness of CORCAS, which serves as interface between the central power and the populations of the Sahrawi provinces, constitutes a space of accommodation of and assistance with integration and reconciliation in these provinces.

II. CORCAS, A SPACE OF ACCOMMODATION AND ASSISTANCE FOR INTEGRATION AND RECONCILIATION

Among the attributions of CORCAS, Article 2 of the dahir governing CORCAS provides for that of putting forward proposals concerning whatever measures leading to the return and integration of all the Moroccans who come from the provinces of the South to the clement and merciful motherland. The article also stipulates that His Majesty could put the Council in charge of any mission in connection with the affairs listed in the self-same article, be they general or specific. The scope of these affairs is sufficiently large to include assistance with return and integration.

Thus, how could CORCAS in fact constitute, within a spirit of reconciliation, a space of assistance with and towards the return and integration of the native populations of the provinces of the South to their motherland?

A. CORCAS AND ASSISTANCE WITH THE RETURN, THE SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION OF THE SAHRAWI POPULATIONS

The illegal confinement of the populations in the camps of Tindouf cannot and will not last forever; the return of these populations to the

motherland is only a matter of time. Therefore, some concrete actions have to be taken and carefully prepared by CORCAS.

1. CORCAS AND ASSISTANCE WITH THE RETURN

The terms of the last conclusions presented by M. Peter Van Walsum, the former personal Envoy of the UN Secretary General for the Sahara, before the Security Council on 21 April 2008, were crystal clear: the option of independence is not realistic. M. Peter Van Walsum has been supported in his realistic vision by the Security Council in Resolution 1813, which was unanimously adopted by the 15 members on 30 April 2008. In this resolution, the Council ratifies, all reservations aside, the call for «*realism*» and the «*spirit of compromise*» launched by M. Van Walsum. Another established advantage of Resolution 1813 is the exceptional protraction by one year of the MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara) mandate, previously of six months only, with a view to bringing the negotiations to fruition. However, should the other parties persist in their determination to maintain the status quo, would it then be still admissible that the populations sequestered in Tindouf continue to be penalized for and shoulder the consequences of a conflict that has dragged on for thirty years now, when they could live freely and decently in their land of origin?

CORCAS would have to play a role in remedying to this situation. It would do so by establishing contact with the sequestered populations as well as by organizing their return.

a. KEEPING CONTACT WITH THE SEQUESTERED POPULATIONS

Both CORCAS and its president, M. Khalli Henna Ould Errachid, never cease to multiply calls in the destination of the Polisario, inviting it over to reconciliation. The calls; however, are not always heard, and CORCAS does then everything possible to establish direct links with the sequestered populations, with a view to making them more confident, as well as empowering them into standing up against risks and coming back home to where they belong.

Indeed, ever since the dawn of the conflict, a growing number of Sahrawis came back to Morocco, individually or in small groups. In yet a recent evolution, their comeback started to take a more massive aspect. The role played by CORCAS has been crucial in this evolution, because the contacts established have led to the return of a group of 100 persons from «Gjjimat», following the 12th congress held by the Polisario.

The multiplication of these contacts, as well as the diversification of their channels of operation, ought to constitute the primary types of actions to be undertaken by CORCAS, and the same goes for the organization of the return process.

b. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE RETURN

The organization of the return by CORCAS is conceivable under two scenarios: one optimist, the other pessimist.

The optimist scenario is that of the soon-to-come success of the negotiations led by Morocco under the auspices of the United Nations on the implementation of the autonomy plan proposed by Morocco; the organization of the return of the populations would then take an official form, and would certainly be examined within the framework of negotiations, as delicate and important as this form is.

We have no precise data on hand, but it is a well-known fact that the populations living in the camps of Tindouf are not all natives of the provinces of the South. Would it be necessary to organize the return of all these populations? How many would they be? Under this scenario, CORCAS would be able to play a certainly important role, albeit a subsidiary one, in organizing the return of the populations. On the Moroccan side, the negotiations were led by the Moroccan authorities, and it is these very authorities which would administer their return, with CORCAS acting in advisory capacity over several aspects of the organization of this return.

The role of CORCAS would be all the more subsidiary, as point 32 of the Autonomy Statute stipulates, in the case of negotiations, and *«once the parties have agreed on the proposed autonomy, a Transitional Council composed of their representatives shall assist with repatriation, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of armed elements who are outside the territory, as well as with any other action aimed at securing the approval and implementation of the present Statute, including elections»*.

The pessimist scenario is, in the current state of things, unfortunately the most probable one. In the face of the support given to the

Moroccan autonomy proposal, the Polisario finds no other means but to scupper and drive it all to ruin, asking to keep M. Peter Van Walsum away by refusing to pursue the negotiations in his presence, as well as by trying to establish a *fait accompli* in the Moroccan region of Tifariti, which is situated on the other side of the wall of defense. The Polisario, supported as it has been mainly by Algeria and South Africa, will push towards escalation – it even threatens from time to time to go back to arms -; or in the best possible cases, perpetuate the negotiations as long as possible, as the title of a national daily newspaper has come to put it. The newspaper in question simply reproduces a declaration by M. Peter Van Walsum to the Dutch daily «NCR Handelsblad» (24 May 2008 edition) wherein he expressed his feeling that he was somehow put in charge of the Sahara only to make it drag on *ad infinitum*. « *Is it morally fair to accept that another generation of Polisario children grow up in the camps?* », he wondered before suggesting that the Polisario «(...) *enter into hard negotiations for a serious and guaranteed form of autonomy under Moroccan flag*».

Considering this situation, and being strong in terms of its representativeness, as well as its legitimacy, CORCAS has, on the contrary, to harness all the peaceful means susceptible of organizing the return of the sequestered. It would indeed be incumbent upon the Moroccan authorities to support it in this effort by all appropriate means available. In either scenario, CORCAS would have to assume yet another task, important as much as arduous, too—that of assisting with settlement and integration.

2. CORCAS AND ASSISTANCE WITH SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION

As has already been mentioned, it is stipulated in the dahir of creation relative to CORCAS that this body assists the King, notably on the questions of promoting the social and economic development of the provinces of the South, as well as on the preservation of their cultural identity. In its communiqué at the close of the first ordinary session in the year 2008, this Council renewed its call for reconciliation, and announced the adoption of a set of important programs in the area of fishing, transportation, housing and employment, programs that it has implemented in perfect coordination with the government.

Whether it is the case of a general return of the sequestered populations in Tindouf, as the result of negotiations, or a return resulting from procedures undertaken by CORCAS, such initiatives are of great importance in preparing the settlement of the returnees, first, and their integration, later. To examine these questions deserves some special attention, especially as this body has shown its limits on these planes.

a. ASSISTANCE WITH THE SETTLEMENT OF THE REJOINED

We could consider that the first administration of the settlement operation concerning the returnees has not been quite successful. The return to the mother land would formerly take place on an individual basis; or by groups at the most; in the first operation to have been negotiated and led by CORCAS towards the return of the so-called «Gjjimat» group (around 100 persons), the Council showed its limits.

What would happen if some more numerically significant groups were to rejoin the country tomorrow?

In fact, some media reported the refusal of a number of persons to have rejoined the homeland as part of the «Gjijimat» group of the offer made by CORCAS towards their rehousing within the framework of a housing project in Laâyoune. A number of them chose to stay in the hotel where they were received upon their arrival, among whom there were entire families.

We have no reasons for doubt as to the facts related by this source of information; they have indeed the advantage of urging this Council to take cognizance of all the efforts it should deploy in order to better administer this operation whose dimensions may be much more important.

CORCAS must inescapably be equipped with a clearer strategy and sufficient enough means if it were to better organize the settlement of the returnees, as a prelude to their integration.

b. ASSISTANCE WITH THE INTEGRATION OF THE REJOINED

In his book on «*Le Sahara, liens sociaux et enjeux stratégiques*», Mohamed Cherkaoui devotes the second part entirely to the question of the social and economic integration of the Sahara. He delivered up the following in this sociological study: «*I have sought and analyzed to this end all the demographic, economic and sociological data concerning the last four decades, and have used the most refined mathematical and statistical models in order to test the hypothesis of*

the relatively good integration of these populations. The findings of the study all go in the same direction—the emergence as well as reinforcement of a thick network of social and economic ties that integrate the Sahrawi provinces through delivering them from the state of utter destitution they had to suffer during colonization, and allowing them to accede to modernity thanks to a positive and efficient discrimination policy ». The same author continues: *« For the theoretical and practical reasons that I have developed (...) I have also conducted an investigation on what is, in my vision, the best indicator of social integration: matrimonial exchange (...) in the space of forty years, the rate of endogamy went down from upwards of 97% to less than 60%. The quasi-total of mixed marriages took place between Sahrawis and Moroccans from other regions. I hasten to add that this finding would have been more important had I been able to lay hand on the marriage contracts of the Sahrawis that live in Moroccan regions other than the Sahara: among this population, the rate of marriage would attain, it appears, record levels (...) ».* If marriage turns out to be one of several factors that favor the integration of the Sahrawi populations remaining in the provinces of the South or settled in the Northern provinces, the question of integration would have to be put differently in the case of these selfsame populations who live in sequestration in Tindouf.

In this regard, Article 2 relative to CORCAS has not failed to highlight the prerogatives of this Council concerning the integration of these populations (as well as their return). As per this Article, the Council is entitled to make proposals to His Majesty the King with respect to this measure. However, on what grounds would CORCAS be able to make such proposals, especially on a subject that concerns the sequestered

populations, ones around which reliable data are lacking, and to which access to information is nearly impossible? CORCAS would then not be able to make any serious proposals regarding whatever measures leading to the integration of these populations unless it conducted a multidisciplinary study. In this respect, competent international bodies ought to make the realization of such a study a possibility. They could notably do so by favoring access to information on these populations. And there would be no doubt that, after 16 years of armed conflict and 33 years of sequestration, some thorough preparation for integration would constitute a *conditio sine qua non* for reconciliation.

B. CORCAS AND ASSISTANCE WITH RECONCILIATION

In the case of the Sahara conflict, reconciliation would take two forms: reconciliation with the mother land, and reconciliation with the populations remaining in the country.

1. ASSISTANCE TOWARDS RECONCILIATION WITH THE MOTHER LAND

To begin with, point 3 of the text of the Moroccan Initiative for Negotiating an Autonomy Statute in the Sahara Region stipulates that this initiative « (...) *brings hope for a better future for the region's populations, puts an end to separation and exile, and promotes reconciliation* ».

The call to the «*clement and merciful country*» which was launched years ago by the late King Hassan II is reiterated in the text of the dahir relative to CORCAS (Article 2).

The call in question was heard by all those who rejoined the mother land, and none of them showed any sign of worry. The call; however, has to take up more concrete forms when addressing the illegally confined populations in Tindouf. To prepare the reconciliation of these populations with the motherland is one of the questions that CORCAS should look into.

Of the measures that would favor this reconciliation, one finds the Autonomy Plan which is presented by Morocco, and which proposes general amnesty. A measure such as this ought to be normally taken within the framework of the general settlement of the conflict, but this does not preclude it from effectively implementing it before any settlement. It would in this case constitute another gauge of the goodwill and outstretching arm of Morocco, still another element that would perhaps favor the settlement of the conflict. However, not knowing the intentions of the opponents, nor of how they would respond to the outstretching arm, CORCAS has to prepare the legal text relative to amnesty in a most meticulous way. Here again is another task that the Council should devote itself to.

2. ASSISTANCE WITH RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE SAHRAWI POPULATIONS

Should the law – as a necessary tool in the case of amnesty— constitute a means of favoring reconciliation between the populations that are sequestered in Tindouf and their motherland, it would be of no help in the case of reconciliation between the Sahrawi populations themselves. CORCAS would be called for to rally all the assets it has on hand in order to put in practice some appropriate mechanisms.

It is a known fact that the tribal aspect will always remain deep-seated for the populations of the Sahara. Also, the stands of the ones and the others in connection with the Sahara conflict would constitute yet another ground for frictions and antagonisms. Some other factors could eventually come into play, and it is significant to mention, for example, that the return of the «Gjjimat» group, which was organized by CORCAS, was not favorably regarded by the returnees at the dawn of the 1990's, some of whom came out to claim the regularization of their material situation, as has been reported. Here also CORCAS ought to act proactively, to conduct a study that would pin down all the possible reasons behind the conflict, and come up with the appropriate answers. And here again, for CORCAS to conduct a multidisciplinary study turns out to be mandatory.

CONCLUSION

The question of the Sahara conflict could evolve in one of these two ways:

- ❖ To make common sense prevail, show evidence of realism and put an end to this conflict whose first victims are the sequestered populations. The way to settle this dispute has never been as strongly supported as the Moroccan proposal for autonomy has;
- ❖ To maintain the status quo; or in the worst scenarios, trigger off an escalation. In this configuration, the sequestered in Tindouf will not be the only ones to suffer; the whole region will.

In either eventuality, ought CORCAS to remain in a state of expectation? The answer will only be negative, and we have shown throughout the preceding analysis what this Council would represent, and what appropriate actions it would have to take.

