Theme: In light of numerous disagreements for more than fifty years, it appears necessary to promote a more realistic framework for cross-border relations.

Summary: Historically, the varying quality of Spanish-Moroccan relations has been determined almost exclusively by the vicissitudes of domestic politics in both countries. However, despite the numerous ups and downs, Perejil included, the official rhetoric has always expressed a ‘mutual desire to strengthen fruitful relations between fraternal nations’.

Analysis: Common Positions and Disagreements
Apart from the numerous references to fruitful relations and family ties, the main attempt to define a stable framework for Spanish-Moroccan relations is found in the ‘Friendship, neighborliness and cooperation agreement between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Kingdom of Spain’ of 1991.

In theory, the Agreement gave form to the desire for stability in bilateral relations and assumed what since then has been applied as an axiom: that the proliferation and intensification of common ties and interests would ease tensions and facilitate fluid and stable relations.

In practice, this has not been the case. Issues such as fishing, territorial demands, the Sahara, immigration and territorial waters have caused tense relations and difficulties on numerous occasions. Therefore, either the axiom is incorrect or, in my humble opinion, it is incomplete.

A New Opportunity or More of the Same?
On the subject of relations with Morocco and the Maghreb, the Socialist Party’s (PSOE) electoral programme for the most recent general elections proposed, among other things, that Spain ‘must contribute to regional integration’, favouring ‘an area of dialogue, cooperation, prosperity and sustained economic and social development’. Only days before the elections were held, in one of the talks organized by the Real Instituto Elcano, Miguel Ángel Moratinos added that ‘relations with Morocco must return to normal’.

Although more than 10 years have passed, his statement is practically the same as others made when the Agreement was signed in 1991. With few modifications, the same intentions are found in many of the declarations made by Spanish representatives since then, both during Socialist and Popular Party governments.

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If after more than a decade, the same intentions are clear, at least on the Spanish side, we must conclude that either common ties and interests have not been successfully intensified, or, if they have, that this has not served to ease tensions.

**Socio-economic Relations**

![Graph of Spanish exports to Morocco](attachment://graph1.png)

![Graph of Spanish imports from Morocco](attachment://graph2.png)

Source: Ministry of the Economy, Secretariat of State for Trade and Tourism.

Since 1995, trade between Spain and Morocco has fluctuated, but grown constantly. As the above graphs show, during this period, Spanish exports to Morocco grew at an average annual rate of 15.8%. At the same time, Spain’s imports of Moroccan products grew at an average annual rate of 17.94%.

Furthermore, as the following graph shows, the progressive internationalization of Spanish companies during the second half of the 1990s had a clear impact on Spanish investments in Morocco.
On the Moroccan side, the importance of trade with Spain is undeniable. With more than 500 companies present in Morocco, Spain is its second biggest trading partner, second only to France and a considerable distance ahead of countries like the US, Germany, the UK, Italy and Japan.

These relations have been growing constantly and are solid since, as can be seen in the recent growth of trade, they have hardly been affected by the diplomatic tensions between the two countries in 2001 and 2002, which came to a head with the Perejil incident.

This incident, the most serious in Spanish-Moroccan relations since 1975, has not affected economic relations between the two countries, leading to several conclusions:

- Trade and economic relations are solid and stable. Spain is Morocco's second biggest trading partner, making these more than token or symbolic relations. Also, they have hardly been affected by the diplomatic tensions.
Nevertheless, these ties have not eliminated the risk of serious conflict between the two countries nor the frequent outbreak of tension.

The first conclusion is entirely positive. The second, by contrast, questions the official axiom that ties of common interest will end the risk of serious tension. However, as I said at the beginning, I believe that this axiom, though theoretically correct, is incomplete in practice.

Morocco and Spain
Throughout its history, Morocco has taken a very different approach in its relations with Spain than it has in its relations with France, the US or Italy.

Except in cases of serious conflict, international relations (like any personal or professional relationship) are initially approached on terms of equality, negotiation and mutual benefit. In the case of relations with Spain, Morocco has taken a demanding, often clearly discourteous attitude. There are, unfortunately, numerous examples of this, beginning with negotiations between Mohamed V and the government of France and with the Franco government before Moroccan independence, as Mª Concepción Ybarra describes so well in España y la Descolonización del Magreb (Aula Abierta, UNED, 1998).

This attitude, which could be considered inconsiderate and even contemptuous at times, has its roots in the period of the Protectorate. At the time, when France was a major colonial power on the international scene, Spain was a ‘has-been’ that could barely maintain prosperity in the Moroccan zone under its control.

Furthermore, the elites that took over the country after independence came from the south and from the Atlantic region of the country, under the French protectorate. In these regions, because of their Arab origin, there is still a certain disdain toward the northern regions of the old Spanish protectorate, ethnically Berber, with a different language and customs. The Green March and the subsequent Spanish withdrawal from the Western Sahara left many Moroccans with the impression that Spain was a weak country, incapable of maintaining its commitments and likely to make concessions in the face of a strong stance.