In the Sahara conflict, the role of Algeria – long glossed over – has become a well-known fact, even among the misinformed ones. The autonomy Statute proposed by Morocco, including everything it offers by way of a peaceful settlement of the conflict in conformity with international legality, and for what it constitutes in terms of being an asset for the whole Maghreb region, history reveals that back in 1988 this proposal was the selfsame solution proposed by Algeria itself, as transpires from the document classified «Top Secret» of the CIA, declassified recently. It is high time that Algeria started to recognize what is self-evident, and to admit that any settlement of the conflict will only be had within the framework of the autonomy proposed by Morocco. In the same vein, the international Community is called on to put pressure on Algeria in order to lead it into contributing more positively towards the settlement of the conflict; or at least, allow the sequestered to freely leave the camps of Tindouf, and let them make their own choice of their own destination. One would then speak of yet another «autonomy plan»—*the right of the sequestered in Tindouf to self-determination*. In a nutshell, CORCAS should be ready for all eventualities.

CORCAS: TOWARDS BROADENING THE RULE OF POPULAR AND TRIBAL CONSULTATION IN THE SAHARA

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The Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS) is a Royal consultative organ whose creation is intimately linked to the Sahara dossier, as well as to the recent evolutions that it has come to witness. The nomination of its members took place in Laâyoune—which holds a place of precedence among the provinces of the South—during the Royal speech of 25 March 2006. The Dahir pertaining to the creation of CORCAS lays out several reasons behind the establishment of this Council. The following few reasons are in order here:

- ❖ The consecration to the irrevocable Royal commitment in favor of the democratic option which advocates a consultative method that seeks to associate citizens to the running of their own affairs at both the local and regional levels;
- ❖ The Moroccan Constitution, most particularly Article 19, which refers to the direct Royal involvement in as well as follow-up of the Sahara dossier;
- ❖ The Royal determination to associate all the different live forces of the provinces of the south in the promotion and development of these

provinces, as well as in the preservation of the cultural identity of the Sahara region;

- ❖ The reinforcement by the State of the role of the local Sahrawi elites in the area of negotiation with the Polisario.

Its mission consists in:

- ❖ Formulating and presenting opinions to his Majesty on a set of general questions in connection with the defense of the territorial and national integrity of the Kingdom;

- ❖ Accomplishing the missions linked with the afore-mentioned domains (territorial integrity, national unity, development);

- ❖ Making proposals to his Majesty concerning the initiatives, the projects, as well as the measures pertaining to the many domains that Article 2 of the founding Dahir lists as follows:

- The return to the mother-land and the integration of all the Moroccans who come from the provinces of the South;

- The defense of territorial integrity and national unity;

- Guaranteeing the human, economic and social development of the provinces of the South;

- The upkeep and promotion of the cultural, artistic and linguistic (*Hassani*) heritage of the provinces of the south;

- Securing a promising future for the youth;

- The reinforcement of the principles and rules relative to Human rights in the provinces of the South in conformity with the legislation in force;

- The participation, in collaboration with the *ad hoc* authorities, in the activities and meetings of international bodies and organizations on

matters pertaining to the integrity of our territories or to the development witnessed by the provinces of the south.

It can readily be observed thus that CORCAS is an organ that makes use of the principle of consultation as a modernist and democratic mechanism. Besides, this principle abides by the provisions of the rules of “Beïa,” which constitutes in itself an osmosis between the Moroccan social specificities and the spirit of modernization.

The consultative method pursued by CORCAS constitutes an adaptation of the exigencies of modernity as incarnated in international references on matters of Human rights, and the respect for the Constitution in the administration of a dossier such as the one of the Sahara. This, however, is only feasible through deepening the levels of cohesion between the local and the national.

Within the same framework, one ought to mention the relation between CORCAS and the King as the Commander of the Faithful offers considerable guarantees for the settlement of the Sahara dispute. These guarantees derive from the entire set of religious and symbolic significations that his Majesty represents, as well as from the aspects of historical attachment of Sahrawis, being as they are an integral part of the history of Morocco in general.

I. THE COMPOSITION OF CORCAS: TRIBAL EQUILIBRIUM AND THE DIVERSE REPRESENTATIVENESS OF SAHRAWI SOCIETY

Pursuant to Article 4 of the founding Dahir, CORCAS is composed of a chairperson and of members who enjoy a deliberative quality, and

are appointed by the King for a four-year period. These are selected from among the following:

- ❖ The members of parliament, the presidents of regional and provincial Councils, as well as the professional Chambers, throughout their mandate;
- ❖ The members to have been elected by the Sahrawi tribes during the former Council;
- ❖ The chioukhs of tribes;
- ❖ The actors of civil society and youth organizations in the provinces of the South;
- ❖ The representatives of citizens who come from the provinces of the South, but who live abroad, as well as those of the sequestered of Tindouf;
- ❖ The representatives of the actors of socio-economic organizations;
- ❖ Other personalities reputed for their competence and impartiality.

In addition to these, CORCAS comprises some members whose statute is consultative only, as stipulated in Article 5 of the founding Dahir; namely:

- ❖ The governmental Authorities in charge of the Interior, as well as Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, or their representatives;
- ❖ The walis and governors of the provinces of the South;
- ❖ The director of the Agency for the Social and Economic Promotion of the Provinces of the South of the Kingdom ;
- ❖ The directors of the Regional Centers for Investment (CRI) in the provinces of the South.

CORCAS is distinguished from other Royal advisory councils by the fact that it is open to the Chioukhs, the representatives of tribes, as well as the direct representatives of the Sahrawi citizens. In this manner, it watches over involving all the actors that could help it accomplish its missions (Article 6 of the founding Dahir). It is in fact evident that these elements allow the Council to considerably serve the cause of the Sahara. This is made possible thanks to its capacity to adapt to the tribal aspect, including its family and ethnic pedigrees, which are privileged by Sahrawi society, and susceptible of rekindling ties with the members of the latter, including those affiliated with the Polisario.

In this regard, some have expressed their objection concerning the presence of certain former members of the Polisario within CORCAS. However, it must be noted that the latter are full-fledged Moroccan citizens who have rejoined their mother-land. Moreover, their nomination within CORCAS can only serve the Sahara dossier and, by the same taken, would facilitate the return of other Sahrawis to the mother-land. What is more, a nomination such as this allows for benefitting from their experiences, which would positively serve in the settlement of the Sahara problem, the appropriation of the proposals to and perception of the solution to the problem being crucial in this respect. Morocco in fact came to realize early on the necessity to open up to the former senior staff of the Polisario who has rejoined Morocco. Better still; the Kingdom took great care that the latter be integrated within the circles of local and national Administration and management.

As to its social – or rather tribal-- composition, the fact is that CORCAS covers all the tribes that make up the Sahrawi social fabric, including its three major groups; namely:

- ❖ The group of Rguibat which comprises two subdivisions, the Rguibat of the (littoral) Sahel and the Rguibat of Charq (oriental). These tribes are the descendants of the Idrissides, who belong to the descendants of Ali ben Abi Taleb, and they constitute many a branch;
- ❖ The group of Tekna which is made up of Ait el Hamal, of Arab origin, and of Ait Outhmane Oubla, of Amazighe origin;
- ❖ Other groups which are distinguished by their origin as well as the history of their settling process, such as the Ouled Ed-dlim, the Aàroussyines, the Ouled Tidrarine, the Filala, the Ouled Abou Es-sebaà or the Al Cheikh Maà el Aynayne.

At this level, it is important to highlight the existence of some quite strong interferences and liaisons that characterize the tribal structure of Sahrawi society, in view of the nature of the rapports that tie together the different tribes with their pedigrees.

Certainly, there could arise some Sahrawi voices that belong to certain branches that claim not to be represented within the new Council. They; however, leave out the fact they belong to a greater tribal group which is, in turn, certainly represented within CORCAS. In other words, the composition of CORCAS takes into consideration the great tribal entities. A structure such as this one squares perfectly with the sociological specificities of Sahrawi society, considering the importance of tribal solidarity, and the respect due to certain family lineages. In sum, it transpires that it is the very consideration of these

specificities which privilege the family and tribal dimension in relation to other criteria, notably the partisan and political ones, that confers upon CORCAS a strong sociological legitimacy, as well as an effective representativeness.

As far as generational representativeness is concerned, the fact is that CORCAS has been able to widen the circle of its representatives in order to cover all the generations, whether young or more advanced in age. Added to this is its capacity to integrate women, albeit the latter take up only 14 seats out of 141, a proportion that remains to be sociologically and statistically significant.

The structure of CORCAS appears thus to be quite complex, as it covers every which component of Sahrawi society. In fact, other than the great notables, the families, the Chioukhs, the youth and women, the Sahrawi Council also comprises civil society activists and adherents, which predisposes it for the role of enlarged consultation to which it is destined. Indeed, diversified representativeness makes it such that CORCAS encompasses all the sensitivities that represent Sahrawi society, contrary to the Polisario which has not ceased to claim a self-styled representativeness without having any historical or sociological references susceptible of erecting it at the rungs of a representative or a mouth-piece of Sahrawis.

It is to be mentioned that, paradoxically enough, this balanced representativeness of CORCAS has been at the root of intense criticism, particularly on the part of the Polisario as well as from a few other entities that are sympathetic to them. In fact, the latter are very much aware that the legitimacy of the Sahrawi Council impacts their

theses before different international manifestations, in addition to abolishing their quality as the spokesmen of Sahrawis. In fact, all the components of Sahrawi society are found to be represented within CORCAS. And then, what legitimacy would the Polisario be able to pretend to when even the father of Mohammed Abdelaziz himself has a seat within the Moroccan Council?

II. THE ADDED-VALUE OF CORCAS IN THE RESOLUTION OF THE SAHARA CONFLICT

It is probably useful to point out that CORCAS constitutes an important turning-point in the approach adopted towards the resolution of the Sahara conflict. In fact, ever since its creation on 25 March 2006, CORCAS took care to outdo the Council of Chioukhs which was put in place in 1981, and which included only 85 Sahrawis that belonged to the local tribes.

By turning towards the unionist local and national elites, who enjoy popular unanimity and social renown, Morocco came to knowingly adopt an option that respects the sociological and cultural specificities of Sahrawi society. In addition, it is precisely these unionist elites that could come into direct contact with the distraught Sahrawis, or those who hesitate to fully toe the line, as it were, in the country's walk towards peace and prosperity.

In the same vein, CORCAS has already deployed colossal efforts, notably in the following areas:

- ❖ Attempts to enter into dialogue with the leaders of the Polisario, including the movement « khat achahid » (lit. line of martyr), extending thereby the level of its debates in such a way as to cover all tribal components;
- ❖ Obtaining support from the European Union to the autonomy project as the unique solution which would buffer the African and European continents against the risks of instability;
- ❖ Obtaining amnesty in favor of a group of prisoners;
- ❖ Cushioning the local protests in the provinces of the South, ones which have been initiated by elements close to the Polisario;
- ❖ Involvement in important economic dossiers, such as the settlement of the dossier of the minors of Boukrâa and the launch of great real estate projects;
- ❖ Contributing to the realization of proposals for development, such as the approbation in 2007 of the creation of 1000 sea-fishing companies in the provinces of the South;
- ❖ Integrating young Sahrawis within a larger framework that seeks to employ some 4000 young men in the domain of sea-fishing.

Herein, other projects could be added that have been realized in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, with a view to developing the region.

The representativeness of Sahrawis that CORCAS benefits from, in addition to its statute as the latter's mouth-piece, has thrown the Algerian Authorities in such a great embarrassment and has laid bare the contradictions infesting their positions. It has also shown that the neutrality that the latter brag about is nothing short of pretention, since

Algeria never ceases to support the Polisario towards stalling negotiations and muzzling peaceful dialogue.

At the international plane, CORCAS could make known the projects already realized in the provinces of the South, as well as those still in the process of realization. In fact, through its meeting with well-known diplomatic personalities at the international level, the Sahrawi Council has been able to highlight the great works of development as well as the democratic changes taking place in our country.

THE MISSIONS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE ROYAL ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR SAHARAN AFFAIRS (CORCAS)

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Ever since the end of the 1970's, the Sahara affair has been linked to the notion of consultation. Three principal committees could be cited in this respect: the special Council to the King, which was created in 1979, the Consultative Council in charge of Saharan Affairs (1981), and the Royal Commission responsible for Saharan Affairs (1999).

❖ **The dahir n°1.79.74 of 19 March 1979** put in place the special Council to the King, within a particular international, diplomatic and economic conjuncture. This Council comprised every which political party represented in the Parliament.

❖ **The Consultative Council in charge of Saharan Affairs (1981)**, which had a double mission :

- To serve as a space where the populations of the Sahara express all their legitimate claims;
- To be a means for the supervision of any secessionist claims in the Sahara. In fact, the Council constitutes a means of economic, social and political regulation, which the Royal institution called for, and

which was dictated by the new political and economic circumstances obtaining in the provinces of the South.

❖ **The Royal Commission for Follow-up on Saharan Affairs**, which was created on 23 September 1999. This committee is composed of representatives of the populations as well as of civil and military personalities. It was also put in charge of the restructuring and the reformulation of the missions of CORCAS.

I. THE FUNCTIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE ROYAL ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR SAHARAN AFFAIRS

Created by the dahir n°1.06.81 of 25 March 2006, CORCAS is part of the bodies put in place on the basis of Article 19 of the Moroccan Constitution. It is vested with a competence in relation with the Sahara region, pertaining as it is to the political, economic, social and cultural domains.

A. THE POLITICAL FUNCTIONS

A reading of the Royal speech relative to the nomination of the members of the Council allows one to conclude that it is not simply an amendment of the former Council. It is assigned the task of assisting His Majesty in all the affairs relative to the defense of the territorial integrity and national unity of the Kingdom (Article 1 of the dahir relative to CORCAS). Article 2 of this self-same dahir addresses the question of the political functions entrusted to the Council. In question here is the fact that it should submit to the Royal institution its opinion regarding all questions –be they general or special– that bear on the

defense of territorial integrity. Also, the Council is called upon to fulfill all the missions it is tasked with by the King as far as the aforementioned matters are concerned. The Council could also formulate proposals pertaining to the initiatives, the projects as well as the measures relative to numerous domains.

The functions of CORCAS could be divided up into two main missions. On the one hand, there is the defense of territorial integrity and national unity, in advisory capacity, and there is the mission of representation, on the other.

The first mission that the Council is tasked with is the most important one. In fact, ever since its creation, the Council has looked into the implementation of a conception of the Project of autonomy in the provinces of the South.

In fact, ever since its establishment, CORCAS concentrated on the defense of the *Moroccan Initiative for Negotiating an Autonomy Statute in the Sahara Region*. Thus, within the framework of its communicational strategy for the presentation of the autonomy Project, the Council has had a series of meetings with the populations of the provinces of the South (Es-Smara, Tan-Tan, Assa-Zag, Laâyoune, Dakhla, Boujdour). These meetings concretize the community-based policy adopted by the Council during its meetings with the elected members and the representatives of the political organs, with syndicated bodies, civil society, as well as with other social actors.

The active participation of the Council in the elaboration of the text of the *Moroccan Initiative for Negotiating an Autonomy Statute in the*

Sahara Region is manifested in the organization of an extraordinary session on 25 May 2006. During this session, the members of CORCAS looked into the debate on and the formulation of the autonomy Project at the organizational and functional planes. Indeed, the participation of CORCAS in the preparation of the autonomy Project reflects the importance of the consultative function that this institution is called upon to perform.

As concerns the representative function, one observes that the dahir relative to the Council, the dahirs of nomination, as well as the Royal speeches all vest the Council with a certain legality that is both internal and external.

At the internal level, the provinces of the South are henceforth represented by different active forces, and new elite has seen the light of day side by side with the Chioukhs (public notables) of tribes. Notably conspicuous here are the elected representatives, political, civil and scientific actors, former detainees, as well as former Polisario senior officials, a configuration that has been taken into account in the designation of the members of CORCAS.

At the external level, Article 2 of the dahir relative to CORCAS stipulates that among the functions of the Council, one finds its participation, in coordination with the competent authorities, in the works and meetings of the international bodies and organizations.

Thus, this representative function puts in question the allegations of the Polisario Front, which declares itself as being the « unique and legitimate representative » of all the Sahrawis.

CORCAS falls then within the framework of the representation of the entire Sahrawi population, which explains why the first action undertaken by the Council within its function of representation consisted in addressing a letter to the international pro-Polisario civil society on 21 April 2006.

B. THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

Ever since their recuperation, the provinces of the Moroccan South have come to witness some remarkable development, a fact which has been confirmed in the report released by the « International Crisis Group ». According to the latter, Morocco invested, over a thirty-year period, the sum of 4.2 billion dollars on infrastructure projects. Hence, the report came to the conclusion that the Sahrawis living in the provinces of the South enjoy a far better standard of living than that of the sequestered of Tindouf, thanks in fact to the Moroccan investments in the region.

However, the demographic development characterizing the regions of the South has engendered some new socio-economic challenges. This is precisely what explains, within the framework of the reactivation as well as restructuring of CORCAS, the fact that it is imperative that this institution be endowed with economic and social prerogatives.

Following the adoption of internal regulation, and the setting up of permanent Commissions, the Council has established many a meeting with the populations concerned, the objective being to catalogue their claims and preoccupations on matters of development. Hence, CORCAS has worked on social and economic questions with a view to

resolving certain problems; or still more, launching development projects.

II. A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE ACTIVITY OF CORCAS

It is true that the reactivation of CORCAS is a recent initiative, which will not allow us to elaborate a global appraisal of this institution. Notwithstanding, the period stretching from March 2006 through May 2008 allows for the bringing up of some quantitative indices (A), as well as qualitative ones (B), the objective being to evaluate the work that the Council has done over a period of two years of activity.

A. THE QUANTITATIVE INDICES

At this level, two major indicators will be brought to the fore: the sessions of the Council (1) and the diplomatic meetings held by the latter (2).

1. THE SESSIONS OF CORCAS

Pursuant to Article 7 of the dahir n°1.06.81 relative to CORCAS, the Council meets at least twice a year in ordinary sessions. Yet, the same article adds that the Council could also meet in extraordinary sessions whenever this seems necessary.

It is appropriate to specify thus that in order to take stock of the activity of any institution, it is imperative that the latter be analyzed through its sessions, along with the questions raised therein. Also, such analyses will be had thanks to the conclusions and recommendations that are adopted during the sessions of this institution.

Ever since it was put in place, CORCAS held 5 ordinary sessions and 3 extraordinary ones. Among the most important ones, the following are in order:

❖ **The first ordinary session from 4 to 6 April 2006.** This session constituted the fundament of the Council itself. It was essentially devoted to the adoption of an internal regulation which was submitted to the King for appreciation. Also, this session was devoted to the election of 9 vice-presidents who would constitute the Council board;

❖ **The extraordinary session of the year 2006.** The agenda of this session, held in Rabat, included two essential points. The first point concerns the constitution of Commissions that are specified by the internal statute of the Council. The second point, in turn, was devoted to the conception by the members of CORCAS of the Moroccan Autonomy Project, as well as the structure and prerogatives of the region before submitting it to the appreciation of the King;

In view of its particularity, this session was held on two different dates. The first part of the session in question took place on 25 to 27 May 2006. It was devoted to the study of the autonomy Project from a legal and institutional point of view, while the second part of the extraordinary session of CORCAS took place on 4 and 5 December 2006;

❖ **The second ordinary session of 21 and 22 December 2006.** This session was devoted to economic and social affairs. The Council looked therein into the study of the housing project in the provinces of the South. This took place within the framework of the sustainable development of these provinces;

❖ **The extraordinary session of 16 April 2007.** The unfolding of this session practically coincided with the presentation by Morocco of its autonomy Initiative to the Security Council on 11 April 2007. It was thus imperative that the Council meet in an extraordinary session in order to study the autonomy Project, which all the members of CORCAS support;

❖ **The first ordinary session of 29 and 30 May 2007.** « Maritime fishing at the service of development in the provinces of the South, and youth employment in the field of small-scale fishing » was a crucial point on the agenda of this ordinary session in the year 2007. The session was closed with the adoption of a maritime fishing project that aims at integrating the youth of the region into the sector of small-scale fishing;

❖ **The extraordinary session of 29 June 2007.** What distinguishes this session is the fact that it was held in the provinces of the South (Laâyoune). It falls within the framework of the setting in motion of the Manhasset negotiations process between Morocco and the Polisario;

❖ **The second ordinary session of 17 and 18 December 2007.** Its agenda raised two main points: The first is connected with the question of autonomy as a solution that allows for making real the dignified reconciliation and return of the sequestered to their mother-land. The second point, in turn, bore on the problematic of air transport as well as on the road network in the provinces of the South;

❖ **The first ordinary session of 2 and 3 May 2008.** This session is in keeping with the changes that have marked the Sahara dossier, notably

the adoption of Resolution 1813 by the United Nations Security Council, which invited the parties in conflict to show evidence of realism during the negotiation. This session was wrapped up with the adoption of a number of projects in the health sector, all to the advantage of the provinces of the South.

One thus observes that the sessions held by CORCAS are amply reflective of the work undertaken by the Council. They also translate its adaptability to the evolutions affecting the Sahara dossier. Added to this are the various socio-economic questions to which the Council has devoted certain sessions on the development of the region, as well as the improvement of the standards of living of Sahrawi citizens.

2. THE DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY OF CORCAS

Following its reactivation, CORCAS held a series of meetings and round tables with a certain number of international personalities, either by organizing international tours by the President of the Council and the board members ; or by receiving several internationally renowned political personalities at the CORCAS headquarters, the objective being to spread out knowledge and define the new policy led by Morocco with a view to settling the Sahara conflict, as well as the presentation of the Moroccan Autonomy Project.

One could classify the meetings in question under two major categories : Europe, on the one hand, and America, on the other.

❖ **Europe.** This region sparked the interest of the Council in view of the important role that it plays in the Sahara dossier. Besides, this

interest finds justification in the nature of relations and interests that this region maintains with the different parties in conflict. It is in this sense that several delegations have been dispatched by the Council to a certain number of European countries;

❖ **America.** During their visit to the USA, the Chairperson, along with the board members, met with several American top-level officials. Among these, the deputy-Advisor of the President to the National Security Council in charge of the Middle-East and Strategy for Global Democracy, M. Elliot Abrams, as well as M. Gordon Gray, deputy under-Secretary of State for the Near-East, in charge of the Maghreb. In addition, the Council organized some meetings with the scientific personalities that belong to various centers for strategic studies. Equally important are the meetings held with the members of the US Parliament (Democrats and Republicans alike), the Moroccan nationals living in the USA, the members of the American press, as well as a number of senior officials at the head of American non-governmental organizations.

All these meetings had for a major objective to present the broad outlines of the Moroccan Autonomy Project, which had been in preparatory phase before it was later submitted to the Security Council.

The Council was also received at the main office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), on 26 June 2006. It also took part in the works of the 14th Congress of the Non aligned movement (NAM) in Havana, as well as in the meeting of the 4th Commission of the United Nations. Besides, the chairman of CORCAS received several personalities from differing persuasions.

It transpires then that the visits made abroad by the delegations of the Council; or also the meetings organized at the main offices of latter, reflect the dynamism that CORCAS has shown during its last two years of activity. At the international level, the mission of CORCAS aims in fact at delimiting the missions it is put in charge of, as well as the defense of territorial integrity, and the Autonomy Project.

B. THE QUALITATIVE INDICES

Of the multiple qualitative indices marking the activity of CORCAS, we offer to look into two types of indices : the first pertains to the contribution of CORCAS towards the return and integration of the sequestered of Tindouf, through « the G'jjimate affair » (1). The second index will be about the active participation of CORCAS in the Manhasset negotiations (2).

1. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE COUNCIL TO THE RETURN AND INTEGRATION OF THE SEQUESTERED OF TINDOUF : THE G'JJIMATE AFFAIR

While the Polisario Front was organizing its 12th Congress in Tifariti, several dissidents met in G'jjimate, near Tifariti, representing as they were the popular masses of the camps of Tindouf. During a congress that was organized by these dissidents, the latter expressed their categorical refusal of the policy adopted by the current leaders of the Polisario Front, as well as decried the Front's bad handling of the negotiations that were held by the Kingdom of Morocco in Manhasset under the aegis of the United Nations. In a communiqué that was adopted during the congress held in G'jjimate, the Chioukhs and

leaders of tribes expressed their unconditional support for *the Moroccan Initiative for Negotiating an Autonomy Statute in the Sahara Region*. Moreover, they expressed their will and determination to put an end to this conflict, which has done nothing but to trigger off humanitarian dramas that stall the development of the region.

In the same vein, CORCAS played a considerable role, and deployed so much effort in order to secure the return of the « G'jjimate group » in Morocco, both directly and indirectly. The indirect level translates in the calls launched by the Council ; the latter invited the Polisario Front to show evidence of more realism and sound judgment. At the direct level, the Council took care of the return of the « G'jjimate group » to the mother-land.

Also, Article 2 of the dahir relative to CORCAS stresses the fact that, within the framework of the functions it is vested with, this institution is put in charge of formulating proposals that guarantee the return and integration of practically all the Moroccans who come from the provinces of the South. It is in precisely in this sense that the Council adopted an approach that aims at securing the dignified return of the « G'jjimate group » along with their families.

2. THE POSITIVE PARTICIPATION OF CORCAS IN THE MANHASSET NEGOTIATIONS

The important place that CORCAS occupies has been reinforced through its participation in the negotiations of Manhasset, which were held in four rounds under the aegis of the United Nations, and which sought to find a definitive solution to the Sahara dispute.

In fact, the presence of the President of CORCAS in the Manhasset negotiations is a further concretization of the new approach led by Morocco within the framework of the settlement of the Sahara dispute. This approach aims first at having all the persons concerned by the Sahara affair participate in the settlement of the conflict. It also seeks to present this affair to the international Community by way of diplomatic campaigns. Essentially, what this means is that CORCAS is the sole representative of the populations of the provinces of the South, not the Polisario.

THE VALUE-ADDED OF CORCAS IN THE SAHARA AFFAIR

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INTRODUCTION

The Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS) is a structure that was set up in the provinces of the South in March 2006. It is composed of 141 members, and is led by a restricted body which comprises the President, nine Vice-presidents as well as a General-Secretary.

Barely three months following its creation, CORCAS met in an extraordinary session (from 25 to 27 June, 2006 in Rabat) so as to discuss, in plenary sessions and in commissions, the Autonomy Project that concerns the Sahara Region.

Ever since then, CORCAS found itself to be an integral, and privileged, part in the process of the Autonomy Project under three fronts: 1) as an “advisor” to the King on Sahrawi Affairs; 3) for having engaged in debate on this project, and 3) because it is immediately

concerned by the whole affair, as long as the Project is devoted to the Sahrawi populations to be found in the camps of Tindouf.