Given this Moroccan idea of a weak, second-rate country, they could understandably succumb to the temptation to base their relations with Spain on demands and self-interest, rather than on mutual benefit and negotiation. A large part of the Moroccan government has dealt with Spain in this way and, until the breakdown in negotiations on the fishing accord in 2001, it was very beneficial to Morocco.

Melilla: ‘Realpolitik’
One of Morocco’s most persistent demands, despite their positions being rejected in several international forums (the UN included), has involved the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla and the islands and rocks off its coasts. This issue, however, contrasts with the fact that both Melilla and Ceuta provide great benefits to a large part of the population of northern Morocco and, for many people, constitute their only way to make a living (two-way trade, work, free health care, etc). In practice, far from being a problem for Morocco, common borders with these two cities provide a social and economic safety valve.

However, the official Moroccan message regarding the impact of Ceuta and Melilla on the country’s economy is negative. Not long ago, the Moroccan Minister of the Economy spoke of huge annual losses that he blamed on the business done in the two cities. These unverifiable losses hide a fact: 76% of the taxes collected in the provinces of Oujda, Nador and Alhucemas are actually collected in the province of Nador, bordering on
Melilla. In fact, the Moroccan authorities are considering moving the regional tax headquarters from Oujda to Nador.

The weight of Moroccan tax collection in the province of Nador is explicable only in terms of the economic exchange with its neighbour, Melilla. The province has no economic conditions or structure except for the border trade that can explain such a difference in tax collection compared to neighbouring Moroccan provinces: tourism is non-existent and agriculture and industry are obsolete, with little impact on the provincial economy as a whole.

The province of Nador, far from the economic and commercial circuits of the Atlantic zone of Morocco, more than 500 kilometres from Rabat and Casablanca, has traditionally seen Melilla as a focal point of opportunity for employment, commerce, training and social services for its nearly one million inhabitants. Nearly thirty thousand Nador residents enter and exit Melilla daily to work, do business and receive services they lack in Nador.

This on-going daily exchange has been developing and fine-tuning itself over the centuries, since the days when the city of Melilla was no more than a walled citadel that opened its doors to take in fresh provisions. Independent of how Madrid-Rabat relations have developed, Melilla-Nador relations have not evolved along the official paths and this has benefited both sides.

Existing relations between entrepreneurs, merchants, public employees, and sports and cultural associations of all kinds in Melilla and Nador are, by way of example, like those between the Portuguese Algarve and the provinces of Seville and Huelva. They have nothing to do with the official rhetoric in Rabat. This ongoing situation has been acknowledged by the different governors of Nador and their equivalent in Melilla, the Government Delegate, who have traditionally maintained very good relations.

In addition to the thousands of individuals who cross the border daily, there are numerous Moroccan and Spanish entrepreneurs with businesses on both sides of the border and, more importantly, with partners ‘on the other side’. For Nador business people, their special city for doing business is not Casablanca or Rabat, but rather Melilla and therefore, in many cases, Malaga and Madrid (there are a dozen daily direct flights from Melilla to these cities).

There are now various investment projects promoted jointly by entrepreneurs in Melilla and Nador, whose location either in Melilla or in the province of Nador is yet to be decided. Political considerations aside, the final location of these projects will depend on economic parameters, something that is openly acknowledged off the record.

The existence of a border, far from being an impediment, has demonstrated that the exchange of supply and demand between different but connected countries and societies generates mutual business opportunities. This is nothing new; it is what happens at any border between two countries that maintain reasonably fluid relations. For the people of Nador, Melilla is much closer than Rabat, despite official stances and cultural, economic or political differences.

Nevertheless, despite this reality being perceived as positive on both sides of the border (otherwise it would not occur), its development potential is limited by the official Moroccan veto of anything that comes from Melilla. At the individual level, there is no problem; at the official level, a negative response can automatically be expected.
'Laissez-faire'
Given Morocco's persistent demands regarding Ceuta and Melilla, it does not seem viable to try to change its government's official rhetoric on the subject. Neither is this necessary, since reality outweighs the rhetoric day by day. However, as Miguel Ángel Moratinos said, Spain can indeed aspire to a ‘return to normality’ in Spanish-Moroccan relations on their common borders.

What is normal is to do business that benefits both sides and acknowledge that obstacles must not be put in the way of good relations, rather just the opposite. Normality, therefore, would mean recognizing existing relations, regardless of the differences that may exist, particularly when this reality benefits everyone involved.