It must ; however, be recalled that this Project (which is presented as a Moroccan Initiative for the settlement of the Sahara conflict within the framework of an autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty) is part and parcel of the State foreign policy, one that principally derives at the level of conception and elaboration from Royal power (notably in virtue of Articles 19 ad 31 of the Moroccan Constitution), and from the ministry of Foreign Affairs which plays, indeed, an instrumental role at the level of implementation. This is to say that the role of CORCAS ought to fit in within this canvas, and come in therefore to reinforce this combined policy, be it at the level of heed and sensitization at the internal plane; or of vigilance and motivation at the international level. In other words, to use economic jargon, CORCAS could bring in some sort of value-added to the Sahara affair by carrying out a two-fold mission, which is shouldered both at the internal plane (I) and the international plane (II).

I. THE ROLE OF CORCAS AT THE INTERNAL LEVEL

The running of affairs at the level of the Sahara does not forcibly abide by the rules and practices that have been in evidence in the northern Regions of the country, which have for a long time now been settled and broken off from public matters. This in no way suggests that the Sahara Region has not taken stock of administrative techniques and modalities. On the contrary, ever since its reunion with the mother country (1975), it has been involved in this process. However, a thirty year period, which was marked by some great flexibility for the sake of

taking into account local specificities, cannot constitute any historical depth susceptible of providing a safety-valve, as it were, that would help to carry out things for the better.

It is for this reason that it rests with CORCAS to further involve itself, and more closely so, side by side with the local populations, to be at their beck and call, and to get down to the task of training the people who will be called upon to assume responsibilities at the local plane. This is to say that CORCAS is called upon to promote, on the one hand, a community-based policy and to secure the training of the local elites, on the other.

A. THE PROMOTION OF A COMMUNITY-BASED POLICY

What do we understand by a community-based policy? Some define it as “system of social attention and alertness, destined to improve the quality of life” within a determinate space, oftentimes urban. More simply put, one could define it as the situation of being close to the people in order to pin down their expectations, as well as their needs and, by the same token, to be reactive to the extent of their priorities and urgent needs.

As the representatives of different Sahrawi fractions, the members of CORCAS could well perform these tasks by seeking information from the inhabitants, and taking note of their grievances, in order to relay these to such intermediary bodies as commissions and work groups, and later to the supreme authority—the Sovereign.

The impact of this social wariness through this community-based policy translates in promoting as well as reinforcing this policy of solidarity in such a way as to encourage reconciliation, and to ban the psychological frontiers inherent to ideologico-tribal belonging in the narrow sense of the term. An approach such as this will not fail to have an impact on participative democracy, as well as on local governance and, by the same token, make the inhabitants receptive to and ready for the experience of autonomy in the Sahara region.

This community-based policy; however, ought not to be conceived of in a vacuum; it has to be instrumentalized, that is, provided with or having a certain operationality in order to lead the Sahrawi citizens to cooperate. To this end, this community-based policy out to be both attractive and dynamic:

❖ *Attractive*, that is, it must put in place an open framework that allows all types of sensibilities to express themselves, including that part of Sahrawis who rejoined Morocco after quite a long “wondering”, as it were, but who cannot easily break away from under the spell of certain received ideas, or certain manners of reasoning. What matters most essentially is that they have accepted to come back to the mother land in order to envision a future which, for lack of being immediately bright, is at least promising; the members of CORCAS have to plan for the future with a clear orientation as well as an immovable confidence, that is, they have to foster and nourish hope;

❖ *Dynamic*, in the sense that this community-based policy has to take root in a structured vision that aims at progressively integrating the different spaces, from the smallest to the widest, wherein men and women are grouped, eventually passing through intermediary spaces,

the ultimate objective being to come to a relation of affinity; nay, of symbiosis, between the inhabitants and the locally elected members, through transparent liaison channels and facile meeting opportunities and, if need be, through mobilization.

All that has been said so far is a necessary condition, no doubt, but it does not suffice, though. In fact, in order to be brought to fruition, this community-based policy requires that it be pursued by a class that is very much aware of the stakes involved in this autonomy, that is, by an elite that ought to be trained so that it could, on the spur of the moment, come in as a reinforcement for the current elite and ultimately take over.

B. THE TRAINING OF LOCAL ELITES

It is commonly admitted nowadays that, among the human institutions that evolve slowly, one precisely counts the governance and training of elites. With respect to the latter, the fact is that this inertia could perhaps appear, first of all, as an inconvenience. In light of yet another scale of reading, which may be accused of being conservative, such inertia could turn out to be an asset rather, in so far as it testifies to a certain stability of institutions, which in general constitutes a major point of reference, as well as a condition of legitimacy for the exercise of power.

Some qualifications are in order here, however. Should this slowness in the renewal of the local elites constitute stability in the short and medium terms, it could, in the long term, become a real inconvenience, even a threat, owing to at least three factors:

- ❖ First, because the mutations that are taking place at the international and national planes (political and economic governance, the advent of interdependence and of globalization, etc.) hold the germs of a dysfunction; nay, a certain sclerosis, should the modes of management at the local plane prove to be incapable of keeping up with the rhythms of this evolution;
- ❖ Then, because this slowness could favor a tendency on the part of the present elites to take delight in a comfort that could easily degenerate into a bureaucracy;
- ❖ Finally, because it could eventually create social outcasts, and therefore malcontents. As Talleyrand would have it, “*the malcontents are the poor ones that think.*” In other terms, a slowness of this kind could trigger off tensions, and even hatred within the social fabric.

What this implies is that in the area of training elites, the task of CORCAS is burdensome and quite difficult; it does not only have to secure on-the-job training through, at best, cycles of training that are provided for local officials by the Ministry of Interior. It has also, and above all, to supply and develop, in cooperation with the other regions of the north of Morocco; or even with foreign countries that have experience in this area, the structures of reception as well as the institutions (universities, centers, institutes, etc.) considered to offer some basic theoretical training.

Only these conditions will be such as to create what we call today in the developed world “*public institutional engineering*,” that is, the will and capacity to put in place, by means of conceptual schemas, a type of administrative management, or even “culture” that are on the same wavelengths as the objectives that society sets for itself. This amounts

to saying that, in securing the reinvigoration and training of elites, one will not fail to equip, in the last instance, the administration with a management which will be such as to respond, both efficiently and effectively, to the challenges of society in general, and of administrative and political direction, in particular.

CORCAS could equally draw inspiration from certain foreign experiences that have shown evidence of a certain innovation on matters pertaining to the involvement of potentials and competences that issue from different horizons of the management system of public matters. Such is the case, for instance, of certain cities in Brazil, where the officials of local collectivities regularly meet with private-sector staff as well as civil society militants in order to address and debate a certain number of problems of a local nature.

The training of elites could also revolve around research and research training, as well as on the elaboration of programs such as “*young innovative companies*,” as is the case in a certain number of emerging countries such as Brazil, India and China, which grant a place of precedence to technological innovation, of which the environment, for instance, is one part.

II. THE ROLE OF CORCAS ON THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

It would not be unnecessary to recall here that CORCAS has been appointed by the King so that it should give him authorized advice and opinion on everything that bears upon the Sahara issue. In view of this fact, CORCAS has, at the international plane, a legitimacy that allows this structure (President, Vice-presidents, Secretary-general, or a

mandated group), and above all to its president, to act as a special envoy, a sort of unparalleled itinerant in charge of defending the national cause, and presenting the autonomy Initiative as a *credible Project*.

On yet another plane, it is the task of representing Sahrawis - be they inside or outside the State frontiers--that CORCAS is called upon to fulfill.

A. THE PRESERVATION OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY

CORCAS represents the human beings who would be most threatened in their existence as Moroccans, should the unity of the territory not be safeguarded. Besides, the fact that the enemies of the territorial integrity of Morocco grant credibility only to “the internationally recognized frontiers” reinforces this existential precariousness, and exacerbates at the same time – and here is a very positive point—the feeling of national belonging, as well as the unshakeable will and determination to perpetuate the latter.

Indeed, the idea of unity and of national belonging, which are vehemently defended by CORCAS, moves then in the direction of preserving the territorial integrity of the Kingdom. It brings guarantees to the autonomy Project, and endows it with a consistency that has no parallel other than the desire that the Sahrawis have for benefitting from a large autonomy, considering the specificity of their local realities in relation to other Regions.

It is then as such that the Moroccan Initiative relative to the autonomy Statute will be presented on the international scene, through different meetings and encounters with foreign interlocutors, should they be actors in governmental spheres (Heads of States, Prime Ministers, Foreign Affairs ministers, diplomats), or elected representatives (Parliaments, Senates, Presidents of Regions, etc.); or belong to civil society or the world of the press. To these different interlocutors, this Initiative will not fail to come under two aspects, fundamental ones for that. First, as a *coherent* Project, because it seeks to yoke together a national requirement (unity and territorial integrity) and a regional requirement (an autonomy as large as possible), to which one has to add the fact that the Project in question is one that has not been defended by some guardian authority of sorts, but by those immediately concerned themselves. Also, because it is a question of a *pragmatic* Project, considering, on the one hand, the terms of the solution that it proposes towards overcoming the crisis and; therefore, settling a dispute that has by now become almost like a school case, especially at the level of international Organizations, owing its longevity and complexity, above all. And, on the other hand, considering the will and determination to ban all sorts of exclusion by giving the hand, for the sake of bringing this project to fruition, to all the Sahrawis, including those found to be under the authority of the Polisario.

Thus, in its ardent desire to defend the principle of territorial integrity, CORCAS should not find much difficulty with the representatives of other States, so long as it is true that it is a question of an almost sacred principle. Yet, despite the somewhat intrinsic character of the latter, one should not expect that it be sufficient to pronounce and announce

the principle for it to automatically lead to the effects sought out; that is, an automatic adhesion and support. Some perseverance is mandatory, and so is a follow-up that is coupled with some lobbying capable enough to lead States to stand out and take a favorable position and, later, to make it such as to preserve and fructify the positive gestures and affinities.

In acting so, CORCAS will bring in not only extra support, as well as complementarity to the different moves of the State in connection with this question, but will also serve as a link with the Moroccan authorities in charge of foreign policy, be it at the level of the central administration or foreign services (diplomatic Missions), for which the Sahara dossier constitutes but one of a multiplicity of daily preoccupations. It is true that for each one it is a principal dossier, but it remains for CORCAS, at least at the external plane, a predominant; nay, a unique one. This amounts to saying that this Council ought to show evidence of a more intense activity at the international plane; that is, as much as, if not more than, traditional diplomacy, for it must be borne in mind that as a form of *ad hoc* diplomacy, CORCAS has more flexibility at the level of its means and the deployment of its actions.

It remains to recall and specify here that CORCAS is not answerable to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, neither is it so to the Prime Minister. It submits its reports directly to the Sovereign (guarantor, pursuant to Article 19 of the Constitution, of the *territorial integrity of the Kingdom*), who attends to coordinating, along with his immediate entourage and therefore his close collaborators (Advisors, the Army, intelligence services...), the actions of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who remains to be the principal tool for the King at the level of foreign

policy. Of course, all of this will not be had unless the latter offers his feedback in order to ratify, to correct and give directives, in some cases, so that the realizations are completed and fructified and, at others still, in order to prompt innovation and investment in domains that have remained so far beyond exploration.

If then the quality of CORCAS, as an advisory body that poses no problems, its penchant for being the representative of all the Sahrawis could become somehow problematic to the extent where the term “Sahrawi” applies to both those who happen to be on Moroccan territory and those who can be found outside the State frontiers, be they in Tindouf, in Mauritania or in Spain. But doesn’t the autonomy Project make them flow into the selfsame mold, precisely with a view to reconciling and rallying them together?

B. THE REPRESENTATION OF ALL « SAHRAWIS » IN ORDER TO SHUN ANY EXCLUSION OF THE « EXPATRIATE THIRD »

We understand by the “expatriate Third,” the numerical proportion, commonly admitted and well-established, of the populations of the Sahara that are to be found outside the national territory, mainly those found in Tindouf and, if need be, those that have a home in Mauritania and in Spain.

We hasten to say here that for CORCAS, this Third cannot be considered as an intruder, or an odd element in relation to the Sahawi social entity, for though CORCAS operates at the level of political positioning in total antipode to the ideas and ambitions propagated by the elements of the Polisario, it remains no less true that it shares with

the latter blood ties because they are oftentimes parents and cousins. And for a good reason: Mohamed Abdelaziz, the Head of the Polisario that he is, his father, a Moroccan Sahrawi, still lives in Marrakechi, the city whence the term “Marrakchi” derives (a resident of Marrakech), and is given to this selfsame Abdelaziz! Normally, these family ties ought to contribute towards creating relations of *confidence*, which constitutes a fundamental element in situations such as these.

It is for this that ever since its creation, CORCAS has not ceased in this regard to appeal to the sequestered of Tindouf, who make up the bulk of this Third, as well as to their heads. Better still, Khalienna Ould Errachid, the President of CORCAS showed no hesitation in declaring in an interview that: « (...) *we are ready to help our brother and parent, Mohamed Abdelaziz, Polisario leader, to assume the presidency of the authority of autonomy, and we are determined to act with our utmost force to realize this objective within the framework of Moroccan sovereignty (...)* ». Yet, he quite specified that this had to be done « *through an election* ».

Also, the will of CORCAS to present itself as the representative of all Sahrawis is one way to secure the support of all the socio-tribal components of the Sahara, the ultimate aim being to lead the latter to a general participation in as well as an integral involvement in the politico-administrative management of the future autonomous Region. Isn't this a sort of reconstituted *melting-pot*; nay even more, a *reunion* of the members of the same family or the same tribe or fraction of a tribe, that will bring in the Autonomy Statute, promote economic and social development, and secure a well-being and a family life that have been missing in the lives of a great number of the «expatriate Third»?

In its new formula, more representative than that of the year 1981, because it comprises not only notables (chosen from among the Parliamentarians, the Presidents of Regional Councils, the Presidents of provincial Assemblies and the presidents of professional Chambers) as well as the *Chioukhs* of tribes, but also the representatives of civil society (notably Human rights militants), economic operators as well as Moroccan nationals abroad, to which one has to add the fact that the structure as a whole includes, in a non negligible proportion, women and the youth.

These are then the ingredients that will be such as to secure this body a greater credibility which, coupled with a large independence (CORCAS depends solely on the King) will not fail to turn this Council into a quality interlocutor at the international plane. It could thus present and defend the Moroccan Autonomy Project, convince the members of the international Community, still undecided or misinformed as it is, and hence lead it to conducting a rereading of the Sahara dossier in light of the positive as well as favorable attitude of the UN Security Council, notably its Resolutions 1754, 1783 of the years 2007 and 1813 of the year 2008, all of which have qualified the Moroccan Proposal for an Autonomy Statute in the Sahara as « *serious and credible* ».

THE INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITY OF THE ROYAL ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR SAHARAN AFFAIRS (CORCAS)

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional diplomacy was formerly run solely within a state-controlled framework; that is, between States, and it was by means of their official representatives. Today, modern diplomacy reflects a multidimensional aspect. It has made it such that different non-governmental organizations (individuals, civil society organizations, the private sector, scientific institutions, and subsidiary authorities) get involved in international activity. This is due to the fact that States have come to realize the importance of the participation of these different actors in the administering of their foreign policy. It was thus that traditional diplomacy was put in question. In fact, it is henceforth impossible to limit State diplomacy to the exclusive framework of specialized governmental entities.

It is on this very diplomatic path that Morocco has committed itself in the recent years. Diverse actors are now involved in certain

international issues, which is notably the case of the question of territorial integrity, as well as that of economic diplomacy.

In fact, the creation of the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS) falls within the framework of the co-handling, as it were, of the question of territorial integrity. This said, among the principal missions of CORCAS, there figures the defense of the Sahara affair on the international scene. Hence, in his Royal speech addressed to the members of CORCAS, on the occasion of their nomination on 25 March 2006, the King of Morocco said: *«Given your patriotism and deep loyalty to the Kingdom's immutable values, I ask you to serve as the mouthpiece of your brothers in international bodies and forums, shedding light on the just cause of our territorial integrity (...)»*.

It will transpire from analyzing both the Dahir (decree) relative to the creation of CORCAS and the Royal founding speech concerning this institution that the functions of this Council are from being confined to internal affairs only. In fact, they extend over to the administration of certain aspects of Moroccan foreign policy, at the head of which is the question of territorial integrity.

It is appropriate to emphasize here that the prerogatives of the Council in the areas of internal and foreign policies are of an advisory, not deliberative, nature. Articles 1 and 2 of the Dahir relative to the creation of this Council explicitly show that it is a question of an advisory commission that addresses any questions that bear upon the territorial integrity, national unity, economic and social development of the provinces of the south.

In order to analyze the international activity of CORCAS, as well as its external preoccupations, we will lay out at first the mechanisms (official and non-official) of the international activity of CORCAS (I). Then, we will examine the most important affairs that characterize the international activity of CORCAS, as dominated by the Sahara affair (II).

I. THE MECHANISMS OF THE INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITY OF CORCAS

In its international activity, CORCAS adopts two kinds of procedure. The procedure is that of traditional diplomacy, which is manifested at the level of the official delegations that are dispatched to different capitals of the world, the aim being to explain the Moroccan position regarding the Sahara affair. In fact, this procedure principally targets personalities and governmental institutions. The second procedure, in turn, concerns international opinion. It is thus that several means of communication are deployed. This procedure is called, indeed, a general diplomacy procedure, or also popular diplomacy.

A. OFFICIAL DIPLOMACY

The delegations dispatched by CORCAS abroad, as well as the delegations received within the framework of the visits made to Morocco, constitute the most important channel of diplomacy led by CORCAS. These encounters and discussions offer an occasion for CORCAS to present as well as shed light upon the question of the Sahara, notably the *«Moroccan Initiative for Negotiating an Autonomy Statute in the Sahara Region»*.

1. THE DELEGATIONS DISPATCHED ABROAD

CORCAS has paid a series of official visits to a number of international capitals, notably with a view to presenting and explaining the reasons behind and the content of the Moroccan Initiative for Autonomy, and that was even prior to the presentation by Morocco to the UN of the afore-cited Initiative. Within this framework, the first visits were made to the countries that are geographically in close proximity to Morocco, but whose support is of great importance (Spain, France).

During the year 2006, the most important visits made by CORCAS could be summed up as follows:

❖ **The Canary Islands.** The CORCAS delegation engaged in a series of in-depth discussions with different local political and civil actors. These discussions bore upon the situation of the provinces of the south, as well as the Moroccan Project of Autonomy;

❖ **Washington.** Among its most important meetings, CORCAS had one with the assistant-Advisor of the American President at the National Council in charge of the Middle-East and the strategy for democracy. The Council has also met with the State Secretary in charge of the Middle-East and the Arab Maghreb. During this visit, the President of CORCAS has also explained the autonomy project;

❖ **Madrid.** Several meetings were organized with politicians, parliamentarians and trade union executives. These meetings addressed issues pertaining to the creation and composition of the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs, as well as the Moroccan Project of Autonomy;

❖ **Andalusia.** During this visit, the president of CORCAS invited the political powers and civil society in Andalusia to come to the support of the Moroccan Project of Autonomy;

❖ **Brussels.** The CORCAS delegation had meetings with a certain number of European and Belgian officials, including those at the Belgian Parliament. During this visit, the President of CORCAS especially presented the Moroccan autonomy initiative;

❖ **Geneva.** A CORCAS delegation was received at the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva in order lay bare the Human rights situation in Tindouf.

During the year 2007, these visits had for a destination:

❖ **Madrid and Paris.** During these visits, the members of CORCAS could visit with several government officials, with Parliamentarians, as well as civil society actors, both in France and in Spain, the objective being to enlighten the decision-makers of as well as public opinion in the two countries on the fundamentals of the Moroccan Project of Autonomy;

❖ **Argentina.** The President of CORCAS, in his quality as an envoy of the King, along with M. Benaissa, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, left for Argentina in order to present the broad outlines of the Moroccan Autonomy Project.

2. THE FOREIGN DELEGATIONS RECEIVED IN MOROCCO

The visits of foreign delegations in Morocco represent one of the most important aspects of the international activity of CORCAS in that they allow the latter to arrange meetings with foreign officials visiting

Morocco. As far as CORCAS is concerned, such meetings offer an occasion for presenting and explaining the Moroccan Project of Autonomy. In addition to their intensive character, these meetings were especially characterized by the presence of senior officials of international renown: Presidents and Heads of governments, parliament officials as well as foreign senior executives.

During the year 2006, the most important meetings concerned the following personalities and institutions:

- ❖ The Chinese president Hu Jintao;
- ❖ The Emir of the State of Kuwait, Cheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah;
- ❖ The former personal envoy of the Secretary General of the United Nations for the Sahara, Peter Van Walsum;
- ❖ The ambassador of the Netherlands, in charge of Human rights;
- ❖ A delegation of the High Commissioner for Human Rights;
- ❖ The president of the Irish Parliament;
- ❖ The first vice-president of the Parliament of Paraguay;
- ❖ The Director of political affairs at the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accompanied by the ambassador of his country in Morocco;
- ❖ The president of the Greek parliamentary friendship;
- ❖ The General Secretary of the minister of Foreign Affairs of Denmark;
- ❖ The president of the Human rights Commission at the German parliament.

Besides, several meetings took place with foreign ambassadors in Morocco, of whom the ambassador of the United States in Morocco,

the ambassador of the United Kingdom, of Russia, Romania, Portugal, Spain, Qatar, France, and Turkey.

The meetings that have marked the year 2007 the most, and which were held in Morocco, concerned:

- ❖ The president of the Peruvian parliament majority;
- ❖ The president of the Finnish Parliament;
- ❖ The president of the cultural committee at the municipal council of the Emilia region (Romania);
- ❖ The president of the National Assembly of Surinam;
- ❖ Two advisors of the ambassador of Japan in Morocco;
- ❖ The president of the Polish parliament;
- ❖ The president of the National Assembly in Niger;
- ❖ The president of the Norwegian parliament;
- ❖ The president of the Chilean Parliament;
- ❖ The president of the National Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Congo;
- ❖ The general Secretary of the Swedish Parliament;
- ❖ Some African ambassadors who reside in Tripoli;
- ❖ A delegation representing the Spanish Senate;
- ❖ A delegation representing the Moroccan-Colombian Parliamentarian Friendship Group;
- ❖ The assistant of the minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar for follow-up affairs.
- ❖ The vice-president of the Senate in Mexico;
- ❖ A senior German delegation comprised of seven members who represent the group «Friends of Morocco»;
- ❖ A delegation of the Ivory Coast composed of five journalists who belong to the most important media in Ivory Coast;

- ❖ The president of the Swiss National Assembly (the federal Parliament);
- ❖ Some representatives of the Assembly of Jewish Americans;
- ❖ The ambassador of Canada in Morocco.

As to the year 2008, the most important meetings took place with the presence of:

- ❖ The president of the Assembly of the Sultanate of Oman.
- ❖ The president of the independent government of Catalonia.
- ❖ The president of the parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.
- ❖ A delegation representing the Mauritanian majority parties.
- ❖ The president of the « Parti de l'Union et du Changement » in Mauritania.

Thus, all these meetings bring together the members of CORCAS with officials from diverse institutions, but also some international personalities, both abroad and on Moroccan soil. This shows, indeed, the importance of the activity of CORCAS, which seeks to present the Moroccan Autonomy Project, and to sensitize international public opinion about the appropriateness of the national cause, which accounts for the force of impact of CORCAS at the international plane—a thing that gets confirmed thanks to the declarations made by these international personalities, who stand firmly by the Moroccan Autonomy Project describing it as they do as being realistic and realizable.

B. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Public diplomacy; or popular diplomacy, generally takes into the fold the different diplomatic activities that aim at realizing general interest, and doing so by establishing relations of information and influence with the different interlocutors , and making use of different modern means of communication such as television, the radio, the Internet, and cultural exchange. What explains the emergence of this type of diplomacy is, in fact, not only the revolution that has shaken the audio-visual domain, but also the importance that public opinion takes. Indeed, what sets off public diplomacy from traditional diplomacy is the fact that the former is not exclusively reserved for governments, as it could also be undertaken by non- governmental institutions, as well as by non-official persons. Traditional diplomacy, in contrast, remains the work of governments and their representatives. In this sense, public diplomacy has created the need for a redefinition of the traditional understanding of the very concept of representation. The notion of public diplomacy is tied with the concept of “soft power,” which designates the realization of common interests thanks to persuasion and attraction. As to the concept of “hard power,” the fact is that it implies that the objectives are realized by appealing to economic and military pressure, most notably.

However, it is appropriate to make a distinction between the concept of public diplomacy and that of propagandist diplomacy. The former tends to process real data, and to transmit them to foreign interlocutors without any intention for deceit. Propagandist diplomacy, however, is the operation of falsifying data and realities, and *in fine*, the transmission of false information to public opinion abroad.

The public diplomacy of CORCAS aims, in fact, at informing international public opinion, foreign peoples, the international press, as well as different foreign institutions, about its policy and its objectives. Also, thanks to its public diplomacy, CORCAS seeks to present and explain the different points of the Moroccan Autonomy Project, through both direct and indirect means, a fact which was explicitly stated in the Royal speech of 25 March 2006, during the nomination of the members of CORCAS: *« Given your patriotism and deep loyalty to the Kingdom's immutable values, I ask you to serve as the mouthpiece of your brothers in international bodies and forums, (...), and highlighting the achievements made by Morocco, as well as the reforms it has been introducing to forge ahead with sustainable human development and to promote democracy ».*

The public diplomacy of CORCAS unfolds, indeed, in an indefatigably continuous manner, thanks to the meetings and interviews that the members of CORCAS establish with the international press, especially the great satellite channels; or also by way of the website of CORCAS, which falls within what is called virtual public diplomacy.

In order to elucidate the content of and reasons behind the Moroccan Autonomy Initiative, the president of CORCAS has given several interviews with a number of international satellite televisions. Among the most important of these, one could cite "Al-Jazeera," "Al-Jazeera mobachir," "Al-Hourra," "the Spanish channel "Canal Sur Noticias," and the channel "Canal Sur."

With respect to public virtual diplomacy, the Internet site remains for CORCAS an effective tool for the transmission of information, and of

interaction with the targeted public opinion abroad. It also constitutes a means whereby CORCAS develops its ties with different actors of civil society throughout the world. Indeed, the data that this site contains are formulated in eight languages; namely- Arabic, French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, German and Italian, a fact which is designed to widen the scope of potential interlocutors, particularly because international public opinion is today of considerable importance, and constitutes a real diplomatic stake for all countries throughout the world.