This is especially important considering that, traditionally, the Moroccan zone around Melilla (the Rif) has, to say the least, been left out of the Rabat government’s economic and social development plans. During his entire reign, Hassan II was openly proud of never having set foot in the area, an attitude that the new King of Morocco took special pains to distance himself from, as soon as his reign began.

Levels of progress in the north of Morocco are clearly below the Moroccan average. The Rif region is far from the Moroccan Strait-Atlantic corridor where the greatest concentration of people, industry and tourism are located, and in turn, the best chances of employment. This is why emigration (illegal in most cases: 'the Peninsula is right across there') and the cultivation and production of hashish are a dangerous alternative in this region.

Last December, an agreement was signed in Rabat between the governments of Spain and Morocco that includes a financial programme worth 390 million euros, of which 270 million are loans from the Development Aid Fund. The importance of this agreement is clear: this is the biggest economic agreement ever signed by Spain. By contrast, in 2002, Spanish development aid to Morocco was less than 10 million euros. This is clearly a substantial quantitative jump.

However, though the total value of the aid contained in this agreement is in itself historic, what it is most important for both countries is the capacity of this agreement to actually raise the level of socio-economic development in Morocco. Consideration must be given to how the best development results could be obtained and, therefore, where Spanish aid can most effectively be given. *A priori*, it seems reasonable to assume that aid should go to the least favoured regions and those where Spanish culture and language are best known, since the Spanish programme would have the best chance of being well-received there.

In the Moroccan provinces near Melilla the Spanish language is generally well-understood: the radio and TV channels with the largest audience are Spanish. However, comparatively, the socio-economic development there is lower than the Moroccan national average.

Curiously, in this area, which is one of the most needful of development programmes, Spain's presence is limited to two Spanish schools (one in Nador and the other in Alhucemas) with no more than a thousand students between them, and a small number of Spanish clergy. There is no hospital or any other Spanish assistance centre and the Spanish Consulate in Nador has limited means to attend to an area in which Spanish-Moroccan relations are most intense.

If instead of limiting long-standing relations between Melilla and its Moroccan neighbours to ‘private interests’, Morocco acknowledged the reality of these relations, the
opportunities for collaborating with Melilla on cooperation programmes, cultural exchanges and common development projects, would greatly multiply, as would their impact in the region of Morocco surrounding the city.

In the case of Moroccan territory around Melilla, in addition to acting directly on one of the least favoured parts of the country, the city would provide Spanish development aid with an excellent platform for logistics, administration and services (including an airport with domestic flights). Furthermore, although official Moroccan rhetoric denies it, such aid would benefit from relations now five centuries old.

Conclusions: Normalizing Reality
To effectively implement a ‘reality-based’ policy, Morocco must be at least implicitly neutral. However, what is really necessary is for Spain first of all to incorporate this reality into its foreign policy. In its official relations, Spain must avoid allowing solid, constructive daily realities to be ignored due to Moroccan distrust. To be able to speak of normality, it is first necessary to accept a situation that is both real and, in this case, beneficial to both sides.

This normality should be translated into more affirmative action in the management and programming of Spanish development aid in Morocco. This should not be limited to mere administration of the committed resources, but should pursue their more efficient use by placing them in areas where they will have the most positive side-effects. Furthermore, this policy will be more effective if it is accompanied by action channelled through Spanish schools and/or the Instituto Cervantes in the areas closest to Spanish culture, instead of focusing on the big Moroccan cities where the weight of francophone culture is overwhelming.

The principles of effectiveness and efficiency should guide the process of improving the economic and, therefore, social development of the least favoured regions: limited resources should be allocated to the tasks that can bring the best results. It is not simply a question of making larger budget allocations, but rather of guaranteeing that their effective results are increasingly positive.

It is universally recognized that Moroccan development will not benefit only its own citizens and the Moroccan state, distancing dangers to internal stability that are increasingly evident, but will have a positive impact on Morocco’s relations with Spain. The goals of Spanish foreign policy in this respect are impeccable.

However, in practice, Spanish actions in Morocco are restricted by the suspicions and conventions imposed by official Moroccan discourse which, as we have seen, has generated a fictional ‘reality’. The resulting self-limitation burdens our relations with Morocco with a kind of complex that is not in keeping with Spain’s political and economic weight in 2004. This factor must certainly be reconsidered, among other reasons because neither Spain nor Morocco in 2004 have much to do with the way they were in 1975 or 1956. This is not boastfulness; rather, it is simply a question of recognizing reality. Among other reasons, this is important because, as we have seen, this self-limitation prevents Spanish resources destined to the development of our southern neighbour from being applied where they are most needed and where, paradoxically, they could provide the best short- and long-term results.

If we do not recognize the self-limitations and latent complexes that condition Spanish foreign policy in Morocco, the axiom I referred to earlier will remain incomplete. Though it may be perfect in theory, its practical application is far from guaranteeing that goals are met in the most efficient way possible.
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