Equally important in this respect is cultural diplomacy, which is deemed to be one of the most important manifestations of public diplomacy. It could, in fact, strengthen the international activity of CORCAS, more particularly so because the provinces of the South enjoy a singular cultural patrimony. In view of this, the cultural particularism which marks the Sahara region constitutes a favorable element for the sector of tourism as well as that of investments, which will contribute towards giving Morocco the image of a country that has a markedly coherent diversity in terms of identity.

II.THE QUESTIONS LINKED TO THE INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF CORCAS

Besides its mission which consists of defending the Moroccan Autonomy Project, CORCAS is responsible of a host of broader international missions. It is in a general manner concerned with the defense of the unity and territorial integrity of the Kingdom, in addition to its participation, at the international level, in highlighting the different attractive aspects of today's Morocco.

A. THE ROLE OF CORCAS IN THE DEFENSE OF THE MOROCCANITY OF THE SAHARA

The defense of the Moroccaness of the Sahara at the international level constitutes a central point of concern for CORCAS. This mission makes of the latter one of the major interlocutors on the international scene as far as the Moroccan Sahara affair is concerned, as provided for in Article 10 of the Dahir relative to the creation of CORCAS. According to this article, the president of CORCAS is the official spokesman of the Council, and is the official interlocutor with the national public authorities, as well as with international organizations and committees.

To assign CORCAS a mission such as this could be explained by the fact that today's world is marked by a certain distribution of functions in connection with foreign policy among the different specialized bodies. The latter are called upon to effectively defend all the affairs that fall within the area of their competence. Indeed, the putting in place of CORCAS constitutes a certain response to this new international factor. Yet, it is to be noted that this Council does not represent a mere technical or even administrative, institution. CORCAS is a representative and advisory body that is strongly attached to the Sahara region, a fact which endows it with a two-leveled kind of representativeness: national and international. The latter has imbued the discourse and work of CORCAS with much more credibility, which accounts for the fact that this institution is the most apt to represent the populations of the Sahara. Obviously, this situation is far from being profitable to the Polisario Front, which claimed to have monopoly over the representation of the populations of this

region, hence the confused attitude of the Polisario Front during the Manhasset negotiations, because the members of CORCAS were among the members of the Moroccan delegation.

The participation of CORCAS, led by the official Moroccan delegation, in the four rounds in Manhasset, New York, under the aegis of the United Nations, coupled with different other such meetings and visits organized by CORCAS, with personalities and institutions both in Morocco and abroad, constitute the most important manifestation of the effective participation of this Council in the decision-making process on the Moroccan Sahara affair.

Hence, the setting up of CORCAS constitutes a certain concretization of this new approach in Moroccan diplomacy.

B. THE PARTICIPATION OF CORCAS IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF MOROCCAN FOREIGN POLICY

As we have already mentioned, the consultative function of CORCAS is not confined to the Moroccan Autonomy Project. In fact, this institution acts on other subjects in relation to Moroccan foreign policy, more specifically those bearing upon the question of national unity and territorial integrity, a fact which is made explicit in Articles 1 and 2 of the Dahir relative to the creation of CORCAS. According to Article 1 of the so-called Dahir, CORCAS has for a principal mission to assist the King in all the affairs that fall within the area of the defense of national unity and territorial integrity. The second article, in turn, lists the different prerogatives given to CORCAS. One could notably cite the prerogative of voicing its opinion on all sorts of

questions-- general and particular ones alike-- in connection with the territorial integrity and national unity of the Kingdom.

In fact, the creation by CORCAS of a Commission for foreign affairs and cooperation, in addition to four other commissions, shows that the preoccupations of CORCAS are far from being solely limited to the Moroccan Sahara affair.

Hence, economic diplomacy constitutes another domain wherein CORCAS could intervene in an active manner, not only by laying out the assets of the Sahara region, but also by highlighting the evolution that Morocco has especially witnessed at the level of its legislation in the area of the laws relative to direct foreign investments.

Moreover, CORCAS manifests interest in the question of Human rights. It was thus that the Vice-president of CORCAS, Mr. Ahmed Mghizlat, participated, on 8 April 2008, along with a Moroccan delegation presided by the minister of justice, Mr. Abdelwahed Radi, in the meeting by the work group of the UN Human Rights Council in charge of the universal periodical examination of Human rights situations. Besides, some CORCAS delegations regularly pay visits to Geneva in order to acquaint the responsible officials there with the Human rights situation of the sequestered in Tindouf, as well as with the atrocities perpetrated by the Polisario leaders there.

CONCLUSION

The crucial phase that the question of the Sahara currently goes through at the international plane accounts for the reinforcement of the international activity of CORCAS, which equally justifies the

diversification of its contacts abroad, and the growing part accorded to international NGO's, as well as the actors of international civil society. The Moroccan residing abroad, above all those who come from the provinces of the Moroccan South, could materialize into a truly strong point in favor of Morocco. In fact, they could support CORCAS in its mission at the international plane.

Finally, the NGO's which have come to be active in the provinces of the South could also constitute major actors in the promotion of the activities of CORCAS on the international scene. They would do so by participating in the campaigns that the latter organizes in different capitals all over the world, as well as at international organizations. In point of fact, the national NGO's maintain relations of cooperation and friendship with several other NGO's throughout the world. Besides, they enjoy a certain credibility within the international assemblies where the representatives of international civil society come to attend.

CORCAS, AN INSTRUMENT OF PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF *HASSANI* CULTURE

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INTRODUCTION: THE CENTRALITY OF CULTURE WITHIN SAHRAWI SOCIETY

Sahrawi society is very much attached to its culture. Indeed, culture constitutes the basis of Sahrawi society, which is traditionally known for orality, nomadism, pastoral activity, its preferences for poetry or the central role of woman. Certainly, ever since the independence of Morocco, Sahrawi society has undergone many a change, all of which move in the direction of progress, and the adoption of a sedentary life. It also underwent certain social upheavals that have impacted its traditional structures, as is the case anyways with the rest of Morocco. All the figures attest, however, to a significant development of the provinces of the South, provinces that rival the most advanced regions of the Kingdom.

The Moroccan territories of the South have in fact known some considerable expansion, a real challenge of desert and demography. Therefore, the march of these territories towards sustainable development is irreversible, because « *there are the men and women*

whose intelligence and work have allowed, day after day, month after month, years after year, for the economic and social transformation of these territories ¹¹». The human contribution of the non-Sahrawi residents has been of capital importance for the development of these provinces. Within the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS), the fact of the matter is that they are represented by four advisors, considering their full place within Sahrawi society. This is one of the indicators of socio-cultural integration.

Culture is a key element in any process of development. Taken in its anthropological sense, culture is « *an intricate whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morality, laws, customs as well as all other dispositions and habits acquired by man as a member of a society* » ¹². Sahrawi society, from this viewpoint, is culturally very rich. Its sedentarization, while nomadic at heart, has been driven, we learn from the researcher Mohammed Dahmane, by the exigency of integration within the national State ¹³. Indeed, for the “Sahrawi subject,” culture is grasped as a relation to his human and natural, environment, to the things around him.

When we address the issue of patrimony, it is appropriate to view this notion in a broad sense, including both natural as well as cultural

¹¹ Henri-Louis VEDIE, « *Une volonté plus forte que les sables* ». L'expérience du développement durable des régions Sud-Marocaines, preface by Pascal CHAIGNEAU, Editions ESKA, Paris, 2008, p. 24.

¹² A definition advanced by Edward Burnett Tylor. Cited in Jacques LOMBARD, « *Introduction à l'ethnologie* », 2^{ème} édition, Editions Armand Colin, Paris, 2004, p. 78.

¹³ « *Nomadism and sendentarization in the regions of Seguia El Hamra and Oued Eddahab* » (in Arabic), Imprimerie Kawtar Print, 2006, Rabat, p. 13.

patrimony, material and immaterial. The UN Convention on Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) of 1972 has been dedicated to this cardinal problematic, which considers world patrimony (or world heritage in UNESCO parlance), in its aforementioned two-fold dimensions, a shared human heritage¹⁴. In Morocco, there exist several sites that figure on the list of world heritage, such as the Portuguese city of El Jadida (Mazagan), the old medina of Tetuan, Fés, Meknès, or Volubilis. One counts therein also a list of the goods registered on the list of world patrimony. Included on this list is the National Park of Dakhla, which is famous for the plethora of its fauna and flora proper to zones with semi-arid climates¹⁵, a testimony, if need be, of the great wealth of the Moroccan cultural and natural heritage.

In order for it to be preserved and protected, Sahrawi culture, whose constant interaction with the other elements of national culture has never been denied, needs a systematic pattern of cultural governance. In the era of a creeping globalization, which washes off cultural frontiers and pushes towards homogenization, *Hassani* culture is not under the lee of erosion and inconsideration. It is precisely for this reason that CORCAS, created under a Royal initiative on 25 March 2006, sees itself invested with important missions in connection with, among other, the defense and promotion of *Hassani* cultural patrimony, the ultimate aim being to make of this culture a shared, and legally protected, heritage.

¹⁴ In question is the Convention relative to the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Morocco ratified this Convention on 28 October 1975.

¹⁵ Cf. <http://whc.unesco.org/fr/listesindicatives/1183/>, last visit: 5 September 2008.

We will attempt to highlight some aspects of this culture through two fundamental axes:

- ❖ Firstly, the *Hassani* patrimony, as an expression of cultural diversity in Morocco;
- ❖ Secondly, CORCAS, as an instrument of cultural governance.

I. THE *HASSANI* PATRIMONY, AN EXPRESSION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN MOROCCO

Moroccan culture has been subject to several influences, and has made several borrowings that have molded it into a “composite” product¹⁶. This abundance is intensified by the climatic variety as well as geographical diversity of Morocco.

The notion of cultural patrimony is reminiscent of cultural rights. Be it material or immaterial, cultural patrimony, ought to be beneficial for individuals who are taken to be citizens that enjoy rights, but who also have obligations to assume. UNESCO has forged the concept of the cultural heritage of humanity in order to emphasize the fact that culture is the springboard of all humanity, and that the human species is one. Texts and writings are aplenty in this respect¹⁷.

In the profound vision of UNESCO, culture is a factor of peace-making. In the present time, the dialogue of cultures is hoisted, as it were, to the rung of a major element of world peace; all cultures contribute to the civilisational piece of work, which is encouraged by

¹⁶ The Moroccan sociologist, Paul PASCON, described Moroccan society as being indeed « composite ».

¹⁷ Cf, *inter alia*, the Internet site of the UNESCO: www.unesco.org.

the international Community. This cross-fertilization of cultures is synonymous with diversity and; therefore, with wealth. Saharawi culture participates herein through its elements as well as its expressions. In the same vein, the Universal Declaration of the UNESCO on Cultural Diversity recalls in its Preamble that « *the wide diffusion of culture and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all the nations must fulfill in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern*¹⁸ ».

A unifying concept, culture is also a fundamental notion that lies at the heart of the identities and communities of persons¹⁹. Several international texts have been adopted that are destined to the protection of the shared heritage of humanity²⁰. The Sahara is one such a heritage. Rich with its artistic, linguistic, literary and culinary expressions, the *Hassani* patrimony is at the heart of life in the Sahara. From the teapot to the tent, from the dromedary to poetry, no doubt today that the man of the Sahara is attached to his culture, which is a fundamental element for his integration within society.

¹⁸ This Declaration was adopted by the 31st Session of the General Conference of the UNESCO, Paris, 2 November 2001

¹⁹ Cf. Mohammed Zakaria Abouddahab, « *Protection du patrimoine culturel et droits de l'homme* », in « *Le patrimoine culturel de l'humanité* », « *The Cultural Heritage of Mankind* », published under the direction of James A. R. NAFZIGER and Tullio SCOVAZZI. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Leiden, Boston, 2008, p. 253.

²⁰ We could cite the Convention relative to the Protection of World, Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO 1972), the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003), etc. Morocco has ratified several of such conventions, because it is credited with several sites classified as World Heritage of Mankind. See *Supra*.

The expressions of *Hassani* culture are numerous. If we start from culture as « (...) *the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group, (and which) includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs* ²¹(...)», one realizes that the aforesaid expressions are manifested in several aspects of the daily life of Sahrawi populations, and constitute a source of pride for the latter: craftsmanship and trade, poetry, music, popular arts, culinary art, etc., all of which are manifestations that testify to the wealth of this patrimony. Thus, the tent is the first social unit within Sahrawi society. It not only gives proof of spatial unity or housing, but also expresses the whole network of relations that link the members of the same family²².

Throughout history, there have been continuously growing interactions between the diverse components of Moroccan culture. A number of interactions are conveyed through several communication tools and supports: commercial exchange, moussems, festivals, political rapports, demographic movements, etc. The specialists of *Hassani* culture maintain that there are, for instance, many lexical borrowings by the *Hassani* language from Berber, and that the structure of Sahrawi tribes is itself practically the same as that of the Berber tribes in the rest of Morocco. Mohamed Cherkaoui has in this respect stressed the fact that the modes of marriage in the provinces of the South are

²¹ Declaration of Mexico on cultural policies, Mexico City, 26 July – 6 August 1982 (Preamble).

²² For further details, see, cultural gateway of CORCAS (Sahara culturel).

practically the same as in the other Berber regions of Morocco, and that these marriages are no longer endogamous, but exogamous²³.

The Sahrawi cultural patrimony, properly speaking, is not the exclusive privilege of the inhabitants of the Sahara; it is the collective property of all Moroccans; nay, of all humanity. In the present time, there is a growing awareness of the importance of protecting and enriching this patrimony. Many a festival and other manifestations are staged that seek to make known and revivify it²⁴. In fact, throughout the Kingdom, there is this awareness, more and more acute as it is, that it is imperative to confer upon the cultural element the place that it deserves, to turn it henceforth into a central element in any development process, and to integrate it in the circuit of public policies. Basically, human development, elevated as it is in Morocco to the rung of a national priority, fundamentally rests upon the cultural awakening of the individual. At the heart of this process, there figures the generalization of schooling and, therefore, the affirmation of the right to learning, which is a major right to culture.

On the legal plane, cultural rights are progressively asserted through access to positivity. On October 2005, UNESCO adopted the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions²⁵. Cultural rights entail the individuals' access to and use of the cultural expressions conveyed by activities, goods and

²³ Mohamed Cherkaoui, « *Le Sahara : liens sociaux et enjeux géostratégiques* », The Bardwell Press, Oxford, 2007.

²⁴ The same goes for the festival of Dakhla, and Boujdour, etc. The Moroccan eastern Sahara is not spared from this dynamism: Errachidia, Figuig, etc.

²⁵ This Convention, adopted by the 33d session of the general Conference in October 2005, came into effect on 18 March 2007.

cultural services. Certainly, the State is the first guarantor of such an expression, but other institutions, such as CORCAS, are seen to be invested with this mission, considering the assets it has at hand, and the various bodies that it could mobilize in order to secure its efficiency.

Culture is not the exclusive privilege of a minority, but the property of all. This is why the notion of cultural rights is crucial, since it raises the problem of culture in legal terms. Hence, having access to cultural patrimony, learning, and protecting linguistic diversity are put in terms of rights benefiting the citizens, and obligations weighing upon the public powers that, by force of law, ought to spare no effort in order to make culture accessible to all. Such is the consequence of the affirmation of the principle of equality. Basically, CORCAS is an element of the rule of law. It is therefore called upon to anchor the exercise of cultural rights, and to favor their protection and promotion. The vocation of CORCAS is also one of protecting *Hassani* culture against some eventual pillage. From this perspective, CORCAS has earnestly condemned the acts of vandalism that were perpetrated in 2007 by the members of MINURSO in some archeological sites in the Sahara.

II. CORCAS, AN INSTRUMENT OF CULTURAL GOVERNANCE

At the cultural plane, CORCAS is called upon to play the role of a cross-fertilizer of the cultural dispositions and expressions manifested by the tribes that compose it. The question is to go beyond the cleavages that could accrue from the differences of tribal belonging, with a view to establishing a society based more on a contractual logic, to wish to see it live with everyone else, but a society that does not discard its history and its memory, for that. As Mustapha Naïmi notes, « (...) *time has come for going against the purely tribal logic. The composition of CORCAS takes into account other parameters that go by far beyond the simple tribal aspect, with a view to valorizing the notion of civil society and that of political society (...) such is a new approach that aims at the remodeling of Sahrawi society in order to combat separatism in a more efficient manner, not only as a movement, but as a thought, above all*²⁶ ».

The mission of any culture is, fundamentally, to integrate within its folds individuals in such a way as to shun any process of anomie or disruption²⁷. It is all about a quest towards social cohesion, where people find themselves in institutions that represent them, and identify with their traditions, laws and customs. An idea such as this has not stamped out from the architects of CORCAS, neither did it so from those of the Moroccan Autonomy Project. Basically, at the heart of the missions of CORCAS, one finds the notion of cultural governance.

²⁶ Mustapha NAÏMI, in « *Maroc Hebdo International* », n° 694, of 14 to 20 April 2006, p. 19.

²⁷ The concept of anomie was first coined by the French sociologist Emile DURKHEIM, when he was studying suicide as a social phenomenon.

The promotion of *Hassani* cultural patrimony figures among the competences of the Autonomous Sahara Region (point 12 of the Moroccan Autonomy Project). In principle, all the organs of the autonomous Sahara region endeavor towards the protection and promotion of *Hassani* cultural patrimony. Within this perspective, civil society is invited over to participate in this defense undertaking. Thus associations will be represented within the economic and social Council provided for in point 26 of the Moroccan Autonomy Project. Some financial resources will be earmarked with a view to allowing the Sahrawi populations to promote the development of their region, including in the cultural domain (point 5 of the Moroccan Autonomy Project).

CORCAS is not spared from this process of global take-off. In its founding Dahir, one reads in article 2 that this institution is entitled to formulate to the King advice in connection with, *inter alia*, the integrated human, economic and social development of the provinces of the South. It is equally competent for formulating any proposal seeking to further the development of these provinces. The afore-cited article mentions the preservation and promotion of the *Hassani* cultural, artistic and linguistic patrimony as one of the missions to be incumbent upon CORCAS. A mission such as this, in addition to a host of other ones, will be accomplished by CORCAS in concert with the other institutions of the Kingdom, of which the Agency for the Promotion and Socio-Economic Development of the Kingdom's southern provinces is but one. It is true that this Agency, which comes under the Prime Minister's authority, focuses upon the variable projects of economic development, but it is also called upon, in view of the community-based approach that it advocates, to adhere to the

concept of cultural governance that CORCAS could pilot. Incidentally, the composition of CORCAS has become larger, which has allowed it to take advantage of the resources of other national and local institutions: ministries (Interior and Foreign Affairs), Agency of the Promotion and the Socio-Economic Development of the Kingdom's southern provinces, as well as the Regional Investment Centers within the provinces of the South. Obviously, CORCAS also comprises the representatives of local associations. These non-governmental associations (NGO's) will, in some ways, be the spokespersons of the advocates of *Hassani* cultural patrimony. Even for the international instruments relative to cultural rights, NGO's constitute one of the major levers for these rights, which explains the possibility of some quite important cooperation between the Sahrawi associations and the other regional or international bodies, be they the cities themselves, the autonomous regions, or the international organizations in charge of cultural issues. Akin to the future Autonomous Sahara Region, CORCAS could situate its action within the framework of Article 8, paragraph 3, of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of World, Cultural and Natural Heritage: *«A representative of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (Rome Centre), a representative of the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and a representative of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), to whom may be added, at the request of States Parties to the Convention meeting in general assembly during the ordinary sessions of the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, representatives of other intergovernmental or non-governmental organizations, with*

similar objectives, may attend the meetings of the Committee in an advisory capacity».

This vision comes in at the heart of the new approaches to the management of cultural space. Cultural governance, as one of its advocates, Patrice MEYER-BISCH, has it, implies the entitlement of all social actors²⁸; governance is a system that targets interactions, of the individuals and institutions that share the responsibility of their common possession; namely, the *Hassani* cultural patrimony. From this viewpoint, CORCAS will thus be able to elaborate cultural governance to which all the actors of Sahrawi society will participate, in accordance with a democratic pattern. This squares with the vision of the Moroccan Autonomy Project, which states in point 3 that *«this initiative is part of the endeavors made to build a modern, democratic society, based on the rule of law, collective and individual freedoms, and economic and social development. As such, it brings hope for a better future for the region's populations, puts an end to separation and exile, and promotes reconciliation».*

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS AN EFFICIENT SAHRAWI CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

The cross-cultural paradigm is to be taken seriously into consideration in the new global and integrated approach of development that Morocco aspires to promote in the provinces of the South. Culture is an incalculable wealth, as well as an irreplaceable factor of cohesion.

²⁸ University of Fribourg, Interdisciplinary Institute for Ethics and Human Rights (IIEDH), Switzerland.

In the Sahara, this complex whole takes on yet a much more important dimension, considering the fact of its centrality. Herein arises the necessity to develop an ambitious pattern for a cultural governance within the Sahara, one to which all the actors of development, at the head of which is CORCAS, will participate.

In the active approach to the defense of the territorial integrity and national unity of Morocco, CORCAS, in conformity with Royal directives, ought to devote itself to integrating the cross-cultural paradigm in its external communication around the Sahara dossier. In fact, culture incorporates so many elements of sensitivity, emotionalism, and memory, ones that could contribute to breaking certain resistances of the Polisario. In consequence, a certain cultural diplomacy of the Sahara is to be elaborated, in concept and means, with a view to fostering the cultural attractiveness of the mother-land, and preparing for the return of the repatriates, in communion and serenity.

THE CORCAS : WHAT CONTRIBUTION TO THE SAHARA AFFAIR?

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The reactivation of the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS), whose members were appointed by the King on 25 March 2006 in Laâyoune, constitutes a fundamental base in the process of establishing a culture of dialogue and consultation with the citizens who come from the provinces of the South.

In fact, the importance that the new form of CORCAS takes up resides in two essential points:

- ❖ The representativeness of all the notables and elected representatives.
- ❖ The participation of the populations of the region in the economic, social and political development of the region, as the Moroccan Sovereign would wish.

The Royal speech of 25 March 2006 relative to CORCAS has fixed the grand orientations; still more, the program that CORCAS is called upon to put in practice, calling thereby for the members of CORCAS to submit to the Moroccan Sovereign all the proposals and initiatives that allow for the return of the Moroccan citizens in sequestration in

the camps of Tindouf. Also, this institution is in charge of expressing the positions of the latter and, in general, of all the Sahrawis on the international scene, the ultimate objective being to defend the territorial integrity of Morocco.

The contribution of CORCAS consists in its qualification to include civil society and sahrawi tribes altogether. It actively participates in the presentation of the global conception of the Moroccan Autonomy Project for the Sahara region. Indeed, its participation also manifested itself at the level of the proposals susceptible of leading to the realization of global development.

I. CORCAS: WHAT REPRESENTATIVENESS FOR THE POPULATIONS OF THE SAHARA REGION?

The Sahrawi tribes have three kinds of Arab affiliations: the Chourfa, the Anssar and Gharb Al Maaqil. According to the Spanish statistics of 1974, these tribes come as follows :

- ❖ The Ouled Tidrarine : These are the partisans of Ahmed Ben Ghanbour, who left Ouazzane (north of Morocco) in order to settle in the Sahara;
- ❖ The Rguibat : These belong to the Idrissides. The grand-father, Ahmed Reguibi, left Tétouan (north of Morocco) in order to settle in the Sahara;
- ❖ Tekna : It comprises Izerguiyne, Ait Lahssen, Ait Moussa Oali, Yakout and Ait Oussa ;
- ❖ Ouled Dlim ;
- ❖ Ait Ba Amrane ;

❖ Aroussiye: These are Idrissides, too. They had lived in Tétouan and definitively settled in the Sahara.

This anthropological overview has allowed us to observe the importance of the blood as well as kinship ties between the North and the South of Morocco, owing to the fact that the origin of certain Sahrawi tribes goes back to the Northern region of Morocco.

The Sahrawi were, in fact, organized within the framework of tribes that were composed of nomads and shepherds that moved about on a surface that went beyond the international frontiers we know of today. In fact, the chiefs of tribes gathered together within the framework of a tribal association known as the « *Jmaâ* », during which they engaged in discussions with those responsible for the running of the affairs of the tribes. Between the latter and the Moroccan monarchy, there existed ties of allegiance.

Prior to the Spanish colonization in 1884, Morocco had lost a part of its eastern region to France. After the colonization of Algeria by France in 1830, Moulay Abderrahmane decided to stand by Emir Abdelkader in order to face up to the French occupation. After 15 years of confrontations with Emir Abdelkader, France declared war against Morocco. In question here is the battle of Isly, of 14 August 1844, wherein the French forces, at the head of which was General Bugeaud, defeated the Moroccan forces that were placed under the command of Moulay Mohammed (the Sultan's son). The defeat of Isly caused a revision of the frontiers that were traced in conformity with the treaty of Lalla Maghnia, which was signed on 18 March 1845. In

fact, France officialized Tindouf, Touat, Saoura and Tidikelt as part of the colonial territories of Algeria.

Following the Conference of Algeciras, signed on 7 April 1906, Morocco was subject to an international protectorate. Six years later, the Treaty of Fès, which was assigned on 30 March 1912, subjected Morocco to the French protectorate.

During the second half of the 20th century, thousands of Sahrawi took part in the struggle (above all within the framework of the National Liberation Army- South section) for independence.

In fact, right after independence, King Mohammed V claimed the historical rights of Morocco, as well as the restitution of the Moroccan territories under Spanish occupation. In response to Morocco's request, the UN Committee on Decolonization qualified the Sahara region subject to the Spanish occupation as being a region where occupation had to stop. However, towards the beginning of 1958, the Franco-Spanish allied forces could eliminate the Southern section of the National Liberation Army. That was, in fact, within the framework of what we call « Ecouvillon operation », which resulted in the emigration of numerous Sahrawi towards the North, a fact which quite clearly shows the ties that existed between the North and the South, as well as the struggle of the Sahrawi tribes towards enabling Morocco to fully enjoy its independence.

It is in this sense that the representativeness of the Sahrawi tribes within CORCAS accords the latter more credibility. According to Article 4 of Dahir n°1.06.81, published on 25 March 2006, relative to

CORCAS, other than the President of the Council, the latter is composed of other members who enjoy a deliberative quality. They are nominated by the King for a four-year period, and are chosen from among the following:

- ❖ The members of Parliament, the presidents of regional and provincial Councils, as well as the professional Chambers, all along their period of delegation;
- ❖ The members to have been elected by the sahrawi tribes during the former Council;
- ❖ The *Chioukhs* of tribes;
- ❖ The actors of civil society and youth organizations in the provinces of the South;
- ❖ The representatives of citizens who come from the provinces of the South, but who live abroad, as well as those of the sequestered of Tindouf;
- ❖ The representatives of the actors of socio-economic organizations;
- ❖ Other personalities reputed for their competence and impartiality.

In analyzing the provisions of Article 4 of the Dahir relative to CORCAS, we will realize that the legislator has sought to guarantee a certain representativeness to the whole Sahrawi tribes, he thus insisted on the question of the adhesion of the *chioukhs* of tribes, no matter what their size or demographic import are, which translates the Royal determination to involve all the actors concerned by the resolution of the Sahara conflict.

The Dahir in question has not excluded the actors of civil society, nor those in youth organizations in the provinces of the South. Besides,

one observes that the legislator has opted for a global approach in connection with the representativeness of Sahrawi, including as he does those who live abroad as well as the sequestered of Tindouf, which will allow for securing a certain consensus around the Moroccan Autonomy Initiative, on the one hand, and the active participation in the development and promotion of the provinces of the South, on the other.

With reference to Dahir n°1.06.82, published on 25 March 2006, relative to the members of CORCAS, one could raise the importance of the representativeness of the Sahrawi within the Council, which is composed of 141 members. However, with this number, the Council's work used to run the risk of being hindered, particularly in the area of decision-making. It is precisely for this reason that article 2 of Dahir n°1.06.81, charged CORCAS with adopting its internal regulation. The latter will determine the administrative and financial bodies of the Council, as well as its modes of management, the exercise of its prerogatives, and the holding of its meetings and deliberations.

In fact, in analyzing the internal regulation of the Council, it will transpire that the latter is far from being an administrative institution; its internal regulation is in close affinity with the internal regulation of Parliaments. This reflects, in fact, the will that the Council has for activating the political aspect of the affair; it does so by establishing a number of contacts with the Sahrawi populations. It is precisely in this sense that CORCAS has put in place five Commissions that thus reflect the true will and determination to carry out the missions of proximity in relation to the Sahrawi citizens, with a view to inquire about their preoccupations and problems.

II. CORCAS : THE POLITICAL CONTRIBUTION

This contribution materializes at the level of the active participation of the members of CORCAS with regard to the presentation of the Autonomy Project, as well as in the search for a new interlocutor from the provinces of the South able to take part in the management of the internal affairs of the regions of the South.

In fact, the reactivation of CORCAS aims at resolving the Sahara conflict in a definitive manner. This is why all the political parties, and all the representatives of the populations of the South, have been asked for purposes of consultation.

In fact, the Council is a dynamic institution, owing to the fact that it has been able, within a timeframe of no more than six months, following its activation, to elaborate and debate the Moroccan Project of Autonomy, and to present it to the Sovereign. According to Article 2 of Dahir n°1.06.81, published on 25 March 2006, relative to CORCAS, the latter enjoys the following prerogatives:

- ❖ To give its opinion on all the questions connected with the defense of the territorial integrity and national unity of the Kingdom, as well as to the human, economic and social development of the Kingdom;
- ❖ To submit to the Sovereign all the proposals allowing for the return and integration of all the Moroccans who come from the provinces of the South within the framework of the merciful and forgiving motherland, the defense of territorial integrity and the reinforcement of the ties of national solidarity, not only in the provinces of the South, but in the other regions of the Kingdom;

- ❖ To guarantee the human, economic and social development of the provinces of the South, in coordination with every which national and local body, public sector and private sector alike;
- ❖ To protect and promote the cultural and linguistic (*Hassani*) patrimony of the provinces of the South;
- ❖ To guarantee a promising future for the youth thanks to the advancement of education, training and work, as well enable them to express their ambitions and their capacities within a framework of dynamism and solidarity at the local and national planes;
- ❖ To advance the situation of woman, and guarantee its integration in all domains;
- ❖ To promote the principles and rules relative to the question of the rights of Man in the provinces of the South in conformity with the legislation in effect;
- ❖ To participate, in coordination with all the specialized authorities, to all the workshops as well as the meetings of the international Commissions and organizations pertaining to the question of the territorial integrity and the development of the provinces of the South.

All these prerogatives show indeed the importance of the missions that CORCAS is entrusted with.

However, it is appropriate to specify that the listing of the prerogatives of the Council in Article 2 aims at demonstrating the great interest that this institution inspires. This determination in no way seeks to restrict the functions of CORCAS, which is manifested at the level of the crucial role that it has played in the treatment of the dossiers pertaining to the violation of Human rights in the camps of Tindouf.

The political contribution of CORCAS is also manifested in the fact that it constitutes a new interlocutor with the international community. In fact, throughout the multiple advances made by the members of CORCAS to the international community, notably the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies of Georgetown University, Washington D.C., in October 2006, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in the United States, this organ demonstrates the will that its members have for explaining and defending the Moroccan Project of Autonomy. Having said this, this situation allows for obtaining some greater support for the reasonableness of the question of the territorial integrity of the Kingdom. It is in this sense that 170 members of the American Congress have expressed in April 2007 their full support of the Moroccan Autonomy Initiative; they qualified it as being in conformity with international democratic principles. They have also emphasized that it is a question of the active participation on the part of Morocco to put an end to the Sahara dispute. In fact, this demonstrates the importance of parallel diplomacy, which the members of CORCAS have put into practice, obviously in addition to the official diplomacy of the Kingdom.

CORCAS, A VECTOR OF THE PROMOTION OF SAHRAWI YOUTH AND WOMAN IN THE PROVINCES OF THE SOUTH

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The Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS) is a consultative body, a true link between the King and the Sahrawi population in all its components. Its creation testifies to the will and determination to anchor the participative approach in the dynamics of development, as well as in the running of local affairs, where all the live forces of the south, notably women and the youth, are integrated.

I. THE INVOLVEMENT OF SAHRAWI YOUTH AND WOMEN IN THE EDIFICATION OF THE AUTONOMOUS REGION THROUGH THE COMPOSITION AND MISSIONS OF CORCAS

CORCAS is composed of a mosaic of personalities reflecting the diversity of the components of the region. This is explained by the Royal commitment in favor of integrating the live forces of the region within the Council in order to guarantee them a balanced and credible representativeness.

Hence, its composition takes into account the criteria for the representativeness of the different components of the Sahrawi population, with tribal equilibrium and political and provincial representativeness taken into the fold, too. The same goes for the involvement of social and economic actors, as well as women and the youth.

In this respect, women are represented with nearly 10 per cent of the members. Moreover, over 9 vice-presidents, three are women.

This female representativeness is a sort of recognition of their place as active participants in political and social life, both at the regional and national planes. It is also an acknowledgment of the role that they have always played in the defense of the territorial integrity of the Kingdom. In addition, their presence within the Council establishes the gender-based approach advocated by the Moroccan Autonomy Project, according to which the Sahrawi women are represented within the regional and national political bodies.

CORCAS also integrates the elite of the emerging youth which will infuse it with a new dynamic. Indeed, the presence of youth within the Council responds to the political, economic and social mutations that the Sahara has been undergoing, and allows the Sahrawi youth to better prepare for their future.

The Royal conception is nurtured by the idea according to which the Sahara autonomous region cannot be edified without the participation of the youth and women of the region of the South. These two components have to participate with responsibility and determination

in the construction of the autonomous region, by inaugurating a new page in the history of the region and the country at large.

CORCAS equally comprises the members of civil society who operate in the area of Human rights, and who contribute to the defense of the national cause as well as the supervision of citizens.

In fact, its principle is to convince « (...) *all the Sahrawis, wherever they may be in the provinces of the South, in the camps of Tindouf, in Mauritania, in Spain or elsewhere (...) (to) recognize that the autonomy project of autonomy by HM the King is a project that historically and definitively settles the conflicts that the Sahrawis had had in the past with the national administrations ever since independence*²⁹».

II. THE PROMOTION OF THE YOUTH AND WOMEN THROUGH THE POLICIES ADOPTED BY CORCAS

Thanks to her daily combat as well as her perseverance, the Sahrawi woman could impose herself on the scene, and show evidence of dynamism and creativity in several domains. She was able to consolidate her place as an active participant in political life, and thereby contribute to the economic and social development of the region and the country as a whole. The mobilization of Sahrawi women for the national cause is laudable. They act within the framework of an active and responsible community life.

²⁹ From an interview with the President of CORCAS in *le Point Magazine* on 09 November 2007.

Some of them were able to flee the camps of Tindouf, after having discovered a leeway away from the Polisario for rejoining the motherland, leaving behind them many years of suffering and bitterness. Indeed, they have been seizing every which occasion so as to denounce the atrocities perpetrated by the Polisario, particularly towards the sequestered mothers and their own little ones.

The presence of some of them within CORCAS is highly significant. They bring in a value-added to the latter's missions, notably in terms of the advancement of women and the youth, as well as their sensitization into the many merits of the Autonomy Project.

These women who have found out the path of reason are today committed to defending those that are still subject to living ordeals in the camps of Tindouf in Algeria, all in the eyes of international bodies. Let us recall here that thousands of children have been literally snatched away for many years from their parents in order to be indoctrinated, and inculcated many a fallacious idea. *«I have only become aware of the reality of things after I had rejoined Morocco, where I have been received with open arms, and have seen with my own eyes the important steps crossed by Morocco on matters of democratization and the respect for human right, »* says Miss Saadani Maoulainine, a member of CORCAS, and an ex-deportee in Cuba, *apropos* of the distorted image that she had had of her country, an image that has nothing to do with the reality, during a meeting in Paris on the theme “woman citizen, committed woman.” A member of CORCAS, and the president of “the Association of the Sahrawi Children Deported in Cuba,” Miss Saadani Maoulainine militates in

order to shed light upon and lay bare the exactions committed by the Polisario, as well as on the situation of the sequestered in the camps of Tindouf.

These women and many others still, are today mobilized around the national cause. They undertake their action at the regional, national and international levels. What is more, they take great care in informing the international community of the will that Sahrawi women have for putting an end to the Sahara conflict within the respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Morocco, and to definitively close this dossier on the basis of international legality.

Let us cite the case of Keltoum Al Khyate. From among her many interventions, let us mention her participation in the debates of the fourth commission in October 2007. Mrs. El Khyate has notably denounced “the prevalent situation in the camps of Tindouf, most particularly the separation of families.” Besides, she deemed the Moroccan Project of Autonomy to be *«a peaceful situation that allows for putting an end to the conflict (...)»*, and that it is *« (...) an instrument of development susceptible of benefitting not only the Sahara, but the region at large»*. In turn, Gajmoula Bent Ebbi, a CORCAS militant, an ex-member of the Polisario, and a fervent militant for the defense of territorial integrity, affirmed during the afore-said debate that *«Morocco has made a step forward with its Initiative; the elections of September 2007 are significantly illustrative of the large participation of the population of the Sahara, a token of the fact that theirs is a will to follow the footsteps of Morocco in its Initiative»*.

Within the framework of the policy of dialogue, the representativeness of women within CORCAS will equally allow for developing ties with the local population, especially with women. They could lead actions on the basis of proximity, listening and assistance, all the while taking advantage of the favorable climate which is characterized by the broadening of individual and collective liberties, as well as the efforts deployed by the national bodies concerned with the protection of Human rights, such as the Advisory Council for Human Rights and Diwan Al Madhalim, both of which have opened local branches in the provinces of the South.

The proposal of autonomy is a large-scale project that will not come to fruition without broadening the scope of participation in the management of local affairs, and the emergence of a new elite capable enough to assume the responsibilities for regional development. The guidance and training of this local elite constitute the fundamental mission of CORCAS. To this end, the latter is called upon to develop a new strategy for the advancement of the youth as long as the region is imperatively in need of successfully achieving its political and economic emancipation.

The activity of CORCAS towards the youth also targets that fraction that has been indoctrinated by the Polisario.

Besides, CORCAS has for a mission to stand by the young sequestered Sahrawis who express the desire to rejoin the country. Let us recall the communiqué from the Tindouf camps which bears the signature of many Sahrawis. In this communiqué, entitled “*the youth of return*,” the signatories have sharply denounced the blockade imposed by the Direction of the Polisario against the sequestered Sahrawi population,

expressing by the same token the wish to rejoin the mother-land. They declare their total adhesion to the *Moroccan Initiative for Negotiating an Autonomy Statute in the Sahara Region*, which tells a great deal about the intense state of decay that gnaws away at the Polisario, which finds itself barefaced before a youth that is hostile to the manner with which the Direction of the Polisario administers the Sahara dossier. The call for reason and reconciliation that was launched by Morocco appears, then, favorably received by the young Sahrawis, inside and outside of the country alike.

The Sahrawi youth has to fully assume its role in the edification of a modern Morocco, one that is resolutely turned towards democracy and prosperity. In order to achieve this, it needs to be assisted and given due support. If the unionist and legitimist voice of CORCAS, which came to be heard as soon as the first round of negotiations, has allowed it to carry off its diplomatic bet, it is for and by this youth that it could contribute to the success of the principal challenges connected with the autonomy option; namely, the political emancipation and the socio-economic development of the Sahara region